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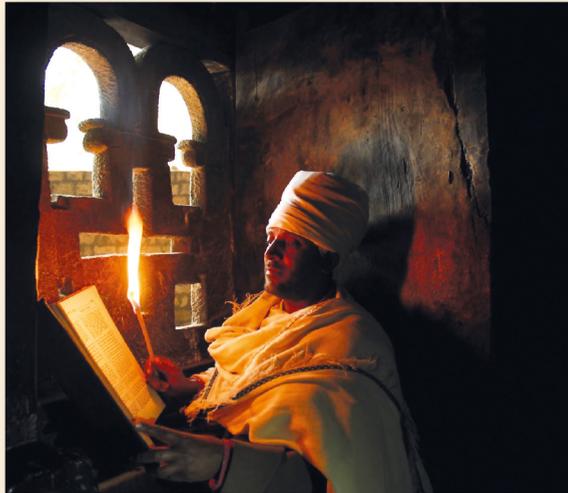
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**FROM AKSUM TO LALIBÄLA
THE MYTH OF THE “DARK AGES” OF
ERITREAN AND ETHIOPIAN HISTORY
(7TH–13TH CENTURIES)**

Edited by

LUISA SERNICOLA

MASSIMO VILLA



UniorPress

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Cover: private reading inside the church of Yəmrəḥännä Krəstos (photo by Luisa Semicola).

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CONTENTS

GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI	
Foreword.....	vii
LUISA SERNICOLA – MASSIMO VILLA	
The Ethiopian “Dark Ages”: An Obsolete “Gibbonian” Theory of Decline?.....	xi
<i>Essays</i>	
MARTINA AMBU	
Ethiopian Connections with the White Monastery (al-Dayr al-Abyad, Egypt): New Hypotheses and Discoveries	1
ALESSANDRO BAUSI	
Textual Transmission from Aksum to Lālibalā: A Couple of Case Studies	29
MARIA BULAKH	
Why Did Old Ethiopic Cease to Be a Spoken Language?.....	53
MARIE-LAURE DERAT	
Moving Beyond the Thirteenth Century in Lalibela: From Archaeology to Manuscripts ...	71
MICHAEL GERVERS	
Periodization, Christianization, Rock-Hewn Churches and the Enigma of Ethiopia’s “Dark Ages”	99
WOLFGANG HAHN	
The Late Period of Aksumite Coin Production (c.540–c.645)	131
HILUF BERHE WOLDEYOHANNES	
An Archaeological Approach to the Study of the Chronology of Rock-Hewn Churches in Tigray (7 th –11 th Cent. CE): New Evidence from the Gud Bahri Iron Production Site, Wuqro, Tigray, Ethiopia.....	141
DENIS NOSNITSIN	
Ethiopian Scribes and the Re-Creation of Ancient Documents: MS UM-035/C3-IV-83 “King Tāntāwädəm’s Register” Revisited.....	165
CAROLIN SCHÄFER	
An Old Layer of Paint: New Discoveries in the Mural Painting of the Church of Yāmṛəhännä Krəstos in Lasta, Ethiopia	209

LUISA SERNICOLA

Post-Aksumite Aksum through the Lens of Archaeology: Space, Environment, and
Social Structures235

NAFISA VALIEVA

“Introduction” to the *gädl*: General Overview with a Focus on the *Life of Lalibäla*.....279

MASSIMO VILLA – RAFAŁ ZARZECZNY

Again on MS EMML 8509 from Ṭana Qirqos: Unconventional Orthography and
Textual Content293

ANAÏS WION

The Anointing of the Kings and the Liturgy of Hosanna in Aksum: Two Mirroring
Rites, Witnesses of Medieval Times339

GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI

Foreword

One of the oldest wishes of scholars in Ethiopian studies is to fill the knowledge gap about the period between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, around the seventh to twelfth centuries. For historiographers, this crucial timeframe is made unintelligible by the documentary *vacuum* and the apparent silence surrounding ruins and monuments. Every specialist involved in the study of the Eritrean and Ethiopian Christian cultures has had to recognize how puzzling the lack of evidence is about what happened in the half millennium between the collapse of the kingdom of Aksum in the seventh century and the revival of the urban civilization in the twelfth century. Recently, an awareness has emerged that a multi-sided approach, integrating archaeology, history of art, manuscript studies and linguistics, is a promising way to give a reliable representation of the facts and processes otherwise shrouded in darkness. The First Neapolitan Meeting of Eritrean and Ethiopian Studies, which took place in Naples March 1–3 2023, was an attempt to give a multidisciplinary answer to this specific historical problem. Many of the contributions published here date back to that scientific event, and for having supported its celebration my gratitude goes to the Department of Asian, African and Mediterranean Studies and to ISMEO Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l’Oriente, through Prof. Adriano Rossi, who included the conference within the programs of the five-year agreement (2022–2026) with the Ministry of the University.

Of course, “dark ages” is nothing but a label and is attached with a certain degree of European presumption. As in the case of the history of Bronze Age Greece, this expression denounces our difficulty in understanding what happened due to the absence of written documents, as if they would be the only reliable records. Firstly, to avoid this distortion, we should think about the whole Mediterranean world and the way it was affected by an effective break-up after the end of Roman political unity. Apart from the centuries-long unity of Byzantium, Medieval Christianity was the result of a revival of traditions and a restart of social order after a dramatic interruption. Secondly, we must also consider that ancient societies (not only African) didn’t pay attention to the written transmission of knowledge as we do nowadays. This is implicitly

suggested if we accept in principle that the space left empty by texts could have been filled by something else and that our comprehension of the facts can be enhanced by the appreciation of the constant intermingling between the oral and the written. There are several examples of how the legacy of Late Antiquity, of which Eritrea and Ethiopia were components, via Aksum, was transferred to the later phases with the help of the oral transmission of knowledge.

The chronographies used in the Ethiopian ecclesiastical circles, and occasionally recorded in blanks and flyleaves of manuscripts, are instructive examples of how orality and literacy can interact fluidly, as they may include data which are not included in historiographical works. The same can be said for hagiographies. The reception of oral elements in these has been stressed on many occasions, sometimes with astonishing effects, like in the case of the celebrated wall-painting of the church of Guḥ (Təgray) showing an episode of the life of the ancient saint Yəmʾatta, not recorded in his *Vita*. Admittedly, in the process of “decline and fall” of Aksum, elements of economic crisis and cultural discontinuity intertwined according to a pattern of “transformation without disaster”, even though social and institutional actors, formerly dominating the political scene, faded away quickly. Consequently, intellectual centers and circles of this African kingdom of Late Antiquity, that for centuries had ensured the written transmission of knowledge, stopped working with the efficacy of earlier times when Adulis used to function as a place of transfer and exchange of goods and riches. In this context, the two civil elites, that of the state officials and that of the businesspersons, but also the two main institutions, the Crown and the Church, were forced to redefine their own social roles, very much reduced within the new economic and political context. Archaeologists and historians can agree in identifying the causes that determined this new phase, namely the decline of trade and towns, the gradual weakening of the state authority and growing international isolation.

This is key to interpreting the latest known inscriptions carved in Aksum at the request of a political authority. RIÉ 193 I–II = DAE 12 and 13 (cf. RIÉ 194 = DAE 14) are cut on the same stone by a historical, but enigmatic, figure named Danʾel, self-styled *ḥaḍani*, a well-known Gəʿəz word meaning “tutor, guardian”. Possibly, this indicates that Danʾel, who lived at some point between the ninth and eleventh centuries, played a hegemonic role *de facto*, but without full legitimacy. He titles himself also “son of Dābrä Fərem”, a qualification which could be the clue to a possible religious affiliation. In his texts, the sovereign includes, among his military deeds, the victory over another *ḥaḍani*, named Karuray, the fight near Kassala against the Barya people, and the submission of the *nəguś* of Aksum. The latter information reveals the persistence in the old capital city of a ruling class showing a continuity with the imperial past, even though the royal title was purely formal, and the *nəguś* was

no more than the head of one of the various chiefdoms struggling for dominance over Northern Ethiopia. This leadership has the merit of having allowed the survival of a “capital without empire” thanks to the agreement with the Christian Church. From this pact between the religious and the secular institutions, the new profile of Aksum arose as that of a “holy city” for the whole of Ethiopian Christianity, where the emperors went for centuries to receive the religious investiture from the hands of the *abun*, the only heir of Aksum of Late Antiquity.

In the future, new conclusions may be drawn from the palaeographic study of the most ancient Ethiopic manuscripts we know of. Until twenty-five years ago, the accepted chronology for the development of the Gəʿəz script usually took for granted that all the records we had did not date back beyond the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Then, the discovery of an absolute chronology of the Abba Gäräma Gospel Books, which now are considered to date from the fifth to the seventh centuries, through C14 analysis, opened a new phase offering at least two examples of the writing habits of Late Antiquity. The consequences of this big discovery are still to be fully appreciated. Parm. 3838 is a gorgeous exemplar of the *Mäṣḥafä säʿatat* (or *Horologion*), a calligraphic masterpiece in the Mordini collection in the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma. The small codex was in a very bad and delicate state because the original cover was lost, together with the binding. The remaining six quires (33 pages) were loose. Now they have been correctly rearranged through the competent intervention of Dr Massimo Villa and Dr Gioia Bottari; the latter is also credited with an accurate restoration of the codex within the project “Catalogo Nazionale dei Manoscritti Etiopici in Italia” (CaNameI). Interestingly, a palaeographic comparison of this codex with the Abba Gäräma Gospel Books allows one to express some doubts about an “early medieval” dating of this kind of script which is not comparable with the oldest script of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, as in Vat. Aeth. 21 or Borg. Aeth. 3. In the case of Parm. 3838, not only do we notice the number of caesuras and non-textual signs in page margins and intercolumns (christograms, *cruces ansatae*, etc.), but the shape of the characters seems to belong to a phase of the Ethiopic script coming from Late Antiquity but prior to the ‘early medieval’, namely the same period when *ḥadani* Danəʾel made his inscriptions.

Certainly, this collection of essays will provide new contributions for a better understanding of the historical problem of the Ethiopian “dark ages” and put forward new hypotheses for its solution. Our series is therefore grateful to Dr Luisa Sernicola and Dr Massimo Villa who took on the burden of editing this volume. As the coordinator of the “Centro di Studi sull’Africa”, I extend my special welcome to the scholars who kindly accepted the invitation to

contribute to this book drawing from their knowledge and the outcomes of their research.

LUISA SERNICOLA – MASSIMO VILLA

*The Ethiopian “Dark Ages”:
An Obsolete “Gibbonian” Theory of Decline?*

Sahata meretrix, cuius nomen ignis exponitur, regnavit annis XL; fuitque mulier iniqua, atque sacrilega; quando templa omnia, sacellaque depraedata fuisse describitur, aurum argentumque omne inde auferendo; quod postea avaritiae causa sub terra occultasse commemoratur.¹

If we were asked to evoke a single image that most powerfully represents the period between the age of Kaleb and that of Lalibāla, the first—or at least the most suggestive—image that would come to mind would probably be that of the legendary queen Ḥsato, or Gudit. This ravaging figure, portrayed by Mariano Vittori and other authors as ungodly and immoral, sometimes beautiful and of noble blood, not only embodies a power endowed with an enormous symbolic value—the feminine and pagan power that overturns the traditional masculine and Christian order—but, like Grañ many centuries later, also offers a perfect alibi to explain the problem of the loss of a material and cultural heritage that we can barely access.

Let us step out of legend and into history. The period between the seventh and thirteenth centuries, conventionally dismissed as the “Dark Ages”, constitutes a huge challenge for scholars, as it is characterized by defective narratives and critical interpretive issues. At the end of this lengthy and shadowy time span between the Aksumite age (up to the seventh century) and the so-called Solomonic period (from 1270), the Ethiopian society—or rather that part of present-day Ethiopia and Eritrea affected by the political events mentioned—emerged transformed politically, economically, and linguistically. If the classical view of this era is one of centuries-long crisis and irreversible decline, the scattered pieces of a puzzle still difficult to integrate and a changed cultural context make us suspect that alternative interpretations exist. This volume brings together a series of contributions that aim, from different angles

¹ Victorius, 1552, [p. 73].

and in a multi- and interdisciplinary key, to take stock of recent findings and to share reflections and stimulate a dialogue on the topic. Rather than bridging the gap between the Aksumite and Solomonic ages in a coherent historical representation, for which too much data is still lacking, this collection of essays aspires to encourage a “deconstruction” of the traditional narrative.

First and foremost, it is crucial to ask where the scholarly traditional narrative comes from. In the eyes of European historians who constructed and consolidated the “myth” of the Ethiopian “Dark Ages”, local traditions immediately offered narratives characterized by strong dynastic discontinuities and memory interruptions. To these interruptions can be attributed the gaps in spiritual genealogies and the apocryphal and almost universal attribution of the construction of rock-hewn churches to the period of the kings Abrəha and Ašbəha, Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl and then to Lalibäla, so skipping the intermediate period. To the accounts of illegitimate overthrows refer the destructive and regicidal figure of Əsato/Gudit² or the usurpation of the Zag^we to the detriment of the glorious Davidic lineage. Portrayed in the dominant Ethiopian representation as a period of silences (if not a veritable *damnatio memoriae*) and institutional traumas, the caesura with the ancient splendours of Aksum—so concretely represented by those “figures of remembrance”³ that are still the stelae today—could not be sharper.

This romantic memorial construction was adopted by European historians, who superimposed on the decline of Aksum the compelling analogy with the decline of the Roman Empire, itself tributary to a view of the evolution of empires according to the natural life-cycle of the human body. The architecture of the paradigm is explicitly defined by Ignazio Guidi: “*si parva licet componere magnis*, the decline of the Roman Empire favoured the invasions of the Barbarians, so the Semitic non-Semitic populations held in check during the good period of Aksum, occupied vast regions of the kingdom”.⁴ In his *Storia d’Etiopia*, Carlo Conti Rossini uses a very unambiguous lexical network, while describing an era of “tenebre assolute”, “inspiegato torpore”, “progressivo imbarbarimento”.⁵ The very title of the chapter, “La decadenza. Invasioni dei Begia”, is the manifesto of a historical reconstruction parallel to that of the Western Roman Empire in the same period. The Semitic north is contrasted by

² See the essay of Michael Gervers in this volume.

³ On the “figures of remembrance” see Assmann, 1997, pp. 13–17.

⁴ Guidi, 1932, p. 19. English translation is ours.

⁵ Conti Rossini, 1928, pp. 265–67.

the *revanche* of the Cushitic south, order is replaced by barbarism, literary flourishing by paralysis; like Latin, Gəʕəz is supplanted by vernaculars. A new power will eventually re-emerge from the alliance between monasticism and political power, which, like the Holy Roman Empire, has divine legitimacy. As Arnaldo Momigliano reminds us, the fall of the Empire has always been the archetype of all forms of decadence.⁶ Moreover, in the elaboration and consolidation of this equation between the crisis of the city of Aksum and the crisis of an entire geopolitical system a major role was played by both the adherence to a dominant analogy, that precisely of the collapse of the Roman empire, and the (conceptually imperialistic)⁷ hierarchy between a militarily and culturally superior civilization—the Aksumite one—and the inferior civilizations of the south (on which, however, we do not know the effects that the changes taking place from the seventh century onward had).

Today—as Hiluf Berhe reminds us in his essay— it is generally accepted that the gap is subjective, not objective, and that it is due to lack of research coverage, interdisciplinary research, and difficult fieldwork conditions. The idea that the scarcity of sources intrinsically implied an idea of decline and crisis of civilization is, of course, not new, and is already found expressed by Enrico Cerulli: “at the dawn of the fourteenth century the long silence is abruptly interrupted; and literary activity rises again for us in Ethiopia. For us, I said; because, in my opinion, that gap of centuries, which divides the inscriptions of King Danʾel and the works of the early fourteenth century, [...], is but apparent and means, however, nothing more than a gap in the transmission of the codices that have come down to us”⁸.

Today, as the reader will discover in the following pages, the picture appears much more articulated in every area of study, to the point that we are experiencing a radical rethinking of the old paradigm. In the words of Thomas Samuel Kuhn, a paradigm enters into crisis when a body of anomalies, i.e. new data which violate the paradigm-induced expectations, expands to the point that it cannot be ignored,⁹ or when the previous dominant analogy

⁶ Momigliano, 1973, p. 397.

⁷ Conti Rossini, 1928, p. 267: “questi secoli oscuri furono certamente secoli di profonda decadenza, d’imbarbarimento. L’elemento cuscitico dovette risollevarsi, riprendere il sopravvento nelle organizzazioni Statali, nelle istituzioni giuridiche, nelle attitudini mentali, paralizzando e in buona parte eliminando i benefici influssi delle civiltà superiori di cui Aksum era stata il prodotto”.

⁸ Cerulli, 1968, p. 35. English translation is ours.

⁹ Cf. Kuhn, 1970, pp. ix, 66–67, 82–83.

proves inadequate because the context in which it was developed has changed. New data from areas previously considered peripheral and new reflections on the slow processes of this era have encouraged a less catastrophic view of the impact of the Great Fall. In this new vision, the Aksumite political drama is tempered in the perspective of a “transformation without disaster”¹⁰ and in keeping with sociocultural changes driven by mutated needs. It is perhaps possible to imagine a parallelism with Mediterranean Late Antiquity: associated in the classical view of Roman Studies with an era of decadence, it has seen a vertical growth of field studies in conjunction with the abandonment of what has been labelled an “obsolete Gibbonian theory of decline”.¹¹ Similarly, one cannot help but see that even in Ethiopian Studies—alongside more traditionally studied geographical areas and documented historical periods such as the northern regions in the fourteenth–fifteenth centuries—the growth of investigations into the liminal period (as shown by the recent interest in the Zag^we) as well as in areas that have traditionally—and misleadingly—been regarded as “marginal” or entirely excluded from the debate¹² is to be correlated with a changed sensibility. Just as the “Late Antiquity explosion”¹³ allowed Late Antiquity to be seen not as an era of decline but as a period of innovation, so also our attitude toward the long Ethiopian *saeculum obscurum* waits to align with a new and broader vision.

A key issue in academic debate has always been to explain the collapse of the polity identified with the urban centralism of Aksum. It is accepted that, whatever its political structure, it underwent profound transformations due to a combination of different causes. Certainly, the Islamization of the coasts, the loss of the monopoly in the Red Sea trade from the seventh century onward, and the silting up of the port of Adulis prevented Aksum from remaining commercially connected with the Syro-Palestinian hinterland (lost to the Byzantines) and with the Mediterranean high-status clients. This is materially proven by the abandonment of the coin economy in the mid-seventh century, as Wolfgang Hahn reminds us in his essay, in which he reconstructs the chronology of the last six coin-issuing kings. Debated is the role played by the spread of Islam, which Michael Gervers, in this volume, considers to be far more limited than normally assumed. Yet—alongside the traditionally invoked

¹⁰ See the reflections expressed in Lusini, 2022, pp. 331–32.

¹¹ Lepelley, 1992, p. 66. See also Lewit Gibbon, 2001.

¹² See, for example, the growing resurgence of archaeological interest in the megalithic cultures of central and southern Ethiopia, as well as the increasing investigations at Islamic sites.

¹³ Giardina, 1999.

exogenous causes—new proposals have emerged, as stressed by Luisa Sernicola in this volume, which see the change as a combination of endogenous factors or dictated by environmental causes, such as the progressive shift towards an arid climate phase, or even an effect of the Justinian plague.¹⁴ According to the “environmental theory”, the reduction of seasonal rainfall in the seventh–tenth centuries caused drought, famine, and epidemics, and the need to rely uniquely on agriculture for survival rewarded the climate of the southern regions, which was much richer in monsoon rainfall, and eventually resulted in the shift of the political and economic centre of gravity in the area.¹⁵ From an adaptive point of view, this progressive *Drang nach Süden* was not a failure, but a strategy that allowed social structures to survive in response to the changed circumstances.

Associated with these transformations is the marginalization and disappearance of Gəʿəz as a spoken language. Maria Bulakh reflects on this correlation in her essay: according to the author, in the multilingual Aksumite kingdom, Gəʿəz had assumed the highest prestige as it was used by a privileged social and ethnic group involved in trade, namely the Agʿazi. Consequently, the language fell into disuse concurrently with the abandonment of trade routes and the marginalization of that elite, being replaced as a *lingua franca* and of trade by Arabic and as a vehicular language by other North-Ethiopian varieties related to modern Tigrinya (as shown by the transitional features exhibited by the Ham funerary inscription).¹⁶ It was when the schism between living speech and the *ləssanā māṣahəft* had become unbridgeable that the national consciousness of Gəʿəz as an unchangeable linguistic register, sanctified by the word of God, must have arisen. We know that it was not a linear process. This is shown by the orthographic heterogeneity found in some of the pre-fourteenth-century manuscripts, such as the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary (MS EMM 8509), investigated in this volume by Rafał Zarzeczny and Massimo Villa. Overall, manuscript sources prior to the fourteenth century remain very few and cannot be dated with certainty in the absence of reliable colophons and accurate radiometric measuring. They have nonetheless revealed more articulate scenarios than assumed, both in terms of competing and perhaps regionally characterized palaeographic varieties (as Marie-Laure Derat briefly recapitulates), and of non-homogeneous spelling and linguistic forms that did

¹⁴ Yohannes Gebre Selassie, 2011; Sernicola, 2017, pp. 100–02.

¹⁵ Marrassini, 2014, pp. 13–14, 287.

¹⁶ Kropp, 1999.

not survive or survived very sporadically the standardization of the Solomonic period. It is because of this “Cerullian” documentary poverty that the dynamics of acquisition and creation of literature in these centuries escape us. But there are paths to follow.

The most successful one arises from the discovery of the *codex unicus* of the *Aksumite Collection*, probably from this era, which inaugurated a groundbreaking phase in philological studies, not least for shedding light on intertextual phenomena of use and transformation of ancient historiographical texts into original productions transmitted in homiletic-hagiographical liturgical collections (Alessandro Bausi in this volume). Homiliaries, such as the aforementioned EMMML 8509, are under special observation not only because of their special role in connecting Aksumite translations and the medieval layer, but also because in them emerges the activity of the elusive authors Elyas, Luləyanos, Mikaʾel, Menas, Tewofəlos, and Yoḥannəs, on which much remains to be done. Equally promising appears to be the line of research focused on palimpsests and hymnodic manuscripts, as well as on the material and scriptural traces of Ethiopian pilgrims and monks outside Ethiopia, particularly in Egyptian monasteries (such as al-Dayr al-Abyaḍ, the subject of Martina Ambu’s essay). Not only Egypt, also Sinai: if the fifth section of the *Ladder* of John Climacus—abbot of the monastery of Raithu on the shores of the Red Sea in the first half of the seventh century—is, as Robert Beylot argued,¹⁷ translated from Greek, it would represent one of the last translations from Greek to be made and, if the translation was made in Sinai itself and not in Aksum,¹⁸ it would testify to the vitality of the Red Sea seaway in the years immediately preceding or concomitant the rise of Islam.

Therefore, contrary to the supposed crisis in the scribal and literary tradition (“in realtà, poco o nulla si dovette scrivere”),¹⁹ copying continued, with the facilitation that there was no transition between majuscule and minuscule as in the Latin West, a circumstance that allowed Ethiopic textual transmission to reconnect with antiquity without bottlenecks. This took place in a context characterized by the expansion of monasticism, both in terms of the number of coenobitic foundations and in terms of authority, as the isolated epigraph of the *Haḍani* Danəʾel reminds us, who calling himself “son of Dābrā Fərem” presumably betrays a monastic affiliation. Available evidence suggests that

¹⁷ Beylot, 2009.

¹⁸ Fiaccadori, 2012.

¹⁹ Conti Rossini, 1899, p. 204.

such profound cultural and social changes led the reorganized communities to abandon the construction of secular buildings in favour of religious ones in eastern Təgray, such as Däbrä Dammo, Ham in Šəmāzana, Mikaʾel Amba, Nazret Maryam, ʿUra Mäsqaḷ²⁰—although this pattern may, at least in part, reflect biases inherent in the extant record. As Hiluf Berhe reminds us in this volume, the conception and execution of this project presupposed a vitality and capacity to mobilize the population that contrasts with the idea of an enduring power vacuum.²¹ And if the territory began to be dotted with religious foundations, they could not but be endowed with libraries.

One might ask whether any traces of these initiatives sponsored by an elite of whatever nature survived in local memory. It is well known that the dominant pattern ascribes almost all rock-hewn monasteries to the Nine Saints or Aksumite kings, yet are some foundational myths are exceptions. The most famous archetype of the pious ruler-builder is obviously that of king Lalibāla. Other examples of patronage of ecclesiastical architecture are represented by Anbäsa Wəddəm and Dəlnaʿod. The elusive Anbäsa Wəddəm, possibly living in the mid-twelfth century,²² is sparsely evoked, in addition to the king lists, in some isolated traditions in connection with ecclesiastical foundations (Mikaʾel Amba), with the restoration of the church at Aksum, and even with translations attributed to *Papas* Minas “before Muslims ruled in Egypt”.²³ His name (“lion of the wilderness”) eloquently combines continuity and transformation: the former onomastic element evokes legitimate Davidic kingship, the latter is incompatible with the Gəʿəz lexicon but not with those of other Semitic languages in the area. Moreover, it generates a semantic network with the names of later rulers attested in king lists or historically documented as Tāntawəddəm and the Solomonic Wəddəm Rāʿad. King Dəlnaʿod, associated with momentous institutional transformations (under him the capital was transferred from Aksum to an eastern province and upon his death the kingdom passed to the Zagʷe),²⁴ was also a founder of churches: it was he who built the Däbrä ʿĪgziʾabəḥer church on Ḥayq island, the first institution from which the prestigious centre of Däbrä ʿĪstīfanos developed. As mentioned, monasteries were established, rock-hewn churches were carved, libraries were born. There is reason to believe that written knowledge spread more than previously thought.

²⁰ Derat 2020, pp. 34–35.

²¹ Lepage, 2006.

²² Sergew Hable Selassie, 1972, p. 203 n. 117; Derat, 2018, pp. 40–42.

²³ Cowley, 1983, p. 78.

²⁴ Kur, 1965, tr., p. 15.

The culminating stage of this process of economic and cultural evolution of monastic institutions is ideally represented by two documents that already show in action the typical features of the following centuries: one is the donation of Ṭāntawəddām—on which see Denis Nosnitsin’s essay in this volume—which recognizes ʿUra Māsḡāl as the beneficiary of vast land donations in the twelfth century and certifies the key-role of the churches in the management of land wealth and in general the socioeconomic organization of the plateau. The other is the well-known inventory of books from the said Dābrā Ḥayq monastery, which snapshots the composition of a library at the terminal point of the period treated in this book, the late thirteenth century, and witnesses to the coexistence of old and new literature and the progressive coagulation of texts into hagiographical collections.

There remain many open questions in this slippery field. Among them, it is worth emphasizing firstly a terminological problem, provocatively raised in the title of this volume. If the Petrarchan²⁵ expression “Dark Ages” appears to be a term that reveals much more about our visual opacities than about historical reality, then how can we frame more appropriately the period under consideration? What is “Late Aksumite”? And what is “post-Aksumite”? Is “post-Aksumite” a set of concepts and structures or rather a convenient container that can be expanded or restricted as per need? The use of this term generates perplexity among scholars from different disciplines. For example, in philology, given the binary character of translational literature, it is common to consider even—and especially—texts translated from Arabic in the early Solomonic age as “post-Aksumite”, but the effect is bewildering for specialists in other fields, such as historians and archaeologists, for whom “post-Aksumite” has perhaps a narrower—but no less debatable—meaning.²⁶ It is also true, as Steven Kaplan recently suggested, taking up a reflection by Michael G. Morony, that we should accept the fact that a complex history such as the Ethiopian one needs multiple periodizations for different historical and geographical contexts and that these might generate contradictions and inconsistencies.²⁷ As Samantha Kelly has recently reminded us,²⁸ we do not have enough data with which to characterize the centuries between the fall of Aksum and the Zag^we period in independent terms and choose a new terminolo-

²⁵ Mommsen, 1942.

²⁶ See Sernicola in this volume.

²⁷ Morony, 1981; Kaplan, 2024, p. 23.

²⁸ Kelly, 2020, p. 4.

gy—leaving, where available, absolute dating as the only viable alternative. Like other chronological periodizations identified by temporal prefixes such as *post-*, one has to question how deep the continuity with the earlier phase was, that is in our case with Aksumite culture, and how pervasive the non-Aksumite features were. It is this challenge that the present volume hopes to stimulate, from a strengthened interdisciplinary perspective and despite the limited data available. In what respects was there continuity with the Aksumite past? In what respects was/were the society/ies between the seventh and thirteenth centuries revolutionarily distinct and structurally autonomous from the ancient Aksumite and the Solomonic ones?²⁹ And in what respects were they instead transitional societies? Will the combination of disciplines represented by the contributions in this volume succeed in forming a less fragmented picture? And also—no less important and fascinating task for the historian—can we understand the reasons why the Ethiopians chose to represent themselves in this way and why certain memorial reconstructions prevailed over others?

Needless to say, the centuries-long process of Christianization of the plateau was not linear, but marked by conflicts, hesitations and sudden closures. And the memory of these ebbs and flows certainly survives in the legend of Gudit, which we have mentioned above. But if during the centuries between Kaleb and Lalibäla there was no institutional stability, there was certainly some continuity at the ideological level. We do not know exactly when and how the centrality of Aksum was replaced by a new social system, in which the ancient city was complemented—or even superseded—by Ku[̣]bar/Soper and other polities, but we can imagine that the ancient city remained the ideological horizon throughout the period under consideration.³⁰ This would be supported by the (albeit scanty) epigraphic evidence from this period: the material traces of the “monk-warrior” *Haḍani Danəʿel*, who chose to place his own inscriptions in the very stone of Aksum reusing one of the thrones onto which the illustrious rulers of the past had celebrated their military enterprises, confirm the city’s role as a “ville qui fait les rois”, as François-Xavier Fauvelle

²⁹ I am using the notion of revolutionary change according to the sense expressed by Pomian, 1978, pp. 551: “une révolution n’est pas conçue comme une mutation, sinon violente et spectaculaire, du moins dramatique ; elle est très souvent silencieuse et imperceptible pour ceux-là même qui la font [...] Elle n’est même pas toujours très rapide ; il arrive qu’elle s’étale sur plusieurs siècles”.

³⁰ As stated by Anaïs Wion (in this volume, p. 340), “this city is paradoxically both a shadow area of the meta-narrative and an over-exposed point”.

has suggestively written.³¹ This would be proven again, for the Zag^we period, by the important intertextual continuities in royal titles between the ancient Aksumite rulers and Zag^we dynasty and in the diplomatic language of the royal land grants, as investigated by Marie-Laure Derat.

So, if there was, on the one hand, ideological continuity and, on the other hand, transformation through the shaping of a new monastic and socioeconomic organization, why were these aspects collectively forgotten and only the caesuras remembered? Why, as the legend of Gudit teaches us, did a sense of a dramatic deconstruction of the ancient society prevail instead? If we consider, alongside the oral tradition about Queen Gudit, the archaeological evidence of an intentional destabilization and collapse of some of the most imposing Aksumite stelae, what does this tell us about the nature and extent of the rupture that must have occurred? Which economic, social, or perhaps even ethnic factors actually contributed to the process accompanying Aksum's decline and the emergence of subsequent political entities? How did these factors intertwine and reinforce one another? Can the legendary narrative and the material record be reconciled, or do they reveal fundamentally different perspectives on this transformative period?

We must keep in mind that the construction of memory is never a neutral operation and that, in crystallizing into *traditional narratives*, memory is “digested”, selected, distorted, and reshaped by dynamics of retrospective representation and self-representation that respond to ideological and emotional implications specific to later historical contexts. We might therefore ask how much the so-called “*Kəbrä nägäšt* propaganda” of late medieval times—in consequence of which the pre-Solomonic kings were largely forgotten or labelled as usurpers—contributed to unhinge this continuity with the Aksumite times.

The perception of crisis and barbarization, then, is not only the last echo of imperocentric and Eurocentric “Gibbonism”,³² but should probably be related to the fact that in the later ideological construction the traits of continuity with the past were denied, those of rupture were emphasized, and those of transition were not perceived as foundational elements of a new system. Recovering this triple line of continuity, rupture and transition through the distorting prism of traditional and modern historiographical constructions is the

³¹ Fauvelle, 2013, p. 121.

³² “The Aethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten”, only to be awakened by the Portuguese”, Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (ch. 47, part VI), cited in Ullendorff, 1960, pp. 57–58.

basis of the idea behind the present volume. In presenting it, we are persuaded that it has intercepted a growing interest and that it will succeed in creating multiple points of contact between scholars and encourage fruitful dialogue among them. We are also convinced that this work represents only a small and limited contribution to the broader study of this complex chronological phase of Ethiopian and Eritrean past. It is our hope that future research—ever more systematic and interdisciplinary—will continue to shed light on the many unresolved questions. In particular, we wish to see the geographical scope of investigation broadened, which can no longer be confined solely to the regions that once formed the core of the Aksumite culture and, later, the Solomonic dynasty. It is through such expansive and integrated efforts that a fuller understanding of the historical processes at play may finally emerge.

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MARTINA AMBU

***Ethiopian Connections with the White Monastery
(al-Dayr al-Abyad, Egypt):
New Hypotheses and Discoveries****

1. – *Introduction*

Many sources, especially manuscripts and ex-voto inscriptions, document the passage and settlement of Ethiopian pilgrims and religious communities in several places in Egypt over a long period, from Late Antiquity to Modern Times.¹

During archaeological investigations conducted between 2004 and 2006, the discovery of an Ethiopic manuscript fragment (on paper)² dating between 1160 and 1232/1233 was made inside the Church of the Apostles at the renowned Saint Anthony Monastery on the Red Sea.³ This archaeological finding suggests that Ethiopians settled at this site during a period when Ethiopic manuscripts were surprisingly rare, roughly prior to the thirteenth century.⁴

Several Ethiopic manuscripts, which were used as archives by Christian Ethiopians in Egypt, further confirm the presence of Ethiopians in numerous

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¹ For Ethiopian communities in Egypt in the Modern periods, see the recent contribution by: Nosnitsin and Reule, 2021.

² Its paper support suggests that this fragmentary Ethiopic manuscript was produced in Egypt. In fact, "with the exception of Islamic manuscripts, which are (almost) exclusively on paper [...], this material was not used to any extent in Ethiopia before the twentieth century. The usage of paper is limited to specific contexts, namely in manuscripts produced in Ethiopian communities abroad, especially in Egypt and Rome." See Balicka-Witakowska, Bausi, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2015, p. 155.

³ Fr. Maximous el-Antony, Blid, Butts, 2016.

⁴ Bausi, 2020, p. 218.

churches and monasteries across the country.⁵ From the fourteenth century to Modern Times,⁶ Ethiopian communities settled in various monastic centres in Lower Egypt, including Wādī al-Naṭrūn (between Cairo and Alexandria), as well as in Middle Egypt, particularly in Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ.⁷ Additionally, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Ethiopians established communities in two monasteries in Cairo: the Church of Saint George in Ḥārat Zuwayla and Dayr Abū Mīnā (Fig. 1).⁸

As for the epigraphic evidence, it reveals an earlier chronology of Ethiopian pilgrims in Egypt (Fig. 1). Indeed, between the fourth and the eighth centuries, three Ethiopic ex-voto inscriptions were carved at three rock-hewn sites: one in Wādī Menīh (somewhere on the formerly called “Berenice road” in the Eastern Egyptian Desert),⁹ another in Dayr Abū Ḥinnis (in Middle Egypt, in the vicinity of the famous city of Antinoë),¹⁰ and a third on one of the slopes of the Sinai peninsula (unspecified location).¹¹ In contrast, no other Ethiopic inscriptions from Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages have been documented in Egypt until the sixteenth century when Ethiopian pilgrims and monks, for example, left several golden ink-painted graffiti on the walls of Saint Anthony Monastery.¹²

Al-Dayr al-Abyaḡ (Fig. 1),¹³ commonly referred to as the “White Monastery”, is another Coptic centre located in Middle Egypt with historical ties to Christian Ethiopia. Founded in the fifth century, al-Dayr al-Abyaḡ gained its fame thanks to the charismatic activities of Shenoute (347–465 C.E.).¹⁴ Until the fourteenth century, this monastery hosted one of the most prolific scriptoria in Coptic Egypt.¹⁵ Moreover, it served as one of the pilgrimage stations in

⁵ Cerulli, 1947, pp. 353–432.

⁶ Cerulli, 1947, pp. 353–55; Meinardus, 1965; Nosnitsin and Reule, 2021.

⁷ Cerulli, 1947, pp. 353–55.

⁸ Ambu, 2024.

⁹ Littmann, 1954, pp. 119–23. Located at: 25°37'11"N 33°29'21"E. I am very grateful to Maël Crépy (CNRS) for providing me the exact position of Wādī Menīh.

¹⁰ See *inter alia*: Delattre, 2016.

¹¹ Puech, 1980.

¹² Griffith, 2002.

¹³ The Arabic name of the monastery is “al-Dayr al-Abyaḡ.” The form “Dayr al-Abyaḡ,” though linguistically wrong, is largely used in Western literature. The official name of the monastery is Dayr al-Anbā Šanūda. I thank the anonymous reviewer for these precise observations.

¹⁴ Blanke, 2019.

¹⁵ See, *inter alia*: Boud’Hors, 1999; Orlandi, 2002.

Middle Egypt due to its proximity to the Nile and its location on the fluvial trade route.

In today's al-Dayr al-Abyaḍ, no traces of a connection with Christian Ethiopia can be found.¹⁶ However, historical relations between this Egyptian monastic centre and the Ethiopian highlands existed in the past, as evidenced by two pieces of evidence. First, an Egyptian translator, known in Ethiopic as Mikaʿel or Zāmikaʿel, translated the *Life of Theodore the Oriental* (CAe 1904, BHO 1163) from Arabic into Gəʿəz, during the reign of King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. Second, a now-lost inscription dating to the 222nd year of Grace was written by a group of Ethiopian pilgrims visiting the White Monastery. The problematic chronology and socio-historical context of these data will be discussed below, and a new and significant discovery from the notes of a French voyager from the twentieth century will be presented in this paper.

2. – *Al-Dayr al-Abyaḍ and the translation of the Life of Theodore the Oriental*

In general, the translations of texts into Gəʿəz occurred in two distinct phases. The first phase involved the translation of a selected corpus of texts from Greek into Ethiopic during the so-called “Aksumite period”, which spanned between the fourth and seventh centuries.¹⁷ The second phase, corresponding to the “Arabic period” of translations into Gəʿəz, commenced sometime in the thirteenth century. Moreover, it gained considerable momentum from the second half of the fourteenth century onward, thanks to the patronage and activities of the Coptic Metropolitan Sälama (1348–1388).¹⁸ However, it is worth noting that *Abunä Sälama* is not the only known translator.

Although this literary and intellectual phenomenon continued in Ethiopia with several other translators well after the fourteenth century,¹⁹ three translators are also documented in Egypt. In fact, Səməʿon, an Egyptian priest from Saint Anthony Monastery, translated one of the two versions of the *Synaxarion*

¹⁶ As part of a fieldwork in Middle Egypt funded by the ERC project HomEast, I had the opportunity to visit this site in May 2023, along with my colleagues Perrine Pilette (CNRS) and Marion Claude (IFAO). Unfortunately, extensive restoration efforts at the monastery have made it impossible to conduct a survey of any materials or evidence related to a previous Ethiopian presence at the site.

¹⁷ See for instance: Villa, 2017; Bausi, 2018.

¹⁸ Pisani, 2019; Ambu, 2022.

¹⁹ See for instance: Ricci, 1967–1968. On translations from Ethiopic into Arabic, see: Ambu, Pilette, forthcoming.

and the *Life of Basilides* by the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the fifteenth century.²⁰ At the same monastery, in 1562/1563, an anonymous Ethiopian monk from Täklä Haymanot's monastic network translated two penitential books: the *Mäṣḥafä nəssəḥa* and the *Mäṣḥafä qändil*.²¹ In his turn, a third translator, the aforementioned Mika'el, is recorded as the translator of the *Life of Theodore the Oriental*, which he completed at a certain "Monastery of Abba Sinoda".²²

The Ethiopic version of this hagiography was edited and translated into Latin by Francisco Maria Esteves Pereira, who asserted that it was originally translated from Arabic into Gə'əz, though without providing further corroborative evidence.²³ Following a preliminary study conducted by Alessandro Bausi,²⁴ at least five manuscripts of the *Gädlä Säma'at* ("Acts of Martyrs") collection preserve the *Life of Theodore the Oriental*, complete with an embedded colophon detailing its translation into Gə'əz.²⁵ These manuscripts were copied between the late-fourteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Below, the list of witnesses I have collected is based on Alessandro Bausi's analysis, since they are accompanied by colophons concerning the translation. This list is not exhaustive and should be enlarged in anticipation of a more thorough study.

1. EMMML 2514, fols 114ra–124ra (colophon on fol. 124ra), 1379–1388 C.E.
2. London, BL Orient. 689, fols 211vb–228vb (colophon on fol. 228vb), fifteenth century.
3. EMMML 6951, fols 126ra–135va (colophon on fol. 135va), fifteenth century (uncatalogued).
4. London, BL Orient. 687-688, fols 185ra–194vc (colophon on fol. 194rc-va), eighteenth century.
5. EMMML 6244, fols 61rb–71vb (colophon on fol. 71vb), nineteenth century (uncatalogued).

The colophon of the Ethiopic version of the *Life of Theodore the Oriental* is particularly interesting. It provides specific details that aid in reconstructing the historical conditions under which its translation occurred. All the selected

²⁰ Colin, 1988, pp. 286 and 300.

²¹ Cerulli, 1947, pp. 419–21; Wion, 2011; Ambu, 2022.

²² Bausi, 2002, pp. 11–12.

²³ Pereira, 1907, p. 123.

²⁴ Bausi, 2002, p. 12.

²⁵ Bausi, 2022, pp. 145–46.

witnesses exhibit minor, non-substantial variations among them. Consequently, I will present a diplomatic edition and translation of the colophon found in the most ancient witness, manuscript EMMML 2514, which was copied between 1379 and 1388 C.E.

አዕለውነ፣ ዘንተ፣ ገድለ፣ በመዋዕለ፣ መፍቀሬ፣ እግዚአብሔር፣ ንጉሥ፣ ገብ
ረ፣ መሰቀል፣ ወዘተርገሞ፣ ቀሲስ፣ ግብጻዊ፣ ዘስሙ፣ ሚካኤል፣ ወመካኑ፣
ብሔረ፣ ግብጽ፣ ደብረ፣ አባ፣ ሲኖዳ፣ ፤፤ (fol. 124ra)

We translated this *gädl* at the time of the friend of the Lord, King Gäbrä Mäsqäl, and the one who interpreted it was the Egyptian priest whose name is Mikaʿel and his place is the land of Egypt <at> the Monastery of Abba Shenoute (*Däbrä Abba Sinoda*).

Some elements emerge from this brief colophon regarding the translator and its work. Firstly, Mikaʿel, also referred to as Zämikaʿel in other witnesses, is identified as an Egyptian priest active in Egypt, specifically in a monastery attributed to Sinoda, which refers to Shenoute (348–465). This toponym can be traced back to the White Monastery. In fact, “it bears the name Dayr al-Anbā Šanūda (the Monastery of St Shenoute), but has been colloquially called Dayr al-Abyaḍ (the “White Monastery”) since the time of the Arab historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442), if not earlier”.²⁶

Regarding the translator’s activity, there are a few pieces of evidence that suggest he might have worked with others.²⁷ The act of translating is expressed by the verb አዕለውነ (*aʿläwnä*), in the first-person plural of the perfect form II.2. Additionally, Mikaʿel seems to be described as “the one who interpreted it” (ዘተርገሞ, *zä-tärgʷämo*), leaving room for the hypothesis that he played a central role in the translation or in the revision of a collaborative project that may have taken place in Dayr al-Abyaḍ.

Furthermore, its embedded colophon specifies the time when the translation occurred, during the reign of King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. As noted by Alessandro Bausi,²⁸ this appellation could refer to at least three Ethiopian kings: Lalibäla (?–1204–1225-?),²⁹ °Amdä Šəyon (1314–1344) and Yəšəhaq (1414–1429). Given that manuscript EMMML 2514 was completed between 1379 and 1388

²⁶ Brooks Hedstrom, Bolman, Rahim, *et al.*, 2011–2012, p. 333a.

²⁷ For collaborative translations and literary techniques, see: Elagina, forthcoming.

²⁸ Bausi, 2002, p. 12.

²⁹ This new chronology is provided by: Derat, 2018, p. 49.

C.E.,³⁰ it is important to note that the translation could not have taken place during the reign of Yəṣṣāq. Instead, it would have occurred during the time of Lalibāla, in the early thirteenth century, or during the reign of ʿAmdä Şəyon in the first half of the fourteenth century.

In both cases, Pereira’s hypothesis regarding the translation process from Arabic into Gəʿəz appears more plausible, as translations from Arabic were widespread during this particular time frame.³¹ Additionally, the *Life of Theodore the Oriental* is likely one of the texts translated before the activity of Abunä Sälama (1348–1388).³²

3. – *Al-Dayr al-Abyaḍ and Maryam Nazret: Two intellectual centres during Lalibāla’s reign?*

Translations could have occurred during the reigns of both kings. Regarding ʿAmdä Şəyon’s lifespan, several studies have highlighted that an ancient set of homilies (some of them translated from Arabic at an unspecified time) was copied and compiled in manuscript EMMML 1763, which dates to 1336/1337 or 1339/40 C.E. This manuscript mentions King ʿAmdä Şəyon and the metropolitan Yaʿqob (1337–1344).³³ Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the translation of an important work took place under the reign of Lalibāla.

Literary and translation activities during the time of the Zagʷe King Lalibāla are documented, *inter alia*, by the famous colophon of the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, known in Arabic and in Gəʿəz.³⁴ This “foundational” text of later Ethiopian royal ideology offers crucial insights into translation dynamics and the King’s role in this process. According to its colophon, the *Kəbrä nägäšt* was initially translated in 1225 from *Coptic* into *Arabic*,³⁵ “in the days of King

³⁰ Lanfranco Ricci dates this manuscript to the fifteenth or sixteenth century (Ricci, 1984, p. 183). However, both Alessandro Bausi and I agree with the dating provided by the cataloguers (1379–1388). Cf. Getatchew Haile, Macomber, 1983, pp. 6–14; Bausi, 2002, p. 12; Ambu, 2022.

³¹ Conversely, no translation from Coptic into Ethiopic has been identified yet. See Bausi, 2002, p. 15, n. 54.

³² Bausi, 2020, pp. 230–32.

³³ All these studies and more recent considerations on the topic are presented by: Bausi 2019, pp. 63–80.

³⁴ “Kəbrä Nägäšt” in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), p. 367a (by Paolo Marrassini).

³⁵ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020, pp. 489–90.

Gäbrä Mäsqäl—whose surname is Lalibäla—in the days of *Abba* Giyorgis, the virtuous metropolitan”.³⁶ As noted in a recent study, this initial translation was carried out “by two persons with Arabic names, Abū al-‘Izz et Abū al-Faraḡ, who, judging from their bilingual faculties, were probably members of the Church of Alexandria”.³⁷ It took more than a century before “the text was translated into Gəʿəz after being uncovered at Nazret, in Təgray (Ethiopia), likely the place of its translation from Coptic into Arabic”.³⁸

Due to the limited available information, it is hard to establish a precise chronology for the translation of the *Life of Theodore the Oriental*. However, external data seem to suggest an early dating, corresponding to King Lalibäla’s reign.

Recent archaeological and historical analyses indicate a period of abandonment of al-Dayr al-Abyaḍ between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,³⁹ making it less likely that the translation of the *Life of Theodore the Oriental* was carried out during ʿAmdä Şəyon’s reign. The last documented visit to the monastery was made in 1301 by a certain monk Macarius,⁴⁰ and a painting of the *Theotokos with Child* inside the main church of the convent was achieved in the very beginning of the fourteenth century.⁴¹ Furthermore, the site, of which only the main church remained intact, was described by Egyptian historian Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī as still being in a state of abandonment in the first half of the fifteenth century.⁴²

If this hypothesis is correct, the colophons of both the *Life of Theodore the Oriental* and the *Kəbrä nägäst* indicate a translation process during the reign of King Lalibäla, which occurred in two precise locations. On the one hand, the White Monastery, one of the most important intellectual centres of Coptic Egypt, where an Egyptian translator, possibly assisted by others, possessed the linguistic skills to translate and “interpret” a hagiography into Ethiopic. Of course, even though it is not mentioned in the colophon, this translation may have been commissioned directly by the king himself, with the result

³⁶ Personal translation of Colin, 2002, p. 110: “[...] dans les jours du roi Gabra Masqal—dont le surnom est Lālibalā—, dans les jours d’*abbā* Georges, le métropolitain vertueux”.

³⁷ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020, p. 490.

³⁸ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020, p. 490.

³⁹ Brooks Hedstrom, 2005, p. 2; Blanke, 2019, p. 38–43.

⁴⁰ Blanke, 2019, p. 32.

⁴¹ Brooks Hedstrom, Bolman, Rahim, *et al.*, 2011–2012, p. 334b, n. 5.

⁴² Brooks Hedstrom, 2005, p. 2.

that new texts were incorporated into the literary repertoire of the Ethiopian diocese, which was dependent on the Patriarchate of Alexandria.⁴³

On the other hand, there was Nazret (or Maryam Nazret), an Egyptian city founded in the twelfth century by the Coptic metropolitan Mika'el, in the heart of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia.⁴⁴ It was here that the future “manifesto” of the Ethiopian kings, the *Käbrä nägäšt*, was translated. Moreover, as some scholars have noted, its colophon sheds light “on a community of Egyptian Christians, fluent in both Coptic and Arabic, who entered the service of the Ethiopian kings in the thirteenth century”.⁴⁵

Having established these elements, the second piece of evidence concerning the relations between the White Monastery and Christian Ethiopia is represented by an important trace left by some pilgrims, the details of which will be discussed below.

4. – *An Ethiopic inscription at Dayr al-Abyad: A problematic chronology*

A now-lost Ethiopic inscription was still visible at the White Monastery at the very beginning of the twentieth century. As a matter of fact, the dating of this epigraphic document raised a debate among the scholarly community that should be resumed here.

First, the Russian Wladimir de Bock (1850–1899) visited the White Monastery in 1898 and his report was published in 1901, after his death.⁴⁶ In his notebooks, which contained various descriptions and drawings, De Bock documented a chapel (subsequently demolished),⁴⁷ located in the middle of the fortified cloister of the convent (see Figs 2–3 and 5). Additionally, within the old church, he transcribed several inscriptions in Armenian and Coptic scripts.⁴⁸

Moreover, De Bock spotted an Ethiopic inscription, written by an Ethiopian pilgrim using unspecified “colours”, which was located on an arch in front of the chapel’s entry (Figs 4–7).⁴⁹

⁴³ Munro Hay, 1997.

⁴⁴ Derat, 2018, pp. 101–04; Derat, Fauvelle, Mensan *et al.*, 2025.

⁴⁵ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020, p. 490.

⁴⁶ De Bock, 1901.

⁴⁷ See below.

⁴⁸ De Bock, 1901, p. 58.

⁴⁹ De Bock, 1901, p. 54.

Since he was unable to read Gəʿəz, the Russian traveller made a copy of the inscription to the best of his abilities, inevitably making natural mistakes (Fig. 7).⁵⁰ He then sent his copy to the *éthiopisant* Boris Alexandrovich Turaev (1868–1920), seeking explanations regarding its meaning. Turaev’s assessment was that it dated to the 222nd year of an unspecified “Judith’s era”,⁵¹ which he converted to 1730 C.E. However, he did not attempt a translation.

In 1923, the Italian scholar Carlo Conti Rossini (1872–1949) tried to revise De Bock’s copy, and edited for the first time the Ethiopic inscription from the White Monastery (Fig. 8), followed by a translation in Italian,⁵² that I provide here below along with a translation into English:

“(1) In nome della Trinità santa! Scrisi – (2) questa scritta io,
“Za-Se‘el (?), peccatore – (3) e colpevole, povero, di... Ascol – (4) tate,
“o padri miei, fratelli miei! Scendemmo (= venimmo a questo con-
“vento) in tredici; – (5) e due morirono nel [cammino?]... – (6) Newāya
“Māryām, monaco, di Ṣelālo, – (7) e Sarṣa Yoḥannes di Dabra Warq,
“– (8) addì 8 del (mese di) sane, nel 220° an – (9) no della Miseri-
“cordia. La preghiera e le suppliche – (10) di abbā Scenuti giun-
“gano a noi. Amen”.

“In the name of the Holy Trinity. I wrote this writing, I, Za-Se‘el (?), the sinner and guilty, the poor, from... Listen, oh my fathers, oh my brothers. The thirteen of us descended (= came to this convent) and two died (on the path?)... Newāya Māryām, monk from Ṣelālo, and Sarṣa Yoḥannes from Dabra Warq, the 8th of (the month of) Sanē, in the 222nd year of Grace. The prayer and the supplications of abbā Shenoute may come to us. Amen.”

Thanks to his translation, the content of the inscription became accessible, revealing that it was written by an Ethiopian monk. The *ex-voto* inscription⁵³ narrates the arrival of a small group of monks, and the deaths of two of them during their journey to the White Monastery. In the inscription, the monk addressed his prayers to “abba Shenoute”. Additionally, the document mentions two monasteries in Ethiopia, Dābrā Wārḳ, and a place called “Ṣelālo”. Conti Rossini disagreed with Turaev’s dating and revised it to 1563 according

⁵⁰ De Bock, 1901, p. 54.

⁵¹ “Ère de Judith”, perhaps referring to the Ethiopian Calendar of Grace. See, *inter alia*: Neugebauer, 1979.

⁵² Conti Rossini, 1923, pp. 461–62.

⁵³ Inscriptions that are written in a holy place as a sign of memory or acknowledgement of a prayer’s achievement.

to the “Easter Cycle”.⁵⁴ However, based on palaeographical grounds, the Italian scholar asserted that this inscription was more ancient.

In 1925, Marius Chaîne (1873–1960) also included this inscription to his significant work on Coptic and Ethiopic chronology, *La chronologie des temps chrétiens de l’Égypte et de l’Éthiopie*.⁵⁵ He offered a new conversion for its dating: the inscription could be dated to either 1038 or 1114 C.E., according to the principles of the calendar of Mercy (or Grace), divided in 532-years cycles, with the option to add 76 years. Emphasizing the ancient characteristics of the Ethiopic script as copied by De Bock, Chaîne justified this earlier chronology by referring to, once again, Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī’s account of the White Monastery’s abandonment before 1442 C.E., attributed to an unspecified “Arab invasion”.⁵⁶

The dating of the lost Ethiopic inscription at the White Monastery continues to be a subject of debate among contemporary scholars. On one side, Chaîne’s dating has been accepted by Claire Bosc-Tiessé and Gianfranco Fiaccadori, who argue that this inscription is the first dated “medieval” Ethiopic inscription on record.⁵⁷ Furthermore, they mention that Yoḥannəs, one of the deceased pilgrims, is associated with Däbrä Wärq in Goḡḡam. This piece of information leads the two scholars to date the existence of Däbrä Wärq to 1038 or 1114 C.E., corresponding to the time when the inscription was authored.

On the other side, Susanne Hummel and Anaïs Wion advocate for a later chronology. In her thesis, Hummel states that the oldest historical reference to Däbrä Wärq dates to the time of King ʿEskəndər (1471–1494). She suggests that this specific Ethiopic inscription at the White Monastery should be dated to 1570 C.E.⁵⁸ Wion, in a recent article, puts forth the hypothesis that Däbrä Wärq and ʿSelalo may not have existed during the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, as they were more strongly associated in the seventeenth century. She proposes a later date for the inscription, between 1570 and 1646 C.E.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Conti Rossini, 1923, p. 462.

⁵⁵ Chaîne, 1925, pp. 191–92.

⁵⁶ Chaîne, 1925, p. 192. See above.

⁵⁷ “*Kəbrä nāgäšt*” in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), p. 367a (by Paolo Marrassini).

⁵⁸ Hummel, 2020, p. 12.

⁵⁹ Wion, 2017, p. 510, n. 49.

5. – *Lost and found... in Jean Clédat's notebook (1903)*

Until today, no other copy of the lost Ethiopic inscription at the White Monastery was known. However, I have conducted further research at the Musée du Louvre in Paris and have delved into an important archive that had once belonged to a French voyager, Jean Clédat (1871–1943). This discovery has provided new information about the recent history of the White Monastery and its ex-voto inscriptions.⁶⁰

Thanks to the efforts of Cédric Meurice, the history of the White Monastery at the turn of the twentieth century is now well-documented. Cédric Meurice has managed to reconstruct the sequence of events that ultimately led to the destruction of the chapel where the Ethiopic inscription, among many others, was housed (Figs 5-6).⁶¹

Shortly after his visit in 1898, Wladimir De Bock alerted the Egyptian *Comité de conservation des monuments de l'art arabe* (henceforth Comité) about the poor state of preservation of the site. The Comité was elected in 1881 to study, preserve, and restore Islamic and Christian monuments in Cairo and, to a lesser extent, in Egypt.⁶²

Soon after, between 1903 and 1905, the Comité accepted a project, that was submitted by Jean Clédat, formerly student at the *École nationale et spéciale des Beaux-Arts* in Paris and at the *École française du Caire*. During his visits to the monasteries in Sohag, the French young man wrote down in his notebooks (Fig. 9) some personal observations, drawings and copies of inscriptions and decorations in both the Red and the White Monasteries, built at less than five kilometres one from the other (Fig. 1).

His work was aimed at preserving a severely deteriorated heritage that was on the brink of disappearing. Since the White Monastery was converted into a village, between 1906 and 1911, the Comité decided to dismantle some of the convent's structures for safety reasons, which included the chapel where De Bock recorded the Ethiopic inscription (Figs 2 and 4).⁶³

⁶⁰ I am very grateful to Dominique Bénazeth, former curator at the Musée du Louvre – Département des Antiquités égyptiennes, and Cédric Meurice, who currently holds the position of “ingénieur d'études” at the Musée du Louvre, for generously sharing valuable information about Jean Clédat's work and activities. I extend my special thanks to Cédric Meurice for providing me with access to Jean Clédat's notebook in 2023 (see below).

⁶¹ Meurice, 2010; Meurice, 2014.

⁶² Meurice, 2010.

⁶³ Meurice, 2010; Meurice, 2014.

This chapel was originally located in the middle of the cloister (Fig. 5), on its western side. As described by De Bock and Clédât (Fig. 10),⁶⁴ inside the chapel there was a staircase, used as a pulpit (Fig. 6, kindly provided by Emmanuel Fritsch).⁶⁵

During one of his visits to al-Dayr al-Abyad in 1903, Clédât made copies of the many inscriptions and graffiti that were painted on the church and the chapel's wall. These were primarily in Coptic, but he also recorded pharaonic hieroglyphics, decorations, and architectural elements, and provided comments and descriptions in French (Fig. 10). These observations were compiled in a particular notebook titled *Couvents Rouge et Blanc* (Fig. 9), which was later donated by Clédât's daughter to the Coptic Department of the Musée du Louvre (E 27427).⁶⁶

Regarding the Ethiopic inscription initially identified by De Bock, Clédât made corrections and filled in the lacunae in the Russian voyager's copy (Fig. 7), that Conti Rossini edited in 1923 (Fig. 8). Here is a transcription (Fig. 11).

Petite chapelle à gauche dans la cour où se trouve l'escalier d'un ambon.
Au-dessus de l'arc du fond une inscr. Gheez de 11 lignes. Noir.

- 1) በስመ – ሥለስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ጸሐፍቲዎ ፡
- 2) ለዛቲ ፡ ኪታብ ፡ ዘሥለሴ ፡ ሐዋእ ፡
- 3) ወአበሲ ፡ ምስኪን ፡ ዘውድብ? ፡ ስመ
- 4) ዑ ፡ አበውዮ ፡ ወአኃወዮ ፡ ንራድነ ፡ ፲ወ፫
- 5) ሥሞቱ ፡ ፪ ፡ በውስተ ፡ ፋኖት ፡ በጸሕ(ኩ?)
- 6) ውስተ ፡ ደብረ ፡ አባ ፡ ሲኖዳ ፡ ምስለ ፡ እኅዮ ፡
- 7) ንዋዮ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ምክስ ፡ ዘጽላሎ ፡
- 8) ወስርፀ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ዘደብረ ፡ ወርቅ ፡
- 9) እመ ፡ ቼለሴ ፡ በ፪፻ ፡ ፳ወ፪ ፡ ዓመ
- 10) ት ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ጽሎቱ ፡ ወስአለቱ ፡
- 11) ለአበ ፡ ሲኖዳ ፡ ትብጽሐነ ፡ አሜን ፡።

Cf. de Bock. Mat. p. 69.

Je complète les lacunes.

⁶⁴ De Bock, 1901, p. 54.

⁶⁵ I express my heartfelt gratitude to my colleague and friend, Fr. Emmanuel Fritsch, for kindly sharing his photograph with me. Although I had the opportunity to visit the White Monastery in May 2023 (as mentioned in fn. 16), the cloister today is less visible due to ongoing restoration efforts at the site.

⁶⁶ Musée du Louvre – section copte. I wish to express my warm thanks to Dominique Bénazeth for providing me with this information in a private exchange. Her assistance has been invaluable.

6. – *A new interpretation of the Ethiopic inscription based on Jean Clédat's transcription*

Jean Clédat's transcription sheds more light on the content of the lost Ethiopic inscription at the White Monastery. Below is an English translation of his copy, together with a brief analysis.

Small chapel at the left, in the courtyard, where the staircase of an ambo stands. Above the arch in the back, (there is) a Gəʿəz inscription on 11 lines. Black.

- 1) In the name of the Holy Trinity. I wrote
 - 2) this writing, (I) Za-Səllase, the sinner,
 - 3) and the guilty, the poor, of *Wədäba* (?).⁶⁷ Listen,
 - 4) my fathers and my brothers. The 13 of us descended
 - 5) and two died on the way. I arrived (?)
 - 6) at the Monastery of *Abba* Sinoda with my brother
 - 7) Nəwayä Maryam, monk from Şəlalo,
 - 8) and Sərdä Yoḥannəs from Däbrä Wärq,
 - 9) the 8th of Säne, in the 222nd year
 - 10) of Grace. The prayer and the supplications
 - 11) of *Abba* Sinoda may reach us. Amen.
- Cf. de Bock. Mat. p. 69.
I fill the lacunae.

Like De Bock, Clédat also identified the Ethiopic inscription in the back arch of the cloister's chapel. However, Clédat observed that it consisted of 11 lines rather than 10,⁶⁸ and that it was written in black ink. As a result, Clédat provided a more comprehensive version of the inscription and, drawing on De Bock's observations, was able to fill in the lacunae in the text.

Additionally, Clédat's copy is certainly more legible, but there are a few errors, from the original inscription or from its copy, that should be noted. In line 1, **ጸሐፍኩ** should be corrected to **ጸሐፍኩዋ**, which means "I wrote it (her)". In line 4, **ንራድን** should be corrected to **ወረድን**, "we descended". In line 5, **ሥዋቱ** should be read as **ወዋቱ**, signifying "and (they) died."

Furthermore, two transcriptions are particularly unclear: in line 3, **ዘውድብ** ? (*zä-Wədäba*?), with the last character being impossible to read, might pertain to the author's place of origin. I propose "Waldäbba," a historical region in the northwest of Ethiopia, but it remains highly uncertain. In line 5, another word,

⁶⁷ Illegible.

⁶⁸ See Fig. 7.

በጸሐ(ኩ?) is of uncertain reading and could potentially mean “I arrived.”⁶⁹ As two of the monks died on the way, this might imply that the author of the inscription, Zäsällase, along with Nəwayä Maryam and Sərdä Yoḥannəs, sojourned at the monastery, while the other monks travelling with them continued their journey.⁷⁰

Line 6 in Clédat’s copy is missing in both De Bock’s copy and Conti Rossini’s edition, and it introduces some additional details to the context. Specifically, it mentions that two of the 13 pilgrims died on their journey to the White Monastery, which is once again referred to as the “Monastery of *Abba Sinoda*”.

In light of this recent discovery, Conti Rossini’s interpretation was largely correct, except for the lacunae that Clédat could fill and the name of the inscription’s author, which is Zäsällase, and not “Za-Se’el.”

This lost Ethiopic inscription is quite important for the social history of pilgrimages. This group of monks, consisting of at least two men coming from Goḡḡam (a central region of Ethiopia) undoubtedly endured a difficult trip toward Middle Egypt. While the author may not clarify the exact cause of his companions’ death, pilgrimages from Ethiopia to Egypt and Holy Land were difficult and perilous, as documented by Western observers such as the Portuguese chaplain Francisco Álvares (1520–1526).⁷¹

Therefore, this inscription serves a dual purpose. It functions as an ex-voto inscription, as it was inscribed by a pilgrim seeking the prayers and supplications of the Coptic saint Shenoute, while also serving as a funerary commemoration for his deceased brothers.

Regrettably, despite the clearer transcription provided by Clédat, it remains impossible to determine the chronology of the Ethiopic inscription. Its loss due to the demolition of the chapel prevents any analysis of the actual characteristics of the Ethiopic scripts. Consequently, both early and late dating hypotheses can be considered.

7. – *Two more lost Ethiopic inscriptions at the White Monastery*

Jean Clédat’s notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc* records for the first time two unknown Ethiopic inscriptions, which he located inside the church of the

⁶⁹ I warmly thank the anonymous reviewer for this important suggestion, that greatly helps in better understanding the meaning of this word.

⁷⁰ Once again, I wish to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for this interpretation.

⁷¹ Gascon and Hirsch, 1992, p. 690.

convent. These inscriptions were both written in black ink and were found in the northern apse (Figs 12–13). Unfortunately, their poor state of preservation at the time of Clédat's copying makes their interpretation impossible at present. Moreover, following a preliminary survey of the White Monastery's main church,⁷² these Ethiopic inscriptions are no longer visible today, due to recent restoration works at the site.

Nonetheless, it is useful to transcribe and translate Clédat's notes. For the first inscription (Fig. 12), which he copied at page 7 of his notebook, he made the following observations:

Abside nord—partie inférieure. Au-dessus de la niche a (Hauteur des niches 1m79)

1°

Entre la niche a et la colonne 2—deux inscriptions gheez—l'une de 14 lignes et l'autre de 6 lignes, brunies à droite—toutes les deux écrites en noir _

Après vérification et avoir passé légèrement de l'eau sur la muraille pour faire partir le noir, il se trouve que les 2 inscriptions n'en font qu'une et que la 1ère ligne de 1. correspond à la fin de la 6e ligne du n° 2 _

Comme l'inscription est à peu près illisible dans son ensemble, je ne donne que la partie la plus lisible.

2°

La seconde est beaucoup moins visible—elle est cachée par une couche de noir qui empêche en grande partie le déchiffrement des caractères.

Northern apse—lower part. Above niche a (Niche height 1.79m).

1°

Between niche a and column 2, there are two Gəʾəz inscriptions—one with 14 lines and the other with 6 lines, darkened on the right—both written in black _

After verifying and lightly wetting the wall to remove the black (layer), it turns out that the two inscriptions are actually one, and the first line of 1 corresponds to the end of the sixth line of number 2 _ As the inscription is almost illegible as a whole, I only provide the most readable part.

2°

The second one is much less visible as it is obscured by a black layer that largely hinders the deciphering of the characters.

⁷² See fn. 16.

Regarding the second inscription (Fig. 13), which Clédat located in the northern apse, between the third column and the fourth niche, the Ethiopic inscription was accompanied by one Arabic and two Coptic inscriptions, all written in red ink. The Ethiopic inscription, while poorly legible in his transcription, was originally written in black ink and consisted of three lines.

Clédat's observations highlight that both the chapel and the main church of the White Monastery were in a poor state of preservation in 1903, when he copied the numerous inscriptions at the site. Covered by black layers, possibly originating from the candles used inside the church, the two Ethiopic inscriptions he recorded are currently undatable based on the present state of research. Nevertheless, they represent additional evidence of Ethiopian pilgrimages in Middle Egypt, specifically in the renowned White Monastery.

8. – *Conclusions*

Recent research at the White Monastery has illuminated the chronological and historical context surrounding its relations with Christian Ethiopia in the early thirteenth century. This hypothesis is supported by textual and historical evidence. The colophon of the Ethiopic version of the *Life of Theodore the Oriental*, coupled with the abandonment of the White Monastery during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, provide evidence that the Egyptian translator Mika'el was operational during the reign of Lalibäla (?-1204–1225-?). It is possible that Mika'el received support from other members of al-Dayr al-Abyad's "scriptorium", where Arabic speakers could produce translations from Arabic into Gə'əz. Furthermore, it appears that the White Monastery situated in Egypt and Maryam Nazret located in Ethiopia, where the *Kəbrä nägäšt* was translated, are the two noteworthy places connecting Coptic intellectuals to King Lalibäla and, in a broader sense, to the Ethiopian diocese.

The dating of the debated Ethiopic inscription (now lost) at the White Monastery, recording Ethiopian pilgrims' passage, remains inconclusive. Although Jean Clédat's notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc* (1903, now Musée du Louvre) offers important discoveries, no palaeographical analysis based on the inscription's copies can be conducted. It can be fixed to 1038/1114 or 1570/1646. However, this missing inscription provides evidence that Ethiopian pilgrims visited al-Dayr al-Abyad. Clédat's findings also reveal the presence of two previously undiscovered Ethiopic inscriptions inside the main church of the White Monastery. Although lost, these inscriptions, together with Coptic and Arabic inscriptions and decorations, provide captivating insights into the history of Ethiopian pilgrimages to one of Middle Egypt's most famous monasteries.

New findings on al-Dayr al-Abyad's connections with Ethiopia from the thirteenth century onward underscore prevalent questions while signalling the prospect of more research in this field. Extensive exploration of the White Monastery's trove of historical artefacts could broaden our knowledge base and offer a deeper comprehension of its history. Further investigation into activities at the White Monastery in the Modern period is necessary to enhance our understanding of the site. The coexistence of Coptic, Arabic, Armenian, and Ethiopic inscriptions (lost or *in situ*) within the monastery's walls presents a clear depiction of the varied pilgrimages that have marked its history.

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Fig. 1: General map of Ethiopic inscriptions and settlements in Egypt from Late Antiquity to Modern Times, realised by Martina Ambu. Source: <https://earth.google.com/web/>

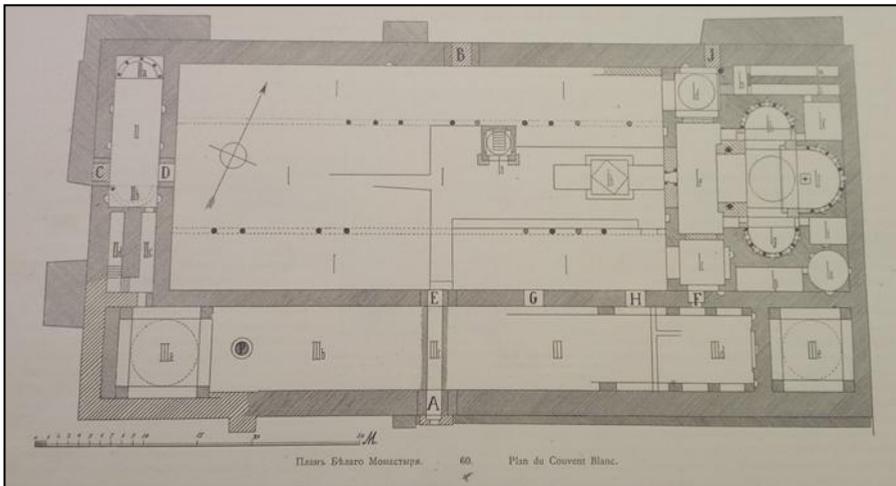


Fig. 2: Map of the White Monastery realised by Wladimir De Bock in 1898. Source: De Bock, 1901, p. 49.



Fig. 3: Today satellite capture of the White Monastery. Source:
<https://earth.google.com/web/@26.53460184,31.64542666,68.73370858a,237.20091933d,35y,0h,0t,0r/data=MikKJwolCiExTzRCc2NRYzkyUjhOcWNFWFZzRzBfdk1zWmFlcFNauFkgAToDCgEw>

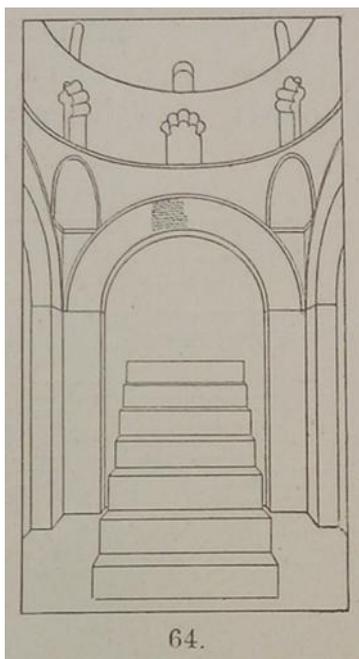


Fig. 4: Wladimir De Bock's drawing of the Western Chapel's entry, showing the Ethiopian inscription. Source: De Bock, 1901, p. 54.



Fig 5: The chapel at the White Monastery before being demolished (1906 circa).
Photographed by the *Comité*, by the courtesy of Cédric Meurice.



Fig 6: Remains of the demolished chapel in the White Monastery. Photographed by
Emmanuel Fritsch in 2005.

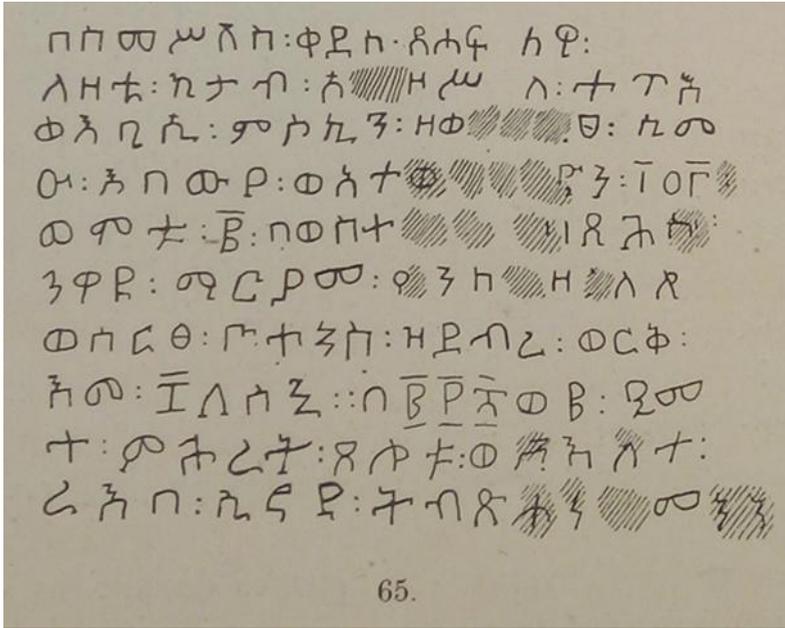


Fig. 7: Wladimir De Bock's copy of the Ethiopic inscription. Source: De Bock, 1901, p. 54.

በስመ [፣] ሥሉስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ጸሐፍክዋ ፡
 ለዛቲ ፡ ክታብ ፡ አ//////ዘሥ////ለ ፡ ኅጥእ [፣]
 ወአባሲ ፡ ምስኪን ፡ ዘወ /// /// /// ፀ ፡ ስም
 ዑ ፡ አበውዮ ፡ ወአኅው- [የ ፡ ወረ?] ድነ ፡ ፲ ወ ፫ ፡
 5 ወሞቱ ፡ ፪ ፡ በውስተ [፣] /// /// /// ጸሕስ (?)
 ንዋየ ፡ ማርያሥ ፡ መ (?) ነኮ[ስ?] ፡ ዘ[ጸ]ላሎ [፣]
 ወሰርፀ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ዘደብረ ፡ ወርቅ ፡
 አመ ፡ ፰ለሰኔ ፡ በ ፪፻፳ ወ ዩ ፡ ዓመ
 ተ ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ጸሎቱ ፡ ወስእለቱ ፡
 10 ለአባ ፡ ሲኖዳ ፡ ትብጽሐነ[፣ አ]ሜን ፡

Fig 8: Carlo Conti Rossini's edition of the Ethiopic Inscription of the White Monastery, based on Wladimir De Bock's copy. Source: Conti Rossini, 1923, p. 431.

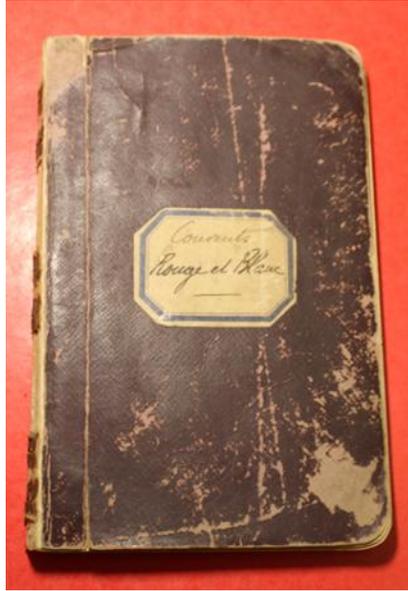


Fig 9: Covering of Jean Clédat's notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc*. Source: Musée du Louvre – section copte (INV. E 27427). Photographed by Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette in January 2023.

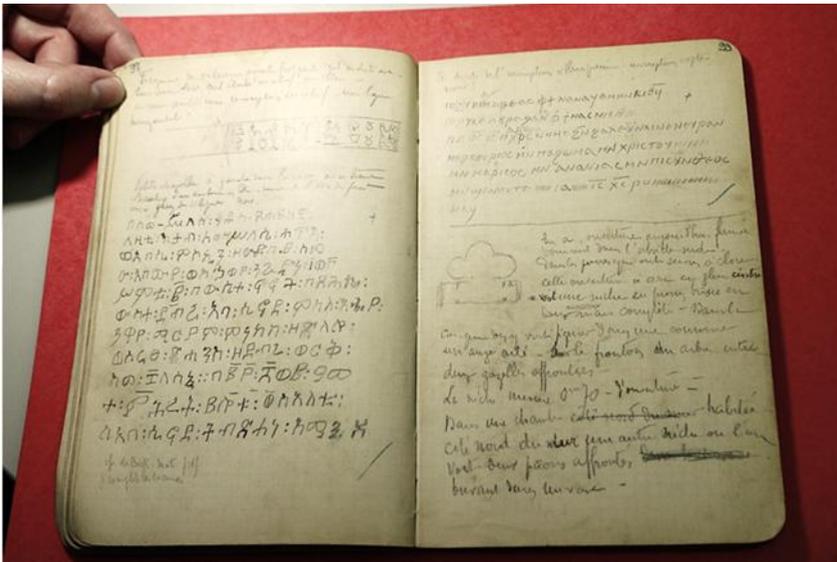


Fig 10: Jean Clédat's notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc*, pp. 98-99. Source: Musée du Louvre – section copte (INV. E 27427). Photographed by Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette in January 2023.

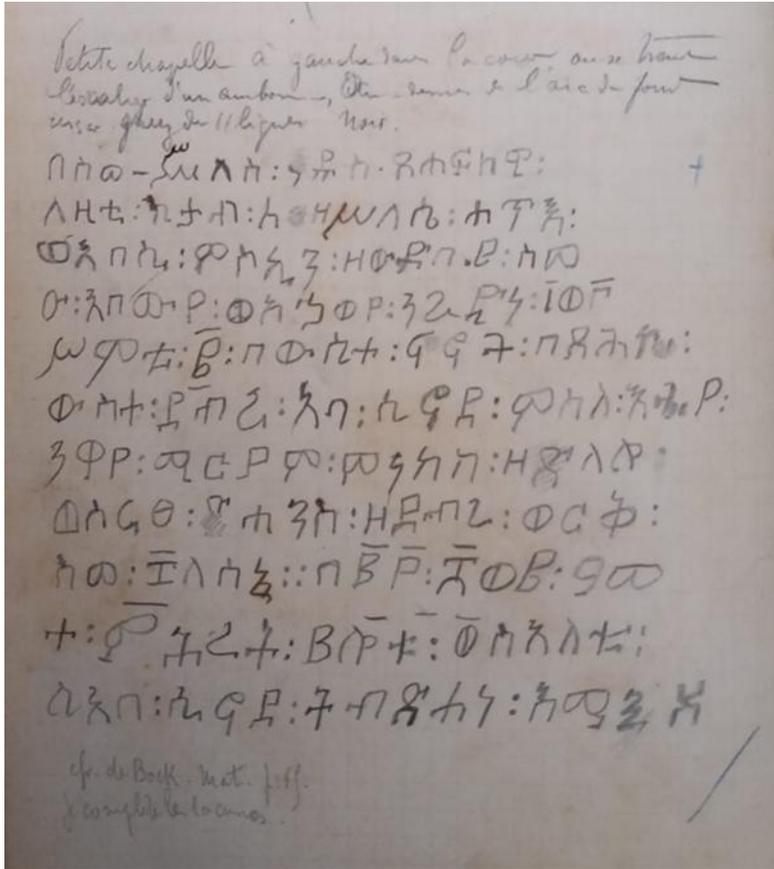


Fig 11: Jean Clédat's copy of the Ethiopic inscription, in his notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc*, p. 98. Source: Musée du Louvre – section copte (INV. E 27427). Photographed by Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette in January 2023.

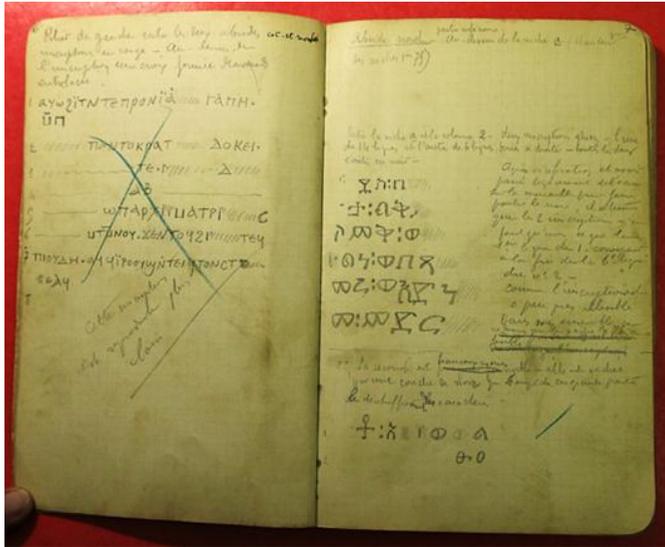


Fig 12: Jean Clédat's copy of an Ethiopic inscription in northern apse (1) of the White Monastery church, in his notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc*, pp. 7–8. Source: Musée du Louvre – section copte (INV. E 27427). Photographed by Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette in January 2023.

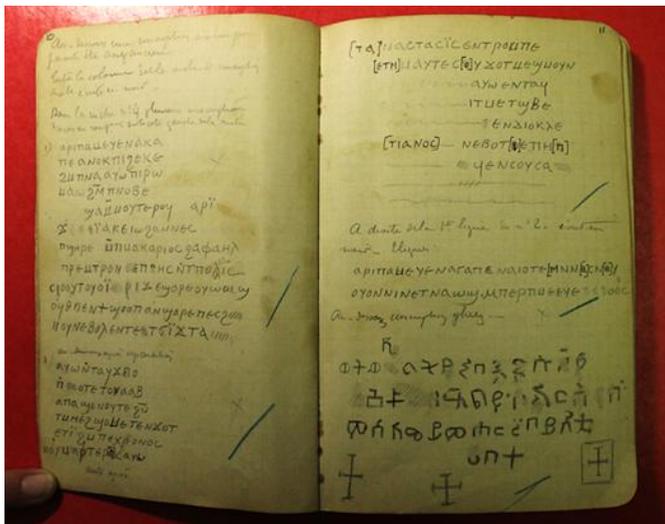


Fig 13: Jean Clédat's copy of an Ethiopic inscription in northern apse (2) of the White Monastery church, in his notebook *Couvents Rouge et Blanc*, pp. 10–11. Source: Musée du Louvre – section copte (INV. E 27427). Photographed by Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette in January 2023.

ALESSANDRO BAUSI

*Textual Transmission from Aksum to Lālibalā:
A Couple of Case Studies**

0. – *Abstract*

It is well known that one of the most dramatic gaps that prevents our understanding of the textual transmission of Gəʿəz texts from the Aksumite time to the medieval period is the lack of data on the materiality of the written culture. The few extant documents—a handful of codices predating the fourteenth century, and a still unidentified number of fragments, and very few epigraphic documents of uncertain dating—do not provide any positive consistent picture that helps us make a sense of what happened and of the material conditions of transmission, although some recent reinterpretations of some documents suggest new paths of inquiry. The distribution of the relevant findings and recently emerged data also help define a geographical area which appears to have played a key role in the vicissitudes of the transmission of written knowledge. Moreover, the missing evidence can be partly complemented with what later texts directly report and, even more, indirectly presuppose. The earliest documentary texts can

* It is my pleasant and humble duty to thank the organisers of this conference, starting from those who have first defined and conceived of the topic, Dr Luisa Semicola and Dr Massimo Villa, and forwarded us the invitation on behalf of the institutions involved: the Dipartimento Asia Africa e Mediterraneo of the Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”, with its articulations (the project “CaNameI: Catalogo Nazionale dei Manoscritti Etiopici in Italia”; the CeSA: Centro di Studi sull’Africa); the IsMEO: Associazione Internazionale di Studi sul Mediterraneo e l’Oriente, Roma; and the IPOCAN: Istituto per l’Oriente Carlo Alfonso Nallino, Roma: all institutions to which I feel—also personally—close and indebted for many reasons with a long-lasting feeling of appurtenance. Finally, and above all, I would like to thank Professor Gianfrancesco Lusini for having promoted this major event in the field, behind and on the scenes, with the largest and most open call to participate addressed to the whole scholarly community, gathered here at “L’Orientale”, at one of the most important centres of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies in the world, and for having been able to put together such a focused programme.

also provide data that help fill the gap. Against this background, the paper intends to deal with a couple of case studies which illustrate the dynamics of transmission from the Aksumite to medieval times.

1. – *Limits of this contribution*

Rhetoric requires that one starts with the expression of his/her own impotence to face the assigned task and match the expectations—*excusatio propter infirmitatem*—and this is also an easy task and a spontaneous feeling. My first idea was that of focussing on a couple of case studies which would illustrate the nature of the textual transmission from Aksum to Lālibalā. When thinking what to say and which examples to choose, it appeared to me that I was going either to repeat myself, for having already too many times dealt with cases of the genres I am mostly familiar with and I know first hand best (liturgical and canonical texts, including, for some of them, their relationship with the homiletic-hagiographical liturgical collections), or to try to say something new from fields which I see as extremely promising but on which I have not the necessary in-depth direct experience which is required: out of experience, one needs to have extensively collated in order to be able to say anything reliable on a given textual transmission. Not to say that a couple of important points and concepts I had already had the occasion to present in Naples in 2019 in the pre-pandemic era, in a longer contribution held on the occasion of the conference on *Linguistica e filologia tra Oriente e Occidente*.¹ My paper “Fratture e

The research for this note was carried out within the scope of the Dipartimento Storia Antropologia Religioni Arte Spettacolo (SARAS) of the Sapienza Università di Roma; it was also funded by the Langzeitvorhaben im Akademienprogramm (long-term project in the programme of The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities), through a project of the Academy of Hamburg, “Beta maṣāḥəft: Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung” (Bm), at Universität Hamburg (UHH) (2016–2040); by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) under Germany’s Excellence Strategy, EXC 2176 “Understanding Written Artefacts: Material, Interaction and Transmission in Manuscript Cultures”, project no. 390893796, at UHH (2019–2025); by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC, at University of Oxford and at University City, London), and by the DFG (at UHH), project no. 672619, “Demarginalizing Medieval Africa: Images, Texts, and Identity in Early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270–1527)”, at UHH (2020–2024); by the DFG (within the framework of the Forschungsgruppe 5138 “Geistliche Intermedialität in der Frühen Neuzeit”, at UHH), project no. 680753, “Der mediale Status des Körpers – Körper im Bild und Körperbild. König Kāleb und andere äthiopische Heilige in Portugal und Brasilien im 18. Jahrhundert”, at UHH (2022–2025). The research was conducted within the scope of the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies (HLCEES) and of the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures

interferenze: filologia e linguistica della tradizione testuale etiopica (Uno sguardo retrospettivo sulla ricerca degli ultimi decenni)”, was meant to provide a broad overview of what is (or was) new particularly as far as the delicate relationship between linguistic and philological issues are concerned.²

Talking of philology, literature, and linguistics, I am not expected to deal with history, but philology as analysis of textual transmission presupposes—and contributes to—historical understanding, and history in turn cannot ignore linguistic implications. In the last part of my paper, I will show that analysis of texts provide evidence that also requires a specific explanation from historians.

Once said this, I think that given the role assigned of a keynote speaker, the most honest plan is that of providing neither a complete nor a systematic overview (wisely enough, the organisers has set a sound limits of 30 minutes to this paper), but a series of mini-case studies which, obviously from the point of view of my competence and interests, can be used to highlight particularly revealing points of new trends and research directions or even ostensibly major achievements. I hope I will be able to present, from my perspective and necessarily based on my experience, at least a couple of fresh and interest-

(CSMC), at UHH. The transcription of Ethiopic texts (Gəʿəz) follows the conventions of Leslau 1987, also adopted by the project Bm, with few exceptions for some place names (for example, “Aksum”, not “Aksum”). For the references to the *Clavis aethio-pica* (CAe), see at the url: <https://betamasaheft.eu/#texts> (last accessed 14 October 2023). Other abbreviations: CANT = Geerard 1992; CPG = Geerard and Noret 1974–2003; DAE = Littmann 1913; EMMML = Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, deposited at Addis Ababa, National Archives and Library of Ethiopia, and at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN; RIÉ I, II, IIA = Bernand, Drewes, Schneider, 1991–2000; RIÉ IIIB = Drewes, 2019.

¹ For the “XLIV Convegno annuale della Società italiana di glottologia (Napoli, 24–26 ottobre 2019)”, organised by the Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”, the Università di Napoli Federico II, and the Università di Napoli “Suor Orsola Benincasa”.

² I delivered the final version of the paper in summer 2020 and it is now printed; see Bausi, 2024. To be honest, similar points I had already touched upon also on the occasion of the Addis Ababa conference “The Written Heritage in the Land of Origins: The 1st International Conference on Ethiopia’s Written Heritage”, Addis Ababa, 8–10 October 2018, with the paper “The Transmission of Written Heritage in the Ethiopian Manuscript Culture: Formatting Content” (Keynote Address in the Panel: “The Body of the Heritage: Content and Transmission”).

ing examples of the dynamic of textual transmission in the so-called Dark Ages of Eritrean and Ethiopian history.³

2. – *Constraint of sources and the limits of our documentation*

Everyone knows, but still, it is essential to recall it as a starting point, that is, *written texts* and *written artefacts* as well (two quite distinct, but equally important aspects) produced in Ethiopia that we can certainly attribute to the period between the seventh and the thirteenth century are extremely few. But there is more: of a certain number of texts for which we can assume on some basis an early date to be attributed to the period under consideration a vast number is still unpublished. These constraints regard not only what we can attribute to this period as far as material evidence is concerned, but also what has been transmitted in later manuscripts: for example we do not have any colophon from a dated pre-thirteenth century manuscript (we have only notes of explicit, stating that the text is concluded: but this is what is closer to a *title*).⁴ The purported names of authors of homilies (the few enigmatic names of bishops of Aksum credited with writings mainly in the archaic homiliaries which I will eventually mention again, that are ʾElyās, Luləyānos, Mikāʾel, Minās, Tewofəlos, and Yoḥannəs) do not tell us much; there is an obstinate silence concerning authorship related to the few (original) texts that we could assign to the Aksumite past, that was well caught and portrayed in a recent contribution by Loren Stuckenbruck and Ted M. Erho:

The scarcity of colophons in early Ethiopic manuscripts may reflect a widespread scribal reluctance to add anything to their copies not found in the source manuscripts. This might even be extended further to patterns of copying books. There are indications that in earliest times the Ethiopian scribal duty was to copy a manuscript from its beginning to its end, and a general lack of interest in combining or excerpting texts, practices that seem relatively common in other traditions. [...] It seems to have been the scribal duty to reproduce source material as accurately as possible, that is, not to interfere with it even if they considered it to be wrong.⁵

³ Usual conventions apply and we simply understand as such the regions corresponding to present-day regions of the independent states of Ethiopia and Eritrea where Gəʿəz language was in use.

⁴ See Bausi, 2022.

⁵ See Stuckenbruck and Erho, 2002, p. 428.

We can definitely share this view, even though stressing exclusively the attitude to reproduce exactly as possible the *exemplars* (in the sense of copyists' models) does not fully explain the process through which, as appears, we happen to have in our earliest extant manuscripts (for example, in the case of homiletic-hagiographical liturgical collections) texts of different provenance and creation, for which we necessarily must assume that they were assembled starting from different written artefacts through a complex process that we cannot understand and define in all its details at the moment.⁶ And let's think for example of the well-known case of the Orthodox Rətu'a Haymānot, behind whose authorship, in all likelihood, more authors and from different periods are concealed.

Many would agree that if we had once the opportunity of using a time machine for visiting one single place in one single time of Ethiopian intellectual history, we could probably opt to observe Giyorgis of Saglā (d. 1425 CE) in his formative period. Obviously, every snapshot of the past would be invaluable (it would be extremely exciting to observe Lālibalā or Kāleb or even ʿEzānā as well), but with him we would have the opportunity to see someone placed in a key moment in textual history and transmission. Probably none of the latter were confronted in such a dramatic way with a turning point when large part of the textual traditions that had survived the Dark Ages of Eritrean and Ethiopian history (seventh–thirteenth century) was on the eve of extinction, in the sense that it was not going to be copied any further. Yet, there is no doubt that Giyorgis of Saglā directly engages with that tradition and therefore is a primary direct witness of those, in the end, dramatic events which posed an end to a prolonged cultural and textual phase and inaugurated a new one. Starting from that moment or around that time, a certain number of transmitted texts—in which material book form and in which state of language and orthography we can only guess—was apparently contested, dismissed, and definitely abandoned, in favour of what has remained and *has become* the classical heritage of Gəʿəz literature we commonly know and is commonly accepted and revered by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church and its sister branches, in its institutional role of custodian of the Gəʿəz tradition.

Another essential source of information that provides us a cross-cutting view—or a snapshot, even though I reject the use and abuse of this term applied in the 'New Philology' approach⁷—of what a library contained at a given point in time are the lists of manuscripts. I have myself published a few of

⁶ See Brita, 2020.

⁷ See Lied and Lundhaug, 2017.

them and there are specialists who have carried out substantial analysis in the attempt of identifying the degree of canonicity of some writings according to their respective position and the sequence of contents (from biblical on), like Ted M. Erho and Massimo Villa.⁸ Even in this case, however (unless I am not well informed about discoveries and new data of the last years, which can be well the case) we are still left with the indications provided by inventories, at the earliest, from the end of the thirteenth century: they are certainly extremely important, but we have to pose seriously the question, to what extent they provide us with a reliable picture of the extant manuscripts and textual contents of the time. We must never forget that we have not yet a reliable understanding of the kind of consistency, distribution, and functioning of the early book and textual culture in Christian Ethiopia. Obviously, they are uncontroversial positive evidence of what they mention, if we rightly interpret them, but we cannot draw any conclusion based on the absence of mentions of texts and writings. Moreover, the statistical relevance and representativeness for the up-to-the-thirteenth-century heritage is very close to zero.

3. – *The exceptions and the new evidence*

Which are the material sources which can tell us something, in addition to what we know from later times? Which features emerge from the available written and textual evidence? If we look at the material traces left by the manuscript tradition, the oldest preserved manuscripts are, as everybody knows, two of the three Gospel manuscripts from the monastery of ʾAbbā Garimā. They have recently been the subject of a thorough re-examination by Sergey Kim, with not a few fresh interesting points, the acquisition of interesting further codicological data, and also the publication of additional documentary texts.⁹ The study marks a progress and shows how much still remains to study until a full-fledged codicological investigation will be carried out directly on the manuscripts, and with adequate equipment and in suitable working conditions. If an early (late antique) date is more than likely at this moment, it remains the value that the ʾAbbā Garimā manuscripts also assume as repository of later writings and for the traces of use they betray as a treasury of later notes providing further details on the role of “manuscripts as archive” which these manuscripts have assumed in the course of time.

⁸ See Erho, 2015; Villa, 2019, pp. 129–43; Erho, 2020.

⁹ See Kim, 2022; see also McKenzie and Watson, 2017; Mercier, 2021.

At variance with the Aksumite period, we do not even have any substantial epigraphic evidence that offers a large variety of documents: if the production related to the so-called Ḥaḍāni Dānəʿel is extremely problematic (DAE nos 12 and 13 = RIÉ no. 193, I and II; lastly re-examined, among many other sources, by Marie-Laure Derat in her remarkable and courageous book, based on the translation provided by Enno Littmann)¹⁰ and we rely to large extent more and more on what others could read in the past, even though its historical importance as witness to the *haḍāni* is considerable, a monument like the funerary inscription of Ham in the old church in the village close to the monastery of Dabra Libānos (RIÉ no. 232)—a quite remarkable evidence, in the end, with its fifteen lines of Gəʿəz and placed in an extremely significant historical place that has given us one of the most important documentary collections of the Ethiopian Middle Ages—is completely ignored (not even mentioned) in one of the last synthesis on the Ethiopian civilization until the thirteenth century appeared in 2012.¹¹ To this inscription I will come back in a moment with a few more details.

4. – *New evidence*

Yet, we also have new evidence. As usual, there is new evidence that has materially emerged, and there is evidence that acquires a new importance when it is looked at through new eyes and based on new premises. And usually new evidence helps us see things in a different perspective, and triggers new hypotheses.

4.a. The Orthodox and the homiliaries

The importance of the tradition related to Rətuʿa Haymānot is well summarized by Massimo Villa, in his nice 2019 monograph, where he has systematically gathered inputs and reflections from previous contributions, and is at the centre of Marcin Krawczuk’s¹² and Ted M. Erho’s ongoing research—particularly important is Ted M. Erho’s contribution on the *Homily on the De-*

¹⁰ DAE nos 12 and 13 = RIÉ no. 193, I and II, pp. 278–83; Derat 2018, pp. 109–13; see now also translations and commentary in RIÉ IIIB, no. 193, I and II, pp. 269–77. See also Fauvelle, 2018, pp. 89–93.

¹¹ See Phillipson, 2012; and I do not think this depends on the chronological collocation attributed to the inscription; it goes better with the book by Marie-Laure Derat and the short essay on Ethiopia within the global early Middle Ages by Hatke, 2020, p. 324.

¹² See Krawczuk, 2019.

nial of Peter (CAe 6441),¹³ in which he has given anticipation in his talk at a Zürich conference on the *Apocalypse of Peter*, highlighting the complex intertextual relationship with a number of early texts, not all of them published, quite the contrary, and of debated status, in which form and recension they were accessible to the Orthodox. A pioneer of the philological study on this corpus is Gianfrancesco Lusini, who dealt with the *Homily on the Sabbaths* (CAe 1269) and also on its relationship to canonical literature since the late 1980s.¹⁴ I have discussed with him several points in the course of time and what I think we can all peacefully agree is that his intuition that the early layer that surfaces in this *Homily*—now available from a larger number of manuscripts, including MS EMLL no. 8509—and its intertextual relationship with canonical texts, which was correct, must be updated in the light of new evidence: this early layer is not from a “Greek-Arabic” source, but actually betrays a purely Greek background, likely dating back to Aksumite times, that is also directly accessible to us since the appearance of what I have called the *Aksumite Collection*.¹⁵

As already said, the analysis of archaic manuscripts (like the homiliaries) is another frontier of research. Better and more complete documentation allows us, for example, to understand in a new way the relationship between some of the archaic homiliaries at the centre of attention for long time.¹⁶ Essential in this connection is the extensive and in-depth study of the Syriac homiletics transmitted in Gəʿəz through Christian Arabic mediation, undertaken in the newly launched project “BeInf: The Connected Histories of Ethiopic and Syriac Christianity”, by Michael Aaron Butts, based at the HLCEES, UHH.¹⁷ On EMLL no. 8509 Massimo Villa presents new data in this volume, but let me simply anticipate, that, for example, we know now the name of the scribe in the subscription, certainly Ḥəzba ʾIyasus, and let’s note that the *ḥəzba*-element has a predominant distribution in the north and in a relatively early time; also the father of Giyorgis of Saḡlā is Ḥəzba Šəyon. Some texts can be further found in this manuscript, what we did not suppose before, like

¹³ Erho, 2024.

¹⁴ See Lusini, 1988a; Lusini, 1988b; Lusini, 1989; Lusini, 1993.

¹⁵ See Bausi, 2003; Bausi, 2006a; Bausi, 2006b = Bausi, 2012.

¹⁶ The three most well-known ones are London, BL Or. 8192, and EMLL 1763 and 8509, complemented now by a few more, at times in fragmentary status.

¹⁷ See at the URL: <https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/beinf.html> (last accessed 18 October 2023). See already Butts, 2011; Butts, 2013–2014; Butts, 2017; Butts and Erho, 2018; Butts, 2020b; Butts, 2021.

the *Gadla ʿAzqir* (CAe 1251, at least a portion of it, on fols 154ra–155ra), making it one of the earliest attested hagiographic texts for which we do not have any counterpart in other textual traditions,¹⁸ at the moment at least; and the aforementioned *Homily on the Sabbaths* attributed to the enigmatic Rətuʿa Haymānot, the Orthodox (on fols 164ra–171va), for which other manuscripts have become known in the meanwhile; and that the edition of the homily by ʿAstonā, Patriarch of Rome (on fols 162ra–164ra), also known from a precious note on his commemoration published by Denis Nosnitsin,¹⁹ is certainly a major desideratum: it is, in the end, a version of the well-known apocryphon of the *Letter fallen from heaven on the observance of Sabbath* (CAe 1978 = CANT 311).²⁰

If these manuscripts are relevant to the chronological layer between Aksum and Lālibalā, so to say, because they definitely witness to texts which fall in the time range considered (seventh-thirteenth century), one of the few material evidence we have, establishes a direct link between the time period of King Lālibalā and a manuscript evidence that is close, yet outside of the limits of the thirteenth century.

The *Homily on Transfiguration* (*Sermo de transfiguratione*) of Anastasius the Sinaite (CPG 7753 = CAe 5864)²¹ is attested written on wooden panels presently preserved in two churches of Lālibalā, where the panels have been variously reused.²² We do not know how many panels were originally used—the panels only preserve a few portions of the homily—and which was their function, and even whether all of them attest the same text, due to the material loss they underwent,²³ but the homily is explicitly attributed to Anastasius the

¹⁸ See Bausi, 2017.

¹⁹ See Nosnitsin, 2012.

²⁰ See Raineri, 2000, pp. 165–71, who has published, with collation and translation, and reference to CANT 311, the same text, even though with quite remarkable variations that need careful assessment, from the two apparently twin manuscripts of the nineteenth and twentieth century, Vatican City, BAV, Comb. Aeth. G 1 and G 2 (nos 167 and 168 in the catalogue). A new edition is necessary.

²¹ All CPG volumes and supplements published so far, besides the Greek, mention only the Arabic and Slavonic versions. For a recent study, while a critical edition also of the Greek text is still missing, see Bucur, 2013.

²² Panels A, B and C are in Beta Gabraʿel church and panel D is in Madḥane ʿAlam church, according to the last reliable description by Mercier and Lepage, 2013, p. 206, n. 57.

²³ The fragments consist all in all of 86 lines (A 13, B 26, C 19 and D 19); see Gigar Tesfaye and Pirenne, 1984, pp. 108–14, who provided the first edition.

Sinaite in the panel, which appears to contain the *incipit*. This set of wooden panels could be contemporaneous with the period of King Lālibālā²⁴ and presumably dates to the early thirteenth century.²⁵ This text, however, is also preserved in later manuscripts (in the collection of homilies indicated as CAe 5856). I have carried out a collation of the text from the panels against two manuscripts and what is interesting are not only some textual variants of substance, but also forms which betray phenomena of *patina*, with updating of forms: see for example]ሰ : A.13: ወሊተሰ : Be;]ዩደነግፅ : B.7: ሠደደነግፅ : Be; ዩወሊ : B.8: የወሊ : Be.²⁶

Still relevant to homiletic production, we cannot ignore the essential evidence published by Fr. Maximous El-Antony, Jesper Blid, and Aaron Michael Butts in 2016 of a carbon-14 dated paper leaf of an Ethiopic manuscript found in situ during excavations at the monastery of St Antony at the Red Sea, with a dating range of 1185–1255 (68.2%) and 1160–1265 (95.4%). The manuscript leaf contains a homily *On silence* (CAe 2103) attributed to John Chrysostom and also known from later monastic collections, while on the other side the name of a ‘John metropolitan (*pāpās*)’ can be also read. As the editors state, there are different consequences depending whether the *On Silence* was translated directly from Greek (it would be one more Aksumite text) or whether it was translated from Arabic (thus establishing an early *terminus ante quem* for translations from Arabic into Ethiopic), or whether it is an Ethiopic composition, pseudonymously associated with John Chrysostom.²⁷ Obviously this finding is also associated with early contacts with Arabophone Egypt and translations carried out in Egyptian communities, on which Martina Ambu has dealt with in depth in her recent PhD dissertation.²⁸

4.b. Palimpsests and fragments

Palimpsest manuscripts with lower layer (*scriptio inferior*) in Gəʿəz have not yet contributed so much to the field as has happened, for example, with Latin, Syriac, and especially Armenian and Caucasian manuscripts, even

²⁴ Lālibālā, not Lālibalā, is the correct spelling that should be observed; see Bausi, 2018, p. 441.

²⁵ See Mercier and Lepage, 2013, pp. 169–207, particularly pp. 180–83 on the wooden panels.

²⁶ See Bausi, 2019, p. 71, with further references: Be. = MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Ms. orient. fol. 3075; besides London, BL Or. 774, further manuscripts are known attesting this homily. For a survey of linguistic phenomena of this kind, see Bausi, 2023.

²⁷ See Maximous el-Antony, Blid, Butts, 2016.

²⁸ See Ambu, 2022; see now also the essays in Derat, Łajtar, Seignobos, *et al.*, 2024.

though they were noted long ago, for example manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopiens d'Abbadie 191. Yet, the little work recently undertaken in the field has shown that archaic homiletic texts are attested in palimpsests: this is the case of the manuscript Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, Peterm. II Nachtr. 24²⁹ investigated in 2016 within the framework of the DFG project “Textkritische Ausgabe und Übersetzung des 1 Henoch”, directed by Loren Stuckenbruck. Multi-spectral imaging has revealed “fragments from at least nine earlier codices” containing Old Testament Apocrypha and a lectionary, a homiliary and multiple hagiographical codices from the fourteenth century and before, with texts containing archaic linguistic features attested in only the earliest layers of Ethiopic material evidence, thus confirming the archaic character of Ethiopic homiletic collections.³⁰

4.c. New material evidence

Other categories of manuscripts, like the hymnodic manuscripts (chants manuscripts and manuscripts containing *Dəggwā*-type texts) have been researched in the last years and have revealed another extremely promising source of information on the forms taken by the manuscript transmission before the thirteenth century or close to the upper limits of the chronological range we consider. This textual material, however, makes no exception, and its attribution to a date before the thirteenth century bases only on hypotheses, although encouraged by material features, palaeographic observations, and material analysis.

²⁹ Described by Dillmann, 1878, pp. iii, 52–53 (no. 63), who detected a lower script dating to the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries for fols 8–107, also recorded as a palimpsest by Uhlig, 1988, p. 233, see Bausi, 2008, pp. 542–43.

³⁰ Ted M. Erho has provided a few details of current work on Ethiopic palimpsests in the paper “Ethiopic Palimpsests and the Curious Case of Petermann II Nachtr. 24”, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature held in Boston in 2017, followed by Loren Stuckenbruck’s paper on “The Recoverable Text to 1 Enoch in Petermann II Nachtrag 24”. More recently, Ted M. Erho has delivered a wonderful overview on “Ethiopic palimpsests”, with consideration of the approximately fifteen known palimpsests involving Ethiopic writing as either an over or under text, at the workshop “Removed and Rewritten: Palimpsests and Related Phenomena from a Cross-Cultural Perspective II”, held at the CSMC, UHH, on 10–11 July 2023; see now Erho, 2025. It is impossible not to mention also the palimpsests discovered in the monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai, which are still awaiting a complete publication and evaluation. As far as I know, in one case the dating of the upper layer (a Greek manuscript) determines a quite early date of the Gəʿəz text. An unpublished draft on this documentation by the late Getatchew Haile and Steve Delamarter deals with this evidence.

The main contributions on this field are due to Denis Nosnitsin, who has published a number of extremely interesting fragmentary texts of hymnodic genre (chants) from 2014 to 2018, also in cooperation with Ira Rabin for material analysis.³¹ Along the same line has worked Jonas Karlsson, who has dedicated an entire dissertation successfully defended in 2022 to the *Dəgg^wā*-type manuscripts, with an in-depth analysis of the most archaic (proto-*Dəgg^wā*) manuscripts. Among the evidence examined he has considered in particular six sets of fragments corresponding to distinct codicological units from ²Ag^wazā Dabra Sāhl, conventionally dated to “pre-mid-fourteenth-century times”, which appears to be the only way of stating their archaic status, nothing preventing a thirteenth-century dating or earlier.³² This site, like others explored for example by the Ethio-SPaRe project, is also remarkable for having delivered material that still awaits publication, like new manuscript evidence on the *Commentary to the Song of Songs* by Philo of Carpasia.³³

4.d. The *Aksumite Collection*

At the obvious risk of repeating what I have already presented in not a few occasions, I have to say something on the role the *Aksumite Collection* plays in our understanding of the textual transmission from Aksum to Lālibalā. This is definitely a case when the emergence of new evidence and its interpretation allow to draw new conclusions, provided we are prepared to actually see what is discovered. Fortunate circumstances and—I have always to repeat—the trust by Jacques Mercier in my competence offered me privilege and possibility of accessing, first under restricted conditions and eventually thanks to the efforts of Antonella Brita and finally of the Ethio-SPaRe project, this unique body of evidence which is being gradually published in the course of almost 20 years. Those interested in all details can read a couple of contributions where all is explained, since I have tried to reconstruct in the most honest and transparent way the complex process of acquisition of the documentation and its gradual, quite elaborate publication in at least two comprehensive articles, where further references are available: one in 2016 with Alberto Camplani and another one in 2020 with Antonella Brita, Denis Nosnitsin, Marco di Bella, Nikolas Sarris, and Ira Rabin.³⁴

³¹ See Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014; Nosnitsin, 2016; Nosnitsin, 2018.

³² See Karlsson, 2024, pp. 217–67.

³³ See Retsö, 2015. On the commentary, see Tedros Abraha, 2008; Tedros Abraha, 2012.

³⁴ See Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020.

I can safely say that this manuscript has brought about a revolution in our understanding of the textual dynamics and transmission between Aksum and Lālibalā: the manuscript of the *codex unicus* is undated, but definitely datable to the thirteenth century at the latest; in all likelihood it is contemporaneous to King Ṭaṇṭawədəm, in whose historical place (*lieux de mémoire*) of Qəfrəyā it was probably kept and preserved unnoticed for centuries.³⁵ With its orthographic oddities, quite at variance with the chants manuscripts I mentioned, it is a very carefully written manuscript, with a consistent apparatus of marginal punctuation signs, and its existence is an important witness to the pre-Solomonic (pre-fourteenth century) manuscript culture.

In the context of this conference, I will limit myself to mention the quintessential points why this manuscript is important: 1) it is important because it preserves otherwise unknown texts which were produced in all likelihood in Aksumite times (not later than the beginning of the sixth century) based on Greek Egyptian models, some of which would be otherwise unknown, dating at the latest to the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century; 2) to various degrees, most of these texts have a complex intertextual relationship with later texts: either because they were excerpted (for example in homiletic and canonical-liturgical collections) or reused or because they were replaced by similar texts updated in a new recension (Arabic-based); 3) the collection provides the ever first historiographical text in Gəʿəz (if we except inscriptions and biblical texts), the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria*, that is extremely important: in itself as a historical source for our understanding of the Christianisation of Egypt; and 4) because it also shows a degree of intimacy with early sources of the Alexandrian Church, still in an Ethiopian document copied at the beginning of the second millennium, that we would have never expected; 5) it confirms the extremely archaic character of the Ethiopian Christianity, which has at the same time a lasting relationship of institutional dependence from the Patriarchate of Alexandria and a textual, linguistic, and liturgical tradition of its own, which is wonderfully represented in this manuscript; 6) it also stresses the enduring late antique roots of the Ethiopian Christianity; 7) it also challenges what I have called the “Guidi paradigm”, that is,

³⁵ While recollecting evidence on Qəfrəyā (Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020., pp. 130–34), I omitted to provide one more interesting mention that confirms the importance of the site as a place well known for books, from the colophon of the fifteenth-century MS Oslo, Kulturhistorisk Museum, UEM35900, fol. 112, where “the scribe recounts how he sought out copies of the *Life of Abraham of Qidun* from Biḥət (ቤሐት), the *Letter (of Dionysius)* from Qəfrya (ቅፍርያ), the *Life of Kiros* from (Däbrä) Dammo (ዳሞ), and the *Book of the Assumption of Mary* from Anṣät (አንጸት)”, see Erho, 2017, p. 55.

the conception of a Gəʿəz heritage confined to a handful of texts in the early period and later, since the fourteenth century, mechanically Arabic based: this conception is dear to the same scholars for whom Gəʿəz grammar and language is that codified in current grammars as a comfortable and unproblematic term of comparison, and who ignore problems and discontinuities in the transmission of the Gəʿəz heritage which the evidence provides.³⁶

It took many years, even though I wrote more or less what I am saying now over 20 years ago, but in the end the message seems now to be an accepted fact: a historian like Roger Bagnall mentions the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria* (CAe 5064, on which I have extensively worked together with Alberto Camplani)³⁷ as an essential source in a comprehensive handbook of Greco-Roman Egypt,³⁸ and one of the most eminent experts on the history of liturgy like Paul F. Bradshaw has drafted a new translation and commentary of the most influential *Apostolic Tradition* (CAe 6240)³⁹ chiefly based on the Gəʿəz version I edited.⁴⁰ I quote only these two examples, but the impact of the Aksumite Collection is much deeper and larger.⁴¹

Since we are here in a section devoted to texts, philology, and linguistics there is a specific aspect I have to stress: there are strong clues that the codex of the *Aksumite Collection* (which is certainly written by one and the same hand as a single production unit) exhibits different linguistic features as far as forms (in the sense of Gaston Paris' *critique des forms*) are concerned; typically, presence or absence of *e*-forms in conjunctions and prepositions and, more rarely, in the plural relative pronoun. There are other palaeographic, orthographic, and linguistic phenomena which are interesting, but I limit myself to this. In the treatise *On the One Judge* I have published recently⁴² (CAe 1047, by the way, a text certainly known also to Giyorgis of Saglā, who quotes the title of this text in his *Book of the Mystery*, CAe 1952)⁴³ these *e*-forms never

³⁶ See Waltisberg, 2022; Bulakh, 2023; also Butts, 2020a.

³⁷ See Bausi and Camplani, 2016; see also Camplani, 2020.

³⁸ See Bagnall, 2021, p. 118.

³⁹ See Bradshaw, 2023; see also Bradshaw, 2021. Now, also Chase and Johnson, 2025; Bausi, 2026.

⁴⁰ See Bausi, 2011.

⁴¹ See different examples for the reception and acknowledgement (or not) of its importance: Lusini, 2019; Hatke, 2022.

⁴² See Bausi, 2021b.

⁴³ See Bausi, 2020, pp. 240–50.

occur, at variance with what we observe in all other texts of the *Aksumite Collection*: which means that presence and absence of these forms belong to the *fondo* of the textual tradition, and are not a phenomenon of *patina*, that is the systematic updating and adjusting carried out by a copyist, or that in any case the manuscript reflect previous different *patine*. This is of great relevance because it determines an early date for the coexistence of different linguistic systems which we assume existed before they were fixed in the same manuscript by the hand of a scrupulous copyist.⁴⁴

4.e. An increasingly complex context

Finally, I would like to mention a new analysis of a well-known document and new evidence which both open up new scenarios, and serve as an introduction to further perspectives, this time on documentary evidence.

I come back to epigraphy. A couple of years ago I have re-examined the hypotheses advanced in dating and interpretation of the aforementioned inscription of Ham and have cautiously advanced the hypothesis that the inscription uses Greek numerals and a dating based on the Era of the Incarnation, with a suggested dating to 27 Taḥšās 967 (Era of the Incarnation = 23 December 974 CE).⁴⁵ More than insisting on the reasons for this dating or (in any case) for the revision of the previously suggested dating, I would like to emphasize the role of the context factor. I suggested that the inscription of Ham “was a stone shaped like a Meroitic offering table, reused to write a Gəʿəz funerary inscription which was probably copied from minutes containing Greek numerals expressing a date according to the Incarnation era”. The context which makes acceptable the use of Greek numerals at this time and the use of the Incarnation era has to do with the possible relationship with Nubia more than with survival from Aksumite times, and advances the hypothesis of some familiarity with Greek as a phenomenon separate from the Aksumite literacy.⁴⁶

In fact, we find a mention of an archbishop of Aksum in a recently published thirteenth–fourteenth-century graffito from the Nubian church of Sonqi Tino, which adds an important element to the little-known medieval relation-

⁴⁴ See Bausi, 2021b, pp. 217, 220, 231; Bausi, 2023.

⁴⁵ I do not pretend that this is the definitive dating and I mentioned all problems and open questions implied by this hypothesis, for which—I am proud to say—I received an explicit appreciation from Manfred Kropp, who had previously suggested a dating to 27 Taḥšās 866 of the Ethiopian calendar (= 23 December 873 CE) (personal communication of 19 October 2021).

⁴⁶ See Bausi, 2021a, with all references which I cannot repeat here. The hypothesis of a connection to Nubia was first advanced by Monneret de Villard, 1940.

ships between Nubia and Ethiopia and provides evidence of the role held by the Greek language as a communicative medium in this relationship.⁴⁷

This context is stressed by a further document: the “Comboni Fragment” studied by Denis Nosnitsin—who found it remarkable for its contents and palaeography—from digital pictures he was able to take of photos among the papers of the “Comboni House” in Addis Ababa: this is an archaic manuscript containing a Gəʿəz treatise on chronology and computus, consisting of only twenty leaves and probably fragmentary, the whereabouts of which are presently unknown. Recently I was able to assign to the same manuscript a second series of analogical pictures, still unpublished, taken *ante* 1994 in Gʷənāgʷənā by Marilyn E. Heldman, who delivered a copy to me for study almost 30 years ago and which—I admit—remained almost forgotten among my papers in Florence. No need to remind that Gʷənāgʷənā is a well-known historical place in Eritrea, Šəmazānā, very close to the sites of Ham and Qəfrəyā. The interest of the Computus of Gʷənāgʷənā (as I will call this manuscript) lies in the fact that in the arch of the *incipit* folium, a series of signs must be interpreted as a list of Greek numerical signs from 1 to 1000, with a few omissions and possibly one repetition: units—A (1, ?), B (2), Γ (3), Δ (4), E (5), C (6), Z (7), | H (8), Θ (9)—tens—I (10), K (20), Λ (30), M (40), N (50), Ξ (60), | Ξ (60, i.e. one number is repeated), O (70), Π (80), Q (90)—hundreds—P (100), Σ (200), T (300), Y (400), Φ (500), <X (600), Ψ (700), Ω (800) missing, > ṽ (900)—and 1000—,A (1000, ?).

Before coming to the short conclusion, I would like to remind of two minor or major discoveries that should not pass unnoticed in our thinking of the textual transmission and its historical context in the Ethiopian Dark Ages and particularly towards its end phase.

The first one is the extensive notice on Ethiopia transmitted in the *Cronica Universalis* by Galvaneus de la Flamma (d. 1345), relating an early-fourteenth century Ethiopian embassy to Europe: whatever we think of the general reliability of this report (which explains a long debated passage in the work of Giacomo Foresti), it is difficult to deny it any connection with an Ethiopia just a few decades distant in time from the end of the Dark Ages.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See Łajtar and Ochala, 2017, p. 259; Bausi, 2021a, pp. 18–19.

⁴⁸ Let me add, as also Paolo Chiesa has recently noted (Chiesa, 2023, pp. 144–45), the author of the discovery together with whom I had the honour of preparing a commentary of the notice for *Aethiopia*, that it is a real pity that Verena Krebs has not recognized the essential importance of this notice first in an article already prepared at the moment of the discovery of this notice and more than that in her 2021 book *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Di-*

The notice has also information that presupposes specific texts of hagiographic and liturgical character.

The second one is the emergence of the ever first Syriac text found in Ethiopia or Eritrea, that is a wooden altar tablet (*tablītō*) inscribed in Syriac, consecrated by an ‘Athanasius bishop of Ethiopia’ in 1295/1296 CE. The altar tablet, preserved in an Eritrean church, is certainly related to the debated issue of the presence of Syrian prelates in Ethiopia and Eritrea at the end of the thirteenth century and has no significance to the issue of Aksumite relations between Aksum and Syria. Yet, as the ever first ancient or medieval written object in Syriac script or language that has so far been found in Ethiopia or Eritrea, it poses more generally the issue of the relationship with the Syriac-speaking world in the thirteenth century.⁴⁹

5. – *Conclusion*

I have no general conclusions to draw, but my impression is that the Gəʿəz textual and linguistic tradition from the Late Antiquity to the early Middle Ages may be much more varied and colourful than we think. New discoveries and systematic investigations will certainly help to enrich the picture. Updated philological and linguistic analysis of literary and documentary texts is also needed, if we are to grasp all the nuances of this elusive and scarcely documented period. Systematic edition of multiple-text manuscripts which serve as repositories of older Aksumite layer will definitely help understand more in depth and more precisely the textual transmission from Aksum to Lālibalā. As far as the linguistic aspects, there is no reason not to think, for example, that as it has happened in other cases of passage from one (later, undocumented) phase to the other, the obliteration was also due to the problem of intelligibility of the “language of Aksum” (this, in the end, is what Gəʿəz originally was),⁵⁰ but this would require one separate contribution. We should also be more inclined to demarginalize Eritrea and Ethiopia of this period and see their enduring interactions and connections with the outside world.

plomacy with Latin Europe. See Chiesa, 2018; Bausi and Chiesa, 2019; Chiesa, 2023, pp. 144–45, on Krebs, 2019; Krebs, 2021.

⁴⁹ See Bausi and Desreumaux, 2021.

⁵⁰ See for example, as far as Latin language is concerned, what stated Giacomo Devoto, see Devoto, 1983, I, p. xix.

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MARIA BULAKH

*Why Did Old Ethiopic Cease to Be a Spoken Language? **

1. – *Introduction*

It is generally acknowledged that Old Ethiopic (Gəʕz) was a spoken language in the Aksumite kingdom, and that it enjoyed high status both politically and culturally. Its political prominence is demonstrated by the fact that it was the only autochthonous language regularly employed by the Aksumite rulers in the inscriptions enumerating their deeds. Its cultural prominence explains the choice of Old Ethiopic as the language into which the Holy Scripture and other religious texts were translated,¹ the language of liturgy and, in general, the sacral language of Ethiopian Christianity.

Likewise, it is generally acknowledged that Old Ethiopic ceased to be a spoken language before the Solomonic dynasty came to power.² However, both the circumstances that led to its death as a vernacular and even approximate date of this event remain obscure. The present paper is an attempt to approach both questions, offering some reflections on the sociolinguistic factors which could have brought about at first, the rise of Old Ethiopic and later, its decline as a spoken language.

* This essay is the fruit of the research project “Semitic lexicography in synchrony and diachrony” implemented as part of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE University), Laboratory for Middle Eastern and North African Languages and Cultures.

¹ A process which must have started in the fourth century AD. See Piovanelli, 2019, pp. 42–43.

² See, e.g., Ullendorff, 1955, p. 13; Tropper, 2002, p. 1; Bausi, 2016, p. 52; Meyer, 2016, pp. 137, 159; Tropper and Hasselbach-Andee, 2021, pp. 2–3. Somewhat more cautiously, Butts, 2019, p. 119, states that in the Solomonic period, Old Ethiopic “was probably never a first language”.

2. – *Tigrinya is not the daughter language of Old Ethiopic*

It was demonstrated by Robert Hetzron in his seminal book on the topic, *Ethiopian Semitic: Studies in Classification*,³ that Old Ethiopic cannot be regarded as a direct ancestor of Tigrinya: there are grammatical features of Tigrinya which are traceable to Proto-Ethio-Semitic (Proto-ES), but do not find direct correspondences in Old Ethiopic.⁴ Thus, Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya are both descendants from Proto-ES, and whereas Tigrinya undoubtedly was spoken on the territory of the Aksumite kingdom in some form (within this article it shall be referred to as “ancient Tigrinya”),⁵ it must have been grammatically and lexically distinct from Old Ethiopic (although, admittedly, this “ancient Tigrinya” must have been much closer to it than modern Tigrinya is).

The linguistic arguments supporting this statement are as follows.

2.a. Hetzron’s arguments for Tigrinya as a sibling (rather than a daughter language) of Old Ethiopic

Hetzron⁶ confined himself to the following arguments (as far as Tigrinya is concerned):

2.a.1. The plural third person and possessive pronouns are *-omu* (3PM) and *-on* (3PM) in Old Ethiopic, but *-om* (3PM) and *-än* (3PF) in Tigrinya (*-om* and *-an*, respectively, in Tigre). The forms of the feminine suffixes in Tigrinya and Tigre are, in Hetzron’s opinion, more archaic than those of Old Ethiopic (the Old Ethiopic *-on* is a result of analogy with the masculine *-omu*). In any

³ Hetzron, 1972, pp. 20–21.

⁴ Although, to the best of my knowledge, the linguistic arguments put forward by Hetzron were not submitted to criticism, the outdated concept of Old Ethiopic as the ancestor of all modern ES languages—advocated, *inter alia*, in the highly influential Ullendorff’s *The Semitic Languages of Ethiopia* (Ullendorff, 1955, p. 15 etc.)—is not fully abandoned even by the linguists. Thus, in a few recent works by R. Voigt, the pre-Hetzronian picture is taken for granted, so that Voigt amends the old concept rather than defends it anew: “[T]he modern Ethio-Semitic languages do not necessarily solely derive from Ge’ez but from sister dialects of Ge’ez as well” (Voigt, 2016, p. 64). In a recent overview of ES, the theory of modern ES languages going back to Old Ethiopic is said to be “accepted by many historical linguists” (Kapeliuk, 2023, p. 404). Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that in a monograph on Ethiopian history Tigrinya is referred to as a direct descendant from Old Ethiopic (Phillipson, 2012, pp. 51–52).

⁵ See Voigt 2022, p. 520, where, however, ancient Tigrinya is treated as a dialect of Old Ethiopic unattested in epigraphic and literary sources.

⁶ Hetzron, 1972, p. 21.

case, there are no reasons to suppose that the Tigrinya form *-än* (or its equivalent in Tigre, *-an*) is a development of Old Ethiopic *-on*.

2.a.2. The Tigrinya form of the infinitive (with the prefix *mə-*) is, in Hetzron's opinion, more archaic than that of Old Ethiopic (with the pattern *qatil(o(t))-*). In reality, it remains unclear which of the two forms of infinitive—with the prefix **mV-* (*mə-* in Tigrinya) or with the suffix **-ot*—is to be reconstructed for Proto-ES. Furthermore, both of them may have coexisted at some period.⁷ In any case, a reliable case of **-ot*-infinitives replaced by **mV*-infinitives is found in Harari,⁸ and it is difficult to rule out the possibility of a similar development in Tigrinya—in which case, this feature is not relevant for the present discussion.

2.a.3. The form of the negative morpheme in Tigrinya (*ʔay-*) is, in Hetzron's opinion, an archaism lost in Old Ethiopic. In reality, the situation is more complex: in Epigraphic Gəʕz⁹ we do observe both *ʔi-* and *ʔay-* as allomorphs of the negative marker.¹⁰ This allomorphy may well continue Proto-ES. Hence, its generalization into *ʔay-* in Tigrinya, and into *ʔi-* in Tigre and Classical Gəʕz does not tell us anything on interrelation between Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya: the Tigrinya *ʔay-* may go directly to Proto-ES, or, alternatively, may be traced to Epigraphic Gəʕz.

Thus, only the first of Hetzron's arguments remains valid.

2.b. Additional arguments for Tigrinya as a sibling (rather than a daughter language) of Old Ethiopic

Some additional arguments can be advanced in support of Hetzron's statement.

⁷ Bulakh and Kogan, 2010, pp. 292–94.

⁸ Wagner, 2011, p. 1259.

⁹ This cover label will be used to refer to the varieties of Old Ethiopic or related languages/dialects attested in the epigraphic corpus (mostly dated to the Aksumite period; see Butts, 2019, p. 118). The term “Classical Gəʕz” will be used to refer to the variety of Old Ethiopic preserved in post-Aksumite manuscripts and codified in the grammars of indigenous and western scholars.

¹⁰ Bulakh, 2012, pp. 391–93. The Gəʕz epigraphic material is also discussed by Sjörö, 2018, p. 318, who, however, fails to mention the most important feature: the allomorph *ʔay-* is attested only before *yə-*, the 3SM prefix of imperfect/jussive. As suggested in Bulakh, 2012, p. 392, the emergence of this allomorph is most likely a result of the dissimilation of *i* before *y*: **ʔi-yə- > *ʔay-yə-*. In other words, the distribution between *ʔay-* and *ʔi-* in Epigraphic Gəʕz was phonologically conditioned. The same distribution can be reconstructed for Proto-ES.

2.b.1. The form of the 3PF object/possessive/subject suffix in Tigrinya is *-än* word-finally, but *-äna-* word-internally: *nägir-än* ‘they_{PF} told’, but *nägir-äna-?o* ‘they_{PF} told him’. The word-internal form is more archaic, with the final **-ä* as the marker of plural feminine (opposed to **-ü* as the marker of plural masculine) traceable to Proto-Semitic.¹¹ In Old Ethiopic, no trace of the final **-ä* has been recorded for this morpheme (which simply does not occur in word-internal position in this language).

2.b.2. Converb (gerund) in Old Ethiopic employs the base *qatil-* combined with the possessive pronominal suffixes and marked for accusative: *qatil-a-ka* ‘you_{SM} having killed’ (compare *bet-a-ka* ‘your_{SM} house_{ACC}’). In 3SM, the accusative marker *-a* is merged with the pronominal suffix into *-o*: *qatil-o* ‘he having killed’ (compare *bet-o* ‘his house_{ACC}’, rather than *bet-u* ‘his house_{NOM}’).¹² In Tigrinya, the 1 and 2 person markers are attached directly to the base of the converb (*nägir-ka* ‘you_{SM} having said’) and, even more importantly, the 3SM form of the converb is *nägir-u* ‘he having said’, where *-u* cannot be traced back to *-o* in Old Ethiopic. The Tigrinya type (with nominative-like endings) and the Old Ethiopic type (with accusative-like endings) must represent reflexes of two distinct forms of Proto-ES converb. Most probably, the protoform could be marked for nominative or accusative, presumably depending on the syntactic function of the noun encoding the agent of the converb.¹³

¹¹ On the opposition **-ü* vs. **-ä* in the plural forms of the pronominal suffixes in Proto-Semitic see Huehnergard, 2019, p. 54; Kogan, 2015, p. 60; Weninger, 2011, p. 168.

¹² This paradigm finds correspondence in Amharic, South Argobba and North Argobba. In Amharic, the paradigm of converb fully corresponds to that of Old Ethiopic as far as the attachment of the suffixes is concerned: *-ä-* (< **a*) is inserted before the suffixes with initial consonant, and *-o* is the 3SM suffix (*säbr-ä-h* ‘you_{SM} having broken’, *säbr-o* ‘he having broken’). In Argobba of Aliyu Amba (which is a South Argobba variety, see Girma Awgichew Demeke, 2015, pp. 4-5), 2SM suffix *-ah* and 2SF suffix *-ih* undoubtedly result from metathesis of **-kä* and **-ki*, respectively, whereas the 1PL suffix is attached by means of the inserted *-ä-* (*sädbäd-ä-n* ‘we having insulted’; see Leslau, 1997, pp. 52-53). Similarly, in North Argobba (Wetter, 2010, pp. 176–180), *-ä-* is inserted only in the 1PL form of the converb (*säbärr-ä-na* ‘we having broken’ vs. *säbärr-ax* ‘you_{SM} having broken’). Both in South and North Argobba, the 3SM suffix of the converb is *-o* (Leslau, 1997, p. 52; Wetter, 2010, p. 176). Thus, both North and South Argobba have lost the inserted **a* in some slots of the paradigm, but have preserved the 3SM marker intact. In other words, the paradigms of converb in Amharic and both branches of Argobba can be traced to a paradigm identical with that of Old Ethiopic, and different from that of Tigrinya.

¹³ The distribution between the nominative-marked and accusative-marked forms of converb in Proto-ES could follow the same lines as that of circumstantial predicative adjectives in Old

2.b.3. The form of the imperfect of the causative stem in Tigrinya in the types A and B (*ʔa-A yānəggər* and *ʔa-B yānəggər*, respectively) cannot be traced back to Old Ethiopic (*ʔa-A yānəggər* and *ʔa-B yānəggər*). Rather, a reconstruction of the Proto-ES verbal system can be offered which accounts both for Tigrinya picture and for the other ES languages, including Old Ethiopic. Within this reconstruction, the Proto-ES opposition was *ʔa-A *yāngər* vs. *ʔa-B *yānəggər*.

This reconstruction has two advantages. Firstly, it accounts for the plural forms of the imperfect of *ʔa-A* in Tigrinya: 3PM *yāngəru*, where apparently the old base *-ngər-* is preserved intact. This is in contrast with the paradigms of B-stems, in which gemination can be traced to Proto-ES: 0B 3SM *yənəggər*, 3PM *yənəggəru*; *ʔa-B* 3SM *yānəggər*, 3PM *yānəggəru*. Secondly, it accounts both for the forms in Tigrinya and in the rest of ES (see Fig. 1). After the gemination of the second radical was introduced in *ʔa-A*,¹⁴ Tigrinya followed a unique path: in stem *ʔa-A*, the vowel *ə* was inserted before the geminated consonant.¹⁵ Thus, *ʔa-A* remained opposed to *ʔa-B*, whereas *ʔa-B* underwent no change at all: *ʔa-A yānəggər*, *ʔa-B yānəggər*. In Old Ethiopic (as elsewhere in ES), the imperfect of *ʔa-A* followed the pattern of 0A. Consequently, the imperfect of *ʔa-B* had to be reshaped after the pattern of 0B: *ʔa-A yānəggər* (cf. 0A *yənəggər*), *ʔa-B yānəggər* (cf. 0B *yənəggər*).

Ethiopic (whose morphology, with nominal base attaching a possessive suffix, is strikingly similar to that of converbs), see Tropper and Hasselbach-Andee, 2021, p. 233; Dillmann, 1907, pp. 482–83.

¹⁴ This took place after the splitting of Proto-ES. In Tigrinya, this process affected only those slots of the paradigm where no suffix appears.

¹⁵ The pattern of *ʔa-A* in the imperfect thus became modelled after 0B. Paradigm adjustment of the causative stem after the D-stem (equivalent of 0B) is found elsewhere in Semitic. Cf., e.g. Kouwenberg, 2010, p. 114 for Akkadian; Huehnergard, 1992, pp. 210, 216 for Hebrew and Semitic languages in general.

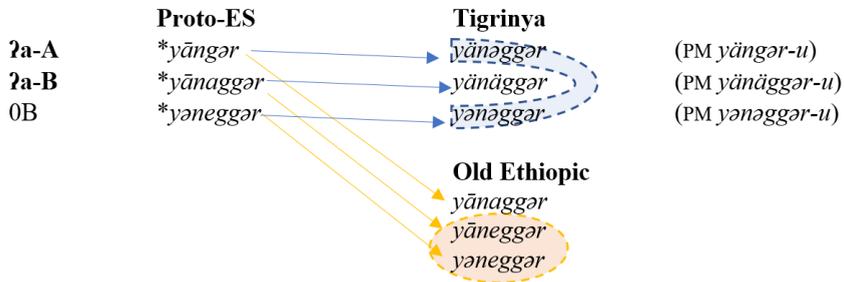


Fig. 1: Imperfect of the λa -A, λa -B, and 0B: from Proto-ES to Tigrinya and Old Ethiopic

2.c. The lexical dimension

On the lexical level, there are no arguments to support the hypothesis of Old Ethiopic as the ancestor of Tigrinya. Firstly, the distance between Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya is more or less the same as between Old Ethiopic and Tigre. According to M.L. Bender,¹⁶ the shared core vocabulary of 100-word list is 71 for Tigre and Old Ethiopic, and 68 for Tigrinya and Old Ethiopic. Even more importantly, the glottochronological evaluation of lexical evidence suggests the splitting between Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya ca. seven centuries BC¹⁷—which implies that in the Aksumite period, Old Ethiopic and (ancient) Tigrinya were already independent languages.¹⁸

3. – Linguistic situation in the northern Ethio-Eritrean highlands in the Aksumite and early post-Aksumite periods

As shown in Section 2, Old Ethiopic was not the ancestor of Tigrinya. Rather, both Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya coexisted in the Aksumite epoch as two separate languages (undoubtedly, among many other vernaculars spoken

¹⁶ Bender, 1971, p. 173, Table 4.

¹⁷ Militarev, 2000, p. 303.

¹⁸ And not dialects of one language, as suggested in recent works by R. Voigt (Voigt, 2016, p. 64; Voigt, 2018, p. 73; Voigt, 2022, p. 519).

in the region).¹⁹ What was the interrelationship between these two languages? What was their geographical distribution in the Aksumite times? Was there any other kind of distribution, for instance, on the social level?

The geographical distribution of Old Ethiopic can be tentatively reconstructed on the basis of the epigraphic corpus. For the present discussion, it is vital to take into consideration only those Aksumite inscriptions whose language can be safely identified as Old Ethiopic—which cannot be done in many cases.²⁰ Still, even with these strict criteria, we obtain rather broad distribution of Old Ethiopic language—from Aksum in west Tigray to ሩAddi Abunä Nazret in south-east Tigray to a number of historical sites in ሩAgamä (north-east Tigray) and Akkälä Guzay (south Eritrea) to a location Aratu in the vicinity of Keren (Eritrea).²¹ With the exception of Aratu,²² all these locations now belong to Tigrinya-speaking area.²³

¹⁹ On Aksum as a multiethnic and a multilingual state see Phillipson, 2012, pp. 36, 52; Voigt, 2016, pp. 62–63.

²⁰ Inscriptions which cannot be with certainty attributed to Old Ethiopic have been left out. This includes for instance the inscriptions RIÉ 182 (from Mätära), RIÉ 183 (from Safra), RIÉ 180 (a bronze object from ሩAddi Gälämo, third cent.), RIÉ 218 (from ሩAnza), the inscriptions on pieces of schist from Mätära published by Ricci (1991), and the inscription on Ḥonzat stele (Ricci 1988, p. 146, Bulakh and Yohannes Gebre Selassie, 2023). In each of these texts, more or less prominent aberrations from Classical Gəፂ are found, and/or some fragments remain obscure. Likewise, numerous fragmentary inscriptions containing personal names or undecipherable sequences of letters are not relevant for the present discussion. Cf. also below, fn. 26.

²¹ The relevant inscriptions are as follows: RIÉ 187 etc. (Aksum), RIÉ 219 (ሩAddi Abunä Nazret), RIÉ 222 (Daḳane), RIÉ 223 (Mätära), RIÉ 228, 229, 230 (Edit), RIÉ 232 (Ḥam), RIÉ 240, 241, 242, 243, 244 (Daḥanamo), RIÉ 250 (Saro), RIÉ 252 (Daፂru in the region of Qoḥayto), Ricci, 2003, Figs. 8, 9, 11 (region of Qoḥayto), RIÉ 254 (ሩAddi ሩAläwiti), RIÉ 313 (Aratu).

²² On this site, as well as some other Aksumite sites of the Tigre area, see Manzo, 2010, pp. 22–23, 24, 26, with further references.

²³ Importantly, there is no evidence for Old Ethiopic as the language of Adulis or the surrounding area of the Red Sea. This may be explained by the simple fact that no epigraphic sources in local languages have been detected in Adulis so far. Yet, one cannot ignore the reconstruction suggested by Lusini (2006, p. 451), in whose opinion the variety spoken in Adulis was closer to Tigre than to Old Ethiopic. One can even venture to seek for tangible traces of this dialect/language. Indeed, the inscription RIÉ 192, known for its specific linguistic features (such as word-initial *h-* corresponding to ሩ in Classical Gəፂ; negative marker *d?*; assimilation *-nt- > -tt-*; complementizer *k-*; see Bulakh, 2013, pp. 214–15), although produced in Aksum, could have been written in the Adulis variety (or under its influence), as a result of intensification of contacts with the coastal area in the course of Käleb's Himyarite campaign of

There are no reasons to suppose a mass migration of Tigrinya-speakers to this area in the late Aksumite period and to regard this migration as the main trigger of the death of Old Ethiopic. Such a reconstruction would involve too many contradictions: one would have to assume that the newcomers were hostile enough to eliminate all the Old Ethiopic speakers and, at the same time, flexible enough to accept their religion and to learn their language well enough to be able to handle the sacred books and to practice liturgy in Old Ethiopic.

A much more plausible reconstruction implies that the Aksumite kingdom was a multilingual state and that Old Ethiopic, Tigrinya, and Tigre were among languages spoken on its territory, together with non-Semitic languages, notably Agaw (Central Cushitic languages).²⁴ It is difficult to establish with certainty the geographic distribution of these various languages.²⁵ It can only be stated that Old Ethiopic enjoyed the highest prestige: although it was not the only written language among the local speech varieties,²⁶ it was most often used in this function, especially by the rulers of the state. In particular, the translation of the Holy Scripture into Old Ethiopic clearly testifies to the high status of this language in the Aksumite kingdom.

How could it be that on this extended territory only one language among many was chosen as the written language? Why did neither ancient Tigrinya

the sixth century (on the dialectal variation as one of the possible explanations for these specific forms see RIÉ IIIB, p. 259; Bausi, 2023, p. 159 fn. 11).

²⁴ Cf. fn. 19.

²⁵ Tigre was presumably the major language spoken by the local population in the area around Adulis, and it is usually assumed that Tigre speakers are to be identified with *tigrētai* mentioned by Cosmas Indicopleustes as one of the local ethnic groups (see Lusini, 2006, p. 452; Voigt, 2016, p. 69; *contra* “Təgre ethnography”, in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), p. 899a (by W. Smidt), where the possibility of identification with Tigrinya-speakers is also considered). This agrees with the linguistic data: the equal distribution of shared core vocabulary between Old Ethiopic and Tigrinya, on the one hand, and Old Ethiopic and Tigre, on the other hand, suggests that Old Ethiopic was in equally close relationship with both languages (see Section 2.c).

²⁶ Attempts to write in other languages were made from time to time. This includes the famous inscription from Šəḥuf əmni (RIÉ 287), written in Ethiopic script, but in a non-Semitic language (“Šəḥuf əmni” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), p. 597b (by M. Bulakh)). Also, there is a number of fragmentary inscriptions which cannot with certainty be attributed to any language, and which are traditionally and somewhat arbitrarily regarded as written in Old Ethiopic. Note, for instance, RIÉ 351 (an unvocalized inscription on a piece of pottery), with the specific Tigrinya root *hgs* ‘to be happy’ (Kane, 2000, p. 292), which, admittedly, with equal probability may be a personal name. For both interpretations see RIÉ IIIB, p. 351.

nor ancient Tigre leave any visible written documentation—neither in the Aksumite time nor for many centuries of post-Aksumite period?

A possible solution is that the distribution between Old Ethiopic, on the one hand, and ancient Tigre and ancient Tigrinya, on the other hand, was not geographical. Rather, Old Ethiopic could be the language spoken by a certain social group enjoying a high prestige and a high political status.²⁷ Yet, it could not have been simply the language of the royal clan in Aksum, because, firstly, it was not restricted to Aksum and its environments, and, secondly, as Old Ethiopic graffiti show,²⁸ it was not restricted to high nobility.

It seems a plausible hypothesis that the Old Ethiopic speakers were an ethnic group predominantly engaged in trading, including far-distance trade. This would explain several facts: that evidence for Old Ethiopic in the Aksumite period is found on a wide territory; that among local languages Old Ethiopic was most frequently used in writing; that Old Ethiopic was the official language of the Aksumite state, whose wealth was based on trade; that Old Ethiopic speakers were the first to embrace the new, Christian, religion, which was allegedly brought by foreign merchants. Incidentally, this would also fit into the association of the language name Gəʕz and the ethnic name Agʕāzi with the verb ‘to migrate, to travel’, the semantic connection between travelling and trading being obvious.²⁹ One could further speculate that Old Ethiopic developed into a *lingua franca* employed by both Semitic and Cushit-

²⁷ A parallel may be drawn to the socio-ethnic system which probably at a certain point of history existed in the northern part of Ethio-Eritrean highland: Tigre must have been originally the language of the serfs, with other language(s) spoken by the ruling clans, and eventually given up by them in favour of the language of the surrounding submitted groups (see Nadel, 1944, p. 14, with some reservations). Within this approach, a hypothesis can be proposed that in the Aksumite state, Old Ethiopic was the language of the elite, and Tigrinya (in the south) and Tigre (in the north) were the languages of the serfs. This reconstruction would roughly correspond to that offered by Voigt, 2016, pp. 69–70, who prefers to speak of ethnic groups rather than languages. Compare also Lusini, 2006, p. 452; Lusini, 2010, pp. 8–9.

²⁸ RIÉ 240, 241, 242, 243, 244 (Daḥanamo); RIE 525 (Daʕru); RIÉ 254 (ʕAddi ʕAlāwti); RIÉ 250 (Saro), RIÉ 252 (Daʕru in the region of Qoḥayto), Ricci 2003 Figs. 8, 9, 13 (region of Qoḥayto).

²⁹ This semantic shift is clearly attested in another Old Ethiopic verb, *nagada* ‘to travel; to trade’ (Leslau, 1987, p. 390; Dillmann, 1865, p. 693). On the relationship between the language name Gəʕz, the ethnonym Agʕāzi, and the verb *gəʕza* see Marrassini, 2014, pp. 24–25; Voigt, 2016, p. 69. Note, however, that since the earliest attestations of Agʕāzi employ this term as an ethnonym (“Agʕāzi” in *Ede*, vol. I (2003), pp. 144b–45a (by A. Sima)), one has to suggest that it was the ethnic name which gave rise to the root *gʕz* ‘to be free; to travel’, not vice versa.

ic speakers on the local markets. Finally, such a hypothesis would also explain the death of this language, presumably soon after the fall of the Aksumite empire. Indeed, as soon as the old trade routes were abandoned and the trade connections broken, the clans of speakers of Old Ethiopic, dispersed along the Aksumite settlements, became isolated, could not pursue their former occupation, and soon lost their identity, becoming submerged by the neighbouring ethnic groups and, among other features, taking over their language(s).

Association of a certain profession with a certain ethnic group is not a rare phenomenon, and in the Ethiopian area, we have several examples of such distribution.³⁰ More specifically, the trading routes were often under control of a certain ethnic group. The religious factor (naturally interrelated with the ethnic factor) was no less important: it is well-known that in the post-Aksumite period the commercial activities on the Ethio-Eritrean highlands were in the hands of the Muslims.³¹ Long-distance trade led to the emergence of chains of urban settlements dispersed along the trading route. As shown by the French scholars F.-X. Fauvelle-Aymar and B. Hirsch,³² in the post-Aksumite period, chains of Muslim cities, presumably inhabited by ES speakers, existed in the Ethio-Eritrean highlands. More precisely, at least since the tenth cent., a trade route from the Red Sea coast (where Dahlak islands and Massawa were the main Muslim commercial centres) southward was controlled by Muslims, who marked their presence by Arabic inscriptions found in Āndārta region.³³

K^wiha (10 km south-east of Māqälä), a town in Āndārta which had already existed in the Aksumite period,³⁴ is regarded by Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch as an outpost of the Muslim settlement of Dahlak in the post-Aksumite period.³⁵

³⁰ See Hetzron, 1977, pp. 6–7, on various Gurage ethnic groups; “Beta ʿsraʿel”, in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), p. 557a (by S. Kaplan), etc.

³¹ See, for instance, Bustorf, 2011, pp. 82–83 on trade as the occupation of Muslim peoples and, more specifically, on involvement of the Silte in local and transregional trade. Another ethnic group traditionally engaged in long-distance trade was Argobba (Abbebe Kefleyesus, 2006, pp. 74–83).

³² Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, 2004–2010, pp. 25–53. The authors base their reconstruction on archeological data bolstered by the evidence from the Arabic medieval authors. See also Smidt, 2009, pp. 126–27.

³³ “Arabic inscriptions in the Ethiopian regions”, in *E Ae*, vol. II (2007), pp. 165a–67b (by A. Gori), here 165b–66b.

³⁴ Breton and Yohannes Ayteneu Ayele, 2019.

³⁵ Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, 2004–2010, p. 31. See also Lusini, 1993–1997.

This route³⁶ apparently gained in prominence after the other major route lost its importance, namely, the route leading from the Red Sea coast to Aksum, the old axis on which the wealth of the Aksumite kingdom was based. But there is little doubt that the route existed in some form already in the pre-Aksumite period—in view of the Sabaic sites found in south-east Tigray³⁷—, although we do not know how far south it reached. The route also likely functioned in the Aksumite period as well—in view of the Old Ethiopic inscription (RIÉ 219) found south of Mäqälä.

While Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch convincingly show that in the post-Aksumite period it was the Muslims who held control over the north-south route, the question concerning their ethnicity and language remains—and probably will remain—unanswered. The southern parts of the route were likely under control of North Argobba and South Argobba speakers.³⁸ What about the territories from the Red Sea to Ĭndärtä (south-east Tigray)—those territories whose trading posts in the Aksumite period were most likely inhabited by the speakers of Old Ethiopic? For the centuries following the fall of Aksum, we lack any information on the linguistic situation along this trading route (since the merchants employed Arabic as their written language—a usual practice for non-Arab Muslim communities for many centuries after embracing Islam). The reconstruction by Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch³⁹ implies that the

³⁶ This route, labeled as “north-south axis of Islamization” by Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch (2004–2010, pp. 39–41), was gradually, in the course of the thirteenth–fourteenth cent., replaced by the “east-west axis”, going from Zaylaʿ along the Čärčär massive to the Ethiopian lakes. Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch are convinced that the inhabitants of these cities predominantly spoke ES language(s). Argobba speakers were probably the dominating group in the southern part of the north-south trading route, whereas the Harari and proto-East Gurage speakers must have been in charge of the east-west axis going from Zaylaʿ to the Ethiopian lakes (until the sixteenth cent. migrations changed the ethnographic situation, so that eventually only one urban center survived together with its original inhabitants, namely, Harar). The modern distribution of Argobba-speaking settlements must reflect the earlier, more prosperous situation, with a longer chain of Argobba-speaking trading posts and with intensive contact between them provided by the Argobba speakers themselves regularly travelling along this route.

³⁷ See e.g. Wolf and Nowotnick, 2010; Benoist, Gajda, Matthews, *et al.*, 2020, p. 21, with further references.

³⁸ This can be suggested on the basis of the modern geographical position of Argobba villages, as well as of their oral traditions linking them to the historical Muslim state of Ifat. On the linguistic distinction between North and South Argobba and on their location see Girma Awgichew Demeke, 2015, pp. 1–12, with map on p. 5.

³⁹ Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, 2004–2010, pp. 30–31. See also Smidt, 2004, pp. 263–64.

traders mostly came from the Dahlak islands, in which case they most likely were naturalized Arabs mixed with local Islamized population (Tigre and/or Tigrinya speakers). They must have gradually gained control over the old trading posts, becoming the monopolists of the long-distance trade and replacing in this function Old Ethiopic speakers.

4. – *Conclusions*

The sociolinguistic history of Old Ethiopic can thus be tentatively reconstructed as follows. The speakers of Old Ethiopic were almost exclusively traders who held under control the trading posts from the Red Sea to Aksum, to south-east Tigray, and to the area of today's Keren in Eritrea. When the Dahlak islands and the Red Sea coast were Islamized, the old, Christian trading routes were partly abandoned and partly taken over by the Muslims, the connection between various Old Ethiopic-speaking settlements broke, and the ethnic group Agṣāzi itself, probably not very numerous, was soon assimilated to the surrounding groups. This must have taken place after the fall of the Aksumite empire, thus, after the seventh century AD. At this period, the route from Red Sea to Aksum was abandoned,⁴⁰ and as for the route going through the eastern Tigray southwards, it must have been reshaped under the Muslim dominance. Did any of the Old Ethiopic-speaking communities survive and continue throughout the Zagwe time into the Solomonic period? Did they still pursue their trading activities, perhaps by means of embracing Islam? There is no evidence either in favour or against such a suggestion. But it can be safely stated that in the post-Aksumite period, since the eighth cent. AD, Old Ethiopic lost its importance as the *lingua franca* and the language of commerce, and that Arabic took over the latter function as soon as long-distance trade fell under the control of Muslims.

In the Christian areas, Old Ethiopic continued as the language of the Christian religion and as the only written language. But the ethnic group which was responsible for the introduction and spreading of Christianity in the region lost its identity and its language, assimilating itself to the surrounding

⁴⁰ Both archeological findings and numismatic evidence show that in the course of the seventh cent., Aksum lost its dominance in the international trade on the Red Sea (Lusini, 2022, pp. 330–32). By the ninth century, it ceased to exist as an urban center (Michels, 2005, pp. 217–18). This does not exclude, however, existence of Gəṣz-speaking enclaves in the post-Aksumite period. In particular, the linguistic features of the inscription from the village of Ham in southern Eritrea (RIÉ 232), recently dated to the tenth century (Bausi, 2021), suggest that it was produced by native speakers of Gəṣz (see Bulakh forthcoming).

agricultural, by that time Christianized, ethnic groups. Thus, Old Ethiopic remained the language of the Ethiopian Christianity, without being any longer the native language of any Christian ethnic group. Eventually, Tigrinya speakers, until then only one of the local ethnic groups, came to play the most prominent role in the local politics and spread their influence and, finally, their language, to the non-Semitic population of Aksum and the adjacent areas of the northern Ethio-Eritrean highlands.

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MARIE-LAURE DERAT

***Moving Beyond the Thirteenth Century in Lalibela:
From Archaeology to Manuscripts***

1. – *Introduction*

Until recently, Lalibela¹ was considered to be both the capital of the Zag^we kingdom² and the residence of the metropolitan contemporary of King Lalibala (c.1204–1225).³ This demonstrates the centrality of the site to the question of the post-Aksum period. However, the dating of the churches of Lalibela is complicated by the scarcity of texts. We cannot determine with certainty which churches were founded by King Lalibala, or whether any churches existed earlier or were founded later. The typological analysis of the architecture⁴ combined with the liturgical arrangements⁵ has yielded many results, but the thirteenth century remains an impassable horizon. This is mainly due to the fact that some liturgical arrangements are deliberately archaic, as shown by Emmanuel Fritsch.⁶ As a result, it is now possible to classify the various churches as belonging to a long thirteenth century, with the exception of those of the Däbrä Sina-Golgota-Šöllase complex, which do not seem to date from before the fourteenth century.⁷ We must also consider David Phillipson's conclusions on the transformations of the Lalibela site. He sees it as a kind of archaeological node that testifies to the transition between Aksum and Lalibela.

¹ I distinguish here between the name of the town, which is written in the way Ethiopians transcribe this name in the Latin alphabet—hence Lalibela—and the name of the king, which is transcribed on the basis of his name in contemporary texts: Lalibala.

² Gervers, 2003, p. 23; Mercier and Lepage, 2013, pp. 40–41; see also the discussion points in Derat, 2018, pp. 174–82; Derat, 2020, pp. 41–49.

³ Lepage, 2002; Mercier and Lepage, 2013, pp. 40–41.

⁴ Lepage and Mercier, 2006; Mercier and Lepage, 2012.

⁵ Fritsch and Gervers, 2007; Fritsch, 2008.

⁶ Fritsch, 2008, p. 107.

⁷ Gervers, 2003.

He dates the first monuments of Group 2 (or Eastern Group) to the seventh–eighth–ninth centuries and the first monuments of Group 1 (or Northern Group) to the tenth–eleventh centuries.⁸

When David Phillipson’s work was published, Claire Bosc-Tiessé and I set up a historical and archaeological mission to Lalibela, drawing on a range of disciplines (history, art history, archaeology, liturgy, stone-cutting)⁹ to approach the site from different angles. This mission, which began in 2008 and is still ongoing,¹⁰ has allowed us to see the site in a different light. No longer as a collection of churches with different architectural forms, whose styles alone would indicate the period in which they were built, but as an archaeological site that has evolved over time. In this respect our work was in line with the approaches of David Phillipson¹¹ and Niall Finneran.¹² Archaeology is only one aspect of the project: the analysis of paintings in their material (and not just stylistic) dimension,¹³ the study of manuscripts and in particular the development of the libraries of the different churches of Lalibela,¹⁴ the record-

⁸ Phillipson, 2007; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 175–80.

⁹ The team that worked from 2008 to 2019 consisted mainly of Kidane Ayalew, François-Xavier Fauvelle, Emmanuel Fritsch, Antoine Garric, Yves Gleize, Anne-Lise Goujon and Romain Mensan, with the technological support of the team of Archeovision (namely Loïc Espinasse, François Daniel and Pascal Mora). As of 2019, Claire Bosc-Tiessé choose to leave the scientific direction of the team, but kept on working with us, and the collective has been enriched by the arrival of Alebachew Belaye, Hiluf Berhe, Martina Ambu, Manon Routhiau, Sigrid Mirabaud, Nafisa Valieva and other scientists who came more occasionally.

¹⁰ This programme was funded by the CNRS, the Centre Français des Etudes Ethiopiennes, the Commission Consultative des Recherches Archéologiques à l’Etranger of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (Cornafrique programmes [2007–2011] then EthioChrisProcess [2018–2021]), the Institut des Mondes Africains (UMR 8171, CNRS-Université de Paris 1-EPHE-Université d’Aix-Marseille-EHESS-IRD), the University of Paris-1, and the labex Resmed. It benefited from a partnership with the Institut National de Recherches d’Archéologie Préventive (INRAP). In 2019 and 2020, substantial financial support from the French Embassy in Ethiopia has made it possible to carry out work that was previously unthinkable and to set up a new research programme financed by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), which aims in particular to provide training through research and to enhance the value of Lalibela’s heritage. Entitled Sustainable Lalibela, this programme began in 2020 and is still ongoing (in December 2023). It is directed by Marie Bridonneau, Kidane Ayalew and Marie-Laure Derat.

¹¹ Phillipson, 2007; Phillipson, 2009.

¹² Finneran, 2009; 2012; Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, Bruxelles, *et al.*, 2014.

¹³ Bosc-Tiessé, Burlot, Mirabaud, *et al.*, 2021.

¹⁴ Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, 2011.

ing of inscriptions on the walls,¹⁵ the analysis of objects¹⁶ are all part of our work, carried out as a team, with the aim of always cross-referencing data.

The aim of this article is to present the methods and a summary of the results on the basis of the current state of the work at Lalibela (as of the date of the conference, i.e., early 2023), with particular emphasis on the period prior to the thirteenth century. Understanding why a monumental church complex developed in the thirteenth century and why King Lalibela founded churches there was one of the questions that guided this work. What did this region, this territory in the Kingdom of Ethiopia, mean to the Zag^we dynasty? This survey begins with archaeological data suggesting that the site was inhabited at least two centuries before the thirteenth century. It continues with the identification of architectural programmes that have all but disappeared and continues with the discovery of two successive painted decorations in the church of Betä Maryam. Finally, the survey provides a preliminary evaluation of the oldest codices still preserved in the churches. Lalibela is a complex place, and each of the studies conducted on the site reveals a number of grey areas. Dating the monuments, paintings, sculptures and manuscripts poses the greatest challenge. Without being able to propose a coherent whole, this article attempts to address these issues, highlighting the few ancient traces and the reasonable doubts.

2. – An elite occupation in Lalibela between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries

The guiding principle of our archaeological work has been the application of two methods. The first was the idea that rock architecture could be a key to the identification of architectural transformations, bearing witness to a history of “building”. In the same way as in the archaeology of buildings, we can read the walls to identify the construction sequences, in Lalibela, by observing the façades, the church interiors, the trenches and galleries of the rock-hewn complex, we can also deduce the digging sequences, on the assumption that doors opening into the void, or truncated staircases—long observed by those who studied these monuments before us¹⁷—bear witness to a first programme that was then entirely transgressed by a second. For example, one of the first intention of the builders of Lalibela was to create a doorway giving access to the

¹⁵ Abullif, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2010.

¹⁶ Bosc-Tiessé, 2010.

¹⁷ See for instance Gervers, 2003; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 175–76.

Betä Maryam from the west. Then, in another phase, the western façade of the Betä Golgota and the “Tomb of Adam” were reserved in the rock, cutting off the western access to Betä Maryam.¹⁸

The identification of these “anomalies”, the superimposition of different intentions on the site of Lalibela, has led to the classification of observations into four major phases in the development of the site: The initial phase was designated as Troglodytic, encompassing galleries and small dead-end rooms dug under the surface of the rocky cortex; a second phase, known as Hypogeum, in which underground rooms supported by massive pillars appear, resulting from the enlargement of the previous spaces; a third phase, referred to as Monumental 1, in which the churches were dug out of the rock and set in open courtyards; and, finally, a fourth phase, called Monumental 2, characterised by the drainage of water and the digging of trenches, which significantly altered access to the site. These sequences of excavations enabled us to establish a relative chronology, although they do not allow us to date these transformations.

In addition to the archaeology of the buildings, another method was used to identify areas on the site where archaeological data could be preserved. A major advance was the discovery of spoil heaps resulting from the piling of rock-cutting waste around the churches.¹⁹ One of these heaps, the largest one, was excavated under the supervision of Romain Mensan between 2017 and 2022,²⁰ in the second group of churches at Lalibela. The hill has a reverse relief to the surrounding monuments: Betä Gäbrä³el-Rufa³el, Betäləhem, Märqorewos and Betä Amanu³el. These monuments were obviously built around the perimeter of the hill. On the northern slope of this hill, Shimeles Taffesse’s work revealed an ashlar wall.²¹ We excavated it in 2012 and its foundation was dated between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries by carbon-14 dating.²² Therefore, between 2017 and 2022, this mound was excavated, focusing on the eastern part where some pottery sherds were discernible in the section. After consultation with the people of Lalibela and the clergy, the hill in question was renamed Qəyit Tärara.²³ Excavations revealed occupa-

¹⁸ Fauvelle-Aymar, Bruxelles, Mensan, *et al.*, 2010.

¹⁹ Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, Bruxelles, *et al.*, 2014; Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, 2019.

²⁰ Derat, Bosc-Tiessé, Garric, *et al.*, 2021.

²¹ Shimeles Taffesse, 1983.

²² Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, Bruxelles, *et al.*, 2014; Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, 2019.

tion in the form of excavated and built structures, dating between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries.²⁴

Here we will only discuss occupations prior to the thirteenth century. The oldest structure discovered consists of a circular space with a diameter of 9.5 metres (Fig. 1). The perimeter of this structure is marked by elongated notches in the rock, which vary in size and depth. The inside of the structure is 0.9 m deeper than the level of the notches. In the centre, another circular structure, 2m in diameter, has been cut out of the rock. It lies below the level marked by the notches, but above the overcut inner level, which it overhangs by 0.75m. No artefacts were found within the structure. However, on the periphery of the structure, fireplaces, ceramics (a complete pot, a very large jar and a sherd with a carinated shape) and fauna were recorded.

The function of this complex, which was revived in a second phase of occupation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as evidenced by the construction of a rubble wall around the perimeter of the excavated structure, is still unknown. Given the size of the circular structure, it is unlikely that this was a simple dwelling. It could be a settlement linked to the surrounding excavations; a structure associated with artisans. Analyses are still in progress. All the C14 dating carried out on this structure suggests that it was built between the beginning of the eleventh century and the middle of the twelfth century, and that it was still in use in the thirteenth century (see Fig. 1).²⁵

In summary, at Lalibela, within the second group sector, the earliest occupations can be traced back to the period between the mid-tenth and mid-eleventh centuries. During that period, the construction of a monumental wall in the northern part of Qəyit Tārara but also to the west, atop Betä Gäbräʾel-

²³ Naming the archaeological site was necessary. Until then, our work had been based on its location in relation to the churches. As access to the hill was via Betä Gäbräʾel-Rufaʾel, the site was called Gabriel. This gave it an identity associated with the churches. The search for a name was a lever for engaging in dialogue with the workers and opening up this dialogue to the Lalibela community more generally. The idea was to bring back to mind a toponym that the life of the churches tended to erase. Everyone recognised that the place had once had a name, but none could remember it. Until it resurfaced from memory and was, in a way, approved by all the inhabitants and authorities, both religious and heritage. Qəyit Tārara is the name by which the archaeological site is now known. It refers to the name of a woman, Qəyit, who is said to have given her land to King Lalibala when he was looking for a place to found churches.

²⁴ An article presenting the full results of these digs will be published shortly in collaboration with François-Xavier Fauvelle, Romain Mensan and Anne-Lise Goujon.

²⁵ Derat, Bosc-Tiessé, Garric, *et al.*, 2021.

Rufa³el and Betälehem, provided a large space for settlement. Among the many questions raised by the study of these monumental structures, their function remains a central concern. Were they constructed as defensive enclosures, or did they serve to demarcate a space within which specific forms of occupation took place—whether residential, religious, artisanal, or administrative in nature? Insights into the function of these walls can be gleaned from the study of the architectural remains discovered within the enclosed space. A circular structure was built at a distance from this wall, either at the same time or a bit later (early eleventh to mid twelfth century), perhaps unconnected to any residential structure. As previously mentioned, however, it remains challenging to ascertain the purpose of these structures, which were dug out and subsequently constructed. This arrangement limited the excavation of the monuments, which took place around its perimeter. It is still impossible to know whether the first monumental excavations took place when the structure was built. Nonetheless, from a technological standpoint, observations have been made that the structure testifies to the use of both excavation and construction. This raises the question of whether the first excavations at Lalibela, in the troglodyte and hypogeum phases, should be assigned to the tenth to twelfth centuries AD.

This evidence for pre-thirteenth-century occupation in Lalibela can be related to the findings from the excavation of the burial area in Qədəmt, a district within the modern city of Lalibela, situated approximately 500 meters from the church site. Excavations were carried out there between 2010 and 2014.²⁶ They uncovered 39 pits containing more than 57 burials,²⁷ attesting to occupation of the site between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries.²⁸ Yves Gleize's analysis of the data has enabled the delineation of several phases of occupation at this burial site. The earliest of these phases is postulated to have occurred between the early eleventh century and the mid-thirteenth century. Four burials are associated with the earliest occupation (SP 70 (late tenth-mid twelfth century), SP 28, SP3E, SP 81), to which must be added 5 other burials (SP 6, SP 8, SP 14, SP 69 and SP 82) which are slightly later (mid twelfth-mid thirteenth century). This earliest phase is also characterised by a variety of burial practices: some of the burials have an east-west orientation, while others have a more north-south orientation, although the orientation may have

²⁶ Derat and Gleize, 2015; Gleize, Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, *et al.*, 2015.

²⁷ Gleize, 2023, p. 159.

²⁸ Gleize, 2023, pp. 191–206.

been determined by the constraints of the site. The bodies are buried on their backs or on their sides.

In connection with one of the tombs of this first phase—SP28—a complete vase with a strong carination was studied by Anne-Lise Goujon.²⁹ It displays “marked similarities with the Shay culture”,³⁰ the burial tumuli found in the Mänz region. In this area, numerous intact ceramics, clearly used domestically, were placed alongside the deceased within the burial mounds.³¹ In the current state of research, these affinities are perhaps best seen as markers of a regional pottery tradition, corresponding to the actual northern Šäwa and Lasta regions.³²

Consequently, during the period spanning the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, a society with the capacity to harness substantial human resources successfully established itself in Qəyit Tärara and Qədəmt. Technologically, this society had chosen both to construct and to carve into the rock.³³ The monumentality of the finely crafted stone wall discovered at Qəyit Tärara suggests that the occupation of these sites was orchestrated by an elite. The identity of the members of this elite is a subject that merits further investigation. This question gives rise to another, more specific inquiry concerning King Lalibala and the Zag^we dynasty and their affiliation with this elite class that settled in Lalibela between the tenth and the eleventh centuries

3. – *The transformation of the Lalibela site: the example of the Betä Maryam sector*

Considering the possibility of an occupation predating Lalibala’s reign necessitates a reevaluation of both the churches and their surroundings. This is particularly relevant since the excavation phases at the site have allowed us to determine that the current state of Lalibela is the outcome of significant changes.³⁴ These changes involve both erosion and the deterioration of the

²⁹ Goujon, 2023.

³⁰ Goujon, 2023, p. 156.

³¹ See Fauvelle and Poissonnier, 2012; see also Alebachew Belay, 2020; Fauvelle, 2020.

³² See on this issue the PhD thesis of Anne-Lise Goujon: Goujon, 2021. The attribution of ceramic styles based on cultural affiliation is a contentious issue. It is conceivable that in the future, the definition of a “Shay” style will need to be redefined. At present, these remarks are intended to demonstrate the similarities between the artefacts unearthed in Lalibela and other ceramic collections.

³³ Derat, Bosc-Tiessé, Garric, *et al.*, 2021.

³⁴ Fauvelle-Aymar, Bruxelles, Mensan, *et al.*, 2010; Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, 2019, pp. 52–56.

rock,³⁵ as well as the implementation of successive and at times conflicting architectural plans. Not only have specific areas undergone substantial changes over time, but complete sections have also collapsed, compelling the site's planners to modify their architectural plans to accommodate these challenges. The current Betä Märqorewos was elaborated within a vast underground chamber excavated just beneath the surface, in the vicinity of Qəyit Tärara. Part of this hall collapsed at a date that cannot yet be determined. It was only by enclosing the ecclesiastical space with built walls that the church of Märqorewos could be established or re-established. Much of the old underground chamber remains outside the church: scattered pillars that can no longer support the weight of a rock vault, or small rooms carved into the rock with deeply eroded vaults facing the church of Märqorewos. Therefore, assuming that this complex could have been a terrace or a residence,³⁶ as we read in literature, is to ignore the changes in the site and to read the present remains as direct evidence, without any transformations, of the developments of the thirteenth century.

Moving on to the first group of churches in Lalibela, observations of the same order can be made in the courtyard of Betä Maryam (Fig. 2).³⁷ As one traverses from the west to the east along the roof of Betä Golgota, it becomes evident that the stone vault, once part of the imposing entrance to Betä Maryam, has indeed crumbled.³⁸ At some unspecified time, holes were dug in the vertical walls to allow the passage to be covered with a roof, the beams of which were supported in these holes. Proceeding eastward along this passage, opposite the church of Betä Maryam, there stands a porch positioned at a right angle to the underground Šəllase crypt. The whole sector shows exceptional meticulousness, boasting precision in both carving and decoration, and exhibits a far superior finish compared to the southwards monumental entrance to the church of Betä Maryam.³⁹ After passing through this porch, which includes the

³⁵ See the last analysis of the rock in Lalibela, Giovannacci, Mertz, Gemedä, *et al.*, 2022.

³⁶ Monti della Corte, 1940, p. 69; Lepage, 2002, pp. 158–61.

³⁷ Some elements of this presentation were published in Derat, 2023.

³⁸ Michael Gervers has put forward the idea that this western access to the courtyard of Betä Maryam was the main access, before the door opens into the void above Betä Golgota and the “Adam’s Tomb” (Gervers, 2003, pp. 38–39).

³⁸ Mercier and Lepage, 2013, p. 205.

³⁹ Mercier and Lepage, 2013, p. 205.

so-called Lalibala's "lodge"⁴⁰ on the upper level, one must descend a few steps to access the courtyard of Betä Maryam.

Adjacent to the east, south, and north walls of the courtyard, there is a small 'platform'. Positioned on this platform are two truncated pillars: one located at the entrance of the porch to the south and the other near the entrance to the Church of Betä Mäsqäl to the north of the courtyard. A third pillar exists as a negative impression in the rock, directly across from Betä Mäsqäl, suggesting that the entrance to this church may have been marked by two pillars surmounted by an arch. However, this imprint could simply be an attempt to recreate a pillar that never existed. In rock architecture, the absence of a pillar typically results in the persistence of a small rocky prominence, unless the rock is well leveled, rather than a negative imprint. To avoid potential over-interpretation, it is advisable to discount the significance of this third pillar. Along the west and north walls of the Betä Maryam courtyard, indications of ornamentation and finishing in the upper part imply that these walls once served as the back of a room before they were opened to the sky. Regarding the west wall, the floor of this chamber is situated at an elevated position, corresponding to the level of the Lalibala's "lodge".

Based on these observations, it can be inferred that there was at least one state prior to the present one where the monumental west entrance did not directly lead to the Betä Maryam courtyard but instead opened into a covered or possibly tiered area bordered by pillars. The 'platform' within the courtyard of Betä Maryam might be the last remnant of an earlier circulation level, potentially outlining some form of ambulatory. While these scant traces don't allow for a reconstruction of the vanished spaces, they do reveal that a portion of the layout has disappeared. Therefore, it becomes imperative to consider these gaps in order to analyze the site's layout and understand the intended symbolic meaning.

The significance of this sector was analysed starting from the level below Betä Maryam and its monumental western entrance: the Däbrä Sina-Golgotha-Šállase complex. Michael Gervers has convincingly demonstrated the importance of this complex as a symbolic representation of the Holy Sepulchre.⁴¹ Emmanuel Fritsch has highlighted the close relationship between the Lalibala "lodge" and the Šállase chapel. He has hypothesised that this architectural re-

⁴⁰ Monti della Corte, 1940, p. 52 is one of the first authors to describe the space as a narrow gallery with a window overlooking the church of Betä Maryam and to call it the "Lalibala's lodge".

⁴¹ Gervers, 2003, p. 45 n. 78.

lationship testifies to the position of the person for whom this complex was excavated and that the chapel may have been a tomb for King Lalibala.⁴² Finally, Claude Lepage and Jacques Mercier have produced an extremely valuable analysis of the sculptural programme in Betä Golgota and the Šöllase crypt.⁴³ Elaborating from these analyses, it is tempting to identify the architectural projections carved into the rock above an underground tomb as a representation of the aedicula that crowned the tomb of Christ from the time of Constantine until the destruction ordered by al-Ḥakim in 1009.⁴⁴ Instead of focusing on the function of these now-vanished spaces, a topic covered in another publication,⁴⁵ the objective here is to examine the timeframe during which the observed transformations in the courtyard of Betä Maryam occurred.

A *terminus ante quem* for a state prior to the present one is perhaps provided to us by Francisco Álvares, who describes the court of Betä Maryam:

This church, also, has in front of its main door, made out of the same rock, a big house (with five rooms and a portico with two columns) in which they give food to the poor; and the way out of the church is through this house to the outside, or they come into the church through it going under the rock a very long way.⁴⁶

In this description the rock vault of the monumental entrance providing access to the entrance of Betä Maryam, before passing through the porch, has not collapsed. However, it is unclear whether the rest of the house where the poor are fed represents the current state of Lalibala's "lodge" or a previous phase. Another factor contributing to dating comes from the examination of liturgical elements. In 2003, Michael Gervers proposed that the architectural complex encompassing the Church of Golgota should be dated to a period after the fourteenth century, suggesting it was a product of the evolving cult of Lalibala.⁴⁷ Building on this premise, Emmanuel Fritsch and Michael Gervers assert that the layout of Däbrä Sina, excavated logically prior to Betä Golgota and the Šöllase crypt, reflects a liturgy from the post-thirteenth century, aligning with the trend of incorporating multiple sanctuaries within churches.⁴⁸

⁴² Fritsch, 2008, pp. 98–101.

⁴³ Mercier and Lepage, 2013, pp. 169–74, 189–98, 205.

⁴⁴ Vincent, 1914; Abel, 1927; Canard, 1965.

⁴⁵ Derat, 2023.

⁴⁶ Beckingham and Huntingford, 1961, p. 224.

⁴⁷ Gervers, 2003.

⁴⁸ Fritsch and Gervers, 2007, pp. 43–44.

Consequently, they posit that Däbrä Sina might not precede the fifteenth century, implying that the associated churches would also be of a later period. The monolithic altars in the Šállase crypt supports also this late date.⁴⁹ Were the aedicula and gallery, the upper levels of the now vanished Däbrä Sina-Golgota-Šállase complex, contemporary with these underground developments, or even earlier? In truth, it is impossible to answer this question given our current state of knowledge. These questions highlight the complexity of the Lalibela site and its development.

4. – *Painted decorations at Lalibela: Two superimposed decorations*

The transformations undergone by the monumental complex of Lalibela were not confined to the exterior of the monuments alone. The analysis of the interior wall paintings carried out as part of our research in Lalibela, under the supervision of Claire Bosc-Tiessé, has provided new insights into the church of Betä Maryam. This church is a very important node from the point of view of the history of Christian art in Ethiopia, in particular because it presents both a sculpted and painted programme, and the cycle of mural paintings, dedicated in particular to the life of Christ (Transfiguration at Mount Tabor on the triumphal arch, flight into Egypt on the east wall of the north bay, Annunciation, miracles of Jesus and visitation on the east and south walls of the south bay), seems to be unique, as it is the oldest known⁵⁰ in Ethiopia. Claude Lepage's work has highlighted the archaic features of the painted representations⁵¹ at Betä Maryam and established that this ensemble borrows from Arab-Muslim art after the tenth century, pointing also to the Fatimids in terms of the illustrations of power (double-headed eagle, giraffe, etc.).⁵² He concludes that the attribution to the reign of Lalibala and the very early thirteenth century is "likely".⁵³

In order to achieve a more profound comprehension of the material composition of the paintings under scrutiny, a meticulous observation process was initiated, using photographs taken under ultraviolet light, and samples' anal-

⁴⁹ Gervers, 2003, pp. 43–49; Fritsch, 2012, pp. 500–06.

⁵⁰ Lepage, 1999, p. 901.

⁵¹ Lepage, 1999, p. 945.

⁵² Lepage, 1999, p. 960. See also Lepage, 2013, pp. 174–89, 199–205.

⁵³ Lepage, 1999, p. 961.

yses.⁵⁴ The initial results of this work have been published by Claire Bosc-Tiessé, Delphine Burlot and Sigrid Mirabaud.⁵⁵ The study revealed that the well-known cycle of paintings overlay earlier ones, particularly evident in the most deteriorated scenes on the wings. The gaps in the ornamentation show remnants of underlying paintings that resisted removal. Conversely, two distinct layers of decorations are clearly discernible in the window frames on the south and west sides of the nave (Fig. 3), with the older one still in a well-preserved state.

How ancient is this initial program? At present, there is no way to determine its age precisely. However, it undoubtedly predates the program Claude Lepage estimated to be from around 1200 by comparison with Coptic paintings. The repainting over the earlier program suggests either a significant alteration, likely due to erosion, of the original program or an intentional effort to transform the message conveyed by the paintings. In either scenario, it is challenging to imagine that the time gap between the two programs is brief, considering the substantial investment involved. Therefore, if the paintings indeed date back to before 1200, they are no more consistent with Lalibala's reign. We can infer from this observation that Betä Maryam was excavated before Lalibala's reign.

Alternatively, the paintings examined by Claude Lepage might belong to a later timeframe, potentially associated with the period when, within the initial group, the spaces underwent a complete reconsideration in conjunction with alterations to the site, such as a collapse or a different architectural program. As demonstrated by Emannuel Fritsch, regarding liturgical configurations, Betä Maryam shares similarities with Zärema, Abrəha wä-ʿAṣbəḥa, and Däbrä Sälam Mika'el. These churches still featured *pastophoria*, opening into both the central sanctuary and the bays. Mikael Muehlbauer recently established that the excavation of the Abreha wa-ʿAṣbəḥa church could be dated to the period between the eleventh and mid-twelfth centuries.⁵⁶ Hence, there is no obstacle to considering that some of Lalibela's churches might precede the year 1200. In such a scenario, it follows that the churches of Betä Mädhane

⁵⁴ Analyses (Optical microscopy, scanning electron microscopy coupled to elementary analysis, raman microscopy, fourier-transform infrared spectroscopy) performed by Laboratory MSMAP in Pessac under the supervision of Sigrid Mirabaud.

⁵⁵ Bosc-Tiessé, Burlot, Mirabaud, *et al.*, 2021.

⁵⁶ Muehlbauer, 2023, p. 133.

Aläm, Betä Amanu^cel and Betä Libanos, with comparable liturgical arrangements,⁵⁷ should also be assigned to an earlier period.

5. – *Manuscript libraries: Which codices from the thirteenth century and earlier?*

The final aspect of the research carried out at Lalibela delves into the manuscript libraries, their historical context, and, more broadly, the textual records conserved within the churches. As previously stated, the objective of this paper is not to furnish a comprehensive overview of all the work that has been undertaken, but rather to concentrate on data pertaining to the era preceding the thirteenth century or that may be connected to it. In recent years, the investigation into manuscripts from this timeframe has significantly changed our perspective. Carbon-14 dating of the two Gospels of Abba Garima (I and III), indicating their production between the fourth and seventh centuries,⁵⁸ and of a double parchment fragment discovered during excavations in the monastery of Saint Anthony in Egypt, bearing a Gə^cəz text (*On Silence* attributed to John Bishop of Constantinople), and dating from 1160–1265,⁵⁹ have revealed the existence of parchment documents predating the thirteenth century. Similarly, the paleographic, philological and ink analyses carried out in particular by Denis Nosnitsin and Alessandro Bausi⁶⁰ and more generally as part of the University of Hamburg’s projects, notably around the “Aksumite Collection”, have also significantly extended the horizon prior to the thirteenth century.

In Lalibela, as of now, there are no lists of books prior to the end of the fourteenth century.⁶¹ Consequently, it is currently impossible to evaluate the nature of texts present at the site during the time of King Lalibala. The approach must, therefore, shift towards examining the manuscripts directly to identify those that could potentially date back to the thirteenth century or even

⁵⁷ Fritsch, 2008, p. 75.

⁵⁸ Mercier, 2000, p. 40; Bailey, 2010; 2013; Bausi, 2011; McKenzie and Watson, 2016, pp. 40–41; Mercier, 2021.

⁵⁹ el-Antony, Blid, and Butts, 2016, pp. 30, 32.

⁶⁰ Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014; Nosnitsin and Bulakh, 2014; Bausi and Nosnitsin, 2015; Nosnitsin, 2016; 2022 ; Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020.

⁶¹ The oldest inventory found in Lalibela is a count made at the time of King Dawit, under the authority of the chief priest Käflä Iyasus. Here 120 books are enumerated, but not listed (Gospel of Betä Golgota, EMMML 6934, fol. 1rb).

earlier. Notably, three manuscripts emerge as noteworthy. The first one is the Betä Mādḥane Alām gospel, now kept in the church museum. This manuscript has gained recognition as it has been microfilmed by the EMLL project (EMML 6907) and has undergone both palaeographical analysis by Siegbert Uhlig⁶² and philological analysis by Rochus Zuurmond.⁶³ Additionally, the penultimate folio contains a fragmentary donation from King Lalibala for the *gäbäz* of Mādḥane Alām.⁶⁴ Consequently, it holds significant importance as a document for understanding the history of the site, the era of Lalibala's reign, and the Gə'əz language Gospels.

Rochus Zuurmond has shown that this manuscript is a witness of the translation of the Gospels from Greek into Gə'əz, in between the first translation found in the Abba Garima gospels I and III and the revision from the Greek witnessed in Abba Garima II. For his part, Uhlig assumed that the donation from King Lalibala was made by the same hand that copied the Gospel. He also placed Lalibala's reign in the twelfth century, while the documentation places his reign in the thirteenth century. He therefore considered that the paleography of the manuscript was necessarily later than the twelfth century, and therefore probably a good witness to the thirteenth century. He classified this manuscript in the first phase, which ends in the middle of the fourteenth century.

During the investigation conducted in the Lalibela church museum as part of the Sustainable Lalibela project, we had the opportunity to closely examine this manuscript, with particular attention given to the penultimate folio, which suffered extensive damage. It was cut out, gnawed by rodents, partially consumed by insects, and stained by traces of dampness. Moreover, it is covered near the binding's upper part with a sticky black layer that might be incense. What remains of the text has likely undergone numerous corrections and additions, resulting in scratches and words added above the lines. Despite these challenges, reading this manuscript is genuinely rewarding.

The limited readability of the donation is evident. While some letters' design matches those in the main text (especially the sixth order **ፆ** which is quite distinctive), it is improbable that the copy was intended as a general re-copy of an earlier manuscript encompassing both the Gospels and the dona-

⁶² Bausi and Nosnitsin, 2015, p. 289.

⁶³ Zuurmond, 1989, pp. 49–64. “Manuscript 4 (EMML 6907) stands in between manuscripts 1 (Abba Garima I) and 2 (Abba Garima III) on one side, and the Ab-text at the other side (notably Abba Garima II)”. The comments in brackets are my own.

⁶⁴ Derat, 2010; Derat, 2018, pp. 59–61. See also Bausi, 2022, p. 134.

tion. The line spacing and word spacing are not identical. The main text displays meticulous copying, with careful adherence to the horizontality of the lines, and suggesting that conserving parchment space was likely not a priority. This makes it a rare manuscript. In contrast, the donation of King Lalibala is more condensed, and the copying is less meticulous.

Two additional manuscripts provide evidence of a period preceding the thirteenth century: the Octateuch of Betä Mādḥane Alām (EMML 6913), now kept in the church museum, and the Book of Kings of Betä Amanu^cel (EMML 6940).⁶⁵ These two manuscripts have the particularity of not being complete and lacking binding. The palaeography of both is comparable to that of the famous collection of homilies preserved at Ṭana Qirqos (EMML 8509), studied by Sergew Hable Selassie.⁶⁶ He considered the handwriting of this collection to be archaic and put forward the idea that the manuscript could date from the end of the twelfth century or the early thirteenth century, although lacking a dated colophon.⁶⁷ However, Gianfrancesco Fiaccadori, relying not on palaeographical analysis but on a study of the manuscript's content, proposed an entirely different dating. He posits that manuscript EMML 8509 should be compared with manuscript EMML 1763, both containing identical homilies, particularly that of *Abba* Elyas, Bishop of Aksum, on Mätṭa^c. This homily is believed to have been written between 1335 and 1340, placing manuscript EMML 8509 in the mid-fourteenth century.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, this later dating raises several questions.⁶⁹

Subsequently, numerous manuscripts displaying similar palaeography have come to light. These include the fragment of Däbrä Šāḥl containing songs for Abba Garima,⁷⁰ the fragment of the Gospels of Däbrä Ma^cšo,⁷¹ and

⁶⁵ A fourth manuscript is included in this collection of pre-thirteenth-century codices. It is a collection of songs known as EMML 7078 (see in particular Nosnitsin, 2018, p. 300).

⁶⁶ Sergew Hable Selassie, 1988. Sergew Hable Selassie, 1991, p. 69. Sergew Hable Selassie has analysed the very particular palaeography of this manuscript, comparing it with that of EMML 6913. On this manuscript, see now the essay by Villa and Zarzeczny in this volume.

⁶⁷ Sergew Hable Selassie, 1991, p. 80.

⁶⁸ Fiaccadori, 1989, p. 150.

⁶⁹ See in particular Nosnitsin, 2016, p. 98, n. 46; Nosnitsin, 2022, pp. 60–61; Bausi, 2022, p. 136–37; and now Villa and Zarzeczny in this volume.

⁷⁰ Nosnitsin and Bulakh, 2014; Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014; Nosnitsin, 2016.

⁷¹ The palaeography, on the other hand, is very different from the Codex Σ of Ura Mäsqäl (the “Aksumite collection”, cf. Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020), and also very different from the fragments discovered in the Saint Anthony monastery in Egypt.

the fragment of a chant manuscript kept in Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila.⁷² The palaeography of manuscript EMLL 6913 can also be compared with the donation of King Armähä⁷³ for the church of Garima, found in the Gospel of Abba Garima II (note B11),⁷⁴ as well as some undated folios of this same Gospel manuscript.⁷⁵ Additionally, a comparison can be drawn between the palaeography of our two Lalibela manuscripts and the Octateuch preserved at ʿUra Mäsqäl.⁷⁶ On the reverse, the Betä Mādḥane Aläm gospel appears to share many features with the Ham gospel, the main text of which remains little known due to the absence of a complete copy of the codex,⁷⁷ and seems not to belong to the same group of manuscripts with the distinctive palaeography observed in EMLL 8509.⁷⁸

After a first survey of the manuscripts listed, a noteworthy observation is that the palaeography distinctive of EMLL 8509 can coexist with a more traditional palaeography typical of the pre-mid-fourteenth century. This is exemplified in instances where different copyists are involved, as seen in EMLL

⁷² Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014.

⁷³ On the subject of this sovereign, see most recently Derat, 2018.

⁷⁴ I am following Sergey Kim's recent arrangement of the foliation in the gospels of Abba Garima (Kim, 2022). However, I am employing the traditional sigla to maintain consistency with the previous references used in this work. Consequently, what Kim refers to as Garima B is designated as Garima II in this context, corresponding to the manuscript that has not undergone radiocarbon dating. The donation of King Armähä is referred as B, f. 206rb in Kim, 2022 and as Garima I no. 14 in Getatchew Haile, 2016, pp. 14–15. Getatchew Haile gave an edition and translation of this historical note. See also Davies, 1987: he noted the particular palaeography of this text, which he said was the colophon of the manuscript, and compared it with two folios, in the same manuscript, of the Gospel of Matthew which show identical characteristics. As a result, he thought he could establish that this handwriting could not be much later than that of the manuscript.

⁷⁵ See Kim, 2022.

⁷⁶ For a full description of this manuscript: Denis Nosnitsin, Alessandro Bausi, Abreham Adugna, Pietro Maria Liuzzo, Eugenia Sokolinski, 'Bəḥerāwi Kəlləlāwi Mangəsti Təgrāy, ʿUrā Qirqos, UM-040', in Alessandro Bausi, ed, *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung / Beta maṣāḥəft* (Last Modified: 1.4.2019) [Accessed: 2023-12-05+01:00]. Pictures of this manuscript were taken by the author at ʿUra Qirqos in March 2009.

⁷⁷ For a description of the donations included in this manuscript: Liuzzo and Valieva, 2021.

⁷⁸ In the future, it would be useful to be able to qualify this style of writing, in which the signs are drawn with broken lines, particularly when it comes to noting the fourth order. The other striking feature of this script is the drawing of the **፬** and **፭**, which is interrupted in the middle of the sign by a small indent.

6940 (see table).⁷⁹ There are other material points in common: the colour of the ink used, which is light brown and not black,⁸⁰ and the layout of the texts. Notably, the dimensions of the Octateuch of Betä Mādḥane Alām (EMML 6913, with folios measuring approximately 42cm x 32cm), and the simplicity of the text layout (the beginning of each book being marked simply by a title rubricated in red, surmounted by a very simple *ḥāräg* and followed by a dotted line, and the end in the same way), strongly evokes the layout of the Octateuch of ^cUra Mäsqäl.

The elements of comparison point to a connection between the libraries of Lalibela and the monastic and ecclesiastical institutions of Təgray. The link is quite logical insofar as the two regions, through their links with the Zagwe kings and with Lalibela in particular, may have been in contact.⁸¹ One might even wonder whether the three manuscripts in question did not originate in this Tigray milieu, given the many features they share. All these aspects require thorough verification, a process that is underway. The potential for carbon-14 dating of the manuscript parchments has also been considered. Samples from EMML 6907 and EMML 6913 have been collected for this purpose, and ongoing analyses are in progress.⁸² It is acknowledged that radiocarbon dates may not be entirely conclusive, as they signify the death of the animal rather than the preparation of the manuscript (although the time gap between the two is likely no more than a few years or even months), and the provided chronological range is seldom less than a century. Consequently, if these analyses yield dates ranging from the twelfth to thirteenth centuries, the progress may be somewhat constrained. Additionally, ink analyses to facilitate comparison with results obtained elsewhere would also be valuable.

This examination of Lalibela's manuscripts, possibly originating prior to the thirteenth century, focuses on approximately 200 known manuscripts. However, official inventories compiled by Ethiopian authorities, encompassing both religious and heritage sources, estimate the total at around 500. These brief remarks are thus meant merely as an initial reference.

⁷⁹ I am aware that palaeography alone is not sufficient to date and classify these documents. Vocalization and spelling must also be taken into account to distinguish these documents from one another (see Bausi and Nosnitsin, 2015, p. 289). For example, in EMML 6907, 6913 and 6940, God is written in two parts **እግዚአብሔር**. EMML 6913 does not appear to have an archaic spelling. But here again, it is just survey that requires a full examination.

⁸⁰ On this subject, see Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020.

⁸¹ See Derat, 2018.

⁸² See Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, 2025.

Therefore, an interim conclusion regarding the three manuscripts presented above is that some of the codices preserved in the churches of Lalibela probably date from before the thirteenth century. This dating appears to be consistent with other observations, such as the occupation of the site before the 13th century. This implies not only the establishment of an elite group on site, but also undoubtedly the excavation of the first galleries and churches before that date. However, it should be emphasised that the oldest manuscripts were not necessarily produced in Lalibela, but were donated to its churches at the time of their foundation. While their early dating confirms the site's greater age, this is not sufficient proof.

6. – *Conclusion*

In summary, there is a substantial amount of both direct and indirect evidence suggesting that Lalibela's site was inhabited prior to the rule of the king after whom it is named. It is now quite reasonable to trace the site's history back to the eleventh century. However, determining the exact period of the first church constructions and providing a more detailed account of the early societal and governing structures at the site remains a complex task. Progress on these aspects can be expected through the analysis of the material culture unearthed at the Qəyit Tärara site, along with examinations of the painted and sculpted decorations. Additionally, efforts to identify the contexts in which the manuscripts were crafted and to specify their production timeline will contribute valuable insights to these inquiries.

Despite these findings, it is currently impossible to extend our understanding beyond the tenth–eleventh centuries in the Lalibela region. While there is a clear indication of the emergence of an elite culture during this period, settling in the elevated areas of Lalibela, at Qəyit Tärara and Qədəmt, and possibly not yet fully embracing Christianity, there is a lack of continuity with earlier habitation. Attempts to identify alternative areas of settlement outside Lalibela have been unsuccessful thus far, limiting our comprehension of the dynamics between Aksum and Lalibela. This gap in knowledge impedes our ability to discern developments between the seventh century in Aksum and its surrounding regions and the eleventh century in Lalibela.

For this reason, a significant part of the Lalibela team has relocated to Maryam Nazret,⁸³ which appears to be in position to address the historical gap between the seventh and twelfth centuries. This move aims to facilitate a more

⁸³ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020; Derat, Fauvelle, Mensan, *et al.*, 2025.

precise understanding of the ongoing transformations during this period. As we conclude this article, the Təgray region has become more accessible again following a devastating two-year war. It seems likely that access to the Maryam Nazret site will be restored in the near future. Unfortunately, Lalibela is currently impacted by the war, affecting our ability to access the site. More importantly, this prolonged conflict has taken a toll on our colleagues and friends on the ground. We remain hopeful for a swift resumption of dialogue and collaborative efforts with them.

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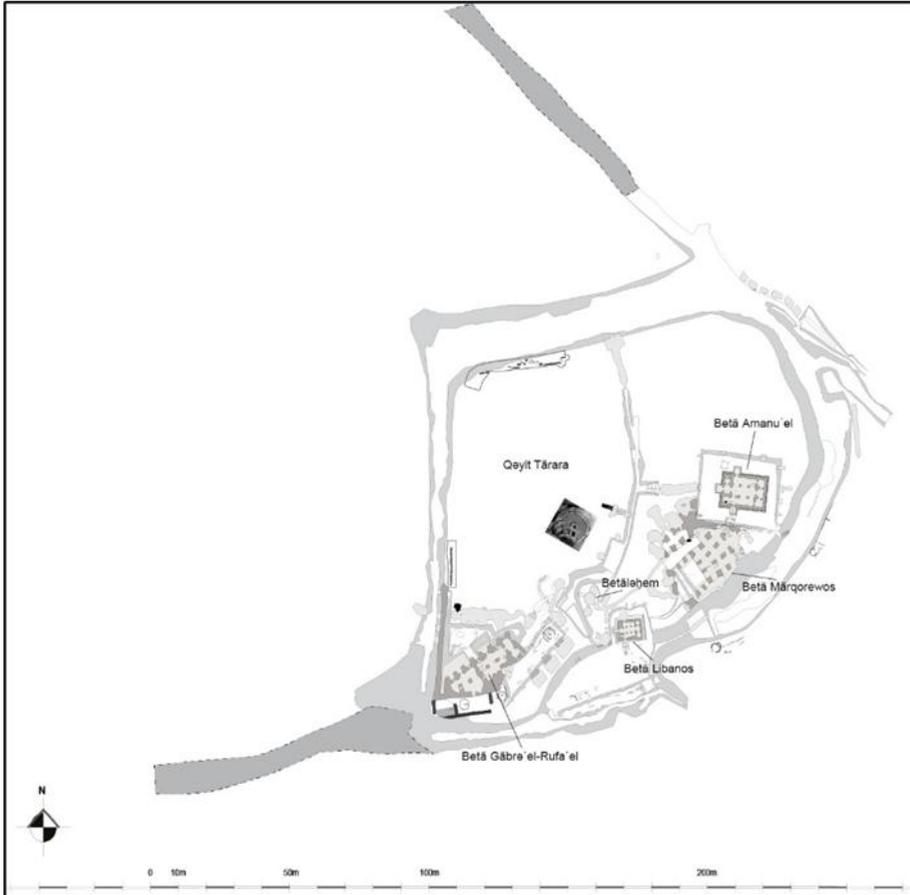
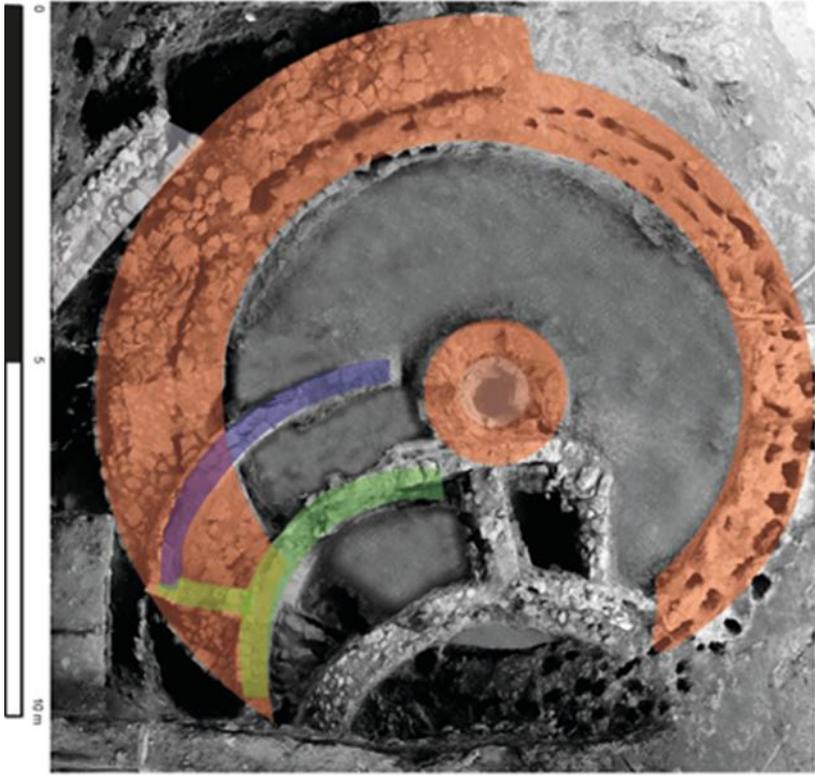


Fig. 1a: Excavations at Qəyit Tärara in the second group of churches, in Lalibela.
Mission Lalibela, 2023.



From ca. 1000 to ca. 1250:

- A carved and built circular structure combined with an excavated central structure
- Two concentric circular masonry structures



Fig. 1b: Excavations at Qəyit Tärara in the second group of churches, in Lalibela. Mission Lalibela, 2023.



Fig. 2: The courtyard of Betä Maryam in Lalibela.



Fig. 3: The first phase decoration in Betä Maryam. Photo by Delphine Morana Burlot for Mission Lalibela, 2020.

MICHAEL GERVERS

*Periodization, Christianization, Rock-Hewn Churches
and the Enigma of Ethiopia's "Dark Ages"*

Determining a periodization for Ethiopian history is uncertain from the start. We may nevertheless begin by asking when the Ethiopian "Dark Ages" are thought to have commenced.¹ I am reminded of an experience I had in Romania in the early 1970s, when I frequently found myself in the company of medievalists at the University of Bucharest. I asked a group of these medievalists when, for them, the Middle Ages came to an end, and they responded that in Romania the Middle Ages ended ca. 1900. I then realized that my impressions of periodization needed revision. Given this experience, I am all the more aware that while change is constant, even though often imperceptible, no historical period has a definitive end. The question is important because if we cannot determine an 'end' to the Aksumite period, perhaps we should rather look to continuation in medieval Ethiopia right through at least to the end of Zagwe rule in the later thirteenth century.²

An initial question, of course, is when the Aksumite empire is generally thought to have ended. The Aksumites, up to ca. 600, are considered to have been wealthy; so wealthy in fact that from the third century they issued gold coins to be used largely in international trade and in keeping with the standards of the Roman world.³ One important measure, therefore, of the economic standing of the empire was its capacity to issue gold coins.⁴ The last king

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¹ Kelly, 2020, pp. 2–7; Steven Kaplan points to the tenth century (Kaplan, 2024).

² See potential links between the Zagwe and the Aksumites in Derat, 2018, pp. 115–16, 144–45.

³ Munro-Hay, 1981–1982, pp. 1–16.

⁴ Hahn and Keck, 2020 ([https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:29042/datastreams /CONTENT/content](https://hcommons.org/deposits/objects/hc:29042/datastreams/CONTENT/content)); Dowler, 2018, pp. 5–20.

known to have done so was Ḥataz, whose coinage appears to have ended ca. 610.⁵ These dates clearly precede the foundations of Islam, the consequences of which have previously led many to argue that it was increasing competition by Muslim merchants in the Red Sea that led to the decline of the Aksumites.⁶ Limited credence may be given, therefore, to the assumption that the foundation, rise and spread of Islam was a major cause for the decline of Aksum's influence in the region.

We may begin instead by considering the consequences of King Kaleb's invasions of the Yemen starting ca. 522.⁷ Kaleb is represented by more gold coins than any other Ethiopian king. The majority of these have been found in the Yemen, prompting Gianfranco Fiaccadori to postulate that this was due "to the need to pay for the Himyarite wars".⁸ Wars are expensive. The precise dates of Kaleb's reign are uncertain, but after spending sometime (months or years) in the Yemen following the defeat of the Himyarite ruler *Dū Nuwās*, he abdicated and retired to a monastery in Aksum as early as 523/524. It is then that he is said to have offered his crown to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem as a sign of thanksgiving for the victory.⁹ What then of this triumph in the Yemen that led, following his abdication, to a struggle for succession in which, before 535, the rulership of the Yemen was taken over by King *Abrəha*, who then battled for dominance over the Yemeni trade routes with the motherland?¹⁰ And what effect, if any, did the great plague of 541/542 and the half century thereafter have on the Aksumite armies on both sides of the Red Sea?¹¹ The glory of Ethiopian hegemony was relatively short-lived, lasting only until the major defeat of *Abrəha*'s son, *Yaksum* or *Masrūk*, by the Persians in 570.¹² Before the end of the decade, the Persians had full control of the Yemen, and went on to conquer Jerusalem in 614 and Alexandria in 617, with much loss of Chris-

⁵ "Ḥataz" in *E Ae*, vol. II (2005), pp. 1046b–48a (by Gianfranco Fiaccadori); Hahn and Keck, 2020, pp. 138–42.

⁶ "Aksum. History of the town and Empire" in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), pp. 173b–79b (here p. 175b) (by Stuart Munro-Hay).

⁷ Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, pp. 132–43.

⁸ "Kaleb" in *E Ae*, vol. III (2007), pp. 329a–32b (here p. 331a) (by Gianfranco Fiaccadori).

⁹ "Kaleb" in *E Ae*, vol. III (2007), pp. 329a–32b (here p. 330b) (by Gianfranco Fiaccadori); Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, p. 143.

¹⁰ Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, pp. 147–50.

¹¹ Yohannes Gebre Selassie, 2011, pp. 36–61.

¹² Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, pp. 153–57; Munro-Hay, 2002, p. 241; Hatke, 2020, pp. 291–326.

tian lives.¹³ Given the cost of Kaleb's expedition, the unrest that followed his abdication, the instability of the Christian leadership in the Yemen under Abrəha and his sons, and the possible effects of a devastating plague, point to a potential weakening of Ethiopian influence and control over the incense trade of the interior and the maritime routes of the Red Sea well before the end of the sixth century.¹⁴ That was a short-lived hegemony and one which could alone have precipitated Aksum's commercial decline.

Contemporary to these events, and seen as an additional blow to Ethiopian Red Sea commerce, is the sudden disappearance of Adulis as a trading port (Fig. 1). According to some, the port city upon which Aksum depended for its maritime trade was washed away "by the collapse of a barrier of a water basin in the mountains that exceeded the city",¹⁵ while others attributed it to "a great earthquake in the Red Sea [that] rocked the sea bed and created a tsunami so powerful that it travelled over six kilometers inland and completely wiped off from the face of the earth the ancient African city of Adulis, capital of Punt".¹⁶ Recent archaeological work under the direction of Gabriele Castiglia is less definitive about the abrupt end of Christian habitation in Adulis, although his excavation of the so-called British Museum Church (Fig. 2), that is thought to have been the cathedral, suggests there was no new construction after the late sixth, early seventh century.¹⁷ This chronology once again eliminates any possibility that the rise of Islam was in any way responsible for an interruption of Aksum's trade routes; that had all happened at an earlier point. We would suggest that while the peak of Aksum's successes can be attributed to the sixth century, the downturn began before mid-century and saw a continuous decline, if not a total collapse, before the mid-seventh century.

¹³ Bosworth, 1999, pp. 318–19 and fn. 748; Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 28–29.

¹⁴ "Incense. Historical Background", in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), 129b–32b (here pp. 131b–32a) (by Maria Bulakh and Gianfranco Fiaccadori).

¹⁵ <https://tesfanews.net/italia-eritrea-archeologists-discover-horn-africa-oldest-churches/> (accessed, 27 January 2023). Massa and Giostra, 2019, pp. 314–52 (here p. 315 and fn. 6). The ruptured dams above Derna (Libya) on 11 September 2023, and the devastation that followed, provides credence for the theory that a similar event led to the destruction of Adulis.

¹⁶ Report by Thomas C. Mountain, independent journalist and historian in Eritrea: <https://countercurrents.org/2018/10/the-great-red-sea-tsunami-and-the-disappearance-of-an-ancient-african-city/>; madote.com.2018/03/italian-eritrean-mission-to-discover.html (accessed, 27 January 2023). The idea of the tsunami appears to come from Serena Massa, as per the second website.

¹⁷ Castiglia, Pergola, Ciliberti, *et al.*, 2013, pp. 49–52

Then comes the thorny question of the rise of the Zag^we (Fig. 3). Who were they and from whence did they come?¹⁸ The *Kəbrä nägäšt*, the work adopted and adapted by the Solomonic dynasty to legitimize its late thirteenth-century takeover, presumes the Zag^we to be illegitimate heirs to the Aksumites. But where is the evidence that they were illegitimate? Their presence in Aksumite lands is witnessed by the majority of their land grants which extend well into what is now Eritrea, and they were without a doubt major patrons of the Church (Fig. 4). In fact, their presence in the Lasta region, where are located the rock-hewn religious complex of Lalibäla (Fig. 5), the monolithic church of Gännätä Maryam (Fig. 6), the church of Yəmrəhännä Krəstos and its derivatives built in caves (Fig. 7), probably represents the southern-most extent of their kingdom. In other words, it was the Zag^we who continued the southerly expansion of the historical Ethiopia begun by the Aksumites and saw it on its way to a trajectory that, over another thousand years, turned the kingdom into an empire with borders as we know them today.

Another product of Solomonic propaganda to condemn the Zag^we may well be the historic legend of Queen Gudit (Ἐsato).¹⁹ It is she, said to have been a pagan or a Semite although herself possibly even a legitimate heir to the throne, who is claimed to have killed the last Aksumite king.²⁰ Based on the work of the tenth-century geographer Ibn Ḥawqal, Tadesse Tamrat suggests that her reign could have begun ca. 945, a date confirmed by Bishop Severos of Ašmunayn who, with reference to the Queen of the Banī l-Hamwīya (who displayed characteristics similar to those of Queen Gudit), places her between 942 and 979.²¹ Although she is accused of having burned churches and sought to destroy Christianity, the legend, manipulated by the Solomonic rulers, saw her also as the founder of the Zag^we, thus adding to the opprobrium attached in the thirteenth century to the dynasty.

And when and from where did Yəkunno Amlak (Fig. 8), the first Solomonic ruler, and his near contemporary and accessory, the evangelizing saintly priest Täklä Haymanot (Fig. 9), derive their Christianity? Täklä Haymanot is said to have been born in Šəläləš, Šäwa (today identified with Ἐtissa in

¹⁸ Derat, 2018, pp. 87–145.

¹⁹ Both names are used interchangeably to refer to the same thing in the literature. The difference is Ga^ʿəwa Mäqabər (meaning the burial place of Ga^ʿəwa/Gudit), the name of the archaeological site. ʿAddi Kāwəḥ (meaning “place of cattle”) is the name of the village where the site is situated (email from Habtamu Tadesse, 25 Feb. 2023).

²⁰ Derat, 2018, pp. 105–08.

²¹ Tadesse Tamrat, 1972, p. 39.

Sälale),²² but what was the extent of the Christian presence in that region in the thirteenth century? In fact, how and when did Christianity become established in Šäwa? Tadesse Tamrat alludes to the tenth century, but with virtually no evidence.²³ There is as yet no archaeological corroboration for a Christian presence in Šäwa before the thirteenth century, nor of towns where Christians might have gathered, traded, built churches and worshipped. This absence also leads to the question of the composition of Yəkunno Amlak's warriors. Could he have been a recent convert and they still largely pagan? Could he have converted in order to attract a following from among the Christian Zagwe, using the inscription and murals of the church of Gännätä Maryam as a sign of his allegiance to their religion?²⁴

What do we really know about the extent of the Christianization of the Ethiopian highlands from the fourth century through the thirteenth? The abandonment of the stele park in Aksum (Fig. 10), the legends associated with the Syrian Frumentius (Abuna Sälama Käšate Bərhan, Fig. 11) who is universally credited as having introduced Christianity to the royal court, and the first appearance of the cross on the coins of King Ezana point to the fourth-century establishment of the religion. Many have questioned, however, whether this initial encounter ever spread beyond the court and the trade routes, and endured until the next injection of the faith, allegedly carried to Ethiopia from Byzantium in the late fifth and early sixth century by the so-called, legendary Nine Saints (Fig. 12). While their narrative is well embedded in Ethiopian folklore, there is no textual evidence for any of them before their hagiographies were written in the fourteenth century and thereafter,²⁵ leading one to question whether the origins of the monasteries and churches attributed to them can in any way be considered accurate. In fact, we have no knowledge about the origin of these foundations. Recent archaeological excavations along the route from Aksum to the Red Sea, however, have provided evidence of possible church building from as early as the fourth century; that is in Betä Samati and Adulis.²⁶ It would make perfect sense for places of worship to have been constructed to serve the merchant community, first at the port and then along the route to Aksum. There is reason to believe that the cathedral of St

²² "Täklä Haymanot", in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 831a–34b (by Denis Nossnitsin).

²³ Tadesse Tamrat, 1972, pp. 36–38, 64–67, 119–22, 156–58, 160–61.

²⁴ On Yekunno Amlak's search for continuity with the Zagwe, see Derat, 2019, pp. 98–111.

²⁵ "Nine Saints", in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), pp. 1188b–91a (by Antonella Brita).

²⁶ Massa and Giostra, 2019, pp. 322–23, 330–34.

Mary of Zion in Aksum (Fig. 13), destroyed by Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Gāzī (Aḥmād “Grañ”) in the sixteenth century, was built under the sponsorship of King °Ezana although, once again, we have no evidence.²⁷ Equally possible is the legend that the cathedral may be attributed to two slightly later rulers of Aksum, Kings Abrəha and Ašbəha.²⁸ Further archaeological enquiry may well pierce this early veil of darkness. Meanwhile, the evidence from the sixth century is relatively rich and includes the churches whose foundations are known from Aksum,²⁹ Agula^c,³⁰ Mätära,³¹ Mälazo,³² Qoḥayto,³³ and elsewhere.³⁴ Across the Red Sea, in the Yemen, there were clearly large Christian communities, very likely merchant and trading communities, at Šan^cā³, where King Kaleb is said to have had a cathedral built,³⁵ and at Nağrān, the site of the massacre ca. 520 that prompted the Byzantine Emperor Justin to ask Kaleb to settle the score.³⁶ Despite the apparently strong Christian presence in these urban centres, the religion does not appear to have survived in the Yemen beyond the sixth century. And what can be said of the survival of Christianity in the Aksumite kingdom after the loss of the Yemen to the Persians and the apparent obliteration of the trading hub of Adulis ca. 600? It seems more than likely that the Aksumite kingdom itself was only partially Christianized in the sixth century, and that beyond the urban and trading centres there too, paganism continued to flourish. Might this scenario be a possible explanation for the apparent absence of church building, not to mention manuscript production, before the appearance of the Zag^we in the tenth or eleventh century?³⁷ Until just a

²⁷ Cf. Buxton and Matthews, 1971–1972, p. 53.

²⁸ “Abrəha and Ašbəha” in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), pp. 45b–46a (by Stuart Munro-Hay); Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 25–27; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 37–40.

²⁹ “Aksum Šəyon” in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), pp. 183b–85a (here p. 183b) (by Stuart Munro-Hay).

³⁰ “Agula^c” in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), p. 153a–b (by Matthew C. Curtis and Kevin O’Mahoney); Phillipson, 2009, pp. 48–49.

³¹ “Church buildings” in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), pp. 737a–40a (by Marilyn E. Heldman); “Mätära” in *E Ae*, vol. III (2007), pp. 864a–65b (by Francis Anfray); Phillipson, 2009, pp. 46–47.

³² “Mälazo” in *E Ae*, vol. III (2007), pp. 694b–95b (by Matthew C. Curtis); Phillipson, 2009, pp. 43–44.

³³ “Qoḥayto” in *E Ae*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 294b–96b (by Steffen Wenig).

³⁴ Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 24–29; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 1–32.

³⁵ Finster and Schmidt, 1994, pp. 67–86; Breton, 2015, p. 103.

³⁶ “Nağrān” in *E Ae*, vol. III (2007), pp. 1114b–16a (especially p. 1115a, by Alessandro Bausi); Bausi, 2010, pp. 241–54; Brita, 2020, p. 279.

³⁷ Derat, 2018, p. 144.

few years ago, the Gärîma Gospels were attributed to the twelfth century, but carbon dating and even more recently artistic and iconographical analysis of the miniatures by the late Judith McKenzie and by Francis Watson have convincingly placed them in the fourth to sixth century (Fig. 14).³⁸ However, the carbon 14 tests made by Jacques Mercier and the European Heritage Fund were derived from the illustrated folios and never scientifically published.³⁹ Furthermore, while deploring the lack of verified carbon 14 analysis, Sergey Kim noted in late 2022 the absence of folio markings on the illustrated folios, leading once again to the possibility that these folios and the manuscript texts are not of the same date, and that the former predate the latter.⁴⁰ Perhaps the texts, then, can once again be ascribed to the Zagwe.⁴¹

Returning to the apparent decline, if not complete absence of basilica building after the sixth century, we note that possible exceptions might have been the small rock-hewn churches in the Hawzen Plain at Bäraqit (Fig. 15), Dægum (Fig. 16) and in Hawzen itself (Fig. 17), presumably corresponding in their modest sizes to the populations they must have been created to serve.⁴² They compare in the quality of their workmanship to the considerably larger church of Gazen in Wämbärta along the trade route on the very edge of the eastern escarpment (Fig. 18).⁴³ All were hewn out of the rock rather than being built, suggesting an alternative architecture in the absence of adequate building materials and trained architects.⁴⁴ The vulnerability of the small hewn churches, situated as they were in the open plain, points to a peaceful period rather than to one experiencing instability and the threats of war. If then, the presumed Queen Gudit entered this region sparsely populated by Christians, she may have encountered little resistance to its takeover once the king himself was removed.⁴⁵ The situation would then be ripe for a third Christianization, that which, it turns out, appears to have been successfully launched by

³⁸ McKenzie and Watson, 2016.

³⁹ McKenzie and Watson, 2016, pp. 40–41; Kim, 2022, §§ 24, 108.

⁴⁰ Kim, 2022, §§ 247–57.

⁴¹ A sixth-century date is questioned by Bausi, 2011, p. 19.

⁴² Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 46–61; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 88–92; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 63–72.

⁴³ Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 90–93; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 98–99; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 68–73.

⁴⁴ Philipp, 2022, pp. 52–57.

⁴⁵ Andersen, 2000, pp. 31–63; “Ἐσατο” in *EAE*, vol. II (2005), pp. 376b–77a (by Steven Kaplan).

the Zag^{we}. This dynasty is represented by a wealth of surviving monumental churches, some built, but the majority carved into, and out of, the rock.⁴⁶ Among these are the great churches of Abrəha wä-ʿAṣbəḥa (Fig. 19) and Wəqro Čərḳos (Fig. 20), lying just east of the Hawzen Plain, and Mikaʿel Amba (Fig. 21), further to the east in the heights of Aṣbi Dära not far from Gazen.⁴⁷ We may note that they are all exquisitely carved, the largest of Ethiopia's rock-hewn churches, and two-thirds monolithic. They have recently been attributed to a single workshop operating in the late eleventh century, making them by more than a century the forerunners of the five original monolithic churches at Lalibäla.⁴⁸ The rock-hewn churches were not the only examples of Zag^{we} provisions for places of worship, for we may here refer to Zärema (Fig. 22)⁴⁹ and Agobo Qirḳos (Fig. 23), also in Aṣbi Dära, and of course Däbrä Dammo (Fig. 24).⁵⁰ Däbrä Dammo, the centre of whose western portal is graced by a large Aksumite pillar possibly placed up-side-down (Fig. 25), and which stands beside a large stone altar-like block and other shapes that must once have been part of an extensive, pre-existing Aksumite building (Fig. 26), has been dated to many periods.⁵¹ From my viewpoint, the present building would fit well with the late twelfth century, and possibly be a close antecedent to the church of Yəmrəḥännä Krəstos⁵² (Fig. 27) and the Lalibäla complex. We must, however, give the Zag^{we} more credit than as being church builders for it would appear that it was during their tenure that Christianity became fully established throughout the old Aksumite kingdom, and was extended southwards into Lasta. To have done so clearly took administrative skill and strong economic development. Paganism must have been rife, as is indicated in a passage from the *gädl* of King Yəmrəḥännä Krəstos where the king encounters

⁴⁶ Juel-Jensen and Rowell, 1975; Plant, 1985; Derat, 2020, pp. 34–35.

⁴⁷ Plant, 1985, pp. 91–96, 98–99; Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 72–89; Phillipson, 2009, pp. 93–98; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 8–92.

⁴⁸ Muehlbauer, 2023, pp. 79–134.

⁴⁹ Lepage, 1973, pp. 416–54; “Zärema Giyorgis” in *E Ae*, vol. V (2014), pp. 152a–53b (by Niall Finneran).

⁵⁰ Lepage, 1975, pp. 34–59; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 37–62.

⁵¹ Sixth to seventh centuries (Phillipson, 2009, p. 64); seventh to eleventh cent. (Lepage and Mercier, 2005, pp. 31–45); eighth cent. (Plant, 1985, p. 192); eighth to tenth cent. (Matthews, 1949, pp. 195–96; Matthews – Mordini, 1959, p. 39); eighth to twelfth cent. (Mordini, 1960, p. 245; Di Salvo, 2017, pp. 35–44); ninth or tenth cent. (Buxton, 1947, p. 13).

⁵² Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, 2001, pp. 9–47 and figs 1–16; “Yəmrəḥännä Krəstos” in *E Ae*, vol. V (2014), pp. 55a–57b (by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and Michael Gervers).

Satan when he prepares to build his church in a cave (Fig. 28). Said Satan, “Why do you drive me out from this cave in which I have been living, where many people, my beloved, worshipped me. In [55b] this grove of olives they offered me cows, lambs and goats, practicing divination through me. But during your reign my glory declined and I am worried (about it)”.⁵³ It was in the natural caves of the massif of Abunä Yosef, for example, that the Zagwe and their successors built churches,⁵⁴ (Fig. 29) or transformed them into churches as at Waša Mika’el (Angot, North Wällo) (Fig. 30), a cave rather than a rock-hewn church (the murals from which have been tied to Yəkunno Amlak),⁵⁵ apparently repurposed as a means to encourage conversion from paganism to Christianity. Compared to what might seem to have been a modest Christian presence in the rural regions of the Aksumite kingdom, the carving of Abrəha wä-ʾAšbəḥa, Wəqro Ćärqos and Mika’el Amba (Fig. 31) would appear by their size to reflect a period of rapid and extensive conversion across eastern Tigray, ancient Ethiopia’s third and most successful phase of Christianization.

This background does not provide sufficiently secure evidence for us to suggest at what date Ethiopians began to carve churches and funerary spaces into and out of the rock. There was, however, ample precedent in the Red Sea region and beyond, starting with the Nabateans whose elaborate first and second-century tombs were cut from the rock within their territory from Petra in Jordan,⁵⁶ to Hegera on their southern frontier in Arabia.⁵⁷ More pertinent by far are the rock-hewn monastic complexes in Anatolia, exemplified by the churches in Göreme and Cavusin, whose origins can be traced to the fifth century and that were expanded at the time of the Iconoclastic Controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries, and thereafter.⁵⁸ One can imagine that at least one of the purported Nine Saints, or other missionaries of the day, derived from Cappadocia and brought the idea and the technique of rock-carving with him. Rock-hewn churches are suited to rocky places made of sandstone and limestone, with extensive cliffs, which the Aksumite kingdom was.⁵⁹ For a land

⁵³ Marrassini, 1995, pp. 54, 86 (English translation by Witold Witakowski from a seventeenth-century manuscript in the church of Yəmərəhannā Krəstos, reg. no. Ama-IV-12394).

⁵⁴ Gervers, 2014, pp. 25–64.

⁵⁵ Mercier, 2002, pp. 143–48.

⁵⁶ McKenzie, 1990.

⁵⁷ Bessac, 2015, pp. 163–201.

⁵⁸ Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil, 2015.

⁵⁹ Williams, 2016, pp. 83–102.

seeking to expand its Christian presence, the geography of the highlands provided a landscape that was a perfect setting for places of worship in the rock. We would argue that what the Aksumites started, the Zag^we continued, and the Solomonic transferred, if in technically inferior workmanship, to the southernmost regions of their own newly Christian kingdom. A known, but inadequately studied example is the extensive rock-hewn church of Yäkka Mika^ʿel (also named Waša Mika^ʿel) in the heights above Addis Abäba (Fig. 32). It collapsed, probably at an early stage in its existence due to the workmen's unfamiliarity in working with the rock. Judging from what remains, it was excavated far too close to the surface, leaving insufficient solid matter to hold the structure together.⁶⁰ And what can be said of the efforts to construct a monolith at Adadi Maryam south of Addis (Fig. 33)? It is hewn out entirely without skill, while the interior is only excavated to about a third of its length.⁶¹ Contemporary efforts to carve churches into the rock in Šäwa are even less impressive (Fig. 34), and compare poorly both structurally and artistically with their northern counterparts in Lasta, such as at Ambagər near Gašäna where the priest Gäbrämäskäl Təsämme is single-handedly responsible so far for carving five churches out of the rock, some of them monolithic (Fig. 35).⁶² Needless to say, the contemporary masters of rock-hewn ecclesiastical architecture in Ethiopia are northerners, who work like their ancestors to provide places of worship for local communities.⁶³

This excursion into the very uncertain chronology of the period from Aksumite dominance in the second quarter of the sixth century to that of the Zag^we 700 years later must for the moment end here, but while the gaps are being filled and significant new questions are being raised, we see in those two dynasties continuity, rather than the degree of change wrought by the arrival of the Solomonic, whose interpretation of Ethiopian history has shaped the direction of scholarly endeavour and popular belief down to the present day. Nothing could be further from the facts than that they were in any way related to the Aksumites. On the contrary, while they adopted Aksumite-Zag^we culture as their own, they were never able to dominate its source.

⁶⁰ “Yäkka Mika^ʿel” in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), pp. 16a–18a (by Bruce Strachan).

⁶¹ “Adadi Maryam” in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), pp. 216b–18a (by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska).

⁶² Philip, 2022, pp. 52–57; Lamesa and Gervers, 2023, pp. 130–32.

⁶³ See the website of video-recorded interviews with contemporary master craftsmen in Ethiopia responsible for hewing out churches from the rock, created by Michael Gervers and sponsored by the Arcadia Foundation: <https://www.utsc.utoronto.ca/projects/ethiopic-churches/> (accessed 19 November 2023).

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Fig. 1: Ruins from the ancient port city of Adulis (Eritrea). Italian-Eritrean Archaeological Project at Adulis by Ce.R.D.O. Photo Credit ANSA: <https://tesfanews.net/italian-archaeology-eritrea-mission-discover-adulis/> (site visited 1 December 2023).



Fig. 2: "British Museum Church", Adulis (Eritrea)
(reproduced by courtesy of the British Museum).



Fig. 3: Four Zag^we kings, and King Gäbrä Mäsqäl; miniature in a folded parchment; Lalibäla, Betä Gäbrä'el (North Wällo). Seventeenth century.
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2013.



Fig. 4: Land donations of King Täntäwädäm, 'Ura Mäsqäl church (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2005.



Fig. 5: Aerial view of churches of Mädhane ʿAläm and Betä Maryam, Lalibäla (North Wällo). Photo by Georg Gerster.

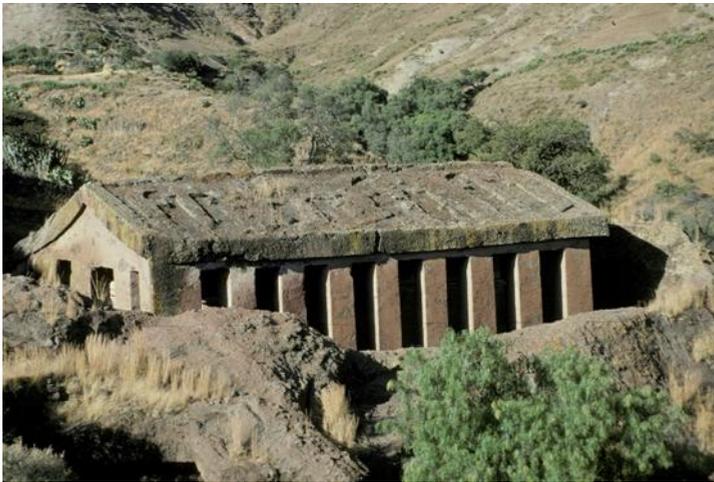


Fig. 6: Rock-hewn monolithic church of Gännätä Maryam, facing NE (North Wällo). Photo by Michael Gervers, 1993.



Fig. 7: Church of Yəmṛəhannā Krəstos facing NE (North Wällo).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2007.



Fig. 8: Image of Yəkunno Amlak, pillar mural in the monolithic church of
Gännätä Maryam (Təgray). Photo by Paul Henze, 2006.



Fig. 9: Image of Täklä Haymanot, pillar mural in the rock-hewn church of Maryam Dəngəlat (Təgray). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2002.



Fig. 10: Fallen great stele, Aksum (Təgray). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2000.

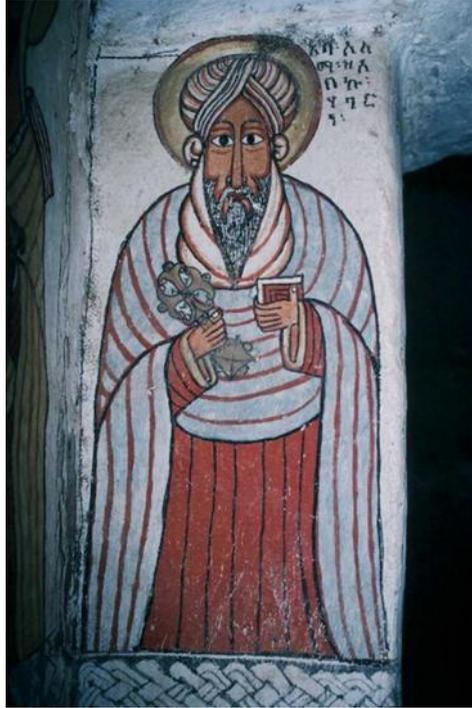


Fig. 11: Image of Abunä Sälama (Fruventius), pillar mural in the rock-hewn church of Maryam Dəngəlat (Təgray). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2002.



Fig. 12: Image of the Nine Saints, ceiling painting, church of Gʷəḥ Yəmʿata (Təgray). Photo by Jan Tromp, 2005.



Fig. 13: Ancient steps of the church of Aksum Şəyon (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2014.

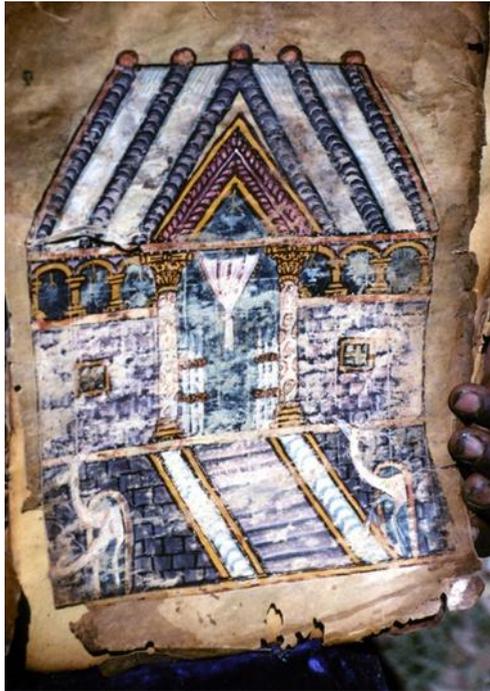


Fig. 14: Miniature of the Jerusalem Temple (Abba Gäräma III, fol. 260r), monastery of Abba Gäräma (Təgray). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2000.



Fig. 15: Rock-hewn church of Bäraqit Maryam, central nave facing east, Gäär^əalta (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2005.



Fig. 16: Rock-hewn church of Dəgum Šəllase, interior facing SE, Gäär^əalta (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2000.



Fig. 17: Rock-hewn church of Täklä Haymanot, interior facing east, Ḥawzen (Təgray).
Photo by Emmanuel Fritsch, 2007.



Fig. 18: Rock-hewn church of Gazen, interior facing NE (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2004.

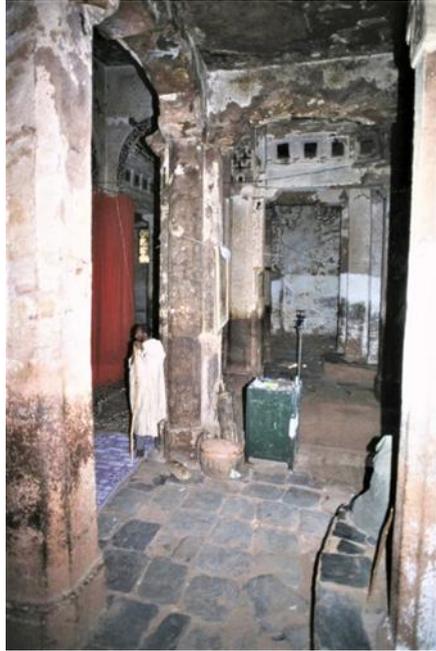


Fig. 19: Rock-hewn church of Abrəha wä' Aşbəha, interior facing SE (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2002.

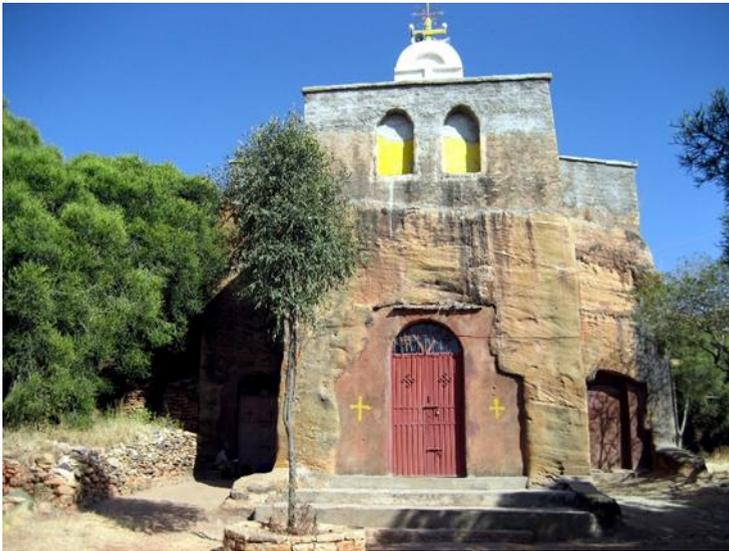


Fig. 20: Rock-hewn church of Wəqro Ćärqos, west façade (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2007.

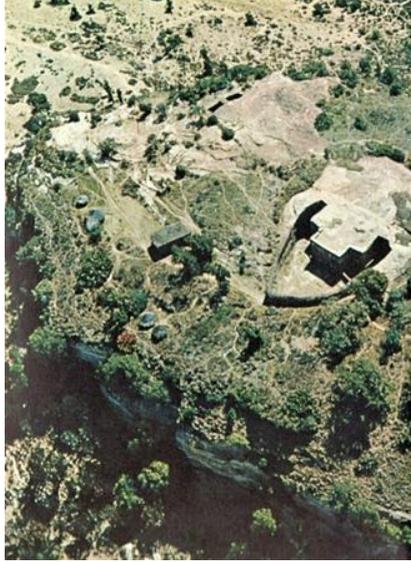


Fig. 21: Rock-hewn church of Mika'el Amba, aerial view (Təgray).
Photo by Georg Gerster.



Fig. 22: Church of Zārema Giyorgis, nave interior facing east (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2002.



Fig. 23: Church of Qirqos Agobo, interior facing east (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2002.



Fig. 24: Amba of Däbrä Dammo, facing NE (Təgray). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2004.



Fig. 25: Reused Aksumite pillar, western portal, church of Däbrä Dammo (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2005.



Fig. 26: Aksumite altar beside church of Däbrä Dammo (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2005.

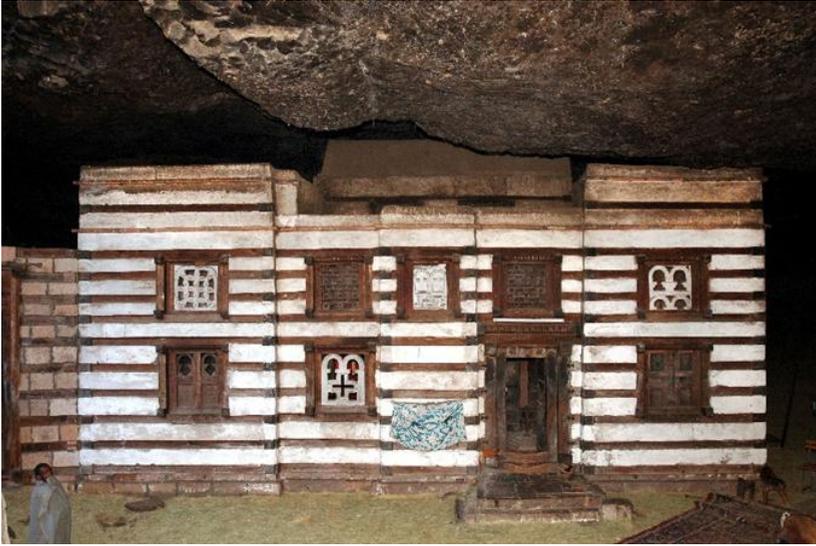


Fig. 27: Church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, north façade (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2007.

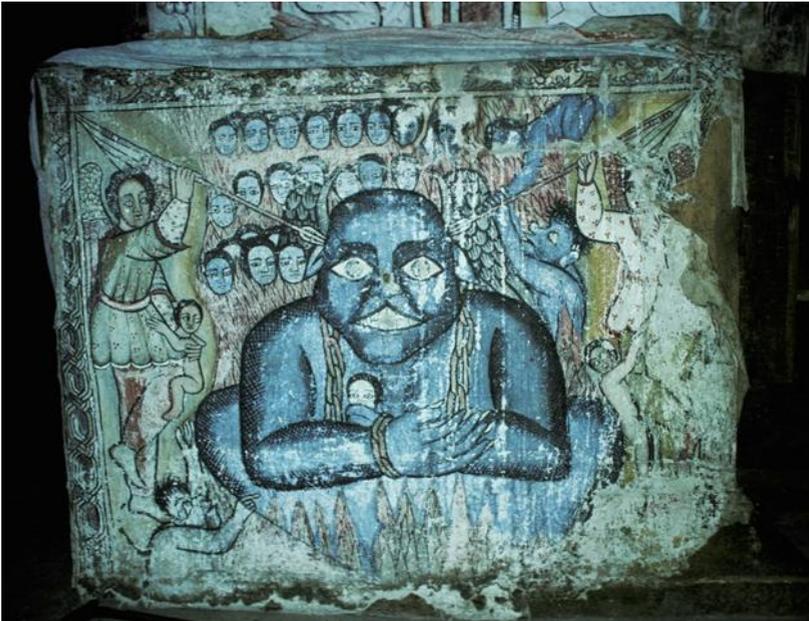


Fig. 28: Satan. Mural. Church of Mika'el and Gäbra'el, Səqoṭa (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 1993.



Fig. 29: Church of ʿĪmäkina Mädhane ʿAläm, facing NE (North Wällo).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2004.



Fig. 30: Cave church of Waša Mikaʿel, interior with triumphal arch facing SE
(North Wällo). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2005.



Fig. 31: Rock-hewn church of Mika'el Amba, interior facing N (Təgray).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2006.



Fig. 32: Ruins of the rock-hewn church of Waša Mika'el, exterior facing SE (Addis Ababa, Šäwa). Photo by L. Vrlíkova, 2014.



Fig. 33: Monolithic church of Adadi Maryam, exterior facing SE (Gurage, Šäwa). Photo by Michael Gervers.



Fig. 34: New rock-hewn church of Säraye Mika'el, interior facing SE (Šäwa).
Photo by Michael Gervers, 2016.



Fig. 35: New rock-hewn church of Däbrä Şayon, exterior facing NE
(Ambagor, nr Gašana, North Wällo). Photo by Michael Gervers, 2015.

WOLFGANG HAHN

The Late Period of Aksumite Coin Production (c.540–c.645)

The periodisation of the Aksumite coinage usually has the late period beginning with the abdication of Kaleb ʾĪllä Aṣḃəḥa around 540 or shortly before. This is reasoned by the fact that some kind of monetary reform was implemented by Kaleb's successor. There are six kings after Kaleb who issued coins under their names; on their sequence and chronology the opinions brought forward hitherto were widely differing and, more or less, only guesses, resorting too much to non-numismatic sources. But recent research has improved the evidence by amassing a largely increased material basis;¹ it enables a better application of the arsenal of numismatic methodology. Besides the observation of the typological development, it is the statistical element in metrology, metal analyses and the number of dies used in striking the coins which helps us further. Of course, the statistical approach is not an absolute instrument as it may be changed by future findings. However, compared with what was known to Munro-Hay when he published his widely consulted book on Aksumite coins almost thirty years ago,² nowadays we can rely on four times more material. By the way, it should be mentioned that only about one fifth of the coins known to us are in public collections.

Defining the whole period summarized as “the time after Kaleb”, that is after the African kingdom reached the apex of its international political role, is justified by the decline in information we can rely on from the literary sources. But regarding the coinage, what seems to be the only aspect of deterioration is a downslide in the alloy of the late period gold coins and in the amount of

¹ Hahn and Keck, 2020. Now the material amounts to several thousand gold and silver specimens and many more coppers so that it is to be hoped that the requirements of an updated reference work are met. Naturally it will take some time to be noticed in archaeology and historical scholarship.

² Munro-Hay, 1995; cf. Piovanelli, 2014, p. 339.

their output.³ But this impression may be a result of fluctuating goldmining in the neighbourhood of Aksum⁴ and the fortuitousness of hoards detected. However, some gold coins are now known of all the six late kings. The decreasing fineness of the gold coins⁵ had already begun under Kaleb. After him it slowly fell to about 2/3; tracing this decline is one of the minor aids in reconstructing the sequence.

On the other hand, Kaleb's direct successor—who can almost certainly be identified as the king named Armaḥ ʿĪllä ʿAmida—improved the silver and copper coinage and modernised their typology by the introduction of new elements.⁶ These lower value denominations constituted the internal currency, especially the coppers which served the small trade in a monetised economy and could be used as a medium of propagating the official ideology. After Kaleb their longstanding appearance was given up in favour of new types, changing preferably with an accession to the throne. All the silver and copper coins now display Gəʿəz circumscriptions (with rather rare vowelling of the *fidäl* script), whereas Greek remained on the gold coins as the valuta in long distance trade.

In the case of Armaḥ and of his immediate successor we are faced with the custom that both kings—who (as common) had several names—used them differently on the coins, according to the metal: what is thought to be the regnal name,⁷ i.e. that composed with the pronoun ʿĪllä, is restricted to the gold coins being the higher ranking in hierarchy; on the other hand the supposedly personal name, Armaḥ and after him Wazen, appears on the lower ranking silver and copper coins.

Armaḥ entered the legendary tradition as Ramhai by a faulty reading of the legends on the coins⁸ which were surfacing over the centuries. Regrettably a completely erroneous identification with an Arha in the Islamic tradition was promoted once,⁹ by which he mutated into a contemporary of Muḥammad. In consequence several authors credited him with issuing the latest Aksumite

³ Hahn and Keck, 2020, pp. 33, 146.

⁴ Smidt, 2013.

⁵ Hahn and Keck, 2020, p. 148.

⁶ Hahn and Keck, 2020, p. 120; Keck and Hahn, 2023, p. 3.

⁷ Hahn and Keck, 2020, pp. 46–47.

⁸ The two halves of the circumscription were read interchanged.

⁹ Hartmann, 1895.

coins.¹⁰ In fact, he is the earliest king in the late period and under him the coinage was thoroughly reorganized, as can be deduced from the appearance of a set of administrative issue marks which was continued under his successors.¹¹ Switching Armaḥ from the last to the first position in the row of late coin-issuing kings helps us to reconstruct the sequence of his successors.

This sequence can now be regarded as quite certainly established. But it must be mentioned that it is not necessary to suppose that every reigning king immediately started to issue coins under his name – this was the custom in the Roman Empire, but not for example in South Arabia. Though coining seems to have been more or less continuous a tendency towards immobilization could lead to posthumous issues.

The successor of Armaḥ was Wazen Agad ʿIllä Gäbāz. The personal name Wazen or Wazān Agad¹² is written in unvocalized fidäl script. In certain reference books he is unfortunately called by the slogan found on the reverse of his silver coins. Therefore, the typology of these needs some comment. The reverse legend starts by repeating the title *nəguś* (which is already given on the obverse) and it continues as “the king who exalts the saviour”. It was the custom on Aksumite coins that the legend explained the image; here we find a gilded cross on a stand under an architectural arch. This image has found various interpretations,¹³ but it is likely to depict a Holy Cross reliquary.

The Gəʿəz verb *abbäyā*¹⁴ can be used when a liturgical exaltation of a Holy cross is referred to, the highest trophy of Christian victory. It may be fancied that such a relic could have been brought by a Byzantine embassy sent to Aksum in order to seek an alliance against the Sasanians. We know that emperor Justin II used presents of this kind in diplomatic missions to the West more than once.¹⁵ His successor, Tiberius II, propagated the cross of Golgotha as an emblem for his crusade against the Persians.¹⁶ Needless to say, the crowned frontal bust and the architectural arch were likewise absorbed from Byzantine models, that is to say from coins and commercial weights.¹⁷ The

¹⁰ Munro-Hay, 1995, p. 75; Munro-Hay 1999, p. 26; formerly I also adhered to this assignment.

¹¹ Keck and Hahn, 2023, p. 3.

¹² Wzn and Agd seem to be a double name, used consecutively on his silver and copper coins.

¹³ Hahn and Keck, 2020, pp. 124–26.

¹⁴ Dillmann, 1865, col. 986.

¹⁵ Hahn and Keck, 2020, p. 126, fn. 353.

¹⁶ Hahn and Metlich, 2009, p. 36.

¹⁷ Hahn, 2011c.

possible connection with the Byzantino-Persian war, which lasted from 572 to 591, might give us a clue for the dating.

The third king in order seems to be a certain ʿĪsraʿel who was formerly seen as another candidate to be put at the end of the coinage, and there we enter into the question of how long Adulis had been in Aksumite hands. A hoard consisting of ʿĪsraʿel’s gold coins was found there during the Italian excavations in 1907¹⁸ and kept in the Museo Coloniale (later Museo Africano) from its foundation in 1923 until its liquidation in 1971 whereupon the coins disappeared.¹⁹ A connection of the hoard’s concealment with an Arab raid on the city may be presumed.²⁰ But, if a warlike event can really be supposed, this could have happened much earlier, e.g. in the 570s when the Sasanians occupied the Yemen and might have raided the opposite coast. Unfortunately the composition of the hoard is totally uniform, containing only 33 gold coins of ʿĪsraʿel with no other coins associated which could help dating. According to the number of dies observed in ʿĪsraʿel’s entire coinage (including his scanty silver and copper) he is likely to have had a short reign,²¹ probably restricted to the 570s.

The next following kings are Gersem and Ioel. Both of them used frontal depictions on their coins. Ioel’s earlier silvers and coppers are also inspired by reverse types of Byzantine coins struck in the 590s.²² A later group of Ioel’s copper coins has the letters of his name allotted to the four angles of a jewelled cross, a position which might signify a posthumous issue; we may date it to the early years of the seventh century.

So Ḥatāz (Hethaza according to the Greek form) is left as the last king in the order. In all probability he reigned at the time of the next and final Byzantino-Persian war during the 610s and 620s and for a while thereafter. Again we are dealing with two types of silver and copper coins; they are very different in style and fabric as if two homonymous kings were involved in their issue at different times. But such a supposition is unnecessary.

¹⁸ Paribeni, 1907, col. 50.

¹⁹ Hahn, 2011b. It is peculiar that the present revisors of the collection (e.g. Zazzaro, 2013, p. 32) did not realize that the coins were sold; they can be traced in the international trade at least since 1979.

²⁰ Paribeni, 1907, cols 501, 570–71.

²¹ Hahn and Keck, 2020, pp. 128–29.

²² Hahn and Metlich, 2009, Mauricius nos. 57, 58 (small silver coins of Carthage) nos 53, 55 (silver of Constantinople).

Possibly the two groups are divided by a longer gap in minting which could have happened between 616 and 629, when the Sasanians occupied Egypt and even advanced as far as the Nubian frontier. In these years the Aksumites were cut off from their connections with Byzantium and the Indian trade was finally interrupted. This, of course, affected the economy and there seems to have been no necessity to replenish the currency in circulation by issuing new coins. The Byzantine victory of 629 and the return of the Holy Cross to Jerusalem (where it had been captured by the Persians in 614) evoked new hopes of a restitution of the political situation. We learn from a literary source²³ that emperor Heraclius was congratulated by the “Indian” king.

Now the minting seems to have been resumed in the name of Ḥatāz and a very numerous issues of coppers was struck. They are of a low-quality manufacture, but their type is eloquent, symbolizing the domination of the cross all over the world: it appears in the centre of a lozenge and is repeated at the four edges (of the universe); the legend addresses the nations/*gentiles* who are chosen instead of the reprobate Jews. The optimistic sentiment came to nothing when the Arabs conquered Egypt 642/45 and the Aksumites were again isolated.

The late coins of Ḥatāz are found in large numbers, particularly at Aksum and a comparison with what is known from Adulis would be informative for the end of Aksum’s access to the Red Sea. But a direct comparison of the findings from the two settlements is infeasible because the archaeological situation is very different. Whereas a large part of the material surfacing at Aksum comes from private collecting, almost all the known Adulis provenanced coins were found in excavations. So, we can only compare the number of excavation coins from both sites. They differ in size as there have been fewer excavations at Adulis and their documentation is largely insufficient. For the coins from Aksum, we can refer to an overview published in a special article²⁴ which is fairly up to date; there a little more than 853 pieces are counted, 431 of them dating to the post-Kaleb time.

Turning to Adulis, the fundamental publication of the 1906/07 excavations²⁵ only mentions the number of some gold and silver coins as well as more than 300 bronzes, their identification being declared desirable. Later on, Anzani quoted all the Aksumite coins from these excavations he was able to

²³ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, ed Carl de Boor p.335 referring to year 6123 of the Alexandrian era (= 630 C.E.).

²⁴ Hahn, 2011a, p. 375.

²⁵ Paribeni, 1907.

identify in his catalogue of 1926,²⁶ where only the gold coins are illustrated (from plaster casts). It is not known to me whether he had seen the originals; at least the gold coins had been transferred to the Museo Coloniale in Rome by request of Carlo Conti Rossini who wanted to study them, but Anzani preempted him. The 1924 excavations of Giorgio Brunetti²⁷ brought forth only a few coins which Anzani could also include in his catalogue; apparently he still had his connections with Eritrea.²⁸ The coins of Anfray's excavations in 1961/2 can be found in the (unpublished) thesis of his disciple Eric Godet.²⁹ We were unable to find more late coins mentioned in recent excavation reports. Altogether more than 110 coins can be counted from Adulis of which a little more than 43 are later than Kaleb.

Thus, the recorded excavation coins from Aksum dating between c.540 and c.645, taken altogether, number about ten times more than those of Adulis. If we have a closer look at the different reigns and metals there are other discrepancies. Adulis is relatively rich in gold coins (13 pieces, besides the 33 in the hoard referred to above), all the late kings being represented, whilst none comes from Aksum (where the gold is soaked up by the organized antiquities dealers).³⁰ On the other hand the ratio between the post-Kaleb coins to the earlier coins is rather similar from both sites. If we turn to the separate reigns we can draw on the following numbers:

²⁶ Anzani, 1926.

²⁷ These excavations were undertaken by Giorgio Brunetti (1886–1971), but no records seem to be extant; in Brunetti, 1923, p. 25 he mentioned *en passant* his excavating in Adulis.

²⁸ Arturo Anzani (1879–1946) had lived some years in Eritrea where he served the financial authorities 1913–18 as an accountant.

²⁹ Godet, 2003, p. 251.

³⁰ This does not mean that we have to attribute these gold coins to a mint at Adulis; they do occur in Aksum but did not find their way into excavation reports.

	ADULIS	AKSUM	proportion
Armh	13 (1 AV + 1 AR + 11 AE)	49 (3 AR + 46 AE)	1 : 3,8
Wzn Agd	> 10 (1 AV + >1 AR + 8 AE)	54 (4 AR + 50 AE)	1 : < 5,4
Israel	(2 AV + 33 in the hoard)	(? AR + 1 AE)	?
Gersem	7 (1 AV + 6 AE)	53 (32 AR + 21 AE)	1 : 7,6
Joel	6 (1 AV + 5 AE)	78 (14 AR + 64 AE)	1 : 13
Hetasas	9 (3 AV + 6 AE) 1st period 2 nd period	199 (29 AR + 170 AE)	1 : 22,1 (1 : 28,3)
	> 45	431	

Late Aksumite, first phase: c.540-c.580

ALLA AMIDAS

ARMEH

ELLA GABAZ / AGD / WZN



Late Aksumite, second phase: c.580-c.640

GERSEM



JOEL 1.Periode



2.Periode?



HETHASAS / HTZ

1.Periode



2.Periode



In principle, the length of a reign has an effect on the number of surviving coins and older pieces were liable to be recoinced (melted down). However, the small number of Hatāz coppers in Adulis compared with those from Aksum is remarkable. Perhaps the supply of coins from Aksum as well as their use came to an end somewhat earlier in Adulis than in Aksum itself. However, we should like to build on a larger number of coins for comparison in order to

achieve a better probability for our conclusions. Another problem arises from the impossibility of estimating how long Aksumite coins circulated in a monetary function after the reign of Hatāz until they disappeared into the soil. The large amount of small change which had been struck previously could have served the shrunken economy of Aksum for quite a long time, perhaps for the rest of the seventh century. Somehow the situation may be similar to that of the Roman coins in fifth-century Central Europe.

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HILUF BERHE WOLDEYOHANNES

***An Archaeological Approach to the Study of the Chronology
of Rock-Hewn Churches in Tigray (7th–11th Cent. CE):
New Evidence from the Gud Bahri Iron Production Site,
Wuqro, Tigray, Ethiopia***

1. – *Introduction*

Təgray, a region in northern Ethiopia, is home to more than 150 rock-hewn churches. While there are scattered rock-hewn churches in all part of Təgray, the highest concentration is found on the ʿAbiy ʿAddi–Aṣbi Wämbärta belt. Gäʿalta mountains have the highest concentration of such churches found on the top of the mountains or on the cliff-side. This area is geologically known for the ʿAddi Grat sandstone, named after the town of ʿAddi Grat where this section of sandstone makes great exposure.¹ The selection of this region for rock-hewn churches could be associated with the suitability of the rock to carve and the exposure of the cliffs which enable to accommodate large-sized churches. This belt extends in a SW–NE axis from Täm̄ben area to Aṣbi Wämbärta, respectively, for a distance of about 100 km (Fig. 1).

Due to their scattered distribution, the rock-hewn churches of Təgray did not receive attention as much as those in Lalibäla where 11 rock-hewn churches are concentrated in small space. As a result, the Lalibäla churches attracted international scholars and visitors; they were soon inscribed as World Heritage in 1978. The monumental carved churches of Təgray were widely brought to the attention of scholars by *Abba* Tewelde Medhin Yosef, who presented a paper during the third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Addis Ababa in 1966.² Since then, many historians, architects, geologists, and art-historians have visited and documented such rock-hewn churches.³ Almost all

¹ Asfawossen Asrat, 2002.

² Pankhurst, 1985.

³ E.g., Gerster, 1970; Plant, 1985; Buxton, 1971.

of such churches have inherited the Aksumite architecture for their window and door friezes (Fig. 2). The architecture of the rock-hewn churches shows a mastery of rock carving skill that was in place since the pre-Aksumite period.

The Aksumite era is believed to have ended by the beginning of seventh cent. C.E. as no similar built monumental structures and coinage were found after this period. Until a presumably new political centre appeared in Lalibäla by twelfth cent. C.E., the period between the seventh and twelfth centuries C.E. is termed as 'dark age'.⁴ The 'dark age' was coined to refer to the period after the decline of Aksumite Empire during the early seventh century and before the emergence of Lalibäla ca. twelfth century. But this 'dark age' does mean simply a period without clearly available sources (particularly for pre-2000s researchers and writers). Historians and archaeologists were temporarily unable to go deep temporally and spatially to look at characteristics and features of the 'dark age'. It could be now understood that the gap was simply due to lack of research coverage mainly posed by limited knowledge, lack of interdisciplinary research, and difficult terrain which limits access with road and visibility. Many of the previous researches were carried out on the already visible ancient centres such as Aksum, Yəḥa, Mätära, Adulis. Other disciplines such as art-history, architecture and geology have carried out research around the rock-hewn churches of Təgray; but their main interest was to explain their architectural style and geological formation of the rocks, as well as their general estimated date of carving.⁵

On the other hand, studies on the social, political, economic and technological situation of Təgray after the decline of Aksumite empire received little attention. After the decline of Aksumite Empire, although monumental and complex churches continued to be built and carved out of a solid rock, no monumental palace (administration centre) was built, because this time with weak empire and economy, the state cannot mobilize the population and dare to build a new centre.⁶ According to the stone inscription of *Haḍani* Danə'el in Aksum, the Aksumite empire was still functioning under a weak king during the ninth cent. C.E. with its centre in Aksum. The inscription narrates that *Haḍani* Danə'el defended Aksum from the raid of Wolqayt people as the king was not strong enough to do it.⁷ It is, therefore, possible to speculate that local

⁴ Munro-Hay, 1991; Phillipson, 2012

⁵ Plant, 1985; Lepage and Mercier, 2005; Gerster, 1970; Asfawossen Asrat, 2002.

⁶ Munro-Hay, 1991.

⁷ Littmann, Krencker and Lupke 1913; Phillipson, 2012; Munro-Hay, 1991.

lords would have been engaged on the project of rock carving with a support from monks and the metropolitans.

Scholars, based on the art and architectural styles of the rock-hewn churches, suggest that the period of these rock-hewn churches' carving is generally accepted to have taken place between the seventh and eleventh centuries C.E., generally after the decline of Aksumite Empire.⁸ Although several publications are available on the art and architecture of the rock-hewn churches, the issue about the makers of these rock churches, and how such project of rock carving was achieved after the Aksumite Empire declined, has been overlooked. These questions are important to know the absolute dating of the rock-hewn churches, and the economic, political and ideological status of the state during the so-called 'dark age' period.

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the scholars' debate on the date of rock-hewn churches of Təgray in general using archaeological evidence, but doesn't focus on the detail analysis and dating of each rock-hewn church. I will present the result of recent archaeological excavation from Gud Bahri and its relationship with the rock-hewn churches. C14 date will substantiate the relative dating of the rock-hewn church as suggested by art-historians and other scholars. This will have its own contribution to fill the gap about the 'dark age', a missing period between Aksum and Lalibāla due to limited sources of history. However, I will argue that this period is not a dark period; it is because so far there are not enough available sources; and this is due to lack of research coverage in the regions between southern Təgray and Lalibāla. Although documents may help to narrow the gap of dating, archaeological approach may be employed to present concrete evidence to see what has taken place on the ground. Recently, archaeological research on the Lalibāla rock-hewn churches has come up with new evidence⁹ that enables us to narrow the gap from the Lalibāla side and inspires to employ archaeological methods for the Təgray rock-hewn churches in order to reconsider the 'dark age'.

It should be noted that during the 'dark age', even if the state was politically and military weak, and its international trade route cut-off due to the loss of Adulis port, the church could have been strong enough to control over its subjects and design the project of rock carving. The mid-twelfth-century metropolitan Mika'el could be mentioned as an example who consecrated several

⁸ Lepage and Mercier, 2005; Phillipson, 2009.

⁹ Fauvelle-Aymar, Bruxelles, Mensan, *et al.* 2010; Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, Bruxelles *et al.*, 2014.

churches including Maryam Nazrät and ordained thousands of priests and deacons.¹⁰

2. – *Brief history of rock carving in Təgray*

The history of rock carving is not a new phenomenon of the post-Aksumite period. Rock carving tradition can be traced back to the pre-Aksumite period, carved for other purpose than for churches or residential building. In Yəḥa, more than seventeen rock-cut tombs have been documented from Da[°]ero Mika[°]el, some 300 meters far south of the great Temple of Yəḥa. These tombs were cut vertical on the bed rock to a depth of about two meters and then formed rock-cut chambers to the north and south directions to place the body and offering goods. The rooms were usually designed with arch or rectangular shape of entrance.¹¹ Several tombs cut out of a bed rock were reported from Eastern Təgray. These tombs are found distributed from Kerseber (some 5km north of [°]Addi Grat town) to Səṅqata town, with the highest concentration around [°]Ədäga Ḥamus at a specific place called Maryam Taqot.¹²

Some of the tombs in the aforementioned areas were very likely from the pre-Christian/pre-Aksumite period while others were found bearing a cross on their wall side. However, the rock-cut tomb from Betä Maryam in [°]Addi Grat catches the attention of scholars in terms of its architecture: its chamber has an entrance carved in the shape of Aksumite door with the boss heads of the door frame on four corners. This type of architecture is commonly represented either on built underground tombs such as those of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl in Aksum, or on the rock-hewn churches of the post-Aksumite period. It is a unique character to find a rock-cut entrance of tomb with an Aksumite architecture. Its periodization is therefore tenuous.

In the Ḥawzen plain, rock-cut tombs hollowed out of the outcropping bed rock have been recorded from Täklä Haymanot and Dəgum Səllase churches.¹³ The rock-cut hypogean tombs were later expanded and adapted into rock-cut churches; it is evident that rock carving for burial was common tradition along this eastern Təgray region where we have a workable geology—the [°]Addi Grat sand stone. This practice of rock carving predates the rock-hewn churches in this region, as discussed below.

¹⁰ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020.

¹¹ Anfray, 1963.

¹² Getachew, 2020.

¹³ Lepage and Mercier, 2005.

In Aksum town itself, hollowing the bedrock for burial started feasibly during the early Aksumite period of the pre-Christian era. The so-called tomb of Bazen is cut from a soft bed rock accessed by sixteen steps; on both left and right side of the entrance, seven rooms of irregular shape and ordinary architecture were excavated; inside the main chamber, there are four burial rooms finely carved; the main doorway of this chamber is a round-topped shape. Outside this main tomb, around 10 m to the north direction, there are nine rock-cut tombs carved on the cliff-side of the May Qoḥo hill. Down the slope, two shaft tombs are hollowed on the gentle-slope bed rock, first cut vertical for two meters of depth, and then four burial rooms carved into four directions thus giving the tomb a cruciform shape at the bottom. Another possibly earlier rock-cut tomb is located beneath the *māqdās* (sanctuary) of Arba^cetu Īnsäsa church in Aksum. This tomb has a shaft of 2 m deep and only two chamber rooms cut north-south axis. Similar features have been discovered at ^cAddi G^waṭiya,¹⁴ and near the tombs of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl.¹⁵ These shaft tombs from ^cAddi G^waṭiya and Kaleb area are all with four chambers forming cruciform shape on their base; the four sides of each shaft tomb and the entrance to the chamber rooms has been reinforced with built wall due to the fragile nature of the bed rock.

Rock-cut shaft tombs from the proto-Aksumite period have been discovered on the top of Betä Giyorgis hill, northwest of Aksum town.¹⁶ Here too, the bed rock from which the tombs were carved is very soft. The access to the burial rooms is different from those pre-Aksumite and early Aksumite rock-cut tombs; on Betä Giyorgis, the access to the burial rooms is with irregular and ordinary steps; the shape of the shaft tomb is architecturally less inferior to those aforementioned tombs.

Unfinished rock-cut feature could be seen on the cliff-side of May Koḥo hill to the east of Maryam Şəyon church of Aksum. According to the local tradition, this was first planned to be a church carved by *Abunä* Libanos during the late Aksumite period; however, *Abunä* Libanos is said to have discontinued by the residents of Aksum; as a consequence, *Abunä* Libanos finally gave up carving the rock and left to a village called Dārāqa, about 12 km south of Aksum. There, he carved another church on the western edge of the Dārāqa plain on a low cliff. Anfray has documented some Aksumite stuff from the area of

¹⁴ Contenson, 1963; Hiluf Berhe, Kifle Zerue, Berhan Tekla, *et al.*, 2023.

¹⁵ Anfray, 1972.

¹⁶ Fattovich and Bard, 2001.

Abunä Libanos in Däräqa.¹⁷ If we associate these Aksumite stuff to the rock-hewn church, we may postulate that the church may belong to the Aksumite period. The unfinished rock-cut feature in Aksum was designated by the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition team as *Grabnische*.¹⁸ There is no concrete evidence to call this feature ‘rock-cut tomb’ as many have chosen to call it;¹⁹ looking at its nature of carving and the size, supported by the local legend, this feature may well have been intended for a church. The cliff was first chiselled out to form a smooth surface for an area of about 10 m wide by 3 m deep; in the middle of this face of the cliff, a wall of 2.5 m high was cut out to form an entrance within which another niche was cut with 1 m depth, 2.3 m width and 1 meter in height.²⁰ As this rock-cut feature in Aksum is the only example, it should be reconsidered its intended purpose.

The main stelae field in Aksum has revealed several underground rock-cut tombs, almost 10 meters below the present surface level dated to between first and fourth centuries.²¹ Apart from rock-cut tombs, there are built underground tombs in Aksum such as those of the famous tombs of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl, the tomb of False Door and the Mausoleum. They are generally dated to second to late fifth century.²² Such built tombs also revealed the high-level technique of construction and quarrying of the stones from the mother rock in Gobo Dura and in the vicinity of Aksum town. The quarrying of stones for construction is not surprising; Aksumites had also quarried the largest single block for the purpose of stela; this stela finally measures 33 metres in height and 560 tons of weight. It is not only the engineering of quarrying, designing and construction of that surprises us, but also the use of strong tools by the Aksumites to cut such hard granite stone. Therefore, the culture of stone carving and designing was in place since the pre-Aksumite time and continued throughout the post-Aksumite as witnessed on the rock-hewn churches of Təgray and Lalibäla.

¹⁷ Anfray, 1970.

¹⁸ Littmann, Krencker and Lupke, 1913, II.

¹⁹ E.g., Littmann, Krencker and Lupke, 1913; Phillipson, 1997; Fattovich, Bard, Petrassi, *et al.*, 2000.

²⁰ Phillipson, 1997.

²¹ Chittick, 1974; Munro-Hay, 1989; Phillipson, 2000.

²² Chittick, 1974; Phillipson, 2000.

3. – *Chronology of the rock-hewn churches*

3.a. Literary sources

According to local tradition, majority of the rock-hewn churches of northern Ethiopia are attributed to the fourth to sixth cent. mainly associating their date of construction with Kings Abrəha and Ašbəha, Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl. Although the connection of the rock-hewn churches to the Aksumite period is visible in terms of their architecture, it is also a prestige to attribute to early dates. This kind of tradition continues even to the Lasta area, except those in Lalibäla which are attributed to King Lalibäla of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. Indeed, one of the legacies of Aksumite Empire to the post-Aksumite period is its architectural heritage revealed on the rock-hewn churches of Təgray and Lasta. The rock-hewn church of Abrəha and Ašbəha is one of the most famous churches attributed to Kings Abrəha and Ašbəha, kings of the Aksumite Empire during the fourth cent. C.E. Further south in Lasta, many of the rock-hewn churches outside Lalibäla are attributed to King Kaleb, king of Aksumite Empire during the sixth century.²³

Some parishes even attribute the origin of their rock-cut church to the very early conversion of King ʿEzana during the first half of 4th cent. The recently reported church of Michael Gundo on the southern side of the Gärcalta mountains is believed to have been carved in 333 C.E. According to the local tradition, tools used to carve the church were produced at a locality called Dogol. Inside the church there are rock arts on one side of the rock-cut suggesting the site was a pre-historic cave (rock shelter) with rock art and later modified and expanded to make a church.²⁴ The rock hewn church of Abba Sälama in Deguča Tämben is believed to have been carved during the time of *Abba Sälama*, the first patriarch of Ethiopia after his appointment by the Alexandrian church bishop Athanasius around 335 C.E.²⁵ Rare churches may have been attributed to their founder as in the case of Abba Yoḥanni, a magnificent rock-cut church dated to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth cent., substantiated by comparative studies of its architecture and art.²⁶

Art and architecture specialists have painstakingly attempted to understand the origin and chronology of these Təgray monumental rock-hewn

²³ Hiluf Berhe, 2015 E.C.

²⁴ Hailay, 2018.

²⁵ Phillipson, 2009; Sergew Hable Sellase, 1972; Munro-Hay, 1991; Munro-Hay, 1997.

²⁶ Gnisci and Villa, 2022.

churches. All of these rock-cut churches of Təgray are semi-monolithic, possibly due to their nature of location that they are hollowed out on the cliff of big mountains. Scholars such as Gerster (1970), Buxton (1971), Plant (1985), Lepage and Mercier (2005), Lepage (2006), Phillipson (2009) etc. have published about the art and architecture of the rock-hewn churches and tried to establish a chronology. Though, these scholars have not reached at similar conclusion about the date. In fact, there cannot be single year for the start and finish of the rock carving project in this ‘Abiy ‘Addi–Aşbi Wämbärta belt; it is obvious that the process of churches construction was continuous. But it appears clear that it was a certain period project (although some continued to be constructed after the twelfth cent.) in this specific area that may range from the seventh to the twelfth cent. C.E.

According to Lepage (2006), this region of Təgray with the highest concentration of rock-cut churches than anywhere in Ethiopia had established a local political and economic power. After the Aksumite Empire lost its access to international trade due to loss of the port of Adulis on the Red Sea, the economy and military of the Empire were destabilized.²⁷ The area of eastern Təgray became a new impetus for trade link and churches construction. This region is located between the axis of north-south (Red Sea to central Ethiopia highland) and the east-west (the Afar salt and the central highland Təgray) trade routes.²⁸ According to sources, the presence of Muslim communities was attested from K^wiḥa, 10 km east of Mäqälä, the capital of Təgray. The Arabic inscriptions were legibly dated to the late tenth century.²⁹ On another route, Muslim infiltration to Ethiopia from the north via Dahlak islands on the Red Sea is dated to the early tenth cent. C.E. This route is believed to have passed to south along the eastern Təgray route.³⁰ However, the entry of Muslim traders to northern Ethiopia shall not be considered as a sole and basic contributing criteria for the trade establishment in eastern Təgray. The rock-carving project may not be directly linked to and solely based on the factor of trade links with Muslim traders after the tenth century. Other factors shall be explicated for the reasons of the construction of such massive-size and large number of rock-hewn churches in this specific region of Təgray. Because accord-

²⁷ Kobishchanov, 1979; Munro-Hay, 1991; Phillipson, 1998.

²⁸ Muehlbauer, 2021.

²⁹ Loiseau, Dorso, Gleize, *et al.* 2021.

³⁰ Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, 2004.

ing to sources, many of the churches may have been carved well before the tenth century.³¹

According to the geological study of Asfawossen Asrat (2002) and Asfawossen Asrat, Metasebia Demissie, Aberra Mogessie (2008), the area under discussion may have been chosen due to the geology of the area and workability of the stone. The sandstone is very soft to work on than the granite stone around Aksum or basalt stone elsewhere. The region where these churches are located is generally mountainous, rising to an altitude of 2400 metres in the west to 2800 metres in the east above sea level. According to Asfawossen Asrat, Metasebia Demissie, Aberra Mogessie (2008), the sandstone deposition is 300 to 700 meters thick. The sandstone is red in color showing facades and sharp cliff. This creates convenience to the church builders to hollow several meters of width and height inside the rock. Additional factor for the choice of this region for the rock-hewn churches would be the general southward shift of the political power in Təgray. It may have been considered a safe place being far from the sea, but also the environment may have been relatively better in this region due to its distance from the ancient centres of Aksum and Yəḥa. Phillipson (2009) added that the area of Ḥaramat under its local rulers may have resisted the later Zag^we rulers from entering the region. This is an indication that the region of the rock-hewn churches was politically and economically at good status under local rulers. But then when was the churches' construction? Could there be other possible motives for the concentration of such churches in this region?

Lepage (2006), based on several comparative analysis, stresses that the general date of the Təgray rock-hewn churches could be considered between eighth and twelfth cent. C.E. One of his arguments is that use of chancels found in the rock-hewn churches of Təgray disappeared by the 12th cent. due to the absence on the churches of Lalibäla. The Təgray rock-hewn churches have combined both secular Aksumite and Mediterranean ecclesiastic architecture.³² Lepage and Mercier (2005) argued that some of the rock-hewn churches may even date from the seventh cent. C.E. Their best example of such rock-hewn churches is that of Səllase Dəgum, where a funerary hypogeum of non-Christian context was expanded into a church. Others have also explained that the employment of Aksumite architecture by the rock-hewn churches is a good support to explain that the rock-carving was a continuum

³¹ Phillipson, 2009; Lepage and Mercier, 2005.

³² Finneran, 2009.

process after the demise of Aksumite Empire.³³ Scant available written sources indicated that by the mid-twelfth cent. C.E., the metropolitan Mikaʼel has constructed many churches, one of them Mikaʼel ፤mba; during his headship, 27,000 priests and 50,000 persons were ordained and baptized, respectively.³⁴

The study of the architectural style alone cannot solve the problem of the date of the churches unless supported by supplementary evidence. The surrounding area where the rock-hewn churches are found demands different method of approach in order to answer the chronology of the churches. Philipson (2004) pointed out that the study of rock-hewn churches shall not be left solely to art and architecture specialists; the use of archaeological methods would improve the enigma of the chronology of Təgray rock-hewn churches. As can be understood from the thus-far available literature concerning the chronology of the churches, scholars have suffered and wandered a lot to unfold the chronology of rock-hewn churches of Təgray. Though, art-historians and architects have remarkably tried to reconstruct the general chronology of the churches; however, almost all of them missed basic questions about the churches: who were the architects and who carved the rocks? What tools were used to carve these magnificent and large number of churches? What was the source of the tools (traded or locally made)? Was there certain skilled (specialized) community to produce the tools? How was the process of rock carving carried out? Without concrete evidence, the explanation about chronology and nature of carving would be an estimated work. With these questions in mind, I will disclose my preliminary result and future direction of research using archaeological evidences.

3.b. Archaeological sources

Lepage and Mercier (2005) had attempted to collect pottery fragment from Səllase Dəgum and estimated its dates to be between the sixth and the tenth centuries; there is no clue whether this pottery was found by chance or by planned survey. The relationship between the pottery and the rock-hewn church of Səllase Dəgum is also unclear. However, systematic survey for archaeological material related to the rock-hewn churches is a skipped approach. This gap may have been mainly due to the lack of multi-disciplinary team composition arising from either lack of awareness or null expectation for archaeological material on the ground.

³³ Finneran, 2007.

³⁴ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020.

Finneran (2009) had also raised the significance of archaeological approach in studying the rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla. It is very recently, however, that the practical engagement of archaeological method for the study of rock-hewn churches is applied. A pioneering French team worked on the rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla to see the sequencing of the churches beyond the legends and other manuscript sources. The research did not stop at searching for the phases of rock-carving, but also examined on the chip material of the churches to see the chronology, and social and economic mobilization. The chip material has been forgotten; but this team solved by discovering the dumping place of the chip, and artifacts that could be associated with the chip to explain about the use of tools and even to make absolute dating about the churches' chronology.³⁵ Archaeological approach to the study of the rock-hewn churches of Lalibäla resolved the problem of dating and the technical and architectural development. These questions can hardly be answered using only documents. Detail analysis of the phasing on the site revealed that an earlier society occupied the area of Lalibäla before the churches were carved as evidenced from a structure overlain by the chip material of the rock-hewn churches. The rock-hewn churches themselves were transformed from an earlier hypogeum. The site of Lalibäla is thus dated to the tenth cent. according to the so-far available data while the rock-hewn churches were dated to twelfth to thirteenth centuries.³⁶

In the case of Təgray, the archaeological method is not employed perhaps due to the dispersed and inaccessible location of the rock-hewn churches. The archaeological evidences for the rock-hewn churches could be multi-fold: the chip material of the churches, sequenced phase of rock-carving, pottery, tools such as iron and wooden handles used for carving. Particularly overlooked is the technology used to carve such large number of monumental churches. How were they carved? What types of tools did they use to carve and smooth the rock? How did they initiate the plan of the rock-carving? Is it from earlier hypogea or a natural cave? Or a newly initiated plan? These and other questions must be answered to fully understand the history and chronology of the rock-hewn churches and their builders

³⁵ Fauvelle-Aymar, Bruxelles, Mensan, *et al.* 2010.

³⁶ Bosc-Tiessé, Derat, Bruxelles *et al.*, 2014.

3.c. The iron production sites and their association with the rock-hewn churches

In 2018 an archaeological excavation has been conducted by Mekelle University directed by the author. The objective was to prevent the expansion of construction in the vicinity. During the three weeks of excavation, trenches were mainly laid out on the iron slag surface to see the depth and sequence of deposition. The 2018 excavation revealed high concentration of iron slag deposited to the depth of 150 cm on the western sector of the site although the bottom layer was not reached, while in the south sector the site seems to have been highly eroded. In trench number 5, fragments of *tuyér* and burnt surface was recorded. Trench 6 yielded a small-sized metal fastener (joint). The result of this excavation opened a way for multidisciplinary research and large-scale excavation. As a result, excavation continued in 2020, this time on a ruined structure.³⁷ In the ruined structure, other tools such as clay mould, iron nails, iron pendant and cross, as well as half-broken iron cup were recovered. The rooms also revealed heap of ash demonstrating the building was used for metal workshop while the iron smelting process took place to the west of the building. By combining these data, a conclusion is reached; the site was an Aksumite site with an Aksumite type building but later (very likely after the decline of Aksum) the site was converted into iron production.³⁸

Shortly prior to the Gud Bahri excavation, Jane Humphris conducted a test excavation at Maryam Kadih and Maryam Taqot, some 10km and 45km north of Gud Bahri, respectively, on iron slag sites.³⁹ Although no complete publication of this text excavation is available, Humphris, based on the deposited pottery from the trenches, estimated the site to belong to pre-Aksumite and Aksumite period. As pointed out earlier, the area of Maryam Taqot is known for its early funerary hypogea and an Aksumite ruined structure overlain by later church. In the valley of the Gär 'alta mountains at a specific place called Dogol, more than 10 iron slag sites were reported; according to the charcoal samples taken from the iron slags, C14 dating analysis revealed that the sites belong to the ninth to twelfth cent. C.E. (Hailay, 2020, table 1). Other sites with concentration of iron slag located close to the rock-hewn churches of Abrəha wä-²Aṣbəha, °Abiy °Addi, Aṣbi Wämbārta, and Ḥawzen have been reported to the author by residents during excavation in Gud Bahri.

³⁷ Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha, *et al.*, 2020.

³⁸ Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha, *et al.*, 2020.

³⁹ Humphris, 2017.

Table 1: Radiocarbon dates from Dogol archaeological site (source: Hailay 2020)

AA number	Sample number	95% calibrated date
AA112052	DGL 1	1036 calAD to 1164 calAD
AA112053	DGL S2	1036 calAD to 1160 calAD
AA112054	DGL S3	898 calAD to 1019 calAD

Indeed, the iron production sites were established to produce iron tools; what were these iron tools for? Iron tools could be produced for agriculture, domestic use, personal tools, war arms, and for rock-carving.⁴⁰ The most important issue in this case is confirm that the iron production sites were mainly producing tools for rock-carving attested from their location being close to the rock-hewn churches and the correlation of the date between the iron production sites (according to C14) and the general chronology of the rock-hewn churches (based on art and architectural comparison). Charcoal samples collected from the iron slag deposition and the iron tools on top of the Aksumite building yielded a span of period from early seventh to early eleventh cent. (table 2).⁴¹ This is a prove that iron was produced for over four centuries. This date generally fits with the supposed chronology of the rock-hewn churches. It is an indication that the rock-carving project took long span of time possibly due to limited man power for the rock-carving and iron smelting, limited supply of tools (as the production may have required large quantity of iron ore and charcoal to produce small iron bar), and difficulty of terrain as most of the churches are located on very difficult cliff and mountain tops. But it should also be noted that the massive size of the churches may have required longer time, large manpower, efficient, large number, and different types of iron tools.

Table 2: Radiocarbon dates from Gud Bahri archaeological site (source: Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha, *et al.*, 2020).

Reference	Trench	Layer from surface level in cm	Lab number	Date (BP)	Calibrated interval
Mek115-6-18	06	30	UCIAMS-219107	1165±15	776-945
Mek2 12-6-18	04	100	UCIAMS-219082	1225±15	713-880
Mek3 11-6-18	05	30	UCIAMS-219083	1220±15	720-880

⁴⁰ Robion-Brunner, Hiluf Berhe, Alebachew Belay, 2024.

⁴¹ Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha, *et al.*, 2020.

Mek4 7-6-18	05	50	UCIAMS-219084	1310+15	661-765
Mek5 12-6-18	02	80	UCIAMS-219085	1425+20	597-655
T4_n_7	04	110	Poz-122470	1310+30	656-769
T4_n_4	02	75	Poz-122471	1085+30	894-1016

The knowledge of rock carving and iron tools production may have been continued from at the latest the Aksumite period as recent reports about archaeological sites around Aksum demonstrate that Aksumites may have been producing iron locally for rock-carving and other purposes.⁴² The technique of rock carving was also in place since the pre-Aksumite period. The iron production sites were located close to the rock-hewn churches; these areas are also rich in iron ore and water. The geological study for the iron production site of Gud Baḥri proved that the source of iron ore is located right on the edge of the iron smelting site.⁴³ The source of iron ore for the site of Dogol was quarried from the lower layer of a sandstone rock where an iron-bearing hematite line was visible.⁴⁴

A survey at the rock hewn church of Abrəha wä-²Aṣbəha in Eastern Tigray has revealed that a metal fastener used to fix the door timbers of the church was similar to a metal fastener discovered from Gud Baḥri archaeological site (Fig. 3). Similar metal fastener has been discovered from the sixth-century site of Dungur.⁴⁵ According to the so far available information, the iron production sites in the belt under discussion are located close to the rock-hewn churches, not only because of, very likely, high demand for tools for churches carving, but also the availability of iron ore in this geology. But then, what is the status of the iron production after twelfth century?

We have seen the association between the rock-hewn churches and the iron production sites. Another area of archaeological method overlooked concerning the rock-hewn churches is the chip material from the churches. The archaeological approach employed for Lalibāla rock-hewn churches needs similarly to be applied to the rock-hewn churches of Təgray. As is true in for the Lalibāla churches, Təgray rock-hewn churches must have dumped large quantity of chip material. Although the nature of sandstone is fragile and may

⁴² Robion-Brunner, Hiluf Berhe, Alebachew Belay, 2024.

⁴³ Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha, *et al.*, 2020: see also Asfawossen Asrat, 2002 for the general geology of Təgray.

⁴⁴ Hamphris, per comm. 2018 during field visit to the site.

⁴⁵ Anfray, 2013.

have been usually turning into dust, it is still essential to investigate the chip site as other artifacts such as worn out and broken tools, pottery, and wooden handles used during the rock excavation could have been dumped together with the chip. This chip would help to understand not only the sequence of the rock carving, but also the time and energy consumed, types of tools used, and datable evidences such as pottery and charcoal. Archaeological approach for the Təgray rock-hewn churches shall be treated independently for each church due to their diversified nature of topography and location. Furthermore, experimental research on the iron production will help to explain the consumption of iron tools by the rock-hewn churches.

4. – *Discussion and concluding remarks*

The decline of Aksumite Empire may have paved a good way for the Coptic church in Alexandria to focus on rock-carving project in Təgray and later in Lalibāla in order to expand the religion so that the society would maintain its social bond through the faith against the possible expansion of Islam which was already dominant in Egypt and infiltrating to Təgray via the Red Sea and the eastern desert by the late tenth century.⁴⁶ The metropolitan Michael of mid-twelfth cent. is an example; he consecrated several churches and ordained thousands of priests and deacons.⁴⁷

The intension of attributing churches to the early Aksumite kings is to increase the prestige of the church by connecting to the Aksumite history. Indeed, the churches have excellently incorporated the Aksumite architecture which makes them appear so elegant and attractive. This living history and landscape of the churches has a lot of wonder to tell the world. On the other hand, the debate on the date of construction of these rock-hewn churches is still an ongoing issue although a wide range of chronology seems to be established. Scholars were not able to see the other issues of the rock-hewn churches: above all how and by what tools these churches were carved is a skipped agenda. It is by searching for the rock carvers, the technique of carving, and the tools used to carve the solid rock that will help us establish the date of the rock-hewn churches.

In order to answer the social, political and cultural history of this so called ‘dark age’ in the north, we need to revisit the period with archaeological approach; the iron production sites recently revealed at several places and the

⁴⁶ Loiseau, Dorso, Gleize, *et al.* 2021; Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch, 2004.

⁴⁷ Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2020.

rock-hewn churches abundant in Təgray will help to answer who the people were, how the political and social organization was during that span of time between seventh and twelfth cent., the economic and political status of the local lords. If the state was military and politically weak, it is possible to hypothesise that the church may have been powerful enough to convince local lords and mobilize the population to construct carve churches out a solid rock.

On the other hand, despite this belt was mainly favoured for its geological suitability,⁴⁸ issues concerning the human requirement, technology, and the engineers are not assessed. A comparative analysis shall be made whether these rock-hewn churches were carved due to their less human requirement, to escape any destruction from a competing religion or political rivals, or it is due to scarcity of resources such as wood, grass, and other accessories. The carving of a rock-hewn church may be carried out by few skilled people or monks, but it may have involved large number of persons for the transportation of the chipped material out of the church under construction and dump it at a reasonable distance. I can also argue that rock-carving was a state and church sponsored project; this is very clear from the perspective of iron production which appears that such time and energy consuming task may have involved large number of populations during the iron smelting. Iron production requires the construction of furnaces, quarrying the iron ore from sources, crushing iron ore into a size that fits to the mouth of the furnace, charcoal production, water supply, and metalwork. Such mass production of iron may have been associated with a demand for tools for rocks carving.

The rock-carving project in Təgray continued southward until it terminated in Lalibäla by the twelfth–thirteenth centuries. The kings of Lalibäla not only copied the Təgray churches architecture, but also may have employed artisans from Təgray where the culture of rock-carving and the incorporation of Aksumite architecture has been inherited. King Lalibäla is considered as a king and Saint, which may suggest that the church had an upper hand influencing kings to become Saintly leaders. As a final remark, it appears that there was no gap between Aksum and Lalibäla; Lalibäla could be part of the rock carving project in Təgray. It is now certain that the so-called Zag^we dynasty had no administration centre in Lalibäla before the tenth cent. other than what we know the rock-hewn churches of the twelfth–thirteenth centuries⁴⁹—a continuation work of the post-Aksumite rock carving project in Təgray. The purpose and architecture of the Lalibäla churches can not be detached from the

⁴⁸ Phillipson, 2009.

⁴⁹ See Derat's contribution in this volume.

Təgray rock-hewn churches. Geographically, Lalibāla is the result of the southward retreat of the declining state in Təgray; chronologically, Lalibāla rock-hewn churches are prolongation of Təgray rock-hewn churches project.

To conclude, with the decline of the Aksumite Empire, the declining state must have been engaged on religious expansion/rock carving—a shift from political power into religious importance. In order to achieve the project of rock carving, high quality and mass production of iron tools must have been necessary. To meet this demand, the production of metal objects locally was a solution, although the knowledge could have been there even during the Aksumite period. But it doesn't mean that the purpose of iron production is solely to meet the demand for rock carving—tools may also have been manufactured for agricultural purpose, domestic use, and army. Only archaeological research will answer these issues with material evidence.

Finally, I would like to recommend that an archaeological excavation needs to be carried out around the rock-hewn churches of Təgray to find the chipped stone from the mother rock in order to find associated evidence for dating and to analyse the labour and time cost of carving a single church. Worn-out and broken tools could have been thrown into/damped with the chipped stone, as is the case in Lalibāla. Archaeological survey shall be conducted between the Late-Aksumite site of Məfsas Bahri,⁵⁰ located on the southwestern edge of lake Hashenge in southern Təgray, and Lalibāla to connect the history and cultural traces on the surface and fill the missing gap between southern Təgray and Lalibāla.

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⁵⁰ Gaudiello and Yule, 2017.

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Fig. 1a: Belt showing concentration of rock-hewn churches between °Abiy °Addi on the west and Aşbi on the east. Source: <https://earth.google.com/web/>

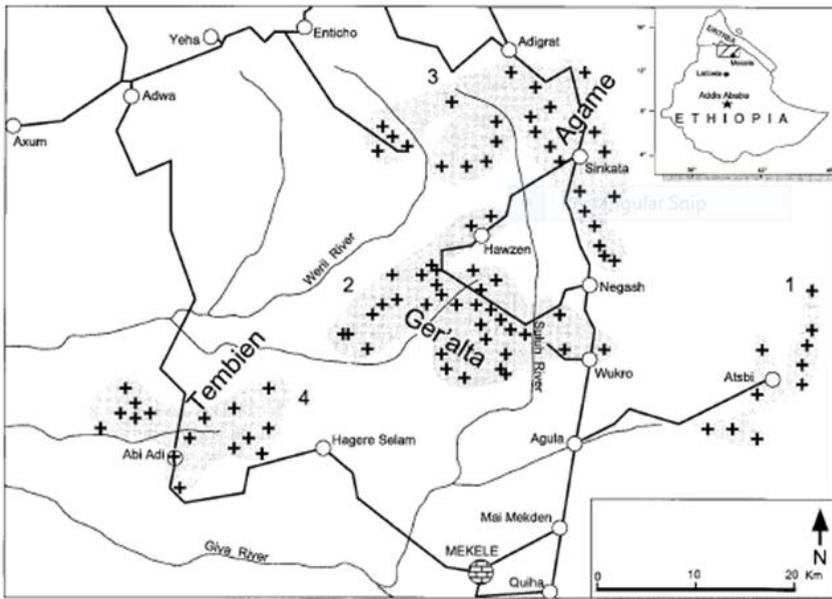


Fig. 1b: Distribution of the rock-hewn churches of Təgray.
Source: Asfawossen Asrat, 2002, p. 651.



Fig. 2a-b: Aksumite-style window friezes in rock-hewn churches in Təgray.
Source: Phillipson, 2009.

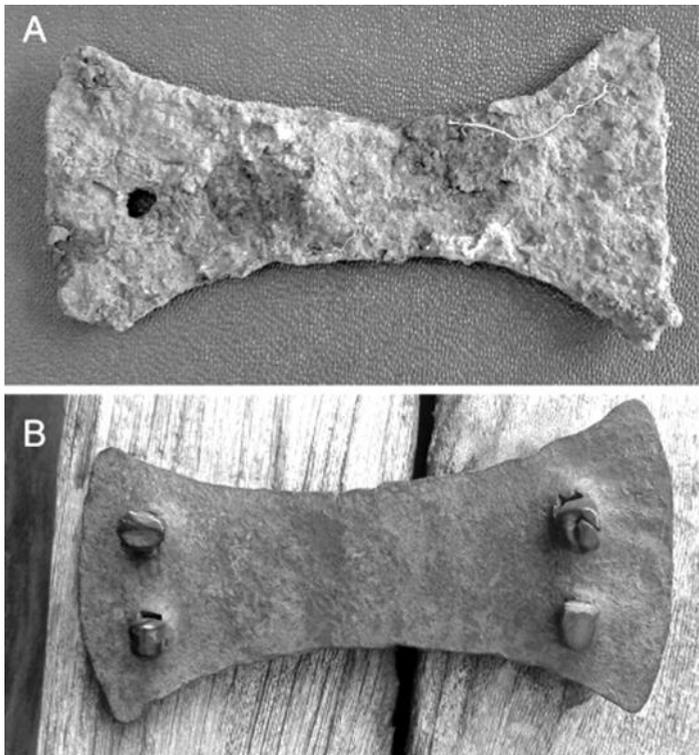


Fig. 3: Metal clamps from: (A) Gud Bahri archaeological site (Hiluf Berhe, Mulata Haftu, Senait Abrha *et al.*, 2020); (B) Abrəha wäʿAšbəħa rock-hewn church.
Photo by Hiluf Berhe.



Fig. 4: Metal clamp from Dungur palace, Aksum (Anfray, 2012, Planche LXX 2).

DENIS NOSNITSIN

***Ethiopian Scribes and the Re-Creation of Ancient Documents:
MS UM-035/C₃-IV-83 “King Ṭāntūwādām’s Register” revisited****

1. – *Introduction*

Over many years, scholars have been intrigued by the problem of the so-called Zag^we dynasty. The dynasty is believed to have usurped the supreme power in Ethiopia sometime after the fall of the Aksumite Kingdom and to have ruled until 1270, at which point the Solomonic dynasty was reinstalled. Quite a few studies have been dedicated to the analysis and evaluation of all written sources—both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian—relevant to the Zag^we period. The number of these sources has been slowly growing, but it still remains limited. Zag^we-related studies have been carried out on various material types, also in other fields such as archaeology and ethno-history. However, it seems fair to say that, despite the significant progress,¹ we are still far from getting a picture of the period with the same coherence and clarity as, for in-

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¹ Cf. at least Derat, 2018; Bausi, 2018; Valieva, 2020; Valieva, 2023; on the Zag^we dynasty in general see also “Zag^we” in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), pp. 107a–14a (by G. Fiaccadori).

stance, that which has been obtained for the fourteenth/fifteenth-century Ethiopia.

The present article deals with the manuscript known as ʿUra Qirqos UM-035 (/C₃-IV-83)² (see Fig. 1). The small-size codex³ of eleven folia in two quires only, with no proper binding, is kept in the church ʿUra Qirqos (East Tigray, the district Gulo Mākāda) where it was first seen by European researchers in 2004. The manuscript contains eleven short documents,⁴ concerning lands and tributes, written consecutively by the same hand, as a kind of cartulary. These documents are believed to have been issued by Ṭāntāwədəm, one of the Zagwe kings (ruled sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century), for the ʿUra Mäsqäl (Qəfrəya ʿUra Mäsqäl) church located not far from ʿUra Qirqos and closely related to it historically. Henceforth, the collection will be referred to as “The Register” (following the designation “King Ṭāntāwədəm’s Register” used in Valieva 2023).

Soon after the discovery, the content of the small manuscript attracted the attention of scholars. It was clear from the outset that the manuscript is not contemporary to the assumed time of Ṭāntāwədəm’s reign. However, despite the relatively recent age of the manuscript, scholars tend to think that the land documents draw upon authentic land grants issued by King Ṭāntāwədəm sometime in the twelfth century, or are actually a (more or less faithful) copy of them.⁵ The original document(s) did not survive.

Scholars, including myself, have put forward proposals concerning the production time of MS UM-035, mostly pointing to the eighteenth century.

² In other publications the manuscript has been given various designations. The shelfmark UM-035 was assigned by the project Ethio-SPaRe (see above). The project team photographed the largest part of the manuscript collection of ʿUra Qirqos in 2010–14. The signature C₃-IV-83 had been assigned to the manuscript by the local Ethiopian authority in charge of the preservation of historical heritage. The online description and the images of the manuscript can be consulted in the database of the project Beta maṣāḥəft (<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/ESum035/main> [by N. Valieva, accessed 06.12.2024]). It is based on the older preliminary version in the Ethio-SPaRe database (https://mycms-vs03.rz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_document_00002262 [by D. Nosnitsin, accessed 06.12.2024]).

³ Ca. 120 mm × 95 mm, the data on the size slightly vary.

⁴ Following the recent edition, Valieva, 2023. For a brief history of the discovery and the study of the manuscript and its content and the availability of the images, see Valieva, 2020 and Bausi, 2023 (esp. p. 313, fn. 13).

⁵ Bausi, 2023, p. 314, admitting the extreme obscurity of the language of “The Register”, speaks of a twelfth-century (Zag^we) chancellery and its standards which the compiler of “The Register” must have followed.

Although this dating is presented with no elaboration and at times may be accompanied by a question mark denoting a degree of uncertainty, it has generally been considered as reasonable and, thus far, not disputed.⁶

Despite the presence of a number of studies on MS UM-035, one essential aspect has barely been attended to up to now. There has been no attempt to examine the 18th-century production of MS UM-035 and its context. Research has instead focused primarily on the content in relation to the remote time of the hypothetical original document(s). The present article seeks to begin filling this lacuna through an enquiry into the scribal hand attested in MS UM-035, and the scribe's identity.

2. – *Palaeography and the study of Ethiopic manuscripts*

2.a. Application of Ethiopic palaeography

The importance of Ethiopic palaeography as one of the main disciplines of Ethiopic manuscript studies is hardly in doubt,⁷ but the vast potential of the handwriting in Ethiopic manuscripts for providing a real source of information has only been exploited partially, and has been restricted to a limited range of questions. It is commonly recognized that students of Ethiopic texts need

⁶ Cf. Derat, 2018, pp. 32–33, “Aucun colophon ne permet de dater le document et aucune notation au texte ne situe la période à laquelle cette copie a été exécutée. Il est certain que nous n’avons pas à faire à un manuscrit très ancien. Les manuscrits antérieurs au XIV^e siècle présentent notamment une écriture monumentale ... Tel n’est pas le cas de l’écriture de notre manuscrit. Mais il pourrait s’agir d’une calligraphie locale que l’on ne sait pas distinguer voire d’une écriture plus ancienne que l’on ne sait pas spécifier car, après tout, nous n’avons pas de point de comparaison pour l’époque de Ṭaṇṭawedem. Toutefois, j’ai pris le parti de penser que ce document nous était conservé sous une copie récente (XVIII^e siècle?). Ce que impose d’établir, par une critique interne du texte, l’authenticité de la donation de Ṭaṇṭawedem” (cf. a preliminary dating proposal in Derat, 2010, p. 26, “une copie tardive, après le XVI^e siècle (?), d’un manuscrit plus ancien”). The preliminary online description in the database of the project Ethio-SPaRe refers to the first half of the eighteenth century as proposed dating; it is slightly modified into early eighteenth century in Nosnitsin, 2020, p. 282, fn. 1). Bausi, 2018, does not take any stance regarding the palaeography and dating of MS UM-035. In Valieva, 2020 both proposals “18th century” and “from 1700 to 1750” are mentioned, and in Valieva, 2023, p. 134 it is modified to a single “18th/19th century”, following the author’s presentation at the conference “From Aksum to Lalibāla ...” (on 1 March 2023) which became the basis for this study. Also, see Valieva, 2023, p. 151 on the possible *terminus post quem* for MS UM-035 being the year 1654, which is still distant, as we will see, from the real production period for MS UM-035.

⁷ See “Palaeography” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 101a–04b (by S. Uhlig and A. Bausi) and Bausi, Nosnitsin, 2015.

some palaeographical skills to read the manuscripts correctly and estimate production dates for them. Indeed, a large number of Ethiopic manuscripts offers virtually no clue to their production dates save through the properties of the handwriting, assigning to palaeography therefore a significant role, particularly in the field of manuscript cataloguing.⁸ For the purpose of dating, the handwriting should undergo a kind of a formal analysis, focused on identifying distinctive features to help assign the manuscript to a distinct period in time.⁹ Some peculiarities of punctuation signs and orthographic features may serve the same end. To sum up, the palaeographical discourse in Ethiopic manuscript studies is clearly dominated by the issue of dating manuscripts,¹⁰ with a handful of the oldest manuscripts being given greater attention.¹¹ Otherwise, palaeographical analysis rarely plays an essential role in any other type of research tasks.

2.b. Methodological issue: identification of scribal hands

Identification of scribal hands¹² is considered to be one of palaeography's classical assignments, though it is not always recalled as such¹³ and rarely studied or conceptualised as a separate research method.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it emerges in various formats, as a significant task in the course of research on manuscripts and texts. It may be carried out for a small-scale case study, but at times can be used as a method for the systematic study of a manuscript culture and the relevant written tradition. In some cases the question of attributing manuscripts to scribal hands amounts to an important research problem and

⁸ Palaeographical evaluation with the purpose of dating a manuscript is always conducted by cataloguers, yet in most cases is not explained in detail. Dating suggestions are offered as conclusions only and in the absence of any supporting arguments (more articulated palaeographical descriptions can be from time to time found in other studies, cf., for instance, Villa, 2019, or Knibb, 2015).

⁹ In many cases the proposed dating is tacitly coordinated with "palaeographical periods" as exposed in the studies Uhlig, 1988 and Uhlig, 1990, deemed instrumental for the task.

¹⁰ One of the rare exceptions may be topics such as the history of the Ethiopic script and writing system, or a very peculiar research question as presented in Bausi, 2021 (explaining a passage in an epigraphic source through the help of the handwriting attested in a manuscript).

¹¹ Cf. the recent bibliography in Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020, pp. 147–48, fn 62.

¹² That is, establishing that the handwriting X in manuscript 1 and handwriting Y in manuscript 2 should be attributed to the same person.

¹³ Cf. Bianconi, 2015, pp. 267–70; see a recent reassertion in Stutzmann, Tensmeyer, Christlein, 2020, p. 12.

¹⁴ Wagendorfer, 2015, [1].

receives greater attention.¹⁵ It may be implemented for a range of research purposes, from proving the authenticity of a scribal hand and studies of manuscript collections and scriptoria, to achieving a more precise dating and/or localising of the manuscript.¹⁶ Conclusions achieved for one specific manuscript may provide points of reference that may be applied to a group of manuscripts identified as products of the same scribal hand. Depending on the material available as well as research aims, a purely palaeographical profile of a scribe may be enriched with other data, for the purpose of looking at an individual writer in his/her original social, cultural, political or economic contexts.

Identification of scribal hands goes alongside the analysis of handwritings for dating purposes, but they are obviously not the same. Both need to describe handwritings; for identification of scribal hands, the basic technique is the comparison of handwriting samples (*Schriftvergleich*). Evaluation of the general appearance of a handwriting¹⁷ can be a good starting point and may immediately provide a hint indicating whether or not a more detailed analysis on the level of the shapes of individual letters and other elements of the writing system should be attempted. Should that be the case, the importance therein, for instance, may be contained in tiny elements of the script, or revealed by those which the scribe carries out less consciously, or elements most unlikely to be imitated.¹⁸ In some cases the result of the hand identification may be

¹⁵ It is enough to recall the long and very detailed discussion on the scribal hands attested in Nag Hammadi codices, summarized in Lundhaug, 2022; or on the scribes of Oxyrhynchus (Johnson, 2004). Among a few other relevant studies of a smaller scale, approaching in one or another way the task of attribution of manuscripts to scribes, of which I recently came across are, for instance, Suci, 2011; Suci, 2014 (cf. Boud'Hors, 2020, p. 7); Valerio, 2020.

¹⁶ As is commonly known, in many cases a palaeographical enquiry may result in conclusions which have to be seriously considered. It is enough to recall the re-evaluation of the dating of some important Ethiopic manuscripts conducted by Sylvain Grébaud (1881–1955) who was the first to develop a more conscious approach to the Ethiopic script and systematic palaeographical analysis. In many other cases however, results may be too speculative or approximate. In fact, a palaeographical analysis can hardly lead to a very exact production date simply due to the specifics and complexity of the phenomenon of writing (cf. below). Dating on purely palaeographical grounds may result in a span at least as long as the active life of a scribe (and in the context of Ethiopian manuscript studies, the span of one century is still acceptable). Identification of the scribal hand may help to achieve a more precise dating.

¹⁷ Sometimes denoted by the term “aspect”.

¹⁸ Cf. Wagendorfer, 2015, [3].

very convincing, in others, inconclusive.¹⁹ Calligraphic hands of well-trained scribes may create more difficulties for identification than those of lesser trained scribes as the latter tend to be more idiosyncratic. Distinctive features taken into account for the dating of manuscripts can also be used here, though not necessarily. Conclusions based on palaeographical data may be supported with arguments related to the materiality of the manuscript, scribal practices, decorations, and evidence gained from written sources, or even linguistic evidence. At the same time, palaeographical data have their own value and should be neither tacitly discarded nor subdued in favour of other types of evidence.²⁰

As is the case with any other kind of palaeographical study, the identification of scribal hands requires access to physical manuscripts or their images in sufficient quality. However, the task itself should not be considered arduous. The analysis should not necessarily result in lengthy elaborations taking into account all aspects of the script and the writing system in its entirety. It should focus upon the most relevant elements, be well articulated, convincing enough and functional.²¹

In Ethiopic manuscript studies, statements on the identity or similarity of scribal hands may contain a few supporting arguments, but more frequently they do not.²² In my experience, I started to repeatedly deal with attributing

¹⁹ It is sometimes recalled that proposals of scribal identity, based upon palaeographical arguments only, have to be understood as hypotheses built upon the individual perception of the beholder, for which any final proof is unlikely.

²⁰ The procedure of identification of scribal hands may be questioned at many points. It has not been “codified” in either Ethiopic manuscripts studies or other fields. First of all, the notion of “identical handwritings” may not necessarily be always clear and undisputed. There are many factors modifying individual handwriting. For instance, the scribe’s natural aging process, illness, fatigue, or psychological condition at the moment of writing; the individual handwriting evolving due to acquired experience and proficiency; a conscious adopting of the new properties of the script; the influence of the handwriting in a model manuscript; the scribe’s own ability to modify his handwriting deliberately when needed (hurried writing of an additional text/marginal note vs careful execution of the main text); properties and quality of the scribal materials and instruments; evolution of the writing system, etc. All these and other factors interplay in the copying work, which is a complex process unfolding on many levels, and sometimes make the identification of scribal hands a difficult task.

²¹ As the palaeographical analysis in general, cf. Bianconi, 2015, p. 269 (1.3.).

²² It is true that the identity (= sameness) or close similarity of scribal hands may be obvious and does not need further explanation; yet, needless to say, in very many cases it is not so evident. Cf. Fiaccadori, 1993, pp. 168–69, an analysis of the important MS Pistoia Biblioteca Forteguerriana, Martini etiop. 5, where the author claims that the scribal hand that added caption(s) to a miniature is the same as the one that copied a part of the main text. The conclusion sup-

manuscripts to the scribes during the cataloguing of the manuscripts recorded by the Ethio-SPaRe project (see above). The project recorded groups of manuscripts in repositories located not far from each other, and here there may well have been more opportunities to encounter multiple products of the same scribe.²³

2.c. Questions concerning MS UM-035/C₃-IV-83

The present article aims at identifying the scribe who wrote MS UM-035. Hundreds of manuscripts from ecclesiastic collections around °Ura Mäsqäl were digitized and catalogued by the team of the project Ethio-SPaRe in 2010–15. Manuscripts with handwritings looking similar to that of MS UM-035 started to pop up, and finally it was possible to identify two more codices (UM-042, MSM-001) featuring handwriting strongly resembling that of the scribe of MS UM-035. My aim is to show, by the analysis and comparison of the handwritings carried out below,²⁴ that all three writings are products of the same scribe. Two newly identified witnesses will be crucial in answering the following questions concerning MS UM-035:

- 1) Is it possible to establish the identity of MS UM-035's scribe?
- 2) Is it possible to be more exact about the production time of MS UM-035, and the time when the scribe was active?
- 3) Is it possible to learn to which ecclesiastic institutions the scribe of MS UM-035 was affiliated?
- 4) Is it possible to say anything meaningful about the level of his scribal proficiency, social status and background?

ports the identification of the painter and the scribe as one person, Pāwlos, mentioned in the colophon, and in the caption on fol. 5v speaking of himself in the first person (cf. Balicka-Witakowska, Bausi, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.*, 2015, pp. 169–70, and other references). Cf. also Zarzeczny, 2015, pp. 507–08, 509; Six, Delamarier, Getatchew Haile, 2011, p. xxx; myself on a couple of occasions, such as Nosnitsin, 2022, p. 47.

²³ As a result, the researchers involved could develop a greater sensitivity towards the cases of similar or identical handwritings. Cf. Pisani, 2013, pp. 114–16 and Nosnitsin, 2013b (on the scribe Wäldä Muse who was active in Gulo Mākāda in the nineteenth century, and attribution to him of a number of manuscripts); Kelly, Nosnitsin, 2017 (identification of manuscripts written by the sixteenth-century monk Yoḥannəs of Qāntorare); Nosnitsin, 2015, pp. 44–45 (on the scribe who left notes in four manuscripts scattered over two collections located in Gulo Mākāda), etc.

²⁴ Mainly in subchapters 4.c, 4.d and 4.e, with fully-fledged discussion, and auxiliary material in the Appendix.

Answers to the questions above will contribute to our understanding of the important written source relevant to the Zag^we-period, thought to be old yet attested in a unique recent witness. Clarification of even small details concerning the materiality and production of MS UM-035 may represent a step forward in our understanding of its content.

3. – *A remark concerning the materiality of MS UM-035/C₃-IV-83*

The present article is an appropriate place to briefly remark on the quire structure of MS UM-035 as it also may be relevant for the palaeographical analysis to follow.

The studies of MS UM-035 are suggestive of occasional material loss and the resulting incompleteness of “The Register”.²⁵ Alessandro Bausi briefly discussed the quire structure of the manuscript, describing the first quire (fols 1–6) as ternion, and the second quire (fols 7–11) also as ternion in which the last leaf—the hypothetical fol. 12—was lost.²⁶ For a better understanding of the manuscript’s structure, we can consider one more feature indicative of the material coherency and completeness of the manuscript, thus far insufficiently addressed in all descriptions of MS UM-035. It is, namely, the adherence to the so-called Gregory’s Rule.²⁷ If we look at the positions of the hair and flesh sides of the folia, there is no irregularity and the sound structure of the first quire can be easily confirmed.²⁸ The counterparts leaf 1 (fol. 1) and leaf 6 (fol. 6) are now almost separate from one another (cf. Fig. 1), but all five transitions from verso to recto in the quire are smooth, obviously with no text breaks and leaves arrangement abiding by Gregory’s Rule.

The second quire presents some difficulties. On the available images we can see that Gregory’s Rule is very probably not followed between fol. 6v (hair) and fol. 7r (flesh),²⁹ at the boundary between the quires (see Fig. 2a–b),

²⁵ See Derat, 2018, p. 32 (“Le document n’est peut-être complet...”), on the basis of the evaluation of the text which ends, indeed, without the typical excommunication formula. However, she herself does not consider this feature to be a very strong argument

²⁶ See Bausi, 2018, p. 440a.

²⁷ The widespread medieval practice of arranging the quires and the entire text block of the parchment manuscript in such a way that flesh sides of the leaves would face flesh sides, and hair sides only hair sides.

²⁸ Represented schematically, it is h1f f2h h3f v f4h h5f f6h.

²⁹ Not clearly visible but still very probable: fol. 7r (flesh side) is of slightly lighter colour, a bit shiny, with ruling lines impressed deeply on the surface (because the flesh sides of the folia have been ruled), in contrast to fol. 6v (hair side), of somewhat darker colour, with the ruled

but the text continues smoothly.³⁰ We may assume that the manuscript maker neglected Gregory's Rule, by whatever reason.³¹

However, Gregory's Rule was obviously not followed also between fol. 7v (hair) and fol. 8r (flesh) (Fig. 3a–b).³² Here the smoothness of the text transition from one leaf to another (**ወ | ርደ ፣ መካን ፣ ዘአልቦ ፣** etc.) can be questioned.³³ At a closer look at the letters of the first word on fol. 8r it becomes clear that the reading **ወርደ ፣**³⁴ may be the first but perhaps not the only choice. A fuzzy and faint dot visible on the parchment to the right from the stem of the letter **ደ**, just below the ruled line (see Fig. 4a, marked with arrow), may represent the remains of the lower part of **ደ** (partly abraded as the other letters in the line). But it can also be just a particle of dirt or a small drop of ink. There is another possible reading of this letter which is **ደ**.³⁵ In this case, the word could be reconstructed as **ቅፍርደ ፣** followed by the word **መካን ፣**, meaning together, literally, “the place Qəfrəya”. This exact collocation refers to the church Qəfrəya ʿUra Masqal that appears in “The Register” as many as eight times (see two examples on Fig. 4b–c). This reading also seems to make sense

grid poorly visible but with some remains of the cut hair. These features are best visible on the images in the database “Mazgaba seelat”, <https://ethiopia.uts.utoronto.ca/about.html>.

³⁰ አውሰየን ፣ በመን | ገድ ፣ ዓግዓለ ፣, cf. Valieva, 2023, pp. 139 (text), 146 (tr.).

³¹ Transgression of Gregory's Rule seems to be a rare occurrence in Ethiopic manuscripts (cf. an old example in Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020, p. 136).

³² The ruling is impressed on fol. 8r, the flesh side, and hardly visible on fol. 7v, the sides are of slightly different colours, hair remains are still visible on fol. 7v (cf. above).

³³ It was not called into question in Derat, 2018, pp. 263, 269, the same in Valieva, 2023, pp. 139 (text), 147 (tr.). One must admit that the passage as it is does not necessarily raise suspicion of a text break (cf. the translation Valieva, 2023, p. 147, “Like this I donated as g^wəlt wells of highlands and lowlands, irrigation channels of spacious and sterile lands, (fol. 8r) *width of place* that has neither tribute nor forced labor that has neither compel nor confiscation...” [cursive mine, DN]). A closer look at the narrative structure of “The Register” goes beyond the scope of this study.

³⁴ The word ward “breadth, width” (see Leslau, 1987, p. 617) does exist in Ethiopic but appears to be rare, and is not common, at least according to my knowledge, in land documents. The entire genitive construction **ወርደ ፣ መካን ፣** is translated as “l'étendue du lieu” in Derat, 2018, p. 269, and “width of place” in Valieva, 2023, p. 147, without further elaboration; the passage was not found worth of further enquiry in Bausi, 2018 and Bausi, 2023

³⁵ The oblique stem of the letter **ደ** protrudes a bit further to the right, and the fourth-order vowel marker with serif at the end is attached to the stem on the left side, at sharp angle. **ደ** and **ደ** have a very similar graphic basis (close to **ደ**, both slightly left-sloping, contrary to the most other characters of the Ethiopic syllabary).

in connection with the text that follows on fol. 8r.³⁶ But if we assume a material loss of at least one leaf between fol. 7v and fol. 8r, then we do not know what the continuation after መስኖሁ ፡ ወ (the end of the text on fol. 7v) could have been. If the missing leaf was a bifolium, it could have a counterpart that also went lost. And fol. 7 could also have had a counterpart (see above; see Fig. 5).

The numbering of the text parts (individual documents) of “The Register” does not supply an argument in favour of either of the interpretations, it only provides a hint to the coherence of the manuscript up to fol. 6.³⁷

The emerging picture is complicated, and we have to assume that the irregularity results in the first case from neglect (fols 6v–7r) and in the second from material loss (fols 7v–8r). Leaves that might have followed fol. 11 remain hypothetical. They may have existed or not, single or double leaves, with or without a text. The discoloration and text abrasion on fol. 11v and the recent crude note in Amharic added with a paintbrush³⁸ indicate that for a long period fol. 11v was the last page of the manuscript. But the possibility of the loss of one text folium between fol. 7 and fol. 8 is real and should be considered. The chances that the leaf (or leaves) reappear one day are very few, but could be improved if knowledge is gained about what is missing and for what one should be looking (cf. below, fn. 41).

4. – *Palaeographical study*

4.a. Material and limitations

For this study, the manuscript collections of 18 churches located around ሩUra Qirqos/ሩUra Mäsqäl were focused upon, of which 220 manuscripts were checked and the handwritings of approximately 40 manuscripts studied more

³⁶ The passage would read then, [ቅፍ]ርዖ ፡ መካን ፡ ዘአልዐ ፡ ግብረ ፡ ወገብጋብ ፡ ዘአልዐ ፡ ግብ ፡ ወዘኖቤ ፡ “the place of Qəfrəyā that has neither tribute nor forced labour that has neither compel nor confiscation ...” (cf. Valieva, 2023, p. 147). The name of the church could have been preceded by a preposition, for instance, ለ (“for, for the sake of”).

³⁷ Some of the documents encompassed by “The Register” are numbered. The numbers are written at the end; they continue from 2 (፪ ፡) to 6 (፮ ፡). The first document is unnumbered. Number 6 is used in the nominal phrase with the word ገንታ ፡ (፮ ፡ ገንታ ፡።, fol. 6r; of somewhat unclear meaning, despite the explanation in Valieva, 2023, p. 144, fn. 54). The last number, 7 (፯ ፡), rubricated, appears on fol. 7r, but, in my opinion, it is uncertain as to what it refers to (cf. the interpretations in Derat, 2018, pp. 263 and 268; Valieva, 2023, pp. 139 and 146).

³⁸ ደብዳቤ ፡ የመስቀል ፡, lit. “the letter of (the church ሩUra) Mäsqäl”.

closely.³⁹ Nearly all these manuscripts were digitized in the framework of the Ethio-SPaRe project, between 2010 and 2014. The study concerns a later and perhaps most complex period of Ethiopic script evolution, which has rarely received any proper attention.⁴⁰

Several factors should be mentioned as limitations to the enquiry. First, the ecclesiastic landscape of Gulo Mākāda is very complex, and it has been difficult to create a comprehensive register of all ecclesiastic sites and their libraries.⁴¹ Furthermore, some churches whose collections might preserve manuscripts relevant for the study could not be reached during the project, nor later, and are likely to remain inaccessible in the near future. Second, in Gulo Mākāda, and the vicinity of ʿUra Qirqos/ʿUra Mäsqäl, demand for manuscripts has probably always been high, and the production of manuscripts significant. However, an unknown number of manuscripts of potential relevance to the study have perished or been dispersed and taken out of the area—even the country.⁴² Third, the study was restricted to an area dubbed the historical Gulo Mākāda and mainly collections located not far from ʿUra Qirqos, those cata-

³⁹ Unfortunately not all those manuscripts have secure dating supported by paleography and internal data (such as dates or kings' or church hierarchs' names used).

⁴⁰ Uhlig, 1988, p. 674 has aptly summarized the difficulties in dating manuscripts originating from the later period (referring specifically to "Period VI", mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century) marked by the diversity of styles and a great number of surviving manuscripts thusly: 1) Not traits of individual signs, but the general appearance of the script becomes of major importance for dating; 2) Multiplicity of forms of individual signs; 3) Relativisation of the notion of distinctive features of script related to a specific palaeographical period due to the parallel existence of multiple styles and persistence of the features over a longer time. These difficulties may contribute to some vagueness and uncertainty in the issue of MS UM-035's production date.

⁴¹ Having visited the area of ʿUra Qirqos/ʿUra Mäsqäl several times, I later found out that I overlooked a church just a few kilometres away from ʿUra Qirqos, at the edge of the cliff, called Qəršəbtī Maryam (14.482618594543109, 39.35282978257105; cf. Qärnä Šəbt in Valieva, 2023, pp. 139–40, 148). Indirect attempts at clarifying its foundation period were unsuccessful. Its proximity to ʿUra Qirqos/ʿUra Mäsqäl render a visit to this church indispensable.

⁴² Gulo Mākāda is located on the historical route towards the Red Sea. To exemplify this point, cf. Brita, Helmholz, Hummel, *et al.*, 2017, p. 173 and figs 1 and 2, on MS GCA-001 (C.A. 837), a Four Gospels manuscript originating from the church Fäqada Maryam located not far from ʿUra Qirqos (Bm ID: INS0071FBM; here and below, for some of the entities like persons and institutions, individual IDs assigned to them in the Beta mašāḥəft project database have been provided).

logged for the Ethio-SPaRe database.⁴³ The last and very significant factor is that Ethiopic palaeography is a neglected discipline. There are neither comprehensive and commonly accepted methods nor terminology for the describing of Ethiopic script or reference to its elements. Basic search instruments provided by the scribal hands in Ethiopic manuscripts are missing; a register of known Ethiopian scribes accompanied by handwriting samples is a desideratum. No electronic tools to aid the palaeographical research on Ethiopic manuscripts have been developed yet. No quantification of results or study of the phenomena throughout all available sources are possible. Despite all these limitations, one of the purposes of the article is to stimulate discussion and research in the field of Ethiopic palaeography.

4.b. Palaeographical context

Starting from approximately the early eighteenth century up to the beginning/middle of the nineteenth century, some manuscripts coming from Gulo Mākāda and the area around ʿUra Qirqos attest a writing style with emphasized width as its main feature. This aspect reminds one of the period’s most remarkable palaeographical features as described by Siegbert Uhlig.⁴⁴ Following his classification, this “broad style” pertains to the palaeographical “Period VI” (mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century) and should be understood as one of the multiple local styles, barely remarked upon,⁴⁵ that was in use at that

⁴³ The phenomena described below are not limited to Gulo Mākāda in its contemporary boundaries. The limitation was imposed by myself to make the study plausible and enable it to be concluded later.

⁴⁴ Uhlig, 1988, pp. 657–58, 3.6.1.3.3 “Tendenz zur breiten, auseinandergezogenen Schrift”; Uhlig, 1990, p. 105, “Tendency to emphasize width”.

⁴⁵ Uhlig, 1988, pp. 654–76, esp. p. 654, 3.6.1.1 stresses the multiplicity of styles. The idea becomes somewhat less clear in Uhlig, 1990, pp. 104–15 due to the introduction of the overarching idea of “*Rāqīq* script”; but the increasing use of “broad, heavy, and awkward-looking script”, one of the other existing styles is underlined (p. 115; cf. already Uhlig, 1988, p. 766, 3.6.4.6). Indeed, not all handwriting samples for the period in question shown in Uhlig, 1988 and 1990 fit the idea of “a broad, heavy script”.

time.⁴⁶ Some of the style's palaeographical features occur in the manuscripts studied, and are as follows:⁴⁷

A. Features concerning the general appearance of the script:

- I. Such letters as **ሐ**, **መ**, **ሠ**, **ወ**, **ጠ**, already broader than others due to their structure,⁴⁸ become broader, with their shapes defining the script's visual appearance. **መ** and **ሠ**, in particular, show low and broad shapes.⁴⁹ The letter **መ** enhances the optical impression even more due to the extended distance between its "loops". Other letters, such as **ረ**, **ቀ**, **ተ**, **ፈ**, and others may tend from normal rectangular slender (height exceeding the width) towards square "modules".⁵⁰ Some elements of the letters protrude to the sides exceedingly, such as vowel markers (of **ሎ**, **ብ**, **ከ**, **ኃ**, etc.). Ample spaces between the letters and broad downstrokes work further towards the optical effect of a broad, bulky script.⁵¹
- II. Downstrokes are vertical or very slightly slanted to the right; the tops of the letters are horizontal.
- III. Letter shapes are mostly rounded, but rectangular forms also appear and appear to increase over time.

B. Features concerning the shapes of individual letters

⁴⁶ Not wishing to enter the discussion concerning the hierarchy of the palaeographical phenomena and the terms to denote them, I distinguish below between "style" (elsewhere defined also as "script", if it is long-lived and with clearly, distinct features, cf. Drogin, 1989, p. 4) and "(scribal) hand" or handwriting that is an individual realisation of the style.

⁴⁷ Here and below, individual letters of the Ethiopic alphasyllabary are referred to in the traditional sequence **ሀ-ለ-ሐ-መ** (cf., for instance, Tropper, 2002).

⁴⁸ Those composed of two segments, in contrast to **ብ**, **ሰ**, **ከ**, **ኃ**, etc.

⁴⁹ They are pressed closely to the lower ruled line, described in different terms in cf. Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.2.2.1 (p. 674).

⁵⁰ Here and below I use the term "module", to refer to the proportions (the relationship of height to width) of Ethiopic letters. "Module" is (an imaginary) frame within which a letter can be accommodated. Probably inspired by other traditions of palaeographical studies where the notion of "module" is actively applied, the term is implemented in Uhlig, 1990, pp. 70, 72, 105 (but not in Uhlig, 1988) and appears elsewhere occasionally (see Nosnitsin, 2015, p. 26). The complexity of Ethiopic script lies in the fact that at least two "modules" are required to describe its letters, if not more (e.g. a rectangular one for such slender letters as **ሀ**, **ለ**, **ሰ**, etc., and a square-like one for such broad letters as **ሐ**, **መ**, **ሠ**, **ወ**, etc., at the least).

⁵¹ Cf. Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.1.3.3 and 3.6.2.1.4 ("Tendenz zur auseinandergezogenen und breiten Schrift"). Cf. also Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.1.3.4 ("Teilweise klobige Federführung"), 3.6.2.1.5 ("Klobige Schrift").

- IV. In many cases the length of the third-order vowel marker (-i) of the letters **Ń**, **Ń**, **Ń**, **Ń**, **Ń** and suchlike is emphasized, whereas the fifth-order marker (-e) may be a line with its end bent upwards. Thus, the fifth-order marker is not necessarily a circle (closed or not).⁵² This graphic feature is enough to distinguish between the orders; but in some cases this type of the fifth-order marker can be mistaken for the third order (this feature becomes more conspicuous towards the more recent time).
- V. **Ń** in various orders (**Ń**, **Ń**, **Ń**, etc.) has the right leg leaning on the left leg.
- VI. The internal loop of the sixth-order **Ń** may be shaped in various ways, and it is not closed. (This feature becomes more conspicuous towards the more recent time).
- VII. The sixth-order **Ń** shows upper bar ending with a serif, protruding far to the left but remaining horizontal.
- VIII. The sixth-order **Ń** has a small but sharply drawn vowel marker (kink) in the left leg.⁵³
- IX. The sixth-order **Ń** has the upper part protruding far to the left, remaining horizontal.
- X. The numeral **Ń** (1) has its body shaped in a peculiar way. The elongated drop-like form is composed of two halves, the left half is drawn first, its upper end being under the upper end of the right half, which is drawn as next (see Fig. 6).⁵⁴

There seems to be a tendency to a decrease in handwriting quality during the eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, in the manuscripts studied; however, good hands are also found in this period.⁵⁵

⁵² Cf. Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.1.3.6 and 3.6.2.2.5 (“Offene Hämesschlinge”), and 3.6.2.2.7 (“Weiter, nach links hängender oder gewölbter Bogen bei **Ń**”), with good examples (though my understanding of this phenomenon is somewhat different). Features discussed in Uhlig 1988, 3.6.2.2.2 (“Vielfaltige Markierung der Ordnung der *sāles*”) and 3.6.2.2.5 (“Offene Hämesschlinge”) should probably be considered interrelated.

⁵³ Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.2.2.8, p. 679.

⁵⁴ Somewhat similar to the structure of **Ń** as mentioned above; the modern printed digit **Ń** (1) seems to follow a graphic prototype structure in a “mirrored” way.

⁵⁵ This observation concurs with Uhlig, 1988, 3.6.1.3.1 and 3.6.1.3.2, who speaks of the massive manuscript production and the decreasing quality of the scribal work pointing to “flüchtige Schreibweise”, “geringe Gleichförmigkeit”. Obviously, the increasing production may have caused the reduction in quality. One could think indeed of dividing the period from mid-seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century into two parts, as suggested in Uhlig, 1988, pp. 659–60.

The notion of the local “broad style” is used as a provisional technical term here. Not all features appear in the manuscripts all together and to the same degree. No commonly shared features distinguishing the local hands of Gulo Mākāda from others in the surrounding areas could be clearly defined up to now. Certainly not all manuscripts from Gulo Mākāda, datable to the early eighteenth century to early/mid-nineteenth century were written in this style.⁵⁶ “Broad hands” have also been attested in other areas of Ethiopia. In Uhlig’s 1988 and 1990 monographs a few samples looking akin to the “broad style” from the study area are to be found.⁵⁷

If one tries to apply some of the above criteria, any precise verdict as to whether a given handwriting is in the “broad style” or not, may well be considered vague and subjective. Exact measurements are not possible; in some cases it is difficult to decide whether a feature is an imminent element of the style or a scribal hand’s own, individual feature. These problems, however, do not render the study impossible as its purpose is not in making a broad, palaeographical conclusion, which is simply not possible at this point and not essential for answering the research questions as outlined above (see above, §2.c). Nevertheless, by implementing the aforementioned characteristics a few parameters could be set up and used for searching through handwritings.

4.c. Handwriting in MS UM-035/C₃-IV-83

Nearly all of the abovementioned traits pertaining to the “broad style” feature in MS UM-035’s handwriting. At first glance it appears very idiosyncratic, but fits well with the “broad style” which could well have been the scribe’s palaeographical background. Aside from which, the handwriting is marked by lack of accuracy and regularity, and not very good pen control, re-

⁵⁶ In particular, the co-existence of the rounded and square forms (both requiring different writing technique) within one style may be difficult to reconcile. The hand of Wäldä Muse, even though from the second half of the nineteenth century, a somewhat later period, may be considered as an example of the latter (see Noslitsin, 2013b).

⁵⁷ I refer to such manuscripts as e.g. Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 39, dated 1728 (Uhlig, 1988, pp. 658, 663, 666, 668, 675 etc.; <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/BNFabb39/main>); BNF Éthiopien 158, datable to 1728–07 (Uhlig, 1988, p. 675; <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/BNFet158/main>); Uppsala, University Library O. Etiop. 4, around 1750 (Uhlig, 1988, pp. 656, 658; Löfgren, 1974, pp. 49–52, n. 18); a finely written early example, Uppsala, University Library O. Etiop. 20, datable to 1682–94, the handwriting of an additional later text on fols 191ra–192v fits the idea of the “broad script” somewhat better (Uhlig, 1988, pp. 691–92; Löfgren, 1974, pp. 47–49, n. 17; images available at <http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:alvin:portal:record-183547>); London, BL Or. 747, datable to 1737–38 (Uhlig, 1988, p. 661).

sulting in irregular, clumsy and exaggerated letter shapes. A few of these features are listed below (cf. those presented in §4.b):

A. Features concerning the general appearance of the script:

- A.1. The handwriting looks broad. In addition to the letters which are broad by definition (cf. 4.b, feature 1) and shaped accordingly, the width of some other letters is also emphasized (cf. **ል**, **ኅ**, **ኃ**, **ፈ**, **ተ**, **ይ**, etc.), enhancing the optical impression of a broad, low script, as indicated above. Elements of the letters (vowel markers, cf. such signs as **ሁ**, **ሎ**, **ራ**, **ቡ**, **ብ**, **ከ**, **ዝ**, **ጐ**, **ገ**, **ጸ**, **ፌ**, etc.) protruding far to the sides creates the same impression.
- A.2. Downstrokes are vertical to slightly right-sloping; the tops of the letters are horizontal.
- A.3. Letter shapes are mostly rounded.

B. Features concerning shapes of individual letters

- B.4. The third-order vowel marker (-i) is a straight line with emphasized length. The fifth-order vowel (-e), in case of some letters, is built on the basis of the third-order vowel marker, through its bending upwards at the end.⁵⁸ In cases of such broad letters as **ሚ** or **ሜ**, the scribe directed the downstroke not vertically downwards, but obliquely to the left, before turning the direction to the right to produce the third-order vowel marker.⁵⁹
- B.5. The internal loop of the sixth-order **ል** is predominantly closed (contrary to feature VI, see §4.b above).
- B.6. **ረ** is made out of one strongly curved stroke, building a kind of “belly” protruding to the left.
- B.7. The opposition between the sixth-order **ስ** and the first-order **ሰ** is poorly visible.

⁵⁸ For instance, compare **ሲ** (**ጸሲም** ፣ fol. 4v) and **ሌ** (**ሐከሌ** ፣ fol. 1r); **ሒ** (**ያሒት**, fols 9v, 10r) and **ሔ** (**እግዚአብሔር** ፣ fols 6v, 7r); **ሚ** (**ሚያዝያ** ፣ fols 1r, 2v, 4r, 8v; **ቀዳሚ** ፣ fol. 11r) and **ሜ** (**አሜን** ፣ fols 7r, 9v; **ዓጋሜ** ፣ fol. 9r, not well visible); **ሢ** (**ኅጋሢ** ፣ fol. 9r) and **ሤ** (**አገርኅ ሤ** ፣ fols 8v, 9v, 9r, 10v–11r); **ሰ** (**ፋሰካ** ፣ fol. 10r); **ሥ** (**ልሰት** ፣ fol. 10v) and **ሰ** (**እምክሶሰ** **ኖ** ፣ fol. 6r; **ሐሰ** ፣ fol. 8v, poorly visible); **ቢ** (**ዓቢይ** ፣ fols 2r, 4r; **ነቢሪ** ፣ fol. 5v; **ነቢያት** ፣ fol. 9r, etc.) and **ቤ** (attested many times, in particular in the word **ቤተ** ፣); **ቲ** (**ላቲ** ፣ fols 2r, 2v, 3v and elsewhere); **ረ** (**ቲአነ** ፣ fol. 5v; **ወአጋዕስቲሆሙ** ፣ fol. 5v, etc.) and **ቱ** (**በአኩቱተ** ፣ fols 1r, 8r, 10v); **ኒ** (**አነኒ** ፣ fols 6r, 7r; **ሐዓኒ** ፣ fol. 8r; **ይምሐረኒ** ፣ fol. 6v) and **ኑ** (**እምጸልቀኑ** ፣ fol. 2v; **ቅኑ** ፣ fol. 11v; **ምኑት** ፣ fol. 11v); **ኢ** (**ተባኢሶሙ** ፣ fol. 6r; multiple **ዘኢይበውእ** ፣ fol. 8r, etc.) and **ኣ** (**ኣፋ** ፣ fol. 4v; **እምግባኣ** ፣ fol. 6r).

⁵⁹ Perhaps the scribe’s intention in this case was to avoid “hyper-broad” letter shapes.

- B.8. **ጥ** and derived letters are characterized by uncommonly broad Greek cross-like shape, fitting into square “module” (cf. above).
- B.9. The seventh-order marker of **ጥ** has a peculiar semicircle shape attached to the (slightly bent) stem of the letter on the right side.
- B.10. The opposition between the first-order **ጥ** and the sixth order **ጥ** is not conspicuous but still visible; first order (**ጥ**) has a thin horizontal line with a “flagged” serif at the end, sixth order (**ጥ**) has an oblique slightly rounded line at the end.⁶⁰
- B.11. The shape of the sixth-order **አ** is simplified, the short lines supposed to make up the vowel marker are disjoined.
- B.12. **ረ** has a “belly” similar to **ረ** (cf. above, B.6), but even more exaggerated because of the inner line.⁶¹
- B.13. The shape of the numeral **፪** (2) is simplified, the lower half is open (cf. fols 1r, 2v, 3v, 4r, 9r).
- B.14. The numeral **፳** (20) is misshaped (fols 1r, 2v, 4r).⁶²

As to the punctuation signs, in some text passages there is a non-transparent and somewhat excessive use of a sign constructed on the basis of the common word divider (**፤**) to which two or three red dots or a short vertical red line are added.

Rubrication is done by the same scribe who wrote the main text, rather accurately with a pen with a somewhat broader nib, probably after the main text was finished (cf. fols 2v and 8v, the lacuna left was not sufficient for the

⁶⁰ Both letters can be compared on fol. 10r of MS UM-035, where they appear one under another at the end of the line 5 (**ጥ**, in **ጥብሱጥ ፤**) and the line 6 (**ጥ**, in **ብጥ ፤**) from below.

⁶¹ This is reminiscent of a curious feature noticed in some manuscripts from “Period III” (mid-fifteenth to mid-sixteenth century). Cf. Uhlig, 1988, p. 299 (3.2.4.10, “...den Abstrich, der zunehmend nach links gewölbt wird, wobei sich verschiedene Varianten ergeben”) speaks thereof as one of the important features of the script of the period. Elsewhere the feature is described as follows: “Der Abstrich bei **ረ** und **ረ** wird nach links gewölbt” (Uhlig, 1988, p. 362, about MS Paris, BnF, Éth. Abb. 74). The feature is emphasized in a few manuscripts, for instance, see Uhlig, 1988, p. 378 (“der Abstrich bei **ረ** und **ረ** ist deutlich nach links gewölbt”, about MS Vatican City, BAV, Aeth. 38), and esp. 403 (“der Abstrich von **ረ** und **ረ** weist eine extreme Linkswölbung auf”, about MS Vatican City, BAV, Aeth. 5), and 417 (“**ረ** **ረ** mit bauchig gewölbtem Abstrich”, about MS Berlin, Royal Library, Or. Oct. 555). The manuscript Ara’ro Täklä Haymanot ATH-001 can be added to this short list (described in Nosnitsin, 2015, p. 29; images can now be accessed at <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/ESath001/main>). The shapes of both letters, **ረ** and **ረ**, are very similar, but at a closer look it appears that their morphology is different. **ረ** is not just **ረ** with an inner line. But the discussion of this subject goes beyond the limits of the article.

⁶² The numeral **፩** (1), unfortunately, does not occur in MS UM-035.

word መስቀል ፣). One correction has been made in red (fol. 7r, l. 2). No abbreviations have been used.

At least a few codicological features may be of importance. First, the leaves of MS UM-035 have been ruled in a rather careless way. Only some of the “vertical pricks” are visible on the leaves; notably, no “text pricks” can be observed.⁶³ Second, it appears that the text starting from the second written line on fol. 9v and entirely on fol. 10r has been written with a narrow nibbed pen.

For the moment, it is difficult to say whether the scribe, consciously or not, tried to “antiquate” his handwriting,⁶⁴ and, should he have worked with older sources, to assume that the handwriting of those texts or elements of the text arrangement influenced the production of MS UM-035.

MS UM-035 bears no hint that could indicate the scribe’s identity. The palaeographical analysis of his handwriting only supports the common hypothesis regarding the production date of the manuscript; the second half of the eighteenth century being more probable than the first. But this does not bring us any closer to answering the questions above. Further writings identified as the same scribe’s work will provide more data.

4.d. MS UM-042/C₃-IV-74 as the first key witness

4.d.1. General information on the manuscript

A clue to the identity of the MS UM-035’s scribe is present in MS UM-042, kept in the same collection as MS UM-035. MS UM-042 is a composite and very complex manuscript. It has survived in precarious conditions which limited, to a certain extent, the possibilities of its digitization and detailed study.⁶⁵ MS UM-042 encompasses as many as three production units. The manuscript has no internal indications of any production date, in the database of Ethio-SPaRe it has been dated to the eighteenth century on palaeographical grounds. The manuscript was briefly discussed by Alessandro Bausi in his article “Composite and Multiple-Text Manuscripts: The Ethiopian evidence”

⁶³ The feature has been observed on a small number of few very old manuscripts only, and still has no satisfactory explanation (see Nosnitsin, 2020, p. 306).

⁶⁴ A small cross filling the line on fol. 2r (see Fig. 1) may hint to that attempt, but to find a corresponding feature in an old manuscript seems to be not so easy. The cross may also mark a part of “The Register” which was of special importance for those who commissioned and owned it.

⁶⁵ One quire belonging to this manuscript was discovered by the author only by chance and photographed at the last moment, in May 2014, during one of last visits to the site (foliated as fols 45a–f).

(2016) as an example of a manuscript in which the main content was enlarged over time with texts of the same text genre (miracles).⁶⁶ The scribal hands attested in it were not that study's subject.

MS UM-042 is composed of 143 (+6) folia, in 16 (+1) quires, and made out of three production units. Here is not the place for offering a fully-fledged description of the manuscript,⁶⁷ only some selected data concerning the scribes and the scribal hands have been summarized below.

4.d.2. Two scribal hands of Unit 1 (fols 1–125)

Hand 1, fols 1ra–7vb, 88ra–125vb: the text here has been written by the scribe Zawäldä Maryam [first half/second third of the eighteenth century (?)] (see Fig. 7).⁶⁸ His name along with his function as a scribe (*ṣāḥafi*) is mentioned in the supplication formulas on fols 121vb, 124vb, 125vb. Names of several commissioners, probably members of the community, are also mentioned.

Zawäldä Maryam's hand (Hand 1) displays characteristics of the "broad style" mentioned above. At first glance, his hand looks similar to that of the MS UM-035's scribe. However, there are some clear differences. Here, only several of them can be mentioned as examples. Zawäldä Maryam's hand is more controlled and uniform than that of MS UM-035. **Ḍ** and **Ḍ** are shaped in the normal way. The sixth-order marker of **ḡ** is an almost straight line directed obliquely.⁶⁹ The fifth-order markers (cf. esp. **ḡ**) are drawn with the

⁶⁶ The manuscript contains an extensive collection of the "Miracles of Mary" (76 stories) and some other texts (see below). The article Bausi, 2016 also reproduces an image of the relevant part of the manuscript (see below, on Unit 2), but in a small size.

⁶⁷ A rudimentary description was published years ago in the database of Ethio-SPaRe and is still available, https://mycms-vs03.rz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_document_00000063 [accessed 06.12.2024]. An updated and expanded description has been uploaded to the database of the Beta maṣāḥəft project, where the images can also be consulted (<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/ESum042/main> [accessed 06.12.2024]). The last description focuses on the material aspects and scribal hands only. The task of the exact identification of the content has been completed only in part. The project Princeton Ethiopian Miracles of Mary Project, led by Prof. Dr. Wendy Belcher (<https://cdh.princeton.edu/projects/princeton-ethiopian-miracles-mary-project>) will hopefully study this witness of the "Miracles of Mary" in detail.

⁶⁸ Bm ID: PRS14489ZawaldaMaryam.

⁶⁹ The scribe of MS UM-035 bent the end of the sixth-order marker strongly to the right.

rings mostly closed.⁷⁰ Only one other manuscript copied by this scribe has been identified so far, MS Märgaḥəya Mikaʿel QMM-011, the name Zawäldä Maryam being still partly readable on fol. 52vb.⁷¹

Hand 2, fols 8ra–87vb: the text here was written by the scribe called Məḥḍəntä Maryam, [first half/second third of the eighteenth century (?)] (see Fig. 8). It is not clear why the feminine form is used as part of the name and what it is supposed to mean.⁷² Should it not be a mistake, are we to seriously consider that, contrary to what we know about the scribal profession in Ethiopia, the scribe here was a woman? However, active participle (*ṣāḥafi*) that precedes the name is in masculine form, and a mistake of the scribe seems to be more likely. The person is mentioned as the scribe only once, in the supplication formula on fol. 13ra,⁷³ but the name has been evoked a few times among the names of the commissioners too.

Məḥḍəntä Maryam’s handwriting (Hand 2) shows the characteristics of the “broad style” and some similarity to MS UM-035. The letter shapes applied by Məḥḍəntä Maryam are slightly less rounded (cf. such letters as **Ḡ**, **ጢ**, **፱**), and the shapes of **፱** and **፳** are less “squeezed”.⁷⁴ The scribe controls the broad letters such as **፱** or **፳** and some others better, mitigating the optical im-

⁷⁰ It should be mentioned that the fifth-order marker of the letters **ጢ**, **ሐ**, **፱**, **፳**, **ሰ**, **ቀ**, etc. is shaped differently from what we find in MS UM-035, and also differently from what is stated under §4.b (see feature IV), and it requires a more nuanced description. The feature will not, however, be further discussed since Hand 1 (Zawäldä Maryam) was definitely not involved in the production of MS UM-035.

⁷¹ Märgaḥəya Mikaʿel, a small church, is located a little exterior to contemporary Gulo Mākäda, to the west from ^cAddigrat (in the district Ganta Afäšum).

⁷² Bm ID: PRS13965MehdentaMaryam. Apparently, *məḥḍənt* is the feminine form for *məḥḍun*, passive participle of the verb *amaḥḍänä* (meaning “deposited, entrusted”, Leslau, 1987, p. 335a). There is a similar word used in some personal names, *maḥḍänt* (“trust, deposit”, *ibid.*, cf. the scribe Maḥḍäntä Mikaʿel attested in MS London, BL, Or. 516 [Bm ID: PRS11820Mahdanta]).

⁷³ On the preceding fol. 12vb (at the end of the preliminary texts), Məḥḍəntä Maryam added an elaborate ownership note, written in smaller script, separated from the end of the text by a double red-and-black dots. The note reads (square brackets mark poorly visible words that were reconstructed): ዝንቱ፡ ሙጽ ሐፍ፡ ዘዐ፡[ራ፡] ወጢንዩ፡ ቃሉ፡ ዘኢይትጎ፡[ለቀ፡] ነገሩ፡ ፈጸምኩ፡ ኣነ፡ በእንተ፡ ዕበዩ፡ ለቂርቆስ፡ ሰማዕት፡ ሙስተጋ[ድ]ል፡ ኢረከብኩ፡ እንበለ፡ ማቕ፡ ወኢፈትል፡ ከመ፡ ይትዋጎሲ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ሰማያት፡ ያብኣኒ፡ ውስተ፡ ጽርሐ፡ ሐዳሰ፡ እለ፡ ኣጽሐፍዎ፡ ወዘጸሐፋ፡ ይጽ[ሐፋ፡ ስሞሙ፡] ኅበ፡ ዓምደ፡ ወርቅ፡ ለዓለም፡ ኣሚን፡።

⁷⁴ In contrast to **፳**, **፱**, and **ቀ** (፱) etc. by Hand 1 (Zawäldä Maryam), which are set up very high on the stem, and pressed to the upper ruled line, this resulted in curious “squeezed shapes”.

pression of over-emphasized width. The extremities of the sixth-order markers of **ሕ**, **ቅ**, **ቸ**, etc. are uniformly raised.⁷⁵ A remarkable feature of the hand is the sixth-order marker of **ሰ** which is long, with the tip directed in such a way as to align with the vowel markers of **ሕ**, **ቅ**, and **ቸ**. The difference between **ገ** and **ገ** (first and sixth orders) is weakly articulated. Thus far, no other manuscripts copied by Məḥdāntä Maryam could be identified.

4.d.3. Scribal hand of Unit 2 (fols 126r–138v)

Unit 2 is composed of two balanced ternions of a smaller size (ca. 166 x 115 mm) as compared to Unit 1.⁷⁶

Hand 3, fols 126r–138v: the text was written here by the scribe Wäldä Tənsä'e [second half of the eighteenth century, later than Hand 1 and Hand 2] (see Figs. 9a–b).⁷⁷ His name and his role as a scribe (*ṣāḥafi*) are mentioned explicitly in the concluding supplications on fol. 138r. Other persons mentioned are Wälättä Krəstos (fols 126r, 131v, 133v, 134r, 135v, 138r) and Kəflä Maryam (fols 134v, 135v)⁷⁸ who is referred to also as a priest (*qäsis*) and commissioner (*aṣḥafi*, fol. 138r).

As in MS UM-035, the handwriting pertains to the “broad style” as described above (cf. above, A.1–3). There is a slight difference in the general appearance of the handwriting between fols 126r–128r (Fig. 9a), and fols 128v–138r (Fig. 9b).⁷⁹ The reason is the use of a pen with a narrower nib on fols 126r–128r, which results in the handwriting looking more regular and rigid (despite the biased written area, cf. Fig. 9a).

The close proximity of Hand 3 and the hand in MS UM-035 is immediately visible, even though not all traits listed under 4.c. are present to the same degree as in MS UM-035.⁸⁰ But others are visible, while such features as B.4 (shapes of **ሚ** and **ሚ**), B.5 (the mostly closed inner loop of **ሌ** and its shape), B.8 (the broad shape of **ቸ**) and B.9 (the shape of **ቸ**) are strongly present, being “finger prints” of the MS UM-035’s scribe. Comparing other individual

⁷⁵ In contrast to those drawn by Zawäldä Maryam which tend to be horizontal and not uniformly oriented.

⁷⁶ Due to a foliation mistake, number 129 is skipped. Thus the first quire of Unit 2 embraces fols 126, 127, 128, 130, 131, 132; and the second quire fols 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138.

⁷⁷ Bm ID: PRS13967WaldäTensae.

⁷⁸ Bm ID: PRS13964KefläMaryam.

⁷⁹ This is an estimation; an exact boundary is difficult to draw.

⁸⁰ For instance, the feature B.7 (the poor visibility of the difference between **ሰ** and **ሰ**).

signs one cannot find enough significant differences indicating the contrary (see below, Appendix).

There are a few non-palaeographical features further hinting to the common origin of MSS UM-035 and UM-042, Unit 2, from the hands of the same manuscript maker.

MS UM-042, Unit 2 shows somewhat excessive and non-transparent use of the punctuation sign composed of the common word divider (⚡) and a short red line drawn over it or two or three vertical red dots (cf. above, §4.c).

Rubrication has been carried out by the same scribe who copied the main text; he used a pen with a broader nib. No abbreviations have been used.

A few relevant codicological features may be recalled here. Text pricks in MS UM-042, Unit 2, are not visible (cf. above, §4.c). The structure of Unit 2 is represented by two ternions, just like in MS UM-035. The size of the leaf in Unit 2 (ca. 166 × 115 mm) is not the same but is also small and thus reminiscent of that of MS UM-035 (ca. 120 × 95 mm). But MS UM-042, Unit 2 has no irregularities in terms of adherence to Gregory's Rule; perhaps the status of the text obliged the scribe (Wäldä Tənsä'e) to follow the conventions of the manuscript production more strictly.

The conclusion is that MS UM-035 and MS UM-042, Unit 2, were produced by the same scribe named Wäldä Tənsä'e.

4.d.4. Two scribal hands of Unit 3 (fols 139r–144v)

Unit 3 is composed of several leaves crudely sewn together in one quire, preserved in very poor condition. Some of the leaves are misplaced and at least one may be lost; to reconstruct the original structure of the quire is difficult.⁸¹ The text was written by two hands, Hand 3 (Wäldä Tənsä'e, attested in Unit 2) and Hand 4.

Hand 4: fols 139ra–141rb: an anonymous scribe [second half of the eighteenth century, close in time or contemporary to Hand 3?] copied here a few stories from the “Miracles of St Cyricus” (Qirqos). The work was commissioned by *Abunä Kəflä Maryam* (mentioned on fols 139ra, 141rb), most probably the same commissioner as in Unit 2. This hand tends to slender, less rounded shapes, in contrast to Hands 1, 2, and 3.⁸²

⁸¹ At least the proper place of fol. 142 (with the end of a miracle of Jesus, the verso being blank) seems to be right after fol. 144. A couple of marginal notes (fols 139v, 143r) are abraded and barely legible.

⁸² The same scribe copied MS UM-010 (<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/ESum010/main> [accessed 06.12.2024]) where his name, Zamikā'el, has been mentioned. This scribe would not

Hand 3 (Wäldä Tənsáʿe): fols 141rb–142rb, 143ra–144vb: here the text has been written by the aforementioned Wäldä Tənsáʿe.⁸³ His name does not appear, the scribe’s identity can only be established on palaeographical grounds.⁸⁴ The commissioner Kəflä Maryam appears here again, mentioned on fols 139ra, 140ra, 141rb, 141vb, 143ra, 144ra.

4.d.5. How far can MS UM-042 bring us?

The palaeographical analysis leads to the conclusion that MS UM-035 was written by the scribe Wäldä Tənsáʿe, Hand 3 of MS UM-042, Units 2 and 3. Wäldä Tənsáʿe and the anonymous scribe Hand 4 (Zamikāʿel [?]) of Unit 3 are linked to the same commissioner, *Abunä* Kəflä Maryam, possibly an important figure at ʿUra Qirqos. This is indicative of the fact that the spans of life of all three persons obviously overlapped. We can assume that Wäldä Tənsáʿe’s scribal activities took place in the second half or at the end of the eighteenth century, and that he was contemporary to Hand 4, but posterior to Hand 1 (Zawäldä Maryam) and Hand 2 (Məḥdəntä Maryam) of Unit 1. Wäldä Tənsáʿe was also closely associated with the community of ʿUra Qirqos or was just one of its (key?) members (cf. also fn. 84).

be of any great interest unless he was responsible for the short secondary colophon in the ancient MS UM-039 “Axumite collection”, ተፈጸመ ፡ ዘቤተ ፡ መስቀል ፡ ዘቅናርያ ፡ ውለዱ ፡ ክፍለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ቀሲስ ፣ discussed and translated in Bausi, 2022, pp. 131–33. Kəflä Maryam appears here again as the central figure, and there will be more hints towards his role below. Based on the evaluation of the local context, and my experience in dealing with the marginal notes and their language featuring elisions and syntactical peculiarities, I would like to propose a slightly different interpretation of the note (round brackets used for integration of meaning): “It is completed. (This book is) of the House of the Cross of Qəfrəya, the children (of) Kəflä Maryam, the priest” (the purpose of the note is not quite clear to me).

⁸³ He added two miracles of Cyricus, a hymn, one miracle of Libanos, one miracle of Jesus (its end is misplaced, see fn. 81 above); and a marginal note at the bottom of fol. 143r (now abraded, hardly readable). The miracle of Jesus is written with a pen with a broader nib.

⁸⁴ After the end of the last text on fol. 142rb there follows a short concluding note. This note belongs to the hand of Wäldä Tənsáʿe (written with a pen with a narrow nib). For reasons unknown, he presents himself as a commissioner of the preceding writing (አነ ፡ ዘአጽሐፍኩ ፡ ; unless this is a mistake and what he actually meant was ዘጸሐፍኩ ፡). The following words, unfortunately partly cut, may be interpreted as a reference to himself, ተ[ላዊ]ሁ ፡ ለቂርቆስ ፡ “a follower of Cyricus”, or to the work he just copied, ተ[አምሪ]ሁ ፡ ለቂርቆስ ፡ .

4.e. MS Mänäbäyti Maryam MSM-001 as the second witness

The next key witness is MS MSM-001 from the churches Mänäbäyti Maryam/Mänäbäyti Täklä Haymanot (Fig. 10a-b), located several kilometres away from ^cUra Qirqos.⁸⁵

MS MSM-001 is, at first glance, quite unremarkable; it contains a collection of the “Miracles of Jesus”⁸⁶ and is datable to the eighteenth/early nineteenth century on palaeographical grounds. But the additional note on fol. 160vb is of particular interest. It informs of a renovation or reconstruction of a local church, of unspecified dedication, at the place “Bet Nobäyt”, i.e. Mänäbäyti.⁸⁷ The note was published with an English translation several years ago.⁸⁸ Recording the event, it refers to “our king Täklä Giyorgis” (who reigned in several intervals, 1779 to 1800)⁸⁹ and “our Metropolitan Iyosab” (I) (in tenure 1779–1803)⁹⁰ and thus gives an indication to the possible date of writing, which would have been at some point between 1779 and 1800.⁹¹ The scribe

⁸⁵ Mänäbäyti is primarily known as an archaeological site. The church dedicated to St Mary stands on a cliff; the church dedicated to Täklä Haymanot stands on the plain, closer to the main road. Both buildings are recent; St Mary church is bigger in size, the church of Täklä Haymanot is very modest. Some Aksumite vestiges are located near both churches. The team of the project Ethio-SPaRe visited the site briefly in 2010 and discovered that the manuscript collection was small and composed mostly of recent manuscripts, of which only nine were photographed. It was difficult to survey the collection because the books were kept at various locations including private houses. In general, the situation was not particularly favourable for a study, and the conditions for photographing were quite difficult. The importance of Mänäbäyti for the issue under discussion became clear much later.

⁸⁶ For a provisional description and images of the manuscript, see <https://betamasheft.eu/manuscripts/ESmsm001/main>, and the database of Ethio-SPaRe [accessed 06.12.2024].

⁸⁷ Bet Nobäyt is the old name of the site from which Mänäbäyti was derived (Bet Nobäyt > Bet Nobäyti (tigrinized) > Män[n]äbäyti?). The etymological link between Mänäbäyti and Bet Nobäyt was confirmed by the local people at the time of the visit of Ethio-SPaRe team in 2010.

⁸⁸ See Nosnitsin, 2013a, pp. 37–40, fig. 38. It is accessible also in a 2010 on-line report, <https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/ethiospare/missions/mission1-2010.html> [accessed 06.12.2024].

⁸⁹ Bm ID: PRS9142TaklaGi.

⁹⁰ Bm ID: PRS10450Yosabl.

⁹¹ One wonders if it is possible to be more exact about the production time of the note since Täklä Giyorgis I's six periods of reign are well-known: 1) July 1779 to February 1784; 2) April 1788 to July 1789; 3) January 1794 to April 1795; 4) December 1795 to May 1796; 5) January 1798 to May 1799; 6) March to June 1800 (see Gusarova, 2015, p. 25, fn. 25 and *passim*; see also “Täklä Giyorgis I” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 826b–27b (by D. Crummey)). The

did not mention his name, but a comparison of handwritings shows that the note was very probably written by the aforementioned Wäldä Tənsáʿe.⁹² A high-resolution photo reproduced here shows more palaeographical details (see Fig. 11).

The note does not contain all signs of the Ethiopic syllabary; some codicological features and scribal practices observed in MS UM-035 and MS UM-042, Unit 2, are not relevant for this short documentary writing. Nonetheless, the note offers enough to identify the scribal hand. The handwriting pertains to the same clumsy “broad style” of Wäldä Tənsáʿe (cf. features A.1–3 above, §4.c). The scribe used a pen with a narrow nib; his handwriting looks more accurate and more controlled than in MS UM-035. The individual letter shapes show a great proximity to the hand of MS UM-035 and Hand 3 in MS UM-042, with only slight deviations. It is sufficient to point to such features of the handwriting attested in MS UM-035 and listed above as B.4 (concerning the structure of third-order *-i* and fifth-order *-e* markers),⁹³ B.7 (opposition between ሰ and ሰ is not always sufficiently expressed),⁹⁴ B.8 (square “module” of ተ), B.9 (peculiar shape of ተ), B.11 (simplified shape of እ), B.6 and B.12 (exaggerated “belly” of ረ, ረ).⁹⁵ A few more letters are compared below in Appendix, showing hardly any significant palaeographical difference.⁹⁶

document under discussion does not relate to the supreme political authority, but it is unlikely that the name of King Täklä Giyorgis would have been mentioned if the writer knew he was not in power.

⁹² The same hand left a few more short notes MS MSM-001, in the upper margins of fols 18r, 23v, 35r, 115v, 130v, 135r, 156v. Upon closer scrutiny it turns out that the manuscript was copied by more than one hand, and one of the hands writing the text starting from fol. 156ra may well be that of Wäldä Tənsáʿe (possibly the passages on fols 156r, 157r, maybe some more). The manuscript is paleographically very complex and demands study in more depth.

⁹³ Even though in full scale only on examples of such letters as ሰ (l. 14) and ሰ (l. 1), ሰ (ls 3, 8) and ሰ (l. 20), እ (l. 11) and እ (l. 8).

⁹⁴ Cf. ሰ (l. 7), ክርስቶስ (ls 6–7, the second ሰ), ውስተ (l. 18).

⁹⁵ Cf. ወረደ (l. 9) and ወረደ (l. 13).

⁹⁶ The reference to “building, structure” (አንገት) (cf. Valieva, 2023, pp. 141, 150) in the last line of “The Register”, indicating that the writer had a special relation to the church building, may be interpreted as an additional argument in favour of the common origin.

5. – *Conclusion*

5.a. Results

Focusing on some codicological features of MS UM-035 it has been possible to detect a material loss and propose a better reading of the relevant passage of “The Register”. Based on the comparison of scribal hands, it has been possible to identify the scribe who wrote “The Register” in MS UM-035 as the one who, with all probability, was responsible for text portions in MS UM-042 (Unit 2, Unit 3), and one additional note (fol. 160vb) and text passages in MS MSM-001. MS UM-042 has supplied the name of the scribe, and MS MSM-001 has given the chronological reference for his activities in the form of the name of the ruling king and the metropolitan in tenure. Returning to the questions posed above (2.c.), I would like to provide the following answers:

1) The scribe’s name was Wäldä Tənsä’ē.

2) The period in which the scribe Wäldä Tənsä’ē was active and produced “The Register” in MS UM-035, could be 1779–1800. Naturally it is possible that he flourished before or after that time. However, not much is known about the average life expectancy of a male in eighteenth-century northern Ethiopia.⁹⁷ Considering all possible exceptions, and that it would have been highly unlikely to assign the composition of a very important document to a young man,⁹⁸ one would therefore consider the second half of the period (close to the end of the eighteenth century) or even the beginning of the nineteenth century as the production period time for MS UM-035. This dating may seem somewhat later than anticipated but it is supported with arguments of palaeographical and non-palaeographical nature, and may work better than a mere estimation.

3) Wäldä Tənsä’ē may have been associated with the church ʿUra Qirqos and *Abunä Kəflä Maryam*, the local senior ecclesiastic, but he was probably also related to the church(s) at Mänäbäyti. The place of production of MS UM-035 was with all probability ʿUra Qirqos/ʿUra Mäsqäl but Mänäbäyti can also not be excluded.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ A simple internet search results in only 40 years of life expectancy in Ethiopia for the year 1960.

⁹⁸ Even more so if we assume that the creation of “The Register” was not pure copying but a result of work with other sources that required composing skills and advanced knowledge of the local realities and history.

⁹⁹ Mänäbäyti appears in “The Register” as Mänäbot/Mänäbät on fols 4r and 7v (cf. Valieva, 2023, p. 152, fn. 148).

4) There is still not much tangible information about Wäldä Tənsáʿe. One may fairly safely surmise he was a local ecclesiastic intellectual, probably influential, and was capable of both composing and writing documentary texts and copying regular texts, but he probably did not make his living from scribing and did not copy much. There may be a hint to Wäldä Tənsáʿe’s knowledge of Scriptures and access to the manuscript collection of ʿUra Qirqos/ʿUra Mäsqaḷ.¹⁰⁰ The question of Wäldä Tənsáʿe’s scribal education can hardly be answered at this stage; the question of his handwriting’s palaeographical classification in the local context requires a deal more research.¹⁰¹ It cannot be ruled out that further writings attributable to the hand of Wäldä Tənsáʿe may be identified in the future and provide more information.¹⁰²

5.b. Further questions

At this point, one may wonder if it is possible to move further and pose more questions concerning MS UM-035 and the context of its production, e.g.:

Which historical events lead to the (re)-production of “The Register”?

What was the intended function of “The Register”?

What was known about King Ṭantäwädəm and the remote Zag^we-time in late eighteenth-century Gulo Mäkäda?

What were the sources Wäldä Tənsáʿe used and what was his perception of them?

Does the very complex and in part vague narration of “The Register” reflect relations between the institutions, hinting at conflicts, disagreements and claims?

¹⁰⁰ As attested in “The Register”, see Bausi, 2018, pp. 445b–46a.

¹⁰¹ Scribal hands that use similar “broad style” and show similarity to the hand of Wäldä Tənsáʿe have been spotted in the collections of the churches Säbäya Maryam and Araʿro Täklä Haymanot, in both main and additional texts (cf. Nosnitsin, 2015, on MSS ATH-003, ATH-005, ATH-008). These collections show the direction moving away from the churches on the plains of Gulo Mäkäda, towards the Irobland and the surroundings of the monastery Gundä Gunde.

¹⁰² Shortly before the article was sent to print, I discovered one more relevant witness. It is MS St John’s College, University of Oxford, 288, where the hand of the text on fols 4r–7r and 63r–70v can be identified as that of Wäldä Tənsáʿe (the name is also mentioned on fol. 6vb, though not as that of a scribe). For the images, see <https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/0bcf4333-f7c1-4eb0-b132-3b55452e5cd3/> [accessed on 12.11.2025]; for the description, see Ullendorff, 2005, pp. 116–20, especially p. 118.

Answers to these questions may be searched for in the eighteenth-century local history of Gulo Mākāda and the neighbouring areas, in the local written tradition and in the memory of the local communities.

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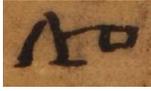
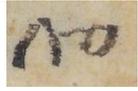
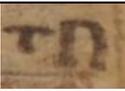
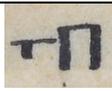
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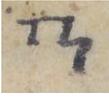
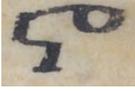
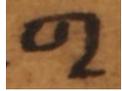
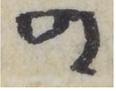
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APPENDIX

In addition to the results presented above, the table below offers a comparison of ten selected letter shapes taken from all three written products assigned to the scribe Wäldä Tənsä'e (see above). Only the letters appearing in all three sources have been selected.

MS UM-035	MS UM-042, Unit 2	MS MSM-001, fol. 160vb (additional note)
		
In ለፌ : (fol. 5r, l. 6 from below)	In ወለተ : (fol. 126r, l. 5)	In ለዓለመ : (fol. 160v, l. 2 from below)
		
In እምጸልቀኔ : (fol. 2v, l. 2 from below)	ለኪሩቤል : (fol. 126r, l. 12)	In ለቃል : (fol. 160v, l. 9)
		
In ሰለሞን : (fol. 5r, l. 8)	In ሰለሜ : (fol. 126r, l. 7)	In ኩሉ : (fol. 160v, l. 9 from below)
		
In ሐፀይ : (fol. 1r, l. 5)	In ሰብሐት : (fol. 126r, l. 12)	In ሐጽዮ : (fol. 160v, l. 12)
		
In ወሀብክዎሙ : (fol. 6r, l. 2 from below)	In ሰብእ : (fol. 134r, l. 7)	In ኢዮሳብ : (fol. 160v, l. 12)
		
In እምነ : (fol. 4v, l. 3 from below)	In ፈነወክ : (fol. 134r, l. 2 from below)	In ሐጽዮ : fol. 160v, ls 12-13)

		
In መንደቆ ፡ (fol. 4v, l. 10)	In በእንተ ፡ (fol. 134r, l. 1)	In ሕንጻ ፡ (fol. 160v, l. 3)
		
In ደኖ ፡ (fol. 4v, l. 9)	In ታደገኖሙ ፡ (fol. 134r, l. 1 from below)	In ዘበኖሙ ፡ (fol. 160v, l. 4)
		
In ላዕለይ ፡ (fol. 2r, l. 2)	In ነቢይ ፡ (fol. 137r, l. 1 from below)	In ኃይለ ፡ (fol. 160v, l. 6)
		
In መንግሥትነ ፡ (fol. 2v, l. 4)	In አግብርተሁ ፡ (fol. 126r, l. 1 from below)	In ተግሁ ፡ (fol. 160v, l. 15)

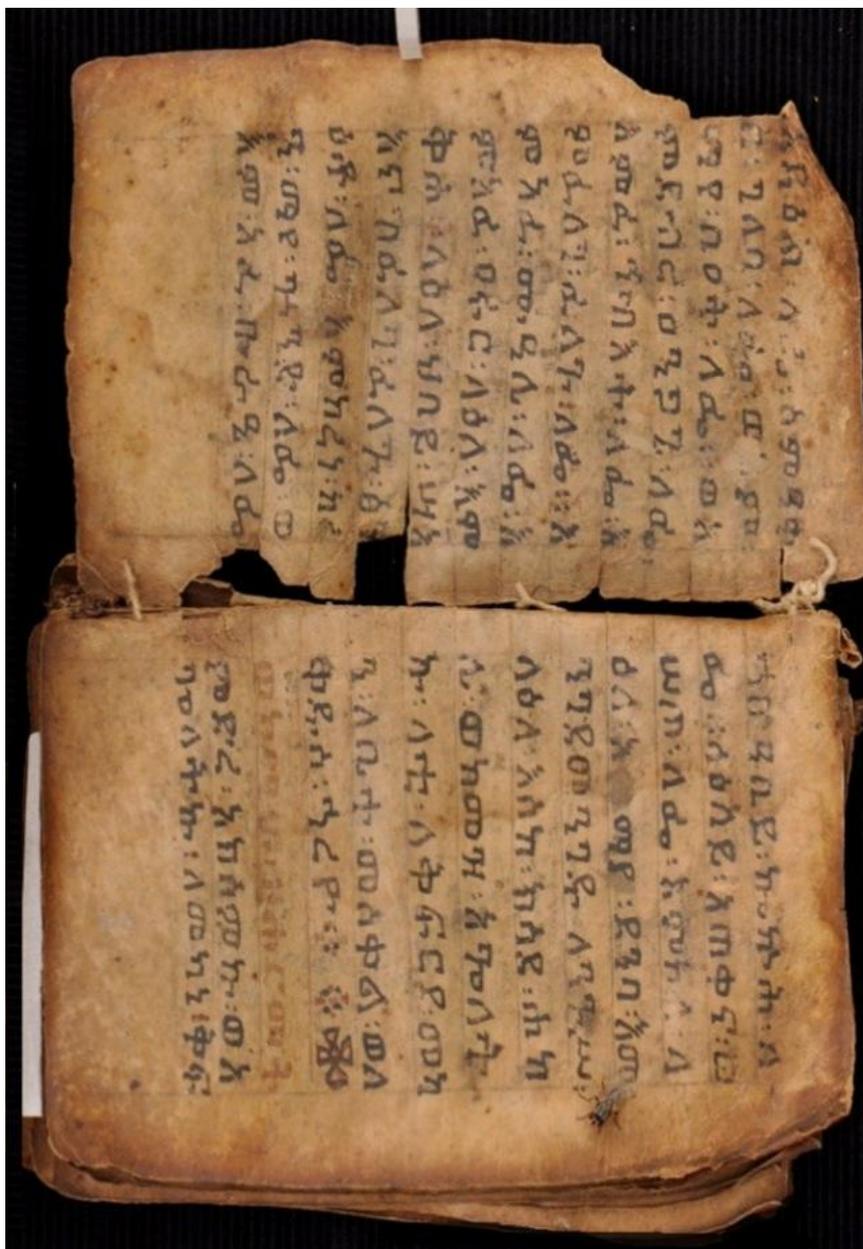
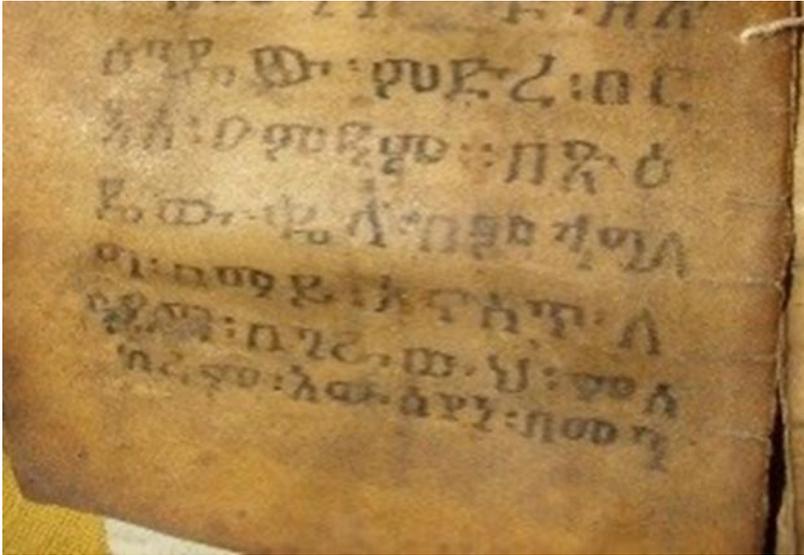


Fig. 1: MS ⁶Ura Qirqos/⁶Ura Mäsqäl, UM-035/C₃-IV-83
 “King Täntäwädäm’s Register”, fols 1v–2r.



Figs 2a–b: fols 6v, 7r (photo courtesy: M. Gervers).

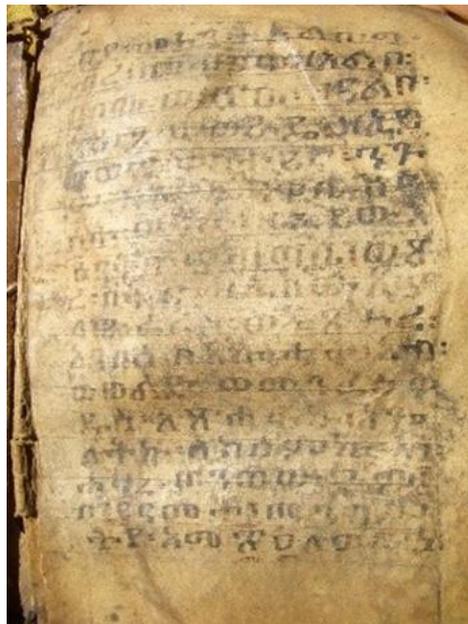
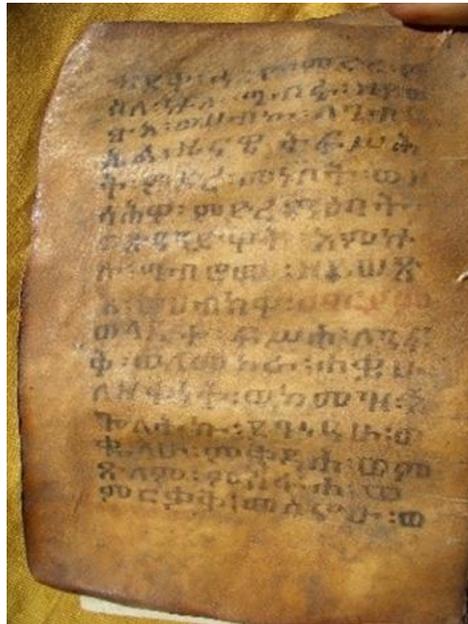


Fig. 3a-b: fols 7v, 8r (photo courtesy: M. Gervers).



Fig. 4a: MS UM-035, fol. 8r, beginning of the uppermost line.

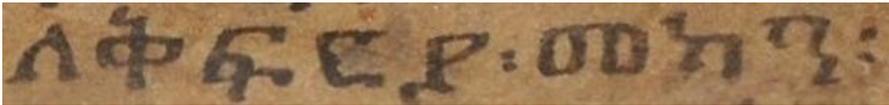


Fig. 4b: MS UM-035, fol. 2r.

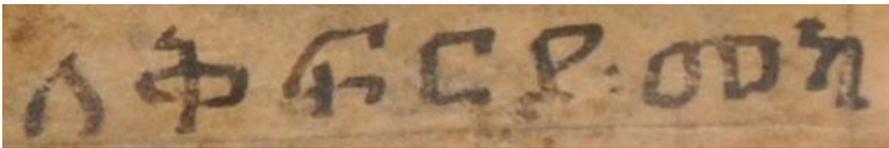


Fig. 4c: MS UM-035, fol. 5r.

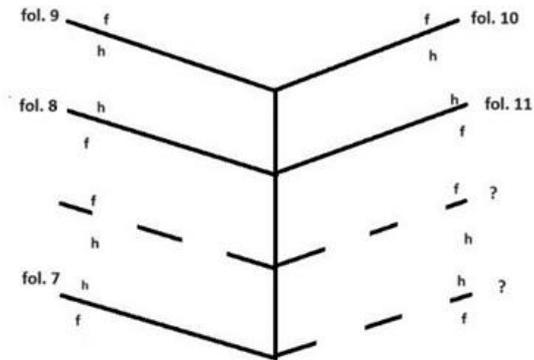


Fig. 5: The structure of quire 2 in MS UM-035 (reconstruction).

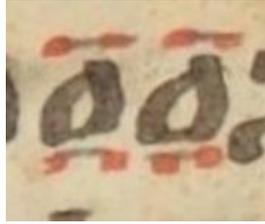


Fig. 6: MS Maryam May Ab'a BQM-012, “Acts and Miracles of St George of Lydda”, eighteenth century, fol. 8vb.

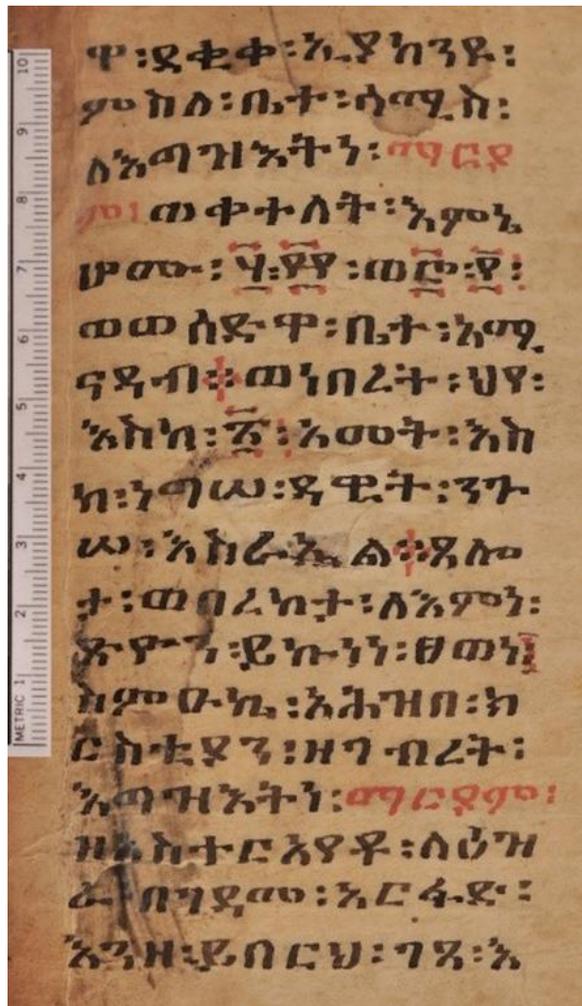


Fig. 7: MS UM-042, fol. 92ra.

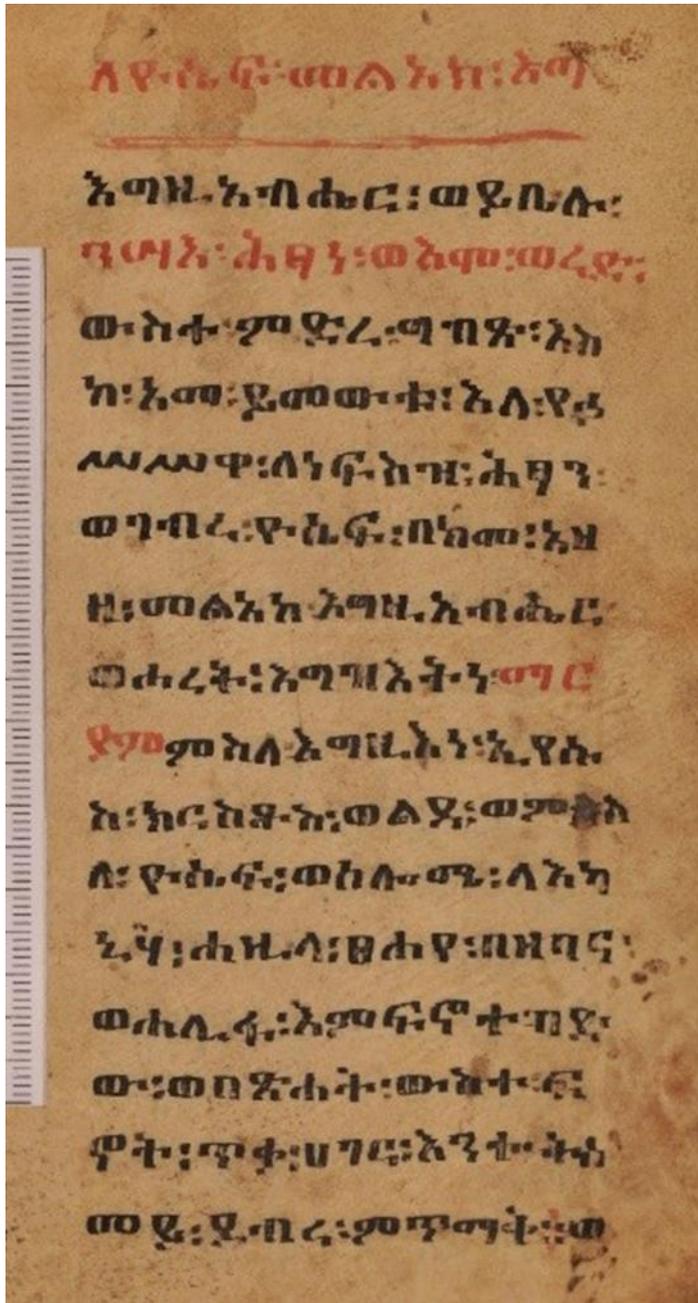


Fig. 8: MS UM-042, fol. 23ra.

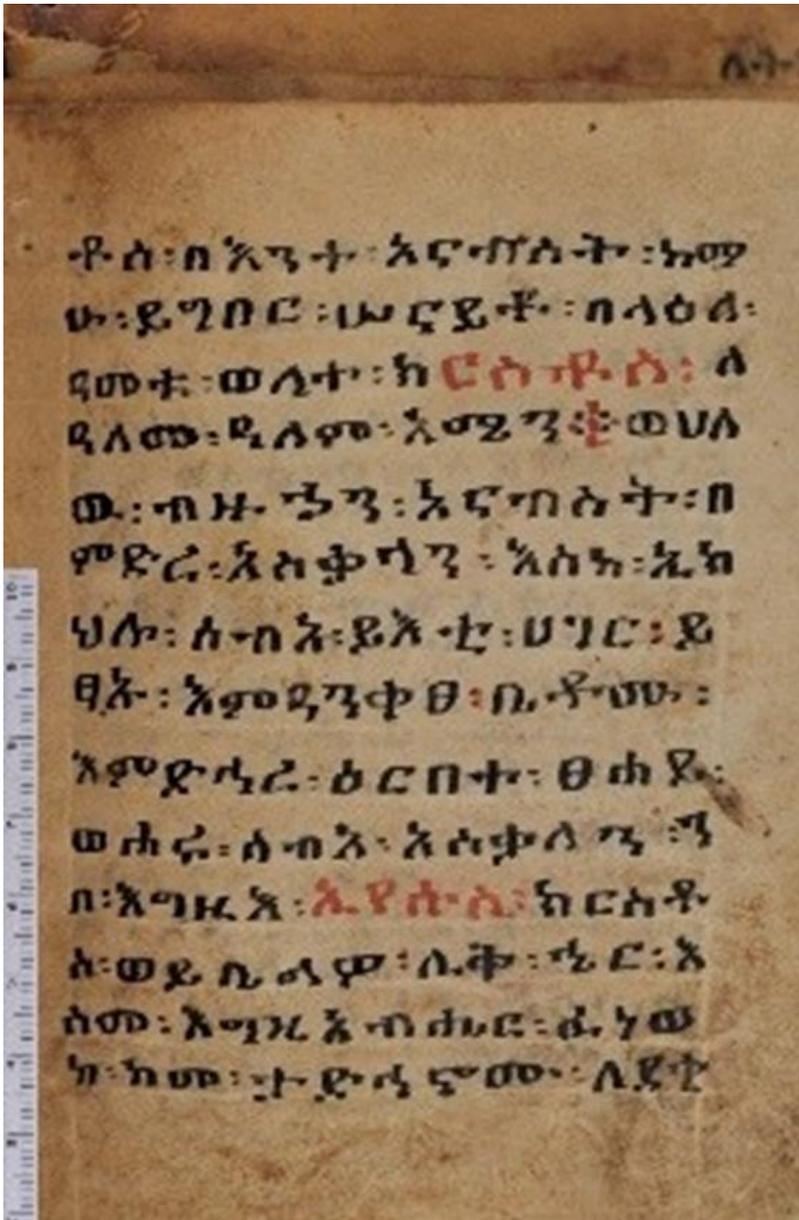


Fig. 9b: MS UM-042, fol. 134r.



Fig. 10a: The church Mänäbäyti Maryam.



Fig. 10b: The church Mänäbäyti Täklä Haymanot.

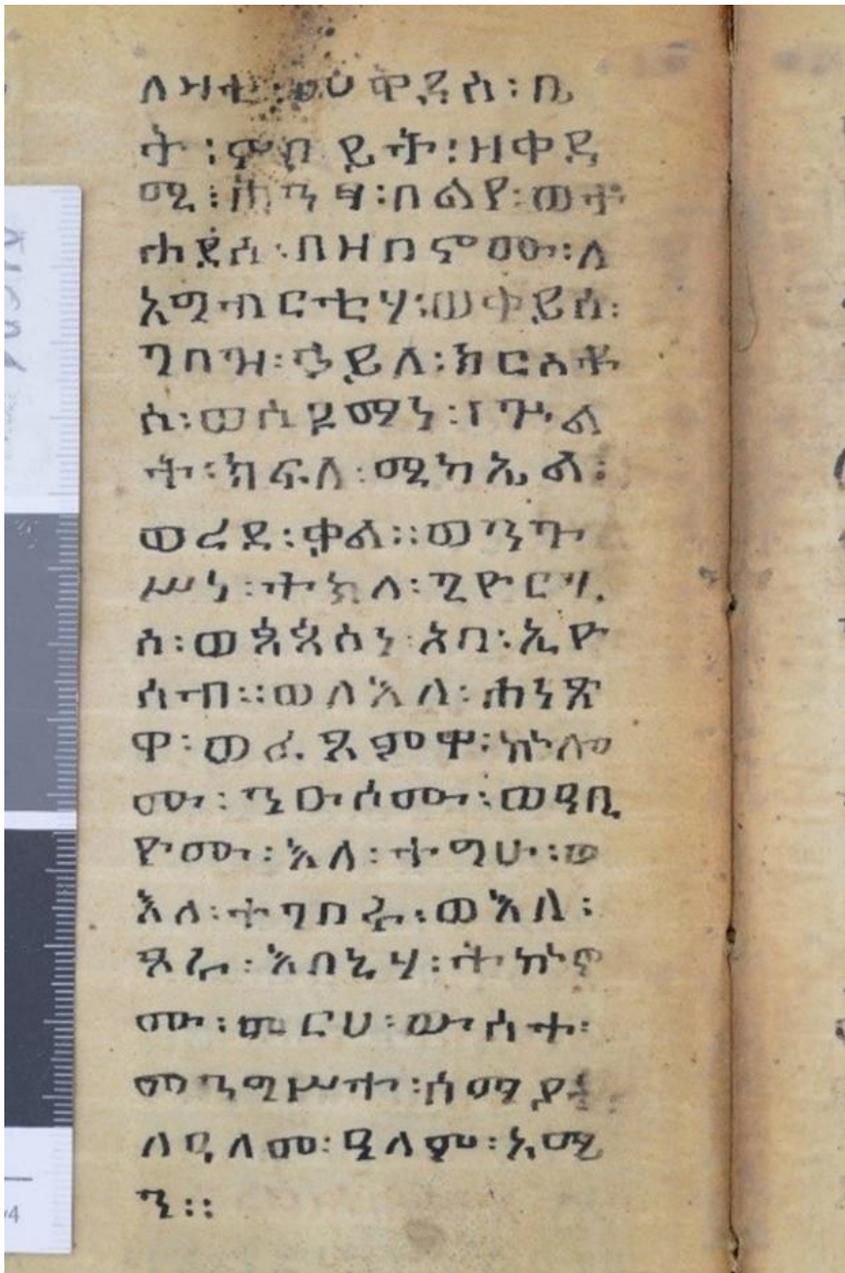


Fig. 11: MS MSM-001, fol. 160vb.

CAROLIN SCHÄFER

*An Old Layer of Paint:
New Discoveries in the Mural Paintings of the Church of
Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos in Lasta, Ethiopia**

1. – *Introduction*

The church of Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos is a well-known and a research object for art historical, historical, and archaeological scholars of Ethiopian art. The place is often visited by tourists who come to see the UNESCO world heritage site Lalibäla. To this day, the church is a popular place of pilgrimage and religious instruction for the locals. About 14 km as the crow flies from Lalibäla, the basilica is situated within a cave complex about 2650 m above sea-level in the Lasta mountains, next to a building of similar construction, and said to be a palace of the legendary builder and priest king Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos. The interior of the church is richly decorated with painted wooden ceilings as well as the assembled,¹ coffered and engraved ornamented ceilings and wooden capitals. It is famous for being home to the oldest surviving Christian wall paintings in Ethiopia, located exclusively in the northern aisle of the three aisled

* I would like to thank Lisa Shekede, Stephen Rickerby and Michael Gervers for providing me generously with essential pictures as the fundamental material on which I made the discoveries, for the exchange of opinions, knowledge, and expertise. I want to thank my supervisor Franz Alto Bauer for his continuing guidance, generous support, and encouragement to publish this work as this article is a part of my master's thesis, handed in at the Ludwig-Maximilian University, Munich under his supervision. My ሰገደግግ, teacher and mentor Wondale Mariam Demissie who taught and teaches me about his culture, cares for me like his sister and for giving me a new home in Ethiopia and proving that I and many others can trust him with my life. I would also like to thank friends and colleagues for their kind support in improving this article, and Lehre@LMU for supporting me and enabling the research on the paintings. Ich danke aus tiefstem Herzen meiner Mutter Rosa Schäfer für ihre unermüdliche Unterstützung und Begleitung und möchte ihr diesen Artikel widmen.

¹ Some of the ceilings with the ornamental decorations are not engraved but assembled from several pieces to achieve the effect of the protruding pattern from the flat surface.

pseudo-basilican building,² facing the natural light from the north (Figs. 1 and 2). With this article I hope to contribute to the discussion and aim for a better understanding of the dating as well as the ties between the Coptic culture and Zagwe dynasty in the Wällo region.

The estimated dating is a much discussed and disputed topic among researchers of different disciplines. Scholars' efforts are met with much difficulty as clear criteria for an exact dating are lacking and we must work with relative dating estimations. To illustrate further issues: "Another complication is whether the architecture, painting and decoration are all of the same date. The possibility of different phasing for these is mostly overlooked in the literature".³ Dating estimates based on the surface of the easily visible painting did lead to later suggestions: Michael Gervers and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska suggested in their article the eleventh–twelfth century for the construction of the building,⁴ based on stylistic evidence in comparison with paintings from Deir el-Chohada in Esna, Egypt.⁵ In a more recent publication, Michael Gervers suggests a contemporary construction to some of the Lalibäla churches, specifically its similarity to the church Betä Amanu²el and dates the construction of Yämṛəḥannä Krəstos to the mid-thirteenth century.⁶ Further discussions of other researchers based on hagiographical and historical sources about the Zagwe dynasty came to similar results, either more or less precisely dating the reign of King Yämṛəḥannä Krəstos to the twelfth century, as Marie-Laure Derat and Gianfranco Fiaccadori suggest with different interpretations.⁷

David Phillipson argues, based on the possibility that the duration of the Zagwe dynasty having lasted longer, and Aksumite elements being used in the

² Although the church is a basilica in shape and plan, it lacks the necessary clerestory for a basilica.

³ Shekede and Rickerby, 2016, p. 14. Phillipson argues similarly to Shekede and Rickerby about different phases of construction and mural painting, Phillipson, 2009, p. 184. Because I am adding only a detail to the overall well published church, please read Michael Gervers article for a more complete list of publications about the church: Gervers, 2014. A more recent publication that refers to the church is authored by Flood – Fricke, 2024, pp. 147–83.

⁴ Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, 2001, pp. 11–12. Other authors supported this estimate: Girma Élias, Lepage, Mercier, 2001, p. 312; Thiessen, 2010, p. 4.

⁵ Leroy, 1975, p. 13; Coquin, 1964. Leroy adopts Coquin's dating and bases it on Patriarch Mark whose name, without Roman numerals, is featured on the painting. It might be the Egyptian Orthodox Patriarch Mark III (1166–1189) in the relevant inscription, the predecessor by name lived in the ninth century and Mark IV in the fourteenth century.

⁶ Gervers, 2014, pp. 27, 46.

⁷ Derat, 2010, pp. 174–75; Fiaccadori, 2015, p. 25.

architectonic style of the church that the construction should be dated to the eleventh rather than twelfth century.⁸ Furthermore, the lemma ‘Wood’ in the *EAE*, by Balicka-Witakowska in 2014, mentions the carved wood decoration of the Yəmrəḥännä Krəstos church and also comes to a date in the eleventh century.⁹ It is important to stress that in these publications the authors base their dating estimates on structural elements and not on pictures, which conceivably could have been painted later.

However, two investigations with radiocarbon dating of samples taken from the palace and the church, as well as fibres from the paintings, resulted in more or less specific dates: both investigations predate most of the suggested dates of scholars. Mengistu Gobezie Worku published in his dissertation the samples taken from different wooden parts of the interior as well as from the exterior of the church. His results showed an average time window from 1020–1200 with 95.4% accuracy.¹⁰ As all the samples taken from different locations and different types of wood have similar dates, it can be stated that the trees were felled on purpose to be used for building the church. Likewise, Mengistu, in agreement with the hagiographic tradition, concludes that the dating needs to be re-evaluated and suggests that the church was built in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.¹¹

The World Monuments Fund has significantly earlier results for the adjacent palace: “Samples of timber were taken from the palace under supervision of ARCCCH and the Local Committee, and these were radiocarbon dated at the Chrono Centre for Climate, the Environment and Chronology, Queen’s University, Belfast. The age of the wood splinter was given as AD 914 +/- 25, and the age of the organic fibres was given as AD 1017 +/- 24. Based on this analysis, a reliable date for construction of the palace and (almost certainly) the church can be given as AD 1017 +/- 24. This is a full century earlier than most scholars have previously believed, which has important implications for the understanding of medieval Ethiopia and history of the Zag^we dynasty”.¹² For the samples taken from the palace it is important to understand that the construction of the two buildings does not necessarily coincide and is therefore

⁸ Phillipson, 2009, pp. 188–89.

⁹ “Wood” in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), p. 555 (by E. Balicka-Witakowska).

¹⁰ Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, pp. 80–81 and Table 11 on p. 87. One sample YK4 dates exceptionally early to the years 860–1025, however, this could be explained with long storage times for timber or the reuse of wood.

¹¹ Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, pp. 185–89.

¹² World Monuments Fund, 2017, p. 18.

not necessarily applicable when discussing the dating of the church.¹³ Furthermore, Mikael Muehlbauer points out that it is in the nature of radiocarbon dates that they indicate the date of the felling of the tree, not the construction of a building.¹⁴ However, the question of how long timber has to be seasoned before it is ready for construction must be asked. The answers, however, cannot significantly distort the dating estimate of the church, based on radiocarbon dates, since the results range over a period of almost two centuries. In fact, it can be ruled out that the use of olive, juniper, and cedar wood underwent a significantly longer process of seasoning before it was finally used for construction, and is therefore negligible.¹⁵

In this article I aim to provide evidence for an older layer beneath the visible painting on the east wall of the northern *pastophorion*, and for an earlier dating than is often assumed. In addition, an inscription in Greek letters provides further evidence of the close relationship between the Zag^we kings and Coptic Egypt.

Above the northern *pastophorion* are two registers of paintings, they are well visible, the first one depicting the Entry into Jerusalem, the Ascension and Pentecost, and in the second one depicting four equestrian saints, Menas, either Victor, Mercurios, George or another equestrian saint stabbing a figure, an anonymous saint and finally Philotheus (Fig. 3).¹⁶

¹³ I am grateful to Stephen Rickerby for his expertise and the fruitful discussions of the results of the World Monuments Fund. It is worth noting though that Mengistu's investigations resulted in a contemporary construction of the palace and the church based on radiocarbon samples, see Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, pp. 59–80.

¹⁴ Muehlbauer, 2020, p. 35.

¹⁵ Avramidis, Lazarescu, Rahimi, 2023; Olorunnisola, 2018, pp. 49–61. It is not possible to give an exact time for the seasoning of timber used in construction, as important parameters such as the humidity in the air, initial moisture content of the timber, ambient conditions, air circulation, location, and applied technique for seasoning etc., are not known. However, the duration of the air drying seasoning process of *Juniperus procera* lasts about 49 days and of a similar species like *Olea capensis* lasts about 112 days in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. For this detailed information I am very grateful to Anteneh Tesfaye Tekleyohannes. Logically, the seasoning process does not significantly alter the estimate of dating as it could be finished within one year in dry conditions like in the case of the highland in Ethiopia. In addition, *Cedrus libani* wood dries quickly and is not as sensitive to seasoning as the other species used. I want to express my gratitude for the generous help of Stavros Avramidis and Anteneh Tesfaye Tekleyohannes for the important explanation, shared expertise, and estimation of this process.

¹⁶ Friedlander and Friedlander, 2015, p. 270.

Focusing on the first register, it becomes clear that structures underneath shine through, which appear separately from the iconography of the visible paintings.¹⁷

2. – *The Entry into Jerusalem*

The wall painting on the left hand side, the triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, shows twelve disciples on the left, Christ enthroned on a white foal, approaching the townscape of Jerusalem, two women welcome him and Zachaeus, in a tree, watches from above. Another small figure can be just made out placing clothes on the ground for the foal to step on (Fig. 4).

Prominently above the heads of the disciples, arch-like bands of bright and dark colours can be seen as well as further structures that are detached from the visible paintings. Seemingly random lines run through the painted disciples, but if one considers the circular shapes to be heads with yellow-coloured nimbus and dark hair then the lines represent the continuing bodies of figures and their clothing, resembling a group of people. At a slightly higher level than the head of Christ on horseback, another figure is clearly visible with recognisable facial features such as eyes with bars for pupils, a beardless mouth and short black hair. The bright colour around his head reveals a nimbus and even his long red-purple clothing, possibly a *pallium*,¹⁸ is visible underneath the white colour of the foal. Because the clothing bulges to the right, the prominent figure is plausibly depicted in a seated position. This enlarged and seated figure emphasises the iconography of approaching figures from his right considering a discernible small gap between the group of figures, his elevated position, the purple colour of his garment, and the prominent frontal depiction. Therefore, it is likely that this section expresses its own narrative, which cannot be identified as yet since the identity of the figures still remains unclear (Fig. 5).

Any suggestion to identify the enlarged figure as Christ would be rather convenient. However, the attribution of a cross nimbus, codex, or blessing

¹⁷ See for a complete description of the later paintings: Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, 2001; Gnisci, 2014; Gnisci, 2015a; Gnisci, 2015b; Gnisci, 2017. A new publication on the church, including the murals, is forthcoming, see Bosc-Tiessé, 2020, p. 342, fn. 72; Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, forthcoming.

¹⁸ When I speak of the *pallium*, especially in combination with the tunic, I am referring to the (late) ancient and Roman-Greek garments of the philosophers, used in the iconography of Christ to represent him as a wise teacher, and not to the pallium of a bishop's garment. See for further information: Jensen, 2020, pp. 60–83.

hand like in the other figure of Christ must consequently remain open for discussion and further research. To the left side of the enlarged central figure appears another scene, possibly to start underneath the townscape of Jerusalem.

3. – *Ascension*

Here, faces with dominant eyes and bars for pupils, repeated semicircles of yellow nimbuses and black hair shine through on the height of the domes of the city, continuing downwards in similar structures like in the painting of the disciples discussed above. The rest of the physiognomy is not visible in the photographs used for this research. In the area of the masonry, outstretched over the two disciples of the Ascension next to it, a more dominant and flat colour can be seen, in the form of a bulging piece of clothing. This is evidence of the fragility and thinness of the painting on top. The shape of the lines divides the garment into two parts, and most likely represents a cloak or *pallium*, revealing the continuing lines of the tunic underneath. At least three figures are recognisable, following the visible and corresponding tilted heads. The figures could be interpreted, based on the direction of the bodies, to be walking towards the enthroned Christ, despite the impression of the tilted heads to face into the other direction when compared to the figures in the spandrel (Fig. 6). Furthermore, some hands, open and held upwards with their palms, emphasising the suggested approach of the corresponding figure of Christ from his right. Of course, the heads do not necessarily belong to the bodies but could be additional figures, depicted independently from them.

Visible to their left is an enlarged and enthroned Christ, who can be clearly discerned by his cross nimbus, as well as possibly holding a codex in his left hand and making a blessing gesture with his right hand towards the approaching figures. For his blessing he uses the outstretched index, middle and little fingers of the right hand, while holding his ring finger with his thumb; this gesture is identical to the blessing gesture in the later or uppermost painting. He is dressed in a tunic and wears the *pallium*, on part of which is laid over his left shoulder and crossed over his torso. More folds from his tunic reach from his chest to his raised right arm. Over Christ's head emerges a structure like a semicircle that acts like a frame and becomes oval but does not form a mandorla since it is interrupted to his left by wavy vertical lines. Moreover, there are beams of light illuminating a scene which could be either a visualised miracle or blessing scene, or possibly represent curtains. Some recognition and contouring of his face were possible and he appears to be frontally depicted, which is consistent with the depiction of the other figures but must be left open for the completion of the contours (Fig. 7).

4. – Pentecost

In the later Pentecost painting, a discernible head emerges underneath the arch and the veil over the dove and was previously often interpreted as God or a biblical personification of Christ as sun (Fig. 8).¹⁹

It is de facto a part of the older painting, shining through the bright yellow colour of the veil in the arch and clarified by the black frame of the yellow nimbus around the round shaped head that continues over the arch. He has short black hair, is beardless, young, and frontally depicted with a body continuing downwards, dressed in a bright coloured long tunic-like clothing and a cloak. Dominant features such as red circles on his cheeks, a very pointedly shaped nose, prominent black eyebrows, and bars as pupils define his physiognomy and are therefore identical to those of the figures in the adjacent spandrel and in the Ascension painting (Figs. 9 and 10).

The man's right hand is held in front of his chest and at the same time seems to point to something on the upper left of it with an outstretched index finger, most likely the inscription or the figures in the spandrel. His enlarged shape, in comparison to the other figures, emphasises a narratively charged meaning. To the right of the man an undulating building structure or element, mentioned above, stretches like an arch over the figure of Christ. Taking a closer look at the figure underneath the Pentecost painting, it is unclear whether the bands emerging are wings from his body, indicating an identification for an angel positioned next to Christ, or whether he has any other meaning. In conclusion, his enlarged portrayal and his position close to Christ make the identification of the figure as an angel probable, but further research is needed, in particular, in view of the inscription, which is still unclear.

The inscription is written to the left of his face, next to his nimbus, underneath the arch, and is framed with a black bow and continues past the yellow coloured arch, which makes a continuation of the inscription likely. The black letters are written on a reddish ground and could be identified as Greek letters, used in Coptic or Nubian texts.²⁰ Considering the close ties to Coptic Egypt, it is reasonable to think of the inscription to be of Coptic origin, like the workshop that overpainted the preexisting mural painting as well as the

¹⁹ Friedlander and Friedlander, 2015, p. 270; Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, 2001, p. 38; Girma Élias, Lepage, Mercier, 2001, p. 326.

²⁰ I want to express my gratitude to Friedhelm Hoffmann, who was able to identify the letters as Greek and suggested the languages to be Coptic or Nubian. Further explanations about the inscription are based on his expertise and kindness to support me in interpreting the new discovery.

imported cedar timber.²¹ In churches of Coptic Egypt, like El Muallaqa church in Cairo, cedar is a popular and important construction material and might have been seen there by the Ethiopian delegates sent there to ask for a new patriarch.²² Cedar wood was used and traded in Egypt since antiquity and it is therefore likely to have been bought by Ethiopian delegates.²³ In addition, the pigments used in the paintings do not appear in any other comparable Ethiopian mural painting and support the already existing evidence for a foreign, most likely Coptic workshop.²⁴

The long lines above the letters usually suggest *nomina sacra* like as is the case for *IC XC* next to the figure of Christ or figures of a date, but the complete inscription has not been identifiable yet.

5. – *Figures in the spandrel*

In the spandrel adjacent to the eastern wall are four painted figures, all turning to their right with the face frontal and the body in a three-quarter view (Fig. 11).

The two central heads are slightly tilted backwards and all figures are dressed in a long tunic and a cloak, possibly a *pallium*, as well as nimbuses around their heads, short black hair, and beardless faces. Some hold what

²¹ Balicka-Witakowska and Gervers, 2001, pp. 17, 42–47; World Monuments Fund, 2017, p. 18; Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, p. 86. Mengistu and the authors of the World Monuments Fund suggest *Cedrus libani* or cedar wood from the Levant as it was written in the *gādī* of the priest king, Marrassini, 1995.

²² Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, pp. 95–96, “Cedar wood was used in the ancient and medieval Coptic churches of Egypt. [...] The interior of El Muallaqa was intricately decorated with painted arches and cedar panels. There were also cedar screens, cedar beams, and cedar door-leaves made from panels. The church of El Muallaqa is very important because it served as an official residence of the Coptic patriarchs of Alexandria, who were historically based in Alexandria. Cairo became the fixed and official residence of the Coptic patriarch at the Hanging Church during the time of Patriarch Christodoulos (1047–1077). It was apparently frequented by the Ethiopian delegates who travelled to Egypt to request a bishop. [...] Therefore, it is possible that such cedar-decorated churches might have inspired Ethiopian representatives who then recommended the use of cedar in the Church of Yimrhane Kristos”.

²³ Liphshitz and Biger, 1991, pp. 167–73; Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, p. 95; Paetz gen. Schieck, 2013, p. 154.

²⁴ Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018, p. 140; Kidane Fanta Gebremariam, Kvittingen, Banica, 2013, p. 465; Shekede and Rickerby, 2016, pp. 40–41. Lead white as a pigment was apparently used by Coptic workshops in Egypt, such as the Red Monastery: Luzi and De Cesaris, 2002, p. 163.

looks like a codex in their hands, but no other attributions are visible. Because the figures are painted without captions, which would allow recognisable attributes, or are embedded in an unknown narrative, their identification must remain open.²⁵ Physiognomic peculiarities such as the red circles on the cheeks as well as the very pointed noses stand out from the facial features in the later wall painting and can be compared more clearly with that of the older painting on the east wall. Thus, the painting in the spandrel is an existing part of the older wall painting that has not been painted over.

6. – *Evaluation*

Once the contour drawings are assembled, while taking careful account of the inaccuracies, a rather complex narrative emerges with the images of several figures, at least two of which are better visible and enlarged and one which can be identified as Christ (Fig. 12).

All the recognisable faces of the potential or even highly visible figures, moreover, share the same stylistic features: the red circles on the cheeks, the pointed noses, and bars as pupils. In addition, x-shaped decorative markings appear on the drapery of some figures. It, therefore, is credible to consider the spandrel as part of the first painting and *belonging to it*. At present it is unclear whether the figures in the spandrel belong to the narrative of the figure in the Pentecost painting, although the figure in the latter is pointing to them with an outstretched index finger.

Further, it remains unclear whether only one iconographical topic is depicted here or whether several topics share the same space. In my view, the possibility of several narratives is indicated by the figure that is below the mounted Christ in the painting *The Entry into Jerusalem*, as it has a greater distance to the other figures or objects to his right and left side.²⁶

The position of the painting is also important as it does not appear to go over the subsequently filled beam in the wall, which is constructed using an alternating timber and plastered stone brick technique. A comparison can be

²⁵ Thiessen, 2010, p. 16, the author interprets the four figures with scrolls in their hands as Apostles, however there is no clear evidence for this identification. In fact, in the Aksumite frieze of the church Betä Maryam in Lalibäla there are saints depicted in a comparative matter: holding scrolls in both their hands and depicted frontally. Their number of 21 figures in total allows no clear identification but seems to represent saints, prophets etc. in a similar pattern, see Mercier, Lepage, Bittar, 2012, p. 108.

²⁶ As the contours drawn are based on photographs, the result should be viewed with this in mind and might contain inaccuracies.

made with the south aisle, as here the original wall, without additional plaster, is still preserved in situ (Figs. 13 and 14). Thus, the painting of the older images was done exclusively on the section of wall that contains plastered stone bricks. The later filling of the gaps, caused by the wooden beams in the wall, were consequently carried out by the painters of the later painting.²⁷ Comparably constructed churches show evidence of similar technique for painting the already plastered layer of stone bricks in the wall, instead of filling in the gaps caused by the beams or blocks of stone.

፳mäkina Mädhane Aläm in Lasta,²⁸ for example, shows that no added plaster was used to expand the area on the wall for mural paintings at walking height. Instead, a circulating narrow frieze was created to decorate the interior of the lower aisles, and is using the available space of the plastered areas.²⁹

7. – Conclusion

In conclusion, the older wall painting is significant in that it enables to raise new questions about dating. The radiocarbon showing results from the eleventh–twelfth century already tended towards an older dating of the church than some authors assumed.³⁰ The paintings would provide further arguments for an older dating and in the light of this research finding need to be re-discussed. Also, the result of the radiocarbon dating of two centuries must be understood as the date of the church’s construction. So far, the paintings do not provide further evidence of an exact date of their creation yet, it is therefore necessary to continue the work with relative dating: an estimation can be made with a tendency towards an older dating of the eleventh century, within the radiocarbon dating of eleventh–twelfth century. Phillipson and Balicka-Witakowska already suggested in their publications the eleventh century for construction based on stylistic arguments like the eclectic copy of Aksumite architecture or the style of engraved decoration on the wooden capitals inside

²⁷ Shekede and Rickerby, 2016, pp. 40, 43–45. I would also like to thank Stephen Rickerby and Lisa Shekede for the fruitful discussions about the correct estimation of dating the paintings in the correct order.

²⁸ “፳mäkina churches” in *EAE*, vol. II (2005), pp. 269b–70b (by E. Balicka-Witakowska).

²⁹ See the pictures in the publication about the church of Gervers, 2006, p. 107 fig. 10.

³⁰ It is important to mention again the significant differences in the evaluation between the results of the World Monuments Fund, 2017 and the published dissertation of Mengistu Gobezie Worku, 2018. The samples of Mengistu were taken directly from the church and not from the adjacent palace and therefore serve as more reliable evidence.

the church, which are important elements to be considered for the fundamental construction.³¹

Finally, it is so far unclear whether the murals show a single or rather several iconographies as the positioning of the figures mentioned above offer this conclusion. However, in order to be able to determine an exact iconography of the older painting, as well as to enable a completion and translation of the inscription in the upper right corner of the wall painting on the east wall, further investigation on site is needed.

In addition, it is essential to engage in a conservation programme that enables the ongoing study of these medieval paintings to continue and ensure their long-term preservation for future generations of the congregation, clergy, and researchers.³²

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³¹ Phillipson, 2009, pp. 188–89; “Wood in traditional Christian art” in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), p. 555a–57b (by E. Balicka-Witakowska).

³² Shekede and Rickerby, 2016, pp. 66–83, here p. 82 for recommendations and requirements. Furthermore, the appropriate treatment of the paintings requires the best possible understanding of them, as the existence of the older painting has only recently been discovered. Further research is needed to assess the best possible treatment for the preservation of the artistic record of this church.

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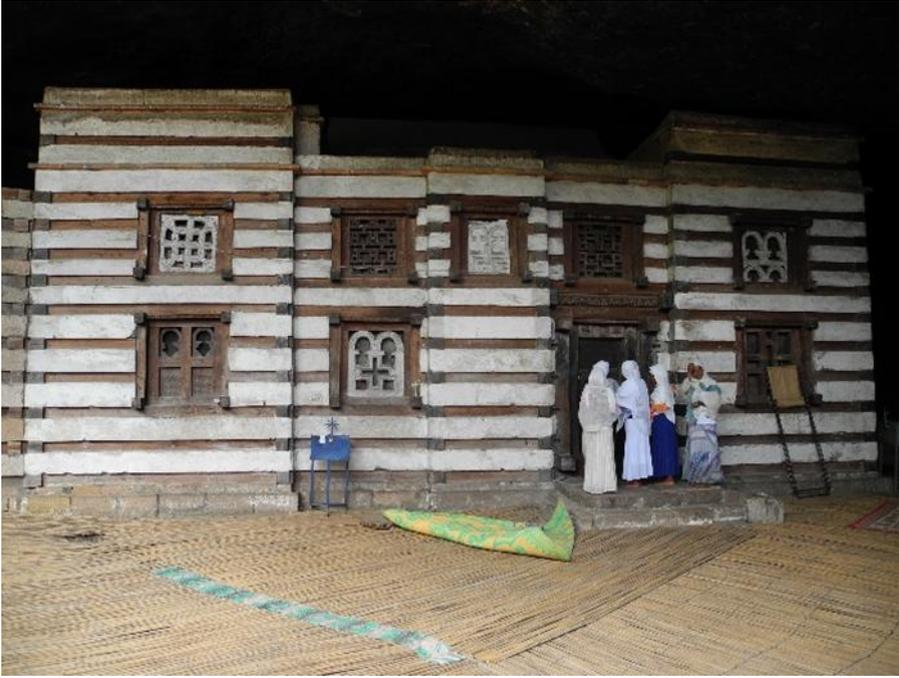


Fig. 1: Wällo, Church of Yəmrəhannā Krəstos, northern façade with prominent towers at the corners and alternating jut out and set back compartments of the façade.
Photo by C. Schäfer.

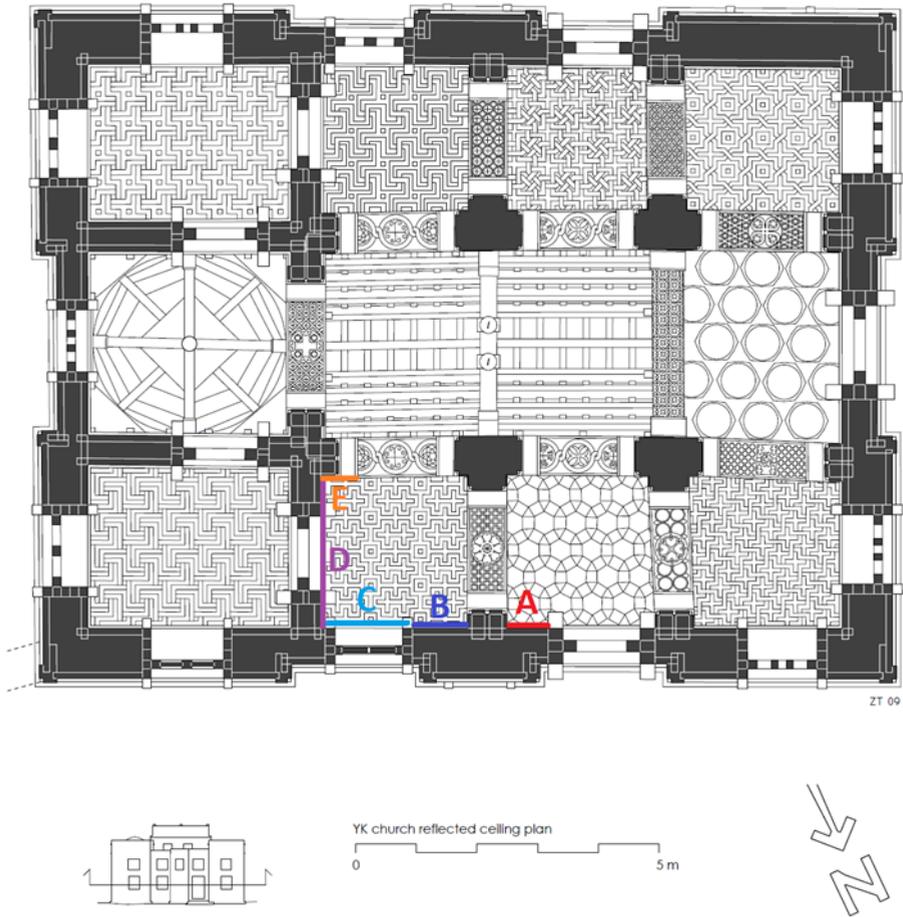


Fig. 2: Plan of the Yəmṛəḥännä Krəstos church by Zara Thiessen with additions of the author; A: Flight into Egypt; B: first register with Baptism; second register Washing of the Feet; C: Crucifixion, Women at the Tomb, Noli me Tangere, Incredulity of Thomas; D: first register with Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension and Pentecost; second register with Menas, Claudius/Mercurios/Victor etc., anonymous equestrian, Philotheus; E: four figures in the spandrel.



Fig. 3: Mural paintings above the door of the northern pastophorion, showing in two registers the Entry into Jerusalem, the Ascension, the Pentecost, Menas, Victor/Mercurios/George/Claudius etc., an anonymous saint and Philotheus.

Photo by S. Rickerby.



Fig. 4: Entry into Jerusalem with black contours of the visible, upper layer and in green contours of the painting underneath. Photo by M. Gervers, contours by C. Schäfer.



Fig. 5: Contours of the older painting underneath the Entry into Jerusalem and part of the Ascension paintings. By C. Schäfer.



Fig. 6: Ascension with black contours of the visible, upper layer and in green contours of the painting underneath. Photo by M. Gervers, Contours by C. Schäfer.



Fig. 7: Contours of the painting underneath the Ascension. By C. Schäfer.



Fig. 8: Pentecost with black contours of the visible, upper layer and in green contours of the painting underneath. Photo by M. Gervers, contours by C. Schäfer.



Fig. 9: Pentecost with figure and the inscription on the upper right corner with black contours of the visible, upper layer and in green contours of the painting underneath.

Photo by M. Gervers, contours by C. Schäfer.

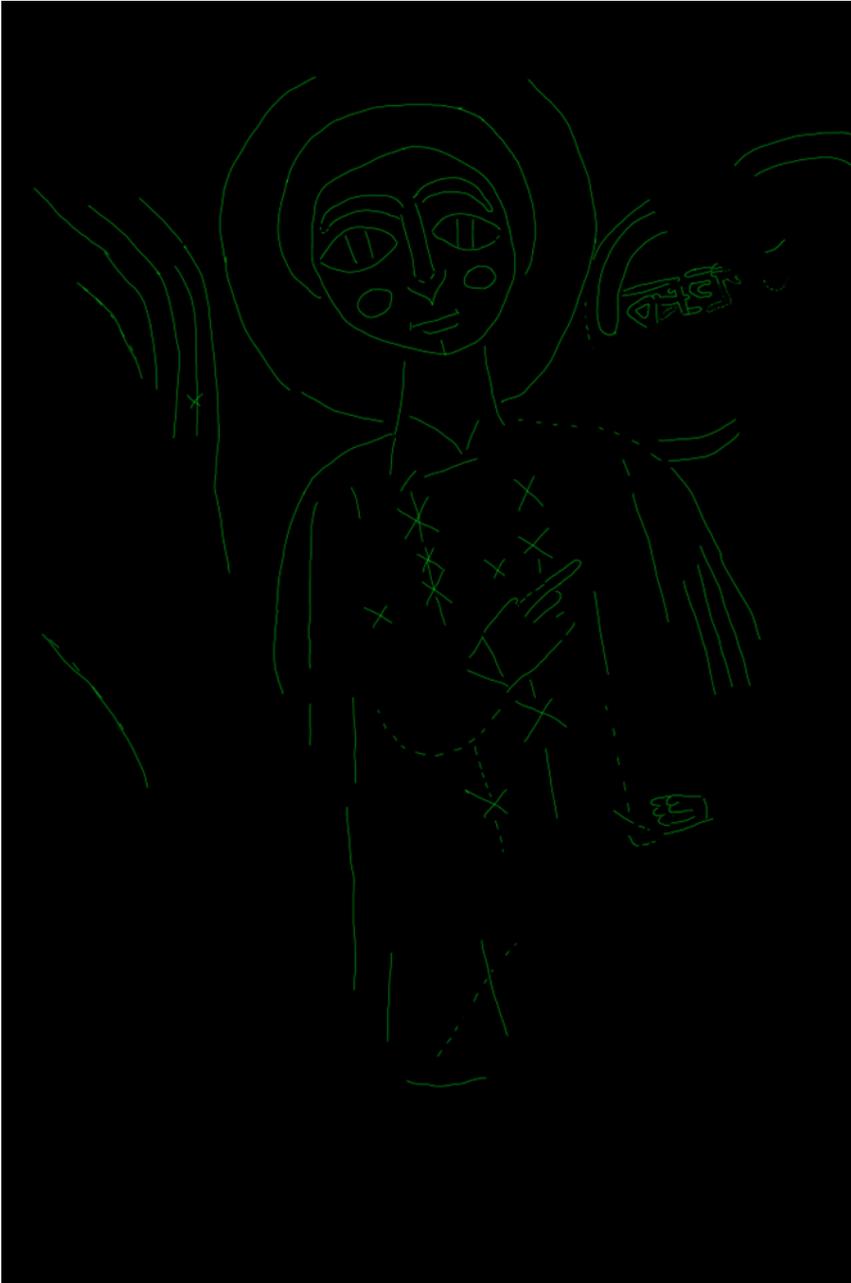


Fig. 10: Contours of the figure and inscription underneath the Pentecost. By C. Schäfer.



Fig. 11: Figures in the spandrel, adjacent to the east wall painting next to the Pentecost depicting four anonymous figures with black contours.

Photo by S. Rickerby, contours by C. Schäfer.

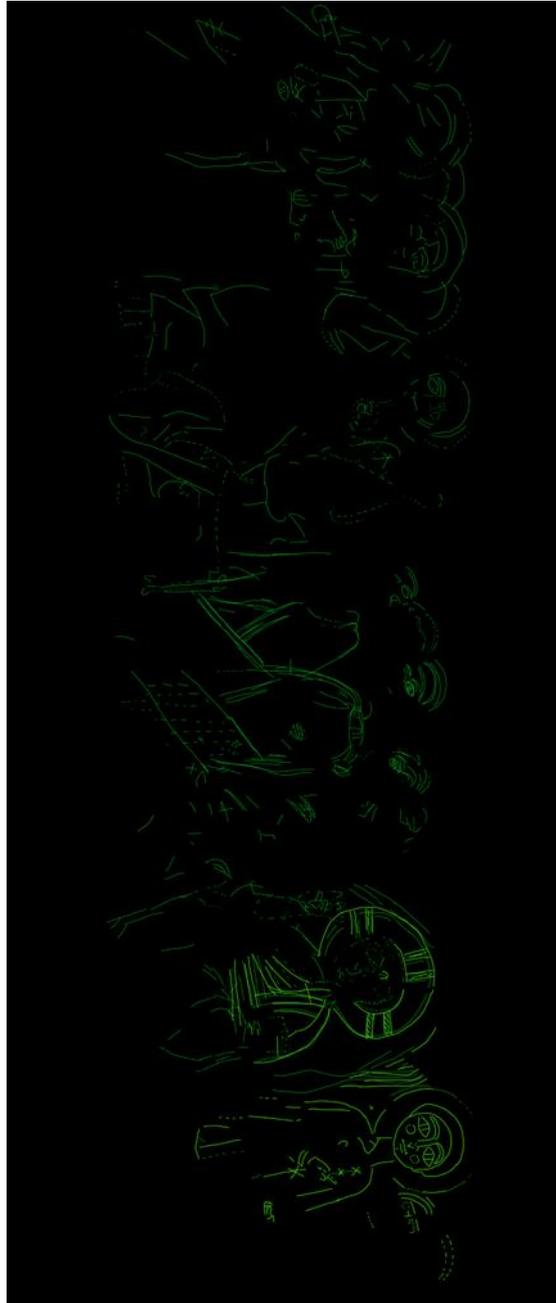


Fig. 12: Contours of the old layer of paint underneath the Entry into Jerusalem, Ascension and Pentecost from left to right with inaccuracies. By C. Schäfer.



Fig. 13: Outlines of the subsequently filled beams on the east wall above the northern pastophorion. By S. Rickerby and L. Shekede.



Fig. 14: Situation of the wall above the southern pastophorion. Photo by S. Rickerby.

LUISA SERNICOLA

***Post-Aksumite Aksum through the Lens of Archaeology:
Space, Environment, and Social Structures***

1. – *Introduction*

The “Dark Ages” of northern Ethiopian and Eritrean history correspond archaeologically to the so-called “Post-Aksumite culture”, a term conventionally used to refer to the material evidence from the period of expansion of the Christian kingdom between the decline of Aksum (eighth/ninth centuries CE) and the emergence of the Solomonic dynasty (thirteenth century CE).

Despite the widespread use of this label, archaeological evidence for the Post-Aksumite culture in the regions that had been Aksum’s heartland and areas of influence remains chronologically vague and rather limited—both quantitatively and in terms of geographic representativeness. A number of potentially informative Post-Aksumite sites have been located in Eritrea and Tigray,¹ but none has so far been extensively investigated, with the exception of Mifsas Bahri,² which, however, still remains far from comprehensively studied.

At Aksum, the most thoroughly investigated site in the region and the primary focus of this article, Post-Aksumite materials from excavated contexts derive almost exclusively from disturbed near-surface deposits, accidentally exposed during the investigation of earlier features. Survey work carried out in

¹ Tringali, 1965, pp. 143–52; Michels, 2005; Finneran, Phillips, Asamerew Desie, *et al.*, 2005, pp. 24–6; Schmidt, Curtis, Zelalem Tekla, 2007; D’Andrea, Manzo, Harrower, *et al.*, 2008; “Post-Aksumite Culture” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 187a–89b (here p. 187b) (by Rodolfo Fattovich); Gajda, Benoist, Charbonnier, *et al.*, 2015, pp. 208–11; Benoist, Gajda, Schiettecatte, *et al.*, 2022, pp. 549–55.

² Hule and Gaudiello, 2020.

the wider Aksum area³ documented a considerable number of sites attributable to the Post-Aksumite culture. However, in this case, the materials are surface finds completely lacking any contextual or stratigraphic coherence.

The most substantial material evidence for this period, both within and beyond Aksum, consists of churches. These flourished in large numbers throughout northern Ethiopia and Eritrea starting from the sixth century, alongside the consolidation and growing diffusion of Christianity, and expanded further in the following centuries with the rise of monastic life. Several studies have been conducted on churches, particularly regarding their architecture and decorative programs.⁴ However, in many cases, the dating remains uncertain, and the relationship with potential nearby settlements and communities is largely uninvestigated.

It is thus evident that, aside from a handful of cases, materials dating from after the final decline of Aksum have not been systematically studied, that no securely dated typological sequences have yet been established, and that a coherent chronological framework is still lacking—making it difficult to draw firm conclusions. Beyond the difficulties involved in understanding this phase, this situation also raises legitimate questions about the appropriateness of the term “Post-Aksumite culture” and its application to such a highly fragmented and uneven body of evidence. As with other terms used to define archaeological cultures in this region, it is legitimate to question whether it is appropriate to group material evidence from such a wide geographical area under a single cultural label—especially in the absence of quantitatively significant and chronologically well-grounded data. The use of “Post-Aksumite culture” may risk implying a level of cultural uniformity and chronological precision that current evidence does not yet support. Further research in both Eritrea and Ethiopia is essential in order to generate more abundant datasets—through extensive excavations, radiocarbon dating, and typological sequences of the material culture—that are securely dated and well-defined in spatial terms. Such data would enable a more nuanced understanding of “Post-Aksumite” com-

³ Michels, 2005, pp. 201–26; Fattovich, Yaqob Beyene, D’Andrea, *et al.* 1999, pp. 45–47; Fattovich, Bard, Petrassi, *et al.*, 2000, pp. 74–75; Fattovich, Yaqob Beyene, D’Andrea, *et al.*, 1999, pp. 45–7; Fattovich, Bard, Manzo, *et al.*, 2003, pp. 32–33; Fattovich and Tekle Hagos, 2006; Sernicola, 2017, pp. 124–28.

⁴ For an overview of the architecture of ancient and medieval churches in northern Ethiopia and Eritrea, and for a starting point for further bibliography, see, among others, Mordini, 1964; Gerster, 1970; Plant and Buxton, 1970; Lepage, 1973; Juel-Jensen and Rowell, 1975; Plant, 1985; Lepage and Mercier, 2005; Phillipson D.W., 2009a; Di Salvo, 2019.

munities, allowing us to situate them more precisely in time and space and to discern both their similarities and regional diversity. A broader debate might also question the logic of naming a cultural phase solely in terms of what preceded it, rather than on the basis of its own defining characteristics, as already noted by Phillipson in the analogous case of the Pre-Aksumite period.⁵ Pending future research and in the absence of a suitable alternative, “Post-Aksumite” is used here primarily as a chronological label, following the precedent set by some scholars for “Pre-Aksumite” in reference to the diverse evidence of the first millennium BCE.

2. – Aksum after Aksum

Although many details remain poorly understood, the limited material evidence available for this period allows for cautious reconstructions of Aksum’s environmental and cultural context in the Post-Aksumite times.

Climatic evidence suggests that northern Ethiopia entered a predominantly arid phase from the mid-first millennium CE.⁶ This shift, beginning after ca. 500 CE and continuing until the fifteenth century, marked a transition away from the earlier humid regime, characterized by generally regular rainfall, which had prevailed since the mid-first millennium BCE and sustained the demographic growth and expansion of Aksum. The long arid phase was briefly interrupted by a short humid episode between 1000 and 1040 CE, but was followed by a renewed dry period lasting about three centuries in the early second millennium CE, underscoring the persistence of arid conditions that defined the region throughout the later first and second millennia CE. This climatic shift undoubtedly reduced the region’s traditionally abundant water resources—including surface water, wells, and cisterns—and likely contributed to further degradation of the vegetative cover, which, as early as the first millennium BCE, was already characterized by sparse tree stands and a predominance of shrubs and bushes.⁷ Wood remains from Post-Aksumite contexts attest to species similar to the present vegetation cover, characterized by *Acokanthera*, *Ficus*, *Acacia abyssinica*, *Juniperus*, and *Olea* (African olive),

⁵ For this and for a general discussion on the terminology adopted to label the first millennium BCE cultures of northern Ethiopia and south-central Eritrea, see e.g. Fattovich, 2009, pp. 275–90; Fattovich, 2010, pp. 151–52; Phillipson D.W., 2009b, pp. 257–74.

⁶ Butzer, 1981; Machado, Pérez-Gonzalez, Benito, 1998; Gebru Tsige Kassa, Eshetu Zewdu, Huang, *et al.*, 2009; Terwilliger, Eshetu Zewdu, Disnar, *et al.*, 2013.

⁷ Fattovich, Bard, Petrassi, *et al.*, 2000, pp. 18–19.

reflecting a dry, single-dominant, open montane woodland.⁸ This vegetation pattern, established in its main characteristics from the early Pre-Aksumite period,⁹ was probably the result of repeated forest clearance associated with the progressive intensification of agriculture and animal husbandry in the late second and early first millennium BCE.¹⁰

Within this natural framework, and amid ongoing climatic fluctuations, the built environment of Aksum underwent significant transformations. Between the eighth and thirteenth centuries, the city center was undoubtedly smaller than in earlier phases, extending over an area of approximately 40 square kilometers.¹¹ The monuments that characterized Aksum's period of greatest expansion in the fourth–sixth centuries CE—such as architectural stelae, elite tombs, celebratory thrones, and palaces—were dismantled, fell into disuse, or occasionally repurposed and reused. Churches, predominantly basilica-plan structures, remained the primary monumental elements in use within the area, and their distribution further underscores the drastic contraction of Aksum's urban extent during this period.

Indeed, the churches that had previously delineated Aksum's urban topography and spatial organization—aligned along key access routes¹²—appear to have been abandoned. These include the church at G^wang^wa ʿĀḏaga (Fig. 1), located along the eastern approach to Aksum, and the church at Məʿraf, situated along the northern route into the city. Excavations at both churches indicate phases of use between the fifth/sixth and the seventh/eighth centuries, followed by a later reoccupation of the area with functions different from the original ones.¹³ The same seems to have happened to the basilican churches which formed the superstructure of the Tombs of Kaleb and Gäbrä Mäsqäl, which lie two km northeast of Aksum city centre.¹⁴ Only the churches within

⁸ Boardman, 2000a, p. 414.

⁹ Boardman, 2000b, pp. 363–65.

¹⁰ Derbyshire, Lamb, Mohammed Umer, 2003; Gebru Tsige Kassa, Eshetu Zewdu, Huang, *et al.*, 2009; Terwilliger, Zewdu Eshetu, Disnar, *et al.*, 2013.

¹¹ “Post-Aksumite Culture” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 187a–89b (here p. 187b) (by Rodolfo Fattovich); Sernicola, 2017, pp. 57, 61, figs. 46, 102, 103, fig. 81.

¹² Sernicola and Phillipson L., 2011, pp. 194–98; Sernicola, 2017, pp. 77–87.

¹³ Fattovich, 2005, pp. 18–21; Fattovich, Manzo, Sernicola, *et al.*, 2006, pp. 22–29; Tekle Hagos, 2008, pp. 23–78.

¹⁴ Conti Rossini, 1909–10, pp. 5–6; Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, pp. 127–34, Tafeln 20, 21; Doresse, 1957, I, pp. 218–21; Beckingham and Huntingford, 1961, pp. 158–

the urban core seem to have remained active. Among them, ʿĪnda Maryam Ṣəyon and the church of Arbaʿəttu ʿĪnsəssa, in the Däbtära district, are attested in use during the Aksumite period¹⁵ and still in continuous use today.

This pattern reflects the physical contraction of Aksum’s urban area and the progressive abandonment of the monumental roads that once structured the city’s approaches and embodied its former grandeur. These roads—lined with funerary stelae, elite tombs, royal inscriptions, and ceremonial thrones, and later with churches—served as key spatial and symbolic elements during phases of expanding influence of Aksum’s polity.¹⁶ Funerary stelae associated with monumental tombs, royal inscriptions, and thrones survived both physically and ideologically in the memory of Aksum’s inhabitants, but, with few exceptions, were no longer actively employed and were sometimes intentionally dismantled, as in the case of some stelae.¹⁷

Other churches dotted the rural landscape, likely serving small communities inhabiting scattered hamlets and isolated compounds populating the surrounding hills. Survey and excavation data attest to the presence of the church known as Mikaʿel Ayyärawi, located on the hill of Gobo Dura, as well as two churches—referred to as Beta Giyorgis Superior and Beta Giyorgis Inferior—on the southern edge of the hilltop of Beta Giyorgis. None of these churches is in use today, but the remains of their architectural elements are still visible, characterized by buildings on podia, and walls with projections and recesses.

59; Anfray, 1972, p. 74, pl. ii3; Munro-Hay, 1989, pp. 157–58; Phillipson D.W., 1997, pp. 73–88, 2003, pp. 42–46; Phillipson D.W., 2009a, pp. 40–42.

¹⁵ Conti Rossini, 1909–10, p. 7; Muir, 1912, p. 480; Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, pp. 136–40; Monneret de Villard, 1938, pp. 21–31; de Contenson, 1963; Anfray, 1965, p. 5; Sergew Hable Sellassie, 1972, p. 186; Phillipson D.W., 1995, pp. 30–32; Phillipson D.W., 1997, pp. 169–78; Phillipson D.W., 2003, pp. 46–53; Phillipson D.W., 2009a, pp. 37–40; “Aksum Ṣəyon” in *E Ae*, vol. I (2003), pp. 183a–85a (by Stuart C. Munro-Hay); Munro-Hay, 2005, pp. 153–65.

¹⁶ Semicola, 2017, pp. 77–87.

¹⁷ The largest stelae at Aksum show clear signs of intentional destabilization, consistent with the local tradition of their deliberate dismantling; see Francaviglia, 1994; Phillipson D.W., 1995, 24–25; Watts, 2000, pp. 147–48; Poissonnier, 2012. Ethiopic sources, survived only as later copies, record activities of a queen known as ʿĪsato (or Gudit), who destroyed several Christian sites in the aftermath of Aksum’s decline, as well as had the stelae toppled to assert her authority and mark a definitive break with the previous ruling line and religious ideology. On this topic, see e.g. Huntingford, 1965; “ʿĪsato” in *E Ae*, vol. II (2005), pp. 376a–77b (by Steven Kaplan).

At Mika³el Ayyārawi, remnants of the ancient church remain visible within the later church complex.¹⁸ These include traces of pillars, gargoyles with leonine protomes, and various decorative elements, among which is a stone block carved on three sides with a Greek cross set within an arch supported by two columns. This motif, albeit with some variants, appears on coins of King Zāyā^cabbəyo Lämädhən Nəguś/WZN (Wazena)¹⁹ as well as on coins of Zāyā^cabbəyo Lämädhən Nəguś (Anonymous)²⁰ and Zāyā^cabbəyo Lämädhən Nəguś/AGD.²¹ All these coin issues are generally dated to the late sixth or early seventh century CE. Taken together with the ceramics identified on the surface, this evidence indicates that the old church was in use from the sixth century onwards, before being replaced by a new structure in the modern era.

Similar evidence of architectural remains can be observed at Beta Giyorgis Superior.²² Here, in addition, Post-Aksumite (or later) graves documented both within and outside the remains of the church bear witness to the final stage of a long transformation in funerary practices: whereas earlier burials had been placed in large cemeteries marked by funerary stelae, the shift toward interments around churches—initiated a few decades earlier—here appears fully accomplished.²³

Other churches and monasteries still in use today, such as Abba Pāntalewon and Abba Liqanos, located on hills in the peripheral area of Aksum, also preserve sparse and contextually isolated ancient elements, as well as a long tradition of existence based on oral and written sources. They were likely ac-

¹⁸ Fattovich and Tekle Hagos, 2006, pp. 173–74.

¹⁹ Munro-Hay 1984, p. 144; Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen, 1995, pp. 214–16, Pl. 117, 117i.

²⁰ Munro-Hay 1984, p. 142; Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen, 1995, pp. 224–25, Pl. 125, 125i.

²¹ Munro-Hay 1984, p. 143; Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen, 1995, pp. 226–29, Pl. 126, 126i, 126ii.

²² Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, 125–7; Ricci, 1974; Ricci and Fattovich, 1988.

²³ Analyses of human skeletal remains suggest that this transformation might have affected not only the location of burials, the mode of interment, and the use of grave goods, but also the treatment of the bodies themselves. While in pre-Christian—both pre- and Aksumite phases—bodies were typically buried immediately after death and often subject to subsequent manipulation and reburial, as shown by skeletal evidence from Seglamen and Aksum, Post-Aksumite burials at Mifsas Bahri indicate less post-mortem processing of the bones and that the deceased remained for a relatively extended period—approximately six to seven days—in a humid environment, likely an underground chamber, perhaps within the church itself, before being finally interred in their grave; see Basanti, 2025. Further analyses will be needed to clarify whether the pattern observed in the Christian Post-Aksumite burials at Mifsas Bahri, in southern Tigray, also applies to Aksum and other areas of Tigray and Eritrea, or whether it represents instead a local funerary practice.

tive during the Aksumite and Post-Aksumite periods, and, in the case of Abba Panṭalewon, even earlier.²⁴

The rural churches, scattered across the hills, were integral to small communities inhabiting villages, hamlets, and isolated homesteads, whose distribution and material culture offer further insight into economic and social life in the Post-Aksumite period.

As in the previous phases, Post-Aksumite settlements were concentrated primarily at the base of the hills of Beta Giyorgis and May Qoḥo—where the urban center of Aksum developed—and on the hill of Beta Giyorgis (Fig. 2).²⁵ In this period, however, a process of reoccupation can be observed on the surrounding hills that frame the Aksum plain,²⁶ areas which had progressively been abandoned between the fifth and seventh centuries CE. The large plain between the urban area and the peripheral hills always remained largely uninhabited, serving throughout all phases mainly agricultural and grazing purposes. Another element of continuity with earlier phases is the location of rural settlements in relation to essential natural resources. Site-catchment analysis has shown that, as in earlier phases, rural sites were still situated no more than 250 meters from a water source and immediately adjacent to the most fertile agricultural land, as well as to open grasslands.²⁷

On the contrary, the total number of settlements increased compared to the final phases of the Aksumite period. This trend, as will be discussed below, may be interpreted as evidence of demographic expansion and as an indication of a shift toward a new pattern of territorial occupation, as reflected in the contraction of the urban center and the re-emergence of rural settlements on the surrounding hills. Investigations at Seglamen, located approximately twelve km southwest of Aksum, support the idea of a revival of a more rural-oriented settlement pattern during the Post-Aksumite period. Excavations at site SG 1²⁸ have revealed that Seglamen was intensively occupied during the first half of the first millennium BCE, in the Pre-Aksumite period. The site was abandoned around the mid-first millennium BCE and shows only sporadic evidence of activity dating to the fifth/sixth century CE. It was later reoccupied more perma-

²⁴ Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, pp. 90–4; Phillipson D.W., 2009a, p. 42.

²⁵ Semicola, 2017, pp. 102, 103, fig. 81.

²⁶ Semicola, 2017, pp. 102, 103, fig. 81.

²⁷ Semicola, 2017, pp. 62, 66, fig. 53.

²⁸ For an overview of the results from the first seven seasons (2010–2016) of research at Seglamen, see Semicola 2019, pp. 11–38. Comprehensive reports of each field season from 2010 to 2019 are published online in the *Newsletter di Archeologia CISA*.

nently during the Post-Aksumite period, when evidence indicates rural dwellings, the reuse of earlier structures, and burials. Radiocarbon analyses of charcoal and osteological samples offer reliable chronological indicators for this phase of re-occupation, situating it in the eleventh–twelve centuries.

In this context of rural occupation, Post-Aksumite houses had two or more rooms and were generally rectangular in plan.²⁹ The material assemblages are dominated by a distinctive type of ceramics characterized by dark-grey to grey ware color, organic fabric and incised, punctuated or rarely moulded decorations depicting geometric motifs and crosses.³⁰ The predominant forms consist of rounded or carinated bowls with short, inflected rims; plain round cups; dishes; trays; and jars with wide necks. The significant changes in ceramic production, including variations in color and clay composition compared to those attested in the Aksumite period, point to significant cultural shifts relative to the preceding phase. These transformations, in addition to indicating ideological changes related to the spread of Christianity and the use of the cross as a primary decorative motif, may reflect the adoption of different raw materials—linked to changes in land use and settlement strategies—but also socio-economic shifts in the patterns of vessel production and distribution.

Lithic tools were still in use and included flakes and scrapers, although these were noticeably less standardized than in earlier phases.³¹ This suggests a re-diffusion of lithic technology, likely due to reduced access to imported metals. The decline in standardization and formal production of lithic tools also indicates a loss of technical knowledge and craftsmanship in stoneworking. Imported materials are rarely attested in domestic sites, suggesting that exotic objects circulated only to a very limited extent among the general population; they were, however, likely more common in church treasuries, which concentrated prestige goods at this time.³²

As in previous periods, the subsistence economy was based primarily on animal husbandry and ox-plough agriculture, with the cultivation of a diverse mixed C3–C4 crop repertoire, including both African and Near Eastern domesticates. These included wheat (*Triticum* spp.), barley (*Hordeum vulgare*),

²⁹ See, e.g. Ricci and Fattovich, 1988, pp. 120, fig. B, p. 145, fig. C.

³⁰ Wilding and Munro-Hay, 1989, pp. 301–11; Fattovich, Bard, Petrassi, *et al.*, 2000, pp. 71–72; Bard, Fattovich, Manzo, *et al.*, 2014, p. 294.

³¹ Phillipson L., 2009, p. 116.

³² “Post-Aksumite Culture” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 187a–89b (here p. 188a) (by Rodolfo Fattovich).

finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*), tef (*Eragrostis tef*), sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), oat (*Avena sativa*), lentils (*Lens culinaris*), and other large-seeded legumes, as well as a variety of oilseeds such as linseed (*Linum usitatissimum*) and noog (*Guizotia abyssinica*), and fibre crops such as cotton (cf. *Gossypium* sp.), as suggested by archaeobotanical evidence from Aksumite and Post-Aksumite contexts.³³ Wild species were likely exploited for dietary, medicinal, fodder, and various other purposes. This crop repertoire is attested in its main components from the beginning of the first millennium BCE, as evidenced by botanical remains from Pre-Aksumite contexts at Aksum and its immediate vicinity.³⁴ It remained largely unchanged in the following periods, with only a few additions, including the cultivation of the vine (*Vitis vinifera*), which is documented from the early first millennium CE onwards but is absent from the botanical record in the Post-Aksumite period. Taken together, these data indicate a remarkable continuity in cultivated crops from Pre-Aksumite through Aksumite to Post-Aksumite periods, illustrating long-term stability in agricultural practices in the region. The only noteworthy change is the general absence of grape remains in Post-Aksumite contexts, which can be interpreted as a consequence of the prolonged arid phase that characterized this period, as well as the result of broader economic and social transformations.³⁵ The consumption of wine appears to have been primarily associated with the expanding elite of the Aksumite period, who imported it and possibly—although this hypothesis still lacks conclusive evidence—began cultivating vines and producing wine locally. This practice may have formed part of a power-ideology discourse, reinforced by parallels from the Mediterranean world.³⁶

³³ Bard and Fattovich, 1995; Bard and Fattovich, 1997; Fattovich and Bard, 1997, p. 70; Fattovich, Yaqob Beyene, D'Andrea, *et al.*, 1999, pp. 56–57; Bard, Coltorti, DiBlasi, *et al.*, 2000; Boardman, 2000, pp. 365–68, 412–14; D'Andrea, 2008.

³⁴ Boardman, 2000b, pp. 363–65; Sernicola, 2019, pp. 28; Sernicola, 2021, p. 149.

³⁵ However, the absence of vines in this period cannot be definitively established, as it may also reflect the limited number of samples available for this phase.

³⁶ Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, pp. 74–7; Casson, 1989, VI, p. 53; Sutton, 2008; Bernard, Drewes, Schneider, 1991, I, pp. 241–42, 363–64; Phillipson D.W., 1997, pp. 162–65; Phillipson D.W., 2000a, p. 373; Phillipson D.W., 2012, pp. 116–17; Manzo, 1999a; Manzo, 2005; Manzo, 2020, p. 10; Marrassini, 2014, pp. 220–24; Drewes, 2019, pp. 197–98. Alongside written sources, material and botanical evidence from archaeological deposits—together with the occurrence of rock-cut tanks at 'Addi Şāhafi, north of Aksum, interpreted as wine presses—indicates the diffusion of a wine culture in the Aksum region. Further support for this comes from vine motifs carved on the stone plate at the base of stela n. 3 and on ivory objects buried in the most elaborate Aksumite tombs; see Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke,

With regard to animal husbandry, in the Post-Aksumite period, cattle and sheep/goats remained the principal livestock; donkeys (*Equus asinus*) is also part of the assemblages, complementing the traditional livestock, while other domesticates such as chickens continued to be maintained.³⁷ Viewed from a longer-term perspective, also in this case the pattern represents a continuation of a livestock economy established since the early first millennium BCE, with minimal but remarkable variations through time. Across Pre-Aksumite and Aksumite phases, faunal assemblages were consistently dominated by cattle (*Bos taurus*, occasionally *Bos indicus*), followed by goats (*Capra hircus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*), and other domesticates including dogs (*Canis familiaris*) and chickens (*Gallus domesticus*).³⁸ In contrast, the Post-Aksumite period is characterized, at least on the hill of Beta Giyorgis, by a relative decline in cattle, accompanied by a slight increase in caprines (sheep and goats) and a greater visibility of donkeys.³⁹ This likely reflects the impact of climatic deterioration, marked by a shift towards more arid conditions. Cattle, being particularly sensitive to dryness, require more stable, humid environments with abundant water resources and greater food availability than caprines and donkeys. The decline in cattle at Beta Giyorgis may reflect a broader regional trend, or it may instead represent a local response to reduced rainfall, with the hilltop's limited water availability prompting herders to favor more drought-tolerant species compared to the surrounding plain. Again, the data demonstrates a remarkable continuity across nearly two millennia, while also highlighting the adaptations in animal husbandry that occurred in response to environmental and cultural changes following the decline of Aksum.

More significant transformations seem to have taken place at the political and economic levels. The contraction of Aksum's city centre, the progressive abandonment of elite palaces and monumental areas, the changes in settlements distribution, all point to a drastic shift from previous trends. When considered together with the cessation of coinage towards the end of the seventh

1913, II, pp. 21–22, pl. VI; Phillipson D.W., 1997, p. 32, fig. 35; Phillipson D.W., 2000b, pp. 116–18; Phillipson D.W., 2012, pp. 116–17; Manzo, 1999a, pp. 348, 354–55, fig. 1a–b.

³⁷ “Post-Aksumite Culture” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 187a–89b (here p. 188a) (by Rodolfo Fattovich); Chaix, 2013; Phillipson D.W., 2012, pp. 111–15.

³⁸ Cain, 2000, p. 369–72; Chaix, 2013; Sernicola, 2019, p. 28; Sernicola, 2021, p. 149 based on Helina S. Woldekiros, unpublished report on the analysis of faunal assemblages (2010–2013) from site SG 1 at Seglamen.

³⁹ Chaix, 2013, pp. 212–14, fig. 3, pp. 229–30.

century CE,⁴⁰ this evidence suggests a phase of economic reorganization—affecting primarily long-distance exchange networks rather than local subsistence systems—accompanied by a reduction in political influence.

These transformations are evident in settlement patterns and spatial organization, and their long-term analysis may help refine our understanding of Post-Aksumite Aksum as a society in transition.

3. – *Shaping space, shaping society: Aksum landscape from Pre-Aksumite to Post-Aksumite times*

The study of settlement patterns and the use of space—encompassing both constructed structures and open areas, as well as their administration, whether private, public, or communal—offers an especially effective lens for understanding changes and continuities in the social organization of ancient communities. Examining spatial patterns in the Aksum area, from the first evidence of permanent settlements in the early first millennium BCE through the Post-Aksumite period, makes it possible to trace trajectories of social development and to identify features that laid the foundations for subsequent transformations.

While a comprehensive study of Aksum's ancient settlement pattern has already been presented by the author,⁴¹ this paper revisits it with a particular focus on the Post-Aksumite period. It also expands the study through additional spatial analyses and by incorporating aspects of land management, while reassessing the overall framework in light of recently acquired archaeological evidence.

The area under consideration, measures approximately 100 km² in total and includes the Aksum plain, dominated at its center by the hills of Beta Giyorgis and May Qoḥo, as well as the surrounding hills that physically delimit the plain and constitute Aksum's peripheral zone (Fig. 1).⁴² The analysis

⁴⁰ Munro-Hay, 1984; Munro-Hay and Juel-Jensen, 1995.

⁴¹ Semicola, 2017.

⁴² This is, of course, an a posteriori and arbitrary definition of ancient Aksum's physical space, based—in the absence of clear archaeological or historical evidence—primarily on the physical characteristics of the landscape. We do not, in fact, know how the territorial boundaries of the city of Aksum were perceived and defined in antiquity, nor how they may have changed over time. They are inferred here from the physical features of the landscape and from how these may have been economically exploited over time in ways that justify their adoption as a unit of study while still envisioning adjacent areas of permeability and blurred boundaries. The very few inscriptions marking land borders, which we will discuss later,

is organized according to the chronological and cultural periodization of the Aksumite culture proposed for the Aksum region.⁴³ This periodization delineates five principal phases in the development of the Aksumite civilization:

1. Proto-Aksumite Phase (360 BCE (?)-120/40 BCE);
2. Aksumite 1 (Early Aksumite) Phase (120/40 BCE-CE 130/190);
3. Aksumite 2 (Classic Aksumite) Phase (CE 130/190-360/400);
4. Aksumite 3 (Middle Aksumite) Phase (CE 360/400-550/610);
5. Aksumite 4 (Late Aksumite) Phase (CE 550/610-800/850).

Based on the currently available archaeological evidence, the earlier Pre-Aksumite occupation in the Aksum area is dated by radiocarbon between the eighth and the fifth centuries BCE,⁴⁴ while the Post-Aksumite phase tentatively extends from 800/850 CE to approximately the thirteenth century CE.

Over the course of two millennia, settlement dynamics in the Aksum area reveal a long trajectory of expansion, urban concentration, decline, and a subsequent renaissance, albeit one of a different nature.⁴⁵

The earliest occupation, during the Pre-Aksumite period (ca. 800-360 BCE), was characterised by isolated compounds, hamlets, villages, and temporary dwellings, totaling around two dozen settlements (Fig. 3). During this phase, no monumental structures—whether religious or secular—have been recorded within the Aksum area, and no Pre-Aksumite cemeteries can be clearly attributed so far.

The subsequent Proto-Aksumite phase (ca. 360-120/40 BCE) brought a profound demographic expansion, as the number of sites doubled and settlements extended across both the core area and the peripheral zone (Fig. 4). Monumental palaces and cemeteries emerged at key locations (e.g. °Ona Nägäšt and °Ona Īnda Abboy Zäg^we on the hilltop of Beta Giyorgis),⁴⁶ signaling the rise in the area of leadership(s) manifested also in the use of space.

seem to refer more to lineage possessions than to political or administrative territorial boundaries.

⁴³ Bard, Fattovich, Manzo, *et al.*, 2014.

⁴⁴ Phillipson D.W., 2000a, pp. 372-74.

⁴⁵ For a detailed discussion of sites density and distribution in the area of Aksum through Pre-, Aksumite and Post-Aksumite periods, see Michels, 2005; Sernicola, 2017.

⁴⁶ For a description of the research conducted at °Ona Nägäšt and °Ona Īnda Abboy Zäg^we see Fattovich, Bard, Ricci, 1991; Fattovich, 1992; Bard and Fattovich, 1993a; Bard and Fattovich, 1993b; Bard and Fattovich, 1995; Bard and Fattovich, 1997; Fattovich and Bard, 1993; 1994; Fattovich and Bard, 1995; Fattovich and Bard, 1997; Bard, Di Blasi, Fattovich, *et al.*, 1996, 1998; Bard (ed.), 1997; Bard, Fattovich, Manzo, *et al.*, 1997, 2014; Fattovich, Yaqob

This expansion accelerated during the Early Aksumite phase (ca. 120/40 BCE–130/190 CE), when settlement numbers grew nearly fourfold, illustrating intense population growth. Bieta Giyorgis emerged as the densest occupation zone, while peripheral areas along river valleys also intensified, reflecting an increasing strategic importance of regional connections (Fig. 5). Extensive settlement also began on the plain at the foot of Beta Giyorgis and May Qoḥo hills, where the monumental urban core of Aksum eventually developed.

During the Classic Aksumite phase (ca. 130/190–360/400 CE), this pattern consolidated: although the total number of sites slightly declined and peripheral zones were progressively abandoned, large satellite settlements appeared immediately to the south-west, south-east, and possibly north-east of the urban core, which extended for about 85 hectares (Fig. 6).

This trend continued in the Middle Aksumite phase (ca. 360/400–550/610 CE), when peripheral areas experienced dramatic depopulation: rural settlements declined sharply, yet the city itself expanded to its greatest extent (>100 hectares) and the outlying satellite settlements around it continued to exist (Fig. 7).

In the Late Aksumite phase (ca. 550/610–800/850 CE), this process of settlements contraction continued, this time affecting both urban and rural areas. The city core shrank to approximately 80 hectares, the large satellite settlements disappeared, and isolated compounds and hamlets sites diminished in number and size, reflecting a drastic demographic decline (Fig. 8).

The Post-Aksumite period marked a partial recovery in site numbers, with reoccupation of peripheral hills, although the urban core continued to contract, stabilizing at roughly 40 hectares (Fig. 2). As noted above, this reconfiguration reflects a demographic increase, coupled with a rural-oriented settlement system and a fragmented landscape of communities.

Across all periods, despite variations in settlement density and distribution, sites were predominantly situated near fertile soils and reliable water sources, typically 250–500 meters away.⁴⁷ This pattern reflects a subsistence-based system in which agricultural potential and access to water dictated site selection.

Building on the quantitative assessment of site density and distribution, geostatistical methods provide further insight into the spatial arrangement and clustering of settlements. Average Nearest-Neighbour (ANN) index was em-

Beyene, D'Andrea, *et al.*, 1999; Fattovich, Bard, Petrassi, *et al.*, 2000; Fattovich, Bard, Ricci, 2002; Fattovich, Bard, Manzo, *et al.* 2003. 2001.

⁴⁷ Semicola, 2017, pp. 57, 62–66, figs 47–53.

ployed to explore the spatial correlation of sites across the study area through the Aksumite and the Post-Aksumite periods. This quantifies the degree to which settlements are clustered or dispersed, offering insights into spatial organization and potential shifts in social, environmental, or economic dynamics.⁴⁸

As shown in Table 1 and Fig. 9, the Pre-Aksumite period does not differ significantly from a random distribution, suggesting that during this earliest occupational phase, the spatial arrangement of sites in the Aksum area was largely unstructured, with only minor clustering. From the Proto-Aksumite to the Post-Aksumite period, all NN Ratios fall well below one, accompanied by markedly negative Z-scores, indicating a persistent and statistically significant tendency toward spatial clustering. The highest degree of clustering is observed during the Early and Classic Aksumite periods, when the observed mean distances are substantially lower than the expected values under spatial randomness, reflecting a pronounced concentration of sites within limited areas. In the subsequent Middle and Late Aksumite phases as well as during the Post-Aksumite period, the degree of aggregation decreases slightly, although the overall pattern remains distinctly non-random and clustered.

In an archaeological and spatial perspective, these results point to a progressive transformation in settlement organization. The Pre-Aksumite period appears to reflect a loosely distributed or non-centralized occupation pattern, whereas from the Proto-Aksumite onwards a clear trend toward spatial concentration emerges. The Early and Classic Aksumite phases mark the apex of this process, possibly corresponding to periods of socio-political centralization, economic intensification, or environmental constraints promoting closer settlement clustering. The gradual attenuation of clustering observed after the Classic Aksumite phase may indicate a phase of decentralization, spatial expansion, or reorganization of settlement systems.

The ANN index provides an initial measure of clustering or dispersion by quantifying the average spacing between sites, yet it remains a global statistic summarizing the overall pattern in a single value. When complemented with Ripley's K function, spatial structure can be examined at multiple scales, re-

⁴⁸ The Average Nearest-Neighbour index is calculated as the ratio between the observed average distance to the nearest neighbour among a set of points and the expected average distance if the same number of points were randomly distributed within the same area. Values around 1.0 indicate a random, homogeneous distribution, values greater than 1.0 suggest spatial segregation, and values below 1.0 reflect a concentrated distribution with a high degree of spatial aggregation.

vealing whether clustering or dispersion occurs at specific distances.⁴⁹ Together, these approaches allow not only an assessment of settlement aggregation but also the identification of the scales at which such aggregation is most pronounced, thereby refining interpretations of spatial dynamics across the chronological sequence.⁵⁰

Results of Ripley's K function analysis on settlement distribution in the Aksum area demonstrate that, at very small scales—up to around 900 meters—all phases show local micro-clustering of sites, although the intensity varies (Table 2, Fig. 10). The Pre-Aksumite period and Proto-Aksumite phase display slight to moderate clustering, indicating small local concentrations of settlements, while the Early and Classic Aksumite phase exhibits moderate to strong clustering, suggesting a more pronounced aggregation of local settlements. Middle, Late, and Post-Aksumite sites also show moderate clustering at this scale, though it is less intense than in the Early and Classic Aksumite phases, indicating a peak of local clustering during the latter periods. At intermediate distances, roughly between 1300 and 2500 meters, the pattern shifts: Pre-Aksumite sites fluctuate between near-random and slight dispersion, Proto-Aksumite sites begin to show dispersion more clearly, and Early and Classic Aksumite sites still retain clustering but with decreasing intensity. Middle, Late, and Post-Aksumite sites show reduced clustering, trending toward a more uniform or random distribution at these intermediate scales. At scales beyond 2,500 meters, Pre- and Proto-Aksumite sites show increasing dispersion at greater distances; Early and Classic Aksumite sites exhibit significant aggregation up to 4,100 meters, followed by a tendency towards dispersion at larger distances; and Middle, Late, and Post-Aksumite sites display strong and pronounced dispersion, reflecting a progressively more even distribution across the study area. Overall, while all periods exhibit local micro-

⁴⁹ Ripley's K function analysis measures the degree of spatial dependence among points by comparing the observed distribution of inter-point distances with that expected under complete spatial randomness, thereby identifying the scales at which statistically significant clustering or regularity occurs.

⁵⁰ For the Ripley's K function analysis, parameters were defined as follows: the study area covers approximately 100 km², representing the spatial extent within which point distributions were analyzed. The analysis employed 15 distance bands, a number chosen within the commonly recommended range of 10 to 20 intervals, to ensure adequate resolution across multiple spatial scales. Each band was set at 400 m intervals, allowing the analysis to extend up to approximately 5 km. The choice of a roughly 5 km distance is justified by the 100 km² size of the study area, which suggests extending no further than roughly one-half the smaller linear dimension to minimise edge effects.

clustering, the Early and Classic Aksumite phases represent the peak of both local and large-scale clustering, whereas the later phases display a more regular and evenly dispersed pattern across a broader spatial scale.

Both the Average Nearest Neighbor (ANN) and Ripley's K-function analyses reveal a consistent overall trend across the Aksumite sequence, yet they capture spatial patterns at different scales.

In the Pre-Aksumite period, ANN results indicate a nearly random pattern, showing no statistically significant clustering. Ripley's K-function refines this picture by revealing localized clustering at small scales (up to ~900 m) but progressive dispersion beyond 2500 m. This suggests that while some settlements were grouped locally, overall spatial organization remained relatively diffuse across the region—a pattern consistent with the ANN's near-random outcome.

During the Proto-Aksumite phase, both methods converge more clearly. The ANN result indicates significant clustering, while Ripley's K shows localized clustering at fine scales and a marked shift toward dispersion at larger distances (>2500 m). This combination implies a dual pattern of spatial organization: tightly grouped local clusters within a broader, dispersed regional framework. Such a pattern may reflect the emergence of local centers or communities that were spatially distinct from one another.

The Early and Classic Aksumite phases show the strongest clustering in both analyses. The ANN confirms pronounced aggregation, while Ripley's K reveals moderate to strong clustering up to ~4100 m, tapering off toward mild dispersion only at the largest scales. These results together indicate a highly centralized settlement system, where sites were densely concentrated within subregional zones—possibly reflecting growing sociopolitical integration or environmental concentration of resources.

In the Middle Aksumite phase, the ANN still suggests clustering, though less intense than in the Early period. Ripley's K similarly indicates clustering at small scales, transitioning to near-random or dispersed patterns beyond ~2500 m. This alignment suggests a loosening of settlement concentration, with local clusters persisting but overall spatial cohesion beginning to diminish.

The Late Aksumite period continues this trend. Both ANN and Ripley's K show moderate clustering at fine scales followed by progressive dispersion at larger distances. The results imply a decentralization of settlement, possibly due to demographic or political shifts leading to more evenly spaced site distributions.

Finally, the Post-Aksumite period maintains similar dynamics: the ANN points to significant but weaker clustering, while Ripley's K reveals moderate clustering at small scales and clear dispersion beyond ~2900 m. Together, they

indicate a residual pattern of localized clustering within a more spatially diffuse system, consistent with a phase of regional reorganization or contraction.

What do the results of these analyses tell us, and how they are integrated with the other information in our possession?

Considered alongside quantitative, typological, and distributional settlement data and broader archaeological evidence from the Aksum area, the spatial analyses collectively reveal a long-term pattern of territorial occupation strategies shaped by changing social, environmental, and economic conditions.

The Pre-Aksumite landscape at Aksum appears to have been sparsely occupied, characterized by villages, hamlets, and isolated compounds oriented toward the exploitation of local resources—fertile soils, grazing areas, and water sources—primarily located near arable plains, with only minimal settlement on hilltops. A religious site was probably located on top of a prominent rocky pinnacle approximately three km east of central Aksum, where the monastery of Abba Pantaḡewon was established in Christian Aksumite times.⁵¹

There is no evidence for formal land administration or urban hierarchy; localized clustering of settlements seems to reflect pragmatic concerns such as mutual support, cooperation, and security, rather than any structured centralization. Based on the available data, socio-economic complexity can only be tentatively hypothesized, primarily from the varying wall sizes of the partially excavated domestic dwellings at Kidanā Məhrät,⁵² which suggest that some houses were larger than others, and from the presence of seals at the same site,⁵³ indicating an organized system of access to resources. These elements point to the incipient process of social stratification involving an increasing degree of status differentiation, ultimately leading to the emergence of elite individuals or groups endowed with superior economic, social, symbolic, and possibly, but not necessarily, political power and wealth.

Beyond Aksum, forms of leadership are evident in some areas, as suggested by archaeological evidence and inscriptions in South Arabian language, which are dated paleographically from the eighth/seventh century BCE and attest to the presence of “kings” within highland Tigrayan communities during the first half of the first millennium BCE.⁵⁴ At site SG 1 in Seglamen, not far

⁵¹ Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke, 1913, II, pp. 90–4; Phillipson D.W., 2009a, p. 42.

⁵² Phillips, Reynolds, Spandl, 2000, pp. 280–301.

⁵³ Phillipson D.W., 2000c, p. 350.

⁵⁴ For an overview of the first millennium BCE in the highlands of northern Ethiopia and south-central Eritrea see Fattovich, 2009; Phillipson D.W., 2009b; D’Andrea, Welton, Manzo, *et al.* 2023.

from Aksum, tomb types, burial practices, grave goods, and variations in buildings dateable to the tenth/ninth centuries BCE indicate that the emergence of socio-economic complexity in this area predates the appearance of written records.⁵⁵ In this context, ritual practices appear to have focused primarily on tombs, stelae and funerary platforms—manifestations of ancestor veneration and lineage construction—rather than on the worship of deities. It is worth noting that the cultural traits related to burial practices attested at Seglamen at the very beginning of the first millennium BCE continued in the Aksum area during the Proto-Aksumite period, indicating a certain degree of cultural continuity among the two areas.⁵⁶ Subsequently, alongside the intensification of economic interactions across the southern Red Sea and the appearance of the first inscriptions in South Arabian language in Ethiopia and Eritrea, temples dedicated to South Arabian deities began to emerge. The spread of South Arabian-style temples and other buildings, deities, inscriptions, and some elements of material culture appears to reflect an effort to unify certain areas of central and eastern Təgray—likely those most involved in long-distance trade along major river valleys—under a central authority, likely centered at Yəḥa.⁵⁷

This initiative seems to have been short-lived, spanning roughly from the eighth/seventh to the fifth centuries BCE, and apparently bypassing Aksum itself, although it seems to have included areas a few kilometers to the southeast and south-west of it. While the nature of interactions between South Arabians and the Tigrayan highland populations remains a debated issue beyond the scope of this study,⁵⁸ this brief overview of the social and cultural dynamics beyond Aksum during Pre-Aksumite times provides essential context for the subsequent long-term reconstruction of patterns of social complexity in the region.

⁵⁵ Sernicola, 2021, pp. 152–54.

⁵⁶ Sernicola, 2021, pp. 150–52.

⁵⁷ Fattovich, 2010.

⁵⁸ The nature and scale of the interactions between the communities of northern Ethiopia and central–southern Eritrea and those of South Arabia have been the subject of extensive debate and repeated reassessment. Interpretations have ranged from the hypothesis of a South Arabian colonization of the northern Horn to the various models of acculturation proposed from the 1960s onward. For a synthesis and most recent contributions to this topic, see Fattovich, 2009; Fattovich, 2012; Manzo, 2009; Phillipson D.W., 2009; Gerlach, 2013; D’Andrea, Welton, Manzo, *et al.*, 2023.

Returning to Aksum, during the Proto-Aksumite phase, spatial analyses reveal the first significant local-scale aggregation in the Aksum area, accompanied by demographic growth and the spatial expansion of settlements, most of which were situated on hilltops, with only a few at their bases. The onset of a prolonged humid climatic phase likely favoured agricultural intensification and supported population growth. Environmental factors associated with this wetter phase may also have encouraged a shift in settlement location from the margins of the plains to the tops of hills, possibly in response to changes in drainage, site salubrity, or soil conditions. However, concerns related to security and territorial control should not be excluded as additional motivating factors. Land administration systems are not visible in the archaeological record, and inscriptions are not attested for this phase. Nevertheless, social complexity and economic inequality became clearly visible through the appearance of monumental buildings and elite burials. Large storage facilities within large, monumental buildings⁵⁹ further suggest forms of resource management and control, whether communal or under the supervision of elite households. No temples are attested for this phase; similarly to what occurred in the earliest phases of Pre-Aksumite Seglamen, the ritual sphere appears to have focused primarily on funerary features such as tombs, stelae⁶⁰ and associated platforms—manifestations of ancestor veneration and lineage construction that likely reinforced claims to land and resources—as well as on the commemoration of clan or lineage chiefs, rather than on the worship of deities. The exact nature of these early leaders remains unclear: they may have played primarily ritual roles, ensuring community survival through ceremonies and rituals, while political authority could have been exercised through other, more diffuse social mechanisms. Agent-based simulations conducted on data covering Aksum's Pre- to Proto-Aksumite periods demonstrate that, given the available natural resources and population size, social structures led by leaders without formal political authority could have sustained community survival through cooperation.⁶¹ The settlement pattern of this period also supports such an interpretation.

⁵⁹ Fattovich and Bard, 1995, pp. 66–69; Fattovich and Bard, 1997, pp. 61–62.

⁶⁰ The connection between stelae and the cult of ancestors is expressed by the inscription on a stela from Matara: “This is the stela that ʾGZ had made for his parents. It was carried by his friends, ʾW^c, ʾLF and ṢBL” (RIÉ I 223; Bernand, Drewes, Schneider, 1991, I, pp. 318–19; Drewes, 2019, pp. 318–22).

⁶¹ Vasellini, Ferrandino, Sernicola, *et al.*, 2025.

The Early and Classic Aksumite phases (ca. 120/40 BCE–360/400 CE) mark the apex of demographic growth and spatial concentration. Settlement patterns reflect both population increase and the aggregation of villages, alongside the expansion of elite complexes. The plain at the base of the hills of Beta Giyorgis and May Qoḥo began to be occupied and monumentalized, extending over c. 85 ha and forming the urban core of the area. Settlements were still closely linked to fertile soils and water resources, but peripheral areas underwent relative depopulation—interpreted not as decline but as a symptom of urban concentration and socio-economic centralization. The ANN and Ripley’s K analyses indicate the highest degree of clustering for these phases, revealing a strong centripetal dynamic in which the expanding urban core of Aksum acted as an economic, social, and ideological attractor. Beyond Aksum, the diffusion of Aksumite-style monumental architecture illustrates its expanding influence in parallel with its increasing role within wider exchange networks.

The rise of coinage, the appearance of royal inscriptions—although very limited in both quantity and content—and the development of monumental architecture all indicate a shift toward a more centralized political authority, capable of managing land, resettling human groups, and mobilizing warriors across long distances to secure exchange routes. However, landscape-scale settlement pattern analyses in eastern Tigray reveal no conclusive evidence of site-size hierarchies, suggesting that—at least in this region—areas under Aksumite influence may not have been characterized by clearly defined settlement ranks.⁶² This suggests that in this phase Aksum may have exerted a broad cultural or economic influence, but not a fully institutionalized political or administrative control over the region.

In this same period, the first evidence of land tenure appears in the form of boundary inscriptions carved on natural rock outcrops, such as those at ʿĒnda ʿĒsələ and ʿAddi Şāḥafi. These inscriptions express the familial association with specific portions of land, either by citing gentilic/personal names—as in the case of the inscriptions at ʿĒnda ʿĒsələ⁶³—or by using the more generic expression “of the house” (this [land?] belongs to the house), such as at ʿAddi Şāḥafi respectively.⁶⁴ They suggest a likely long-standing tradition of lineage- or clan-based tenure systems and land transmission, which

⁶² Harrower and D’Andrea, 2014.

⁶³ Ricci, 1990, pp. 129–30; Fattovich, Bard, Ricci, 2002, pp. 22–23.

⁶⁴ Phillipson L., 2000a, pp. 423–24, figs 375d, 376a–d.

aligns well with the cult of ancestors documented in the region since at least the early first millennium BCE.

The veneration of ancestors seems to continue also during these phases through progressively more standardized burial and post-burial practices and rituals: libations and offerings (and sacrifices?) taking place on the base plates of funerary stelae⁶⁵ and post-burial manipulation of bones⁶⁶—both attested at elite burial sites—may testify to the persistence of ancient ideological and social structures within an increasingly stratified and centralized polity.

The occurrence of monumental structures with ritual features such as the Məstaḥ Wārqi-type structures⁶⁷ and buildings at Wəššatä Golo,⁶⁸ Gərat Abba Qali⁶⁹ and Mäqayoho,⁷⁰ suggests the reappearance, during this phase, of ritual spaces distinct from the cemeteries, as had previously occurred outside Aksum in the late Pre-Aksumite period. This runs parallel to the epigraphic evidence which attests to the presence of deities within the pre-Christian Aksumite religious sphere,⁷¹ suggesting that these buildings may have been somehow linked to cults related to the veneration of such divinities. During this phase, Christianity was officially introduced, quickly becoming a defining feature of Aksumite kingship as suggested by coinage and inscriptions. Christian churches appear in the archaeological record only at a later stage, while non-Christian ritual practices persisted well beyond the fourth century. Nevertheless, as will be discussed below, its introduction substantially reshaped ritual and social structures.

In the Middle Aksumite phase (ca. 360/400–550/610 CE), spatial clustering remains pronounced but begins to loosen. Although the overall number of sites declines significantly (-68%), the urban core of Aksum reaches its maxi-

⁶⁵ Manzo, 2014; Manzo, 2020.

⁶⁶ Basanti, 2025.

⁶⁷ Anfray, 1965, p. 5, pl. I fig. B; Phillipson L., 2000b, pp. 421–23; Tekle Hagos, 2001, pp. 38–39; Tekle Hagos, 2003, p. 67; Fattovich, 2005, pp. 24–27; Sernicola, 2017, p. 50. On the still-debated function of these enigmatic structures, see Phillipson L., 2006; Sutton, 2008; Sernicola, 2017, p. 76.

⁶⁸ de Contenson, 1961.

⁶⁹ Fattovich, Manzo, Sernicola, 2008, pp. 7–13.

⁷⁰ Fattovich, Manzo, Sernicola, 2008, pp. 2–7.

⁷¹ For an overview of non-Christian Aksumite deities and religion, see Conti Rossini, 1928, pp. 141–43.; Manzo, 1999b, pp. 123–27; Manzo, 2014; Marrassini, 2006; Marrassini, 2010; Marrassini, 2012; Marrassini, 2014, pp. 41–53; “Aksumite religion” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 360a–61b (by Serguei A. Frantsouzoff).

num extent—approximately 180 hectares—indicating demographic concentration and growing social cohesion. Peripheral areas experienced marked depopulation, yet the persistence during this phase of large satellite settlements near the core area suggests population redistribution and a diversification of settlement strategies rather than demographic decline. Isolated compounds with granaries (e.g. Tukul Ḫmni II, Qalqal °Asba, Qube 05/74)⁷² attest to family-based modes of land use and crop storage, while terraced fields and small-scale water management systems provide evidence of localized land maintenance strategies.⁷³ The absence of inscriptions commemorating such works supports the hypothesis that these infrastructures were likely the result of collective, cooperative, and locally organized initiatives. Conversely, the first attestations of royal land donations appear to coincide with the spread of Christianity and the establishment of ecclesiastical institutions in this period. Episodes such as those recorded in the traditions of the martyrdom of Areta—where King Kaleb donates parcels of land to the church of Naḡran, rebuilt following his military intervention to avenge the persecution of Christians by the Jewish king YWS¹F °S¹°R YT¹R⁷⁴—attest to the control of land by Aksumite rulers of this period and to the institutionalization of land rights under political and religious authority.

The same sources indicate that, in this same period, systems of ‘delegated power’⁷⁵ emerged, such as the appointment of local governors, indicating the development of more hierarchically structured control mechanisms and to a much more institutionalized political/administrative control over the regions under Aksum’s influence. These developments point to a growing centralization of social structure, administration, and governance, marking a profound shift in the ideological and social foundations of authority. Communities that were once led by ritual leaders in the late first millennium BCE gave way to rulers with a more pronounced political power by the mid-first millennium CE⁷⁶—though this system faced strains in the subsequent centuries.

The Late Aksumite phase (ca. 550/610–800/850 CE) is marked by demographic contraction and ecological stress, consistent with the onset of a pro-

⁷² Fattovich, Bard, Manzo, *et al.*, 2003, pp. 29–31; Sernicola, 2017, p. 109.

⁷³ Bard and Fattovich, 2001; Fattovich, Bard, Ricci, 2002, pp. 17–18; Fattovich, Bard, Manzo, *et al.*, 2003, pp. 28–29; Ciampalini, Manzo, Perlingieri, *et al.*, 2008.

⁷⁴ Bausi and Gori, 2006, p. 87 (§38, ls 25–27), p. 301 (§38^f, ls 5–8).

⁷⁵ Gavrilets, Anderson, Turchin, 2010.

⁷⁶ See also Fattovich, 2018.

longed arid phase and possible demographic shocks. The settlement pattern reflects a clear decline in both urban and rural occupation, with an overall reduction in site density (-18%) and a loosening of spatial clustering even at small scale. The monumentalized core of Aksum contracted to approximately 80 hectares, while peripheral hills were largely abandoned. The large satellite settlements in the neighbourhood of Aksum's urban core disappeared, and other settlements diminished in both number and size reflecting demographic decline, environmental stress, and social reorganization. The abandonment of monumental complexes, the interruption of coinage and the lack of inscriptions from this period further suggest economic contraction and political instability, indicating a stop in the path towards centralization initiated in the previous phases. Some peripheral hills were partially reoccupied by small rural dwellings, occasionally clustered around churches, reflecting the growing prominence of Christian institutions and the diffusion of a new belief system that came to dominate the landscape. Beyond Aksum, major Aksumite sites such as Adulis and Matara were abandoned,⁷⁷ suggesting a general demographic decline, a contraction of the area under Aksum's influence, and reduced control of long-distance trade networks. The causes of this weakening have been widely debated. Explanatory models emphasizing external factors point to the progressive decline of Aksum's involvement in international exchange networks, following a series of political and military events on the Asiatic shore of the Red Sea, as a key driver of the kingdom's collapse.⁷⁸ In contrast, endogenous explanations focus on internal ecological and social pressures, including overexploitation of natural resources and long-term climatic changes,⁷⁹ and the spread of epidemics.⁸⁰

The Post-Aksumite period (from ca. 800/850 CE onward) reveals signs of demographic recovery within a fundamentally transformed sociopolitical framework. Settlement numbers increased again (+98%), while the urban core continued to contract to approximately 40 hectares. Spatial analyses (ANN and Ripley's K) indicate residual micro-clustering at the local scale within a broader, fragmented territorial structure. Peripheral hills witnessed reoccupation, and settlements became more dispersed and increasingly organized around rural churches, reflecting the central role of Christian institutions as

⁷⁷ Anfray, 1974.

⁷⁸ For a discussion on this topic, see Lusini, 2022.

⁷⁹ Butzer, 1981.

⁸⁰ Yohannes Gebre Selassie, 2011; Sernicola, 2017, pp. 100–02.

focal points of community life. Economic resilience persisted, but social structures and political authority appear to have undergone significant change, becoming increasingly decentralized. Environmental aridity continued to shape subsistence strategies, as evidenced by changes in livestock composition, with greater reliance on sheep, goats, and donkeys. Overall, the Post-Aksumite landscape at Aksum reflects adaptation and reorganization: a return to a less centralized social order emerging under ecological and economic constraints.

4. – *Resilience, Continuity and Changes in Post-Aksumite Society*

In light of the archaeological evidence examined above, the Post-Aksumite period in the Aksum area emerges as a complex and dynamic phase rather than a simple epilogue to the Aksumite civilization. Available evidence clearly indicates that, between the end of the first and the beginning of the second millennium CE, a shift occurred in processes that had been set in motion several centuries earlier. Whatever the causes of this transformation—whether internal structural factors or external pressures—it would nevertheless be misleading to interpret the Post-Aksumite as a time of decline or as a “dark age” in the history of Aksum and of Ethiopia more broadly.

When examined through the lens of archaeology and other material-based approaches, the Post-Aksumite period reveals itself as a time of consolidation and refinement of practices rooted in earlier centuries. Agricultural and animal husbandry strategies, for instance, appear to have been adjusted and optimized to meet changing environmental conditions. Similarly, elements of continuity can be traced in systems of land tenure that remained fundamental to Ethiopian society from the early medieval period through the modern era. By the late Post-Aksumite period, key institutions such as *rəst* and *gʷəlt* were fully established, the first guaranteeing the inalienable right of farmers to cultivate specific plots and to transmit those rights to their descendants, the second conversely, referred to grants of land made by kings to monasteries, churches, military personnel, and other individuals, conferring upon holders the right to collect tributes.⁸¹ These arrangements effectively structured social hierarchies, distinguishing between landholding elites—those benefiting from *gʷəlt* grants—and farming communities whose access to land was hereditary but economically dependent. Although the earliest written references to *rəst* and *gʷəlt* date to the eleventh–twelfth centuries, their roots, as noted above, can already be discerned in Aksumite written sources and patterns of land use.

⁸¹ Crummey, 2000; “Land tenure” in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), pp. 496a–99a (by Donald Crummey).

From this perspective, rather than a moment of rupture, the Post-Aksumite period should be seen as a phase of re-adaptation and resilience within a system characterized by a metastable equilibrium in which exogenic and endogenic stimuli lead to long-term directional changes, readjustments and jumps in equilibrium level.⁸² This interpretation aligns with David Phillipson's⁸³ observations on the substantial continuity between the Aksumite and medieval periods at a broad territorial scale, as revealed through the study of religious architecture.

The crucial question, therefore, is not whether continuity existed, but how it operated—what ecological and cultural forces determined this evolution and allowed the reconfiguration of older structures into new forms of organization.

From a broader chronological perspective, the evolution of Aksum's society can be better understood as part of a long-term process of social transformation that began in the first millennium BCE. In its earliest phases, leadership within the Aksum region appears to have been grounded primarily in ritual authority rather than in administrative or political control. Chiefs may have acted as mediators or arbiters of conflict, as observed in other complex yet non-state African societies.⁸⁴ At a regional scale, an effort to establish a more centralized and territorially expansive political entity seems to have taken place between the seventh and fifth centuries BCE, coinciding with the intensification of exchanges across the Red Sea with South Arabia. However, this development was short-lived, and a fragmented social and political landscape soon re-emerged. From the early centuries of the first millennium CE, a gradual process of political and administrative centralisation became evident, this time centered at Aksum. This is reflected in the introduction of coinage, in epigraphic references to tribute collection and royal land control, and in settlement patterns indicating the emergence of more centralized authority. Such developments reached their peak in the Middle Aksumite phase. Evidence from the sixth–seventh centuries indicates increasingly powerful rulers, although it remains uncertain whether Aksum ever attained the level of bureaucratic centralization typically associated with the notion of a “state” or a “kingdom” in the Western sense.⁸⁵

⁸² Butzer, 1982, pp. 279–94.

⁸³ Phillipson D.W., 2009a, p. 3; Phillipson D.W., 2012, pp. 227–43.

⁸⁴ See e.g. Donham, 1986; Southall, 1988; Shipton and Goheen, 1992; McIntosh, 1999; Stanish, 2017.

⁸⁵ Note that Weissleder, 1965, had already defined the Amhara domination in Ethiopia as a form of segmentary state, i.e., a state held together by ritual suzerainty, with a centralized core and

Agent-based modeling simulations of the Aksum region indicate that demographic expansion was likely a major driving force behind the shift from complex but largely horizontal forms of social organization to an increasingly centralized political system⁸⁶—a pattern consistent with other examples both within and beyond Africa.⁸⁷ At the same time, growing participation in long-distance exchange networks also contributed to the emergence of hierarchical authority. Political centralization, which can facilitate exchange both within and across borders, has likewise been observed to develop as a means of managing trade beyond a polity's boundaries.⁸⁸ The adoption of Christianity further contributed to this process. More generally, anthropologists have often interpreted the adoption of a new religion and different non-indigenous practices by elites as a strategic means to further separate themselves socially from the rest of the community, to transform themselves into new elites with increased social influence, new economic privileges and consolidated political authority.⁸⁹ This occurred both during attempts at centralization in Pre-Aksumite times and in the Aksumite period. In the latter case, the adoption of a monotheistic, text-based religion such as Christianity further strengthened the idea of a single sovereign as the earthly counterpart of a monotheistic deity and promoted, within a traditionally oral society, the diffusion of literacy as a tool for ideological and administrative cohesion.⁹⁰

Yet this system proved vulnerable to environmental and economic stress. Episodes of drought, possible epidemics, and shifting trade dynamics undermined the foundations of Aksum's political authority, leading to a phase of fragmentation and regional reorganisation. Nevertheless, the institutional and ideological processes initiated during the Aksumite period did not vanish.

only tenuous unity (Southall, 1988). Regional chiefs replicated the king on a smaller scale, and there were usually minimal formal lines of communication between the king and the regional chiefs. The king traveled throughout the kingdom at regular intervals to collect the tributes gathered by the regional chiefs.

⁸⁶ Vasellini, Ferrandino, Sernicola, *et al.*, 2025.

⁸⁷ Stanish, 2017, pp. 185–268.

⁸⁸ Sahlins, 1963.

⁸⁹ Donham, 1986, p. 76; Watson, 2009, pp. 128–29.

⁹⁰ Note, moreover, the emphasis on biblical quotations in royal inscriptions such as “I will give you this land so that you may rule over it” (Kaleb in RIÉ I 195; Bernand, Drewes, Schneider, 1991, I, pp. 284–88; Marrassini, 2014, pp. 253–58; Drewes, 2019, pp. 279–85), perhaps used to underscore and legitimize an increasingly assertive control over the territory and an ever more centralized authority.

They were reconfigured and persisted in new forms during the Post-Aksumite centuries, showing that centralisation and decentralisation were not a linear process nor mutually exclusive, but part of a cyclical dynamic of adaptation. It is precisely this fluidity that ensured resilience over time and that, in the case of Aksum and its successors, allowed continuity amid transformation.

In this sense, the Post-Aksumite period should be regarded as a pivotal stage within a broader and dynamic historical process in which elements of continuity coexisted with profound social and cultural transformations. It was a time of transition marked by the decline of Aksum as a political and economic hub, the shift to drier climatic conditions, and the progressive weakening of its long-distance trade networks. At the same time, it witnessed the consolidation and diffusion of monotheistic revealed religions based on scriptures and divinely inspired texts, which deeply reshaped systems of belief, modes of authority, and the transmission of knowledge. These factors did not operate in isolation: they interacted within a long, non-linear process rooted in the social organization of local communities. The resulting landscape reflects both rupture and resilience—an adaptive reconfiguration of practices, institutions, and ideologies that had taken shape during the Aksumite centuries. Certain institutions, such as land tenure system, reveal strong continuities with earlier traditions, showing that even amid ecological, economic and political upheaval, the fundamental structures of production, inheritance, and tribute persisted in new forms.

The Post-Aksumite period was not a moment of disappearance, but one of reorganization. Its society, undergoing deep transformation in its social and economic structures as well as in its symbolic and cultural system, laid the groundwork for the emergence of future scenarios. Aksum's legacy did not vanish; it evolved, reinterpreted through new cultural matrices and new forms of political and religious expression.

Much, however, remains to be understood—both at Aksum and in the wider northern Ethiopian and Eritrean region. To comprehend this crucial phase and the long-term processes it encapsulates, future research should focus specifically on Post-Aksumite contexts. Archaeology, in dialogue with environmental and textual studies, can play a decisive role in constructing a precise chronological and spatial framework, allowing the integration of well grounded local data into broader regional patterns. Only through such approaches will it be possible to fully appreciate the Post-Aksumite period not as an epilogue, but as a formative chapter in the making of medieval and modern Ethiopia.

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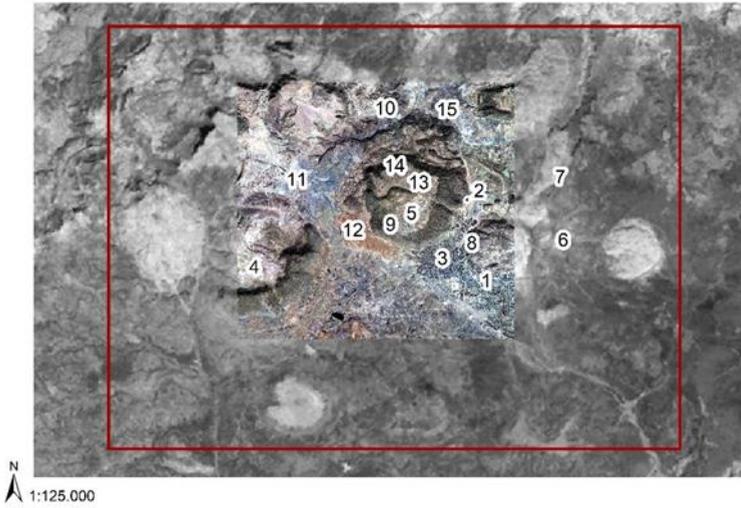


Fig. 1: Map showing the localities in the Aksum area mentioned in the text (by Luisa Sernicola). 1 = G^wang^wa ʿĒdaga; 2 = Məʿraf, Kidanā Məhrāt; 3 = Däbtära district; 4 = Gobo Dura; 5 = Beta Giyorgis; 6 = Abba Pāntalewon; 7 = Abba Liqanos; 8 = May Qoḥo; 9 = ʿĪnda ʾḂsələ; 10 = ʿAddi Şāḥafī; 11 = Wəşşatā Golo; 12 = Gərat Abba Qalī, Mäqayohō; 13 = Tukul ʿĪmni; 14 = Qalqal ʿAsba; 15 = Qube.

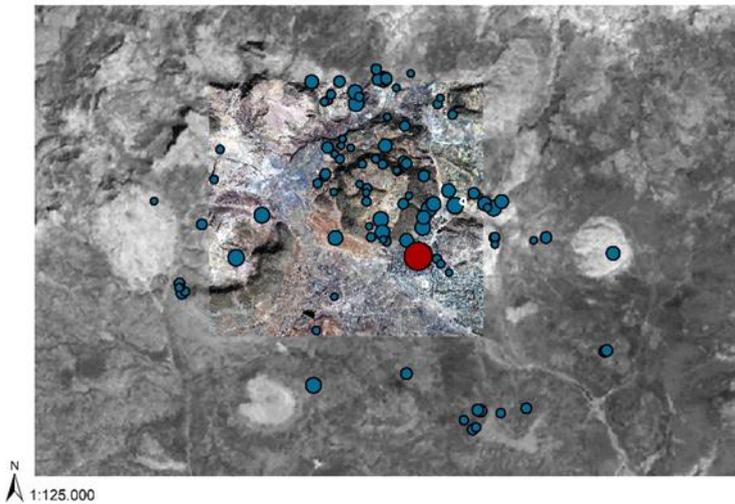


Fig. 2: Map showing the distribution of Post-Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area. Symbols are graduated according to site size. Aksum urban area is in red (by Luisa Sernicola).

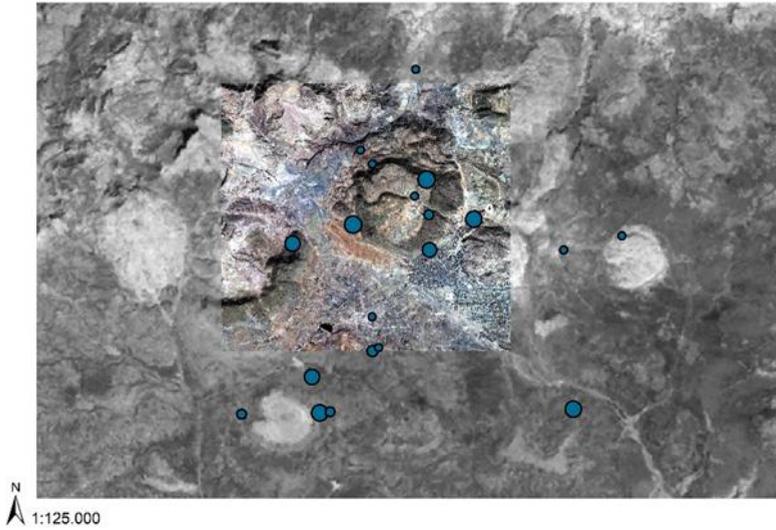


Fig. 3: Map showing the distribution of Pre-Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size (by Luisa Sernicola).

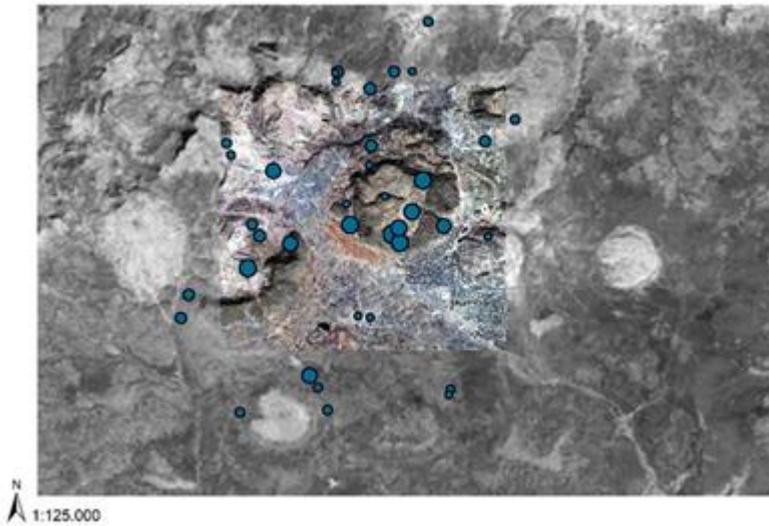


Fig. 4: Map showing the distribution of Proto-Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size (by Luisa Sernicola).

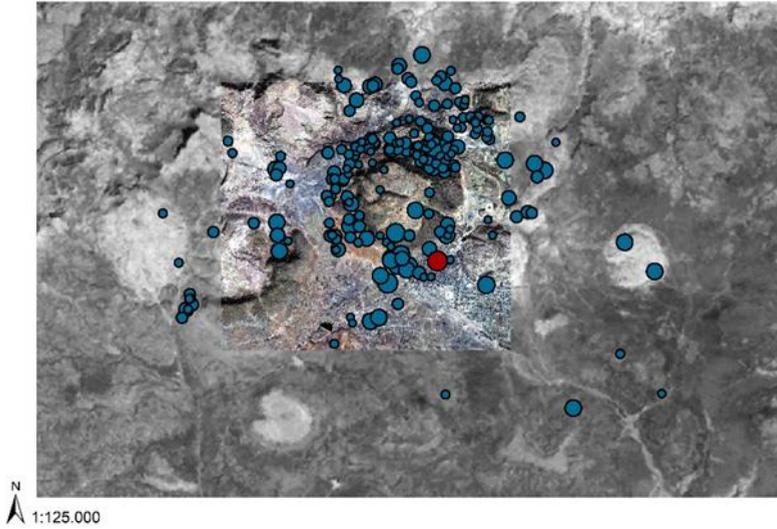


Fig. 5: Map showing the distribution of Early Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size.
Aksum urban area is indicated in red (by Luisa Sernicola).

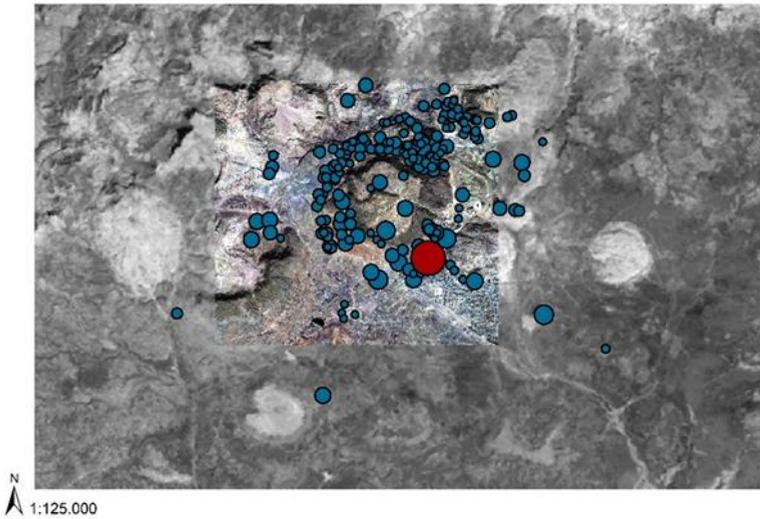


Fig. 6: Map showing the distribution of Classic Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size.
Aksum urban area is indicated in red (by Luisa Sernicola).

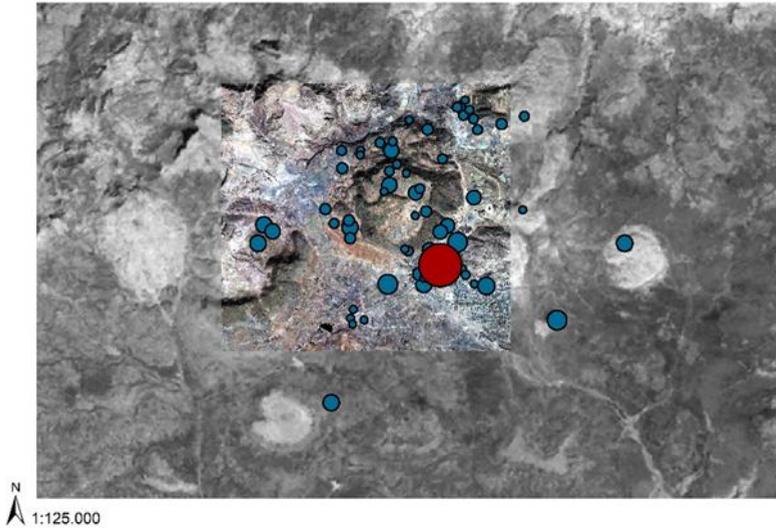


Fig. 7: Map showing the distribution of Middle Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size.
Aksum urban area is indicated in red (by Luisa Sernicola).

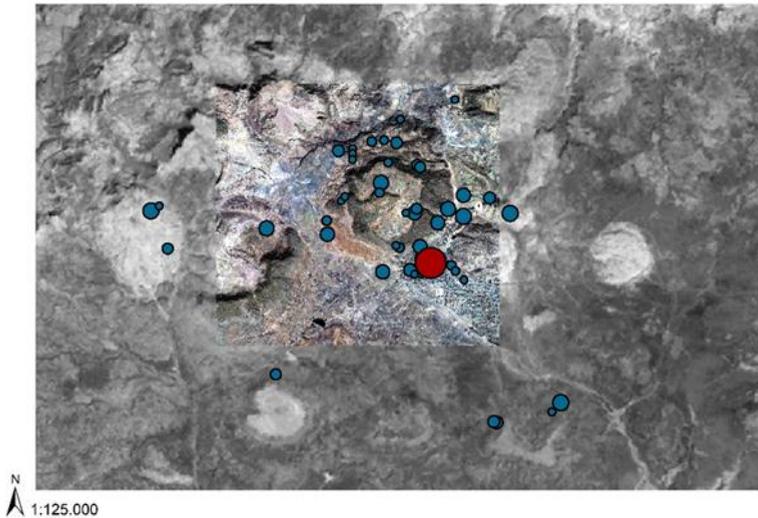


Fig. 8: Map showing the distribution of Late Aksumite settlements in the Aksum area.
Symbols are graduated according to site size.
Aksum urban area is indicated in red (by Luisa Sernicola).

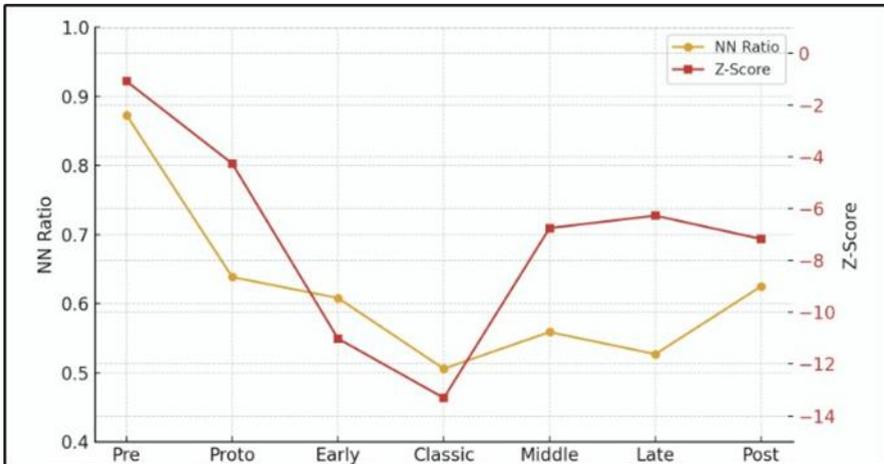


Fig. 9: Diagram showing NN Ratio and Z-Score in settlement distribution from Pre-Aksumite to Post-Aksumite times (generated by AI using data provided by the author).

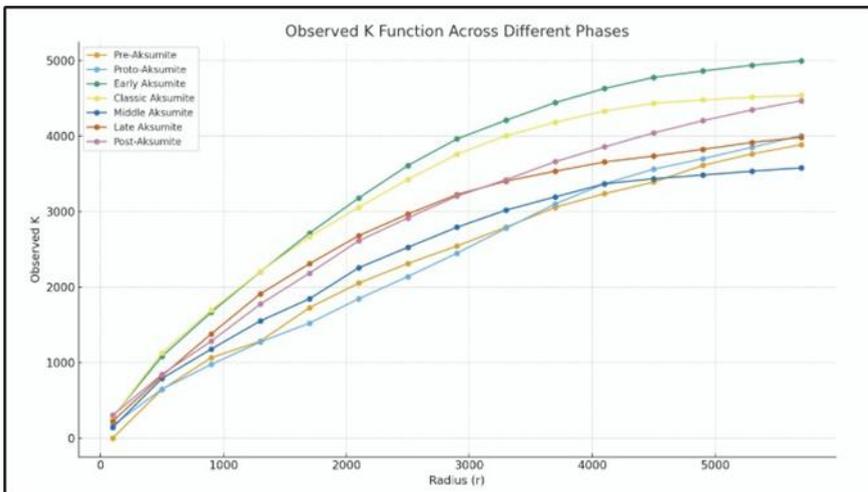


Fig. 10: Diagram showing observed K function at different space intervals from Pre-Aksumite to Post-Aksumite times (generated by AI using data provided by the author).

Period	NN Ratio	Z-score	P-value	Interpretation
Pre-	0.87	-1.09	0.28	Not significant → nearly random pattern, with a slight but non-significant tendency toward clustering.
Proto-	0.64	-4.27	0.001	Significantly clustered → strong spatial aggregation.
Early	0.61	-11.02	0	Highly clustered → very dense clustering.
Classic	0.51	-13.31	0	Highly clustered, even more pronounced.
Middle	0.56	-6.75	0	Clustered, clearly non-random pattern.
Late	0.53	-6.27	0	Clustered, similar to the Middle Aksumite period.
Post	0.62	-7.17	0	Clustered, though slightly less intense.

Table 1: Table listing NN Ratio, Z-Score, p values, and basic interpretation from Pre-Aksumite to Post-Aksumite times.

Radius (r)	Pre-	Diff	Proto-	Diff	Early	Diff	Classic	Diff
	Aksumite K		Aksumite K		Aksumite K		Aksumite K	
100	0	-100	166.861	66.861	278.982	178.982	273.214	173.214
500	640.494	140.494	646.251	146.251	1080.493	580.493	1127.930	627.930
900	1062.139	162.139	972.960	72.960	1662.936	762.936	1690.296	790.296
1300	1280.988	-19.012	1270.778	-29.222	2200.461	900.461	2203.704	903.704
1700	1724.582	24.582	1520.179	-179.821	2711.580	1011.580	2664.180	964.180
2100	2050.581	-49.419	1843.044	-256.956	3176.803	1076.803	3054.449	954.449
2500	2309.333	-190.667	2136.868	-363.132	3607.204	1107.204	3423.994	923.994
2900	2541.881	-358.119	2446.667	-453.333	3960.169	1060.169	3757.368	857.368
3300	2791.848	-508.152	2777.126	-522.874	4207.213	907.213	4001.781	701.781
3700	3054.961	-645.039	3099.312	-600.688	4441.199	741.199	4180.407	480.407
4100	3234.335	-865.665	3366.301	-733.699	4627.157	527.157	4329.025	229.025
4500	3389.175	-1110.825	3559.274	-940.726	4774.291	274.291	4431.764	-68.236
4900	3608.999	-1291.001	3697.400	-1202.600	4860.094	-39.906	4475.246	-424.754
5300	3762.049	-1537.951	3848.677	-1451.323	4935.695	-364.305	4512.679	-787.321
5700	3882.787	-1817.213	4004.672	-1695.328	4991.999	-708.001	4534.800	-1165.200

Radius (r)	Middle Aksumite K	Diff	Late Aksumite K	Diff	Post-Aksumite K	Diff
100	139.926	39.926	222.387	122.387	301.726	201.726
500	787.407	287.407	822.129	322.129	841.474	341.474
900	1176.265	276.265	1376.883	476.883	1280.116	380.116
1300	1549.749	249.749	1908.729	608.729	1772.241	472.241
1700	1842.210	142.210	2307.541	607.541	2181.583	481.583
2100	2253.342	153.342	2677.890	577.890	2610.121	510.121
2500	2523.843	23.843	2964.229	464.229	2913.217	413.217
2900	2790.343	-109.657	3222.689	322.689	3202.660	302.660
3300	3017.342	-282.658	3401.862	101.862	3420.304	120.304
3700	3191.823	-508.177	3532.613	-167.387	3658.928	-41.072
4100	3365.016	-734.984	3654.186	-445.814	3854.152	-245.848
4500	3433.177	-1066.823	3732.300	-767.700	4039.327	-460.673
4900	3481.315	-1418.685	3821.774	-1078.226	4201.357	-698.643
5300	3532.493	-1767.507	3913.416	-1386.584	4344.579	-955.421
5700	3576.559	-2123.441	3980.245	-1719.755	4463.442	-1236.558

Table 2a-b: Table listing Ripley’s K Function data at different scale intervals from Pre-Aksumite to Post-Aksumite times.

NAFISA VALIEVA

**“Introduction” to the gädl:
General Overview with a Focus on the Life of Lalibäla**

1. – Discussion of the ‘Introductions’

Ethiopian *Lives* of saints (*gädlat*) are usually preceded by a more or less lengthy preamble (*mäqdām*), often referred to in European literature as an “introduction”. I do not find the term “introduction” very fortunate, because some of the preambles do not introduce the subject of the *Life* at all. I understand a preamble as a text that immediately precedes the *Life*. Since the borders of a preamble are sometimes fluid, for the dossiers different than the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection”, I decided to mark the beginning of a preamble by the Trinitarian formula and its end with the phrase that introduces the saint’s birth or with a phrase beginning with “Listen to”, “Let’s start”, “Let’s turn to”, or any other similar phrase aiming to catch listeners’ attention. Accordingly, the rhymed preamble of the *Life* of Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus reads as follows:

በሰሙ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ አምላክ ።	In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, one God.
በሰሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ አብ ፡ ዘኢይትዌለጥ ፡ እምህላዊሁ ።	In the name of the Lord Father, who does not change from His essence.
ወበሰሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ወልድ ፡ ዘኢይትፈለጥ ፡ እምሕፅነ ፡ አቡሁ ።	In the name of the Lord Son, who does not separate from the womb of His Father.
ወበሰሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ጳራቅሊጦስ ፡ ናዛዜ ፡ ከሉ ፡ በተፍጻሚ ተ ፡ ሥላሴሁ ።	In the name of the Lord Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the comforter of all in the completeness of His Trinity,
ዘአስተንፈሰ ፡ ቦሙ ፡ በነቢያቲሁ ፡ በእስትንፋሰ ፡ አፋሁ ።	who breathed into His prophets with the breath of His mouth,
ወተሰውጠ ፡ ቦሙ ፡ በሐዋርያቲሁ ፡ ከሙ ፡ ይሰብኩ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ጸጋሁ ።	who poured Himself out on His apostles so they could preach the Gospel of His grace,
ወተጽዕነ ፡ ዲቤሆሙ ፡ ከሙ ፡ ይኩኑ ፡ ሰረገላቲሁ ።	and who was carried upon them so they could become His chariot.
ዝኬ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ አምላክ ፡ ዋሕድ ፡ በሥላሴሁ ።	This is indeed the one God, unique in His Trinity,

ዘኢይትበዐድ ፡ በግጻዌሁ ። ዘኢይቶሳሕ ፡ ድግግሬሁ ።	who does not change in His persons, whose union is not mixed,
ዘሱበሐቲሁ ፡ እምነሴሁ ፡ ወውዳሴሁ ፡ እምዚአሁ ፡	whose glory is from Him, whose praise is His,
ወምኩናኑ ፡ ዲበ ፡ መታክፍቲሁ ።	whose judgment rests on His shoulders,
ወመልእ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ዲበ ፡ እራሁ ፡	whose hand fills the world,
ወስእለተ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ውስተ ፡ እዘኒሁ ፡	in whose ears are the supplications of all,
ወምሥጢረ ፡ ኅግወኢነ ፡ ስጡሕ ፡ ቅድመ ፡ አዕይንቲሁ ።	before whose eyes the mystery of our sins is evident,
ዘሎቲ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ እምነበ ፡ ትጉሃን ፡ መላእክቲሁ ፡	to whom glory [is given] by His watchful angels
እምነበ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ እግብርቲሁ ፡ ለዓለመ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ። (end of the preamble)	and His holy servants, forever and ever. Amen. (end of the preamble)
(beginning of the <i>Life</i>) ንወጥን ፡ ገድሎ ፡ ለቅዱስ ፡ አብ... ¹	(beginning of the <i>Life</i>) Let us begin the <i>Life</i> (<i>gädli</i>) of the holy father... ²

The first to discuss the “introduction” as part of the characteristics of Gəʿəz hagiographic literature was Boris A. Turaev. His analysis suggested the following main features: stylistic resemblances to Copto-Arabic literature, typology of content (trinitology, glorification), variety in length, and optionality,³ noting:

[...] introductions to some Ethiopian hagiographies, presenting lengthy, sometimes endless eulogies or dogmatic excursions in honor of the Holy Trinity, also find their prototype in Copto-Arabic literature, such as in the history of the visions of bishop Theodosius.

These lengthy introductory praises have evolved from the customary “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God, we begin,” etc., and in length, they vary between a few lines and several dozen pages.[...] Praising each Person of the Holy Trinity separately, the hagiographer sought to distinguish himself with his theological erudition and resourcefulness and to shine with the ability for versification [...]. However,

¹ Marrassini, 2003, pp. 1–2 (text).

² English translation has been generated by ChatGPT 4o from the Italian translation by Marrassini, 2003, p. 1 (trans.).

³ See Turaev, 1902, pp. 30–31.

not all authors of hagiographies limit themselves to these introductions, and not all resort to them.⁴

Half a century later, while analysing various “introductions”, in his *Storia della letteratura etiopica* Enrico Cerulli introduced the concept of the use of “rhymed prose”,⁵ in which he saw an “imitation of the Arabic style”.⁶ He argued that the more or less abundant use of rhymed prose should be considered a characteristic of the fifteenth-century style.⁷ He observed that the content of such prefaces does not have any particular connection to the biography and, as such, could be shifted from one biography to another. Additionally, he noted that there are often two “introductions”: a proper, simple “introduction” to the Life and a rhymed “introduction” with an “indefinite” meaning. He described the style of the latter in various ways in Italian,⁸ but in French he called it *le style 'fleuri'*.⁹ In his further works he used the presence of the rhymed prose as one of the elements for dating a *gädl* to the fifteenth century.¹⁰

When Cerulli first used the concept of *le style 'fleuri'* outside his *Storia* in the introduction to his edition of the *Life* of Krəstos Šämra,¹¹ he referred to the *Storia*.¹² However, a few years later, in the introduction to the *Life* of Iyäsus

⁴ Turaev 1902, pp. 30–31: “Наконец вступления к некоторым эфиопским житиям, представляющие длинные, иногда бесконечные славословия или догматические экскурсы в честь св. Троицы также находят себе прототип в копто-арабской литературе, хотя бы например в истории видения епископа Феодосия. Эти длинные хвалебные вступления развились из обычного в книгах начального: ‘во имя Отца и Сына и Св. Духа, Единого Бога, начинаем’ ит.д., и по длине колеблются между несколькими строчками и несколькими десятками страниц [...]. Славословия каждое Лицо Св. Троицы отдельно, агиобиограф старался отличиться своей богословской начитанностью и находчивостью и блеснуть способностью к стихосложению [...]. Но не все авторы житий ограничиваются этими вступлениями и не все к ним прибегают.”

⁵ Cerulli, 1956a, p. 84: “prosa rimata”.

⁶ Cerulli, 1956a, p. 85: “stata una imitazione dell’arabo”.

⁷ Cerulli, 1956a, pp. 84–85.

⁸ Cerulli, 1956a, pp. 57, 78, 84–85, 95.

⁹ See the introduction by Cerulli to the edition by Stanislas Kur (Kur, 1965 and Cerulli, 1956a, p. 95).

¹⁰ See Cerulli, 1956b, p. xvi: “D’altronde a queste considerazioni storiche va aggiunta quella dello stile dell’opera, che, come era caratteristico uso del secolo XV etiopico [...], è preceduta da una lunga e retoricamente elaborata introduzione in prosa rimata, dove l’autore fa largo sfoggio della sua abilità scolastica”.

¹¹ Cerulli, 1956a.

¹² Cerulli 1956b, p. xvi.

Moʼa of Stanislas Kur's edition, Cerulli refers to *le style 'fleuri'*, "typical of Ethiopian literary works from the second half of the fifteenth century",¹³ without any reference or explanation.

For a certain period, the notion of *le style 'fleuri'* seems to have been commonly accepted by the editors of *gädlät* and used without any reference to Cerulli's work, although the use varies, for Stanislas Kur refers to *le style 'fleuri'* of the "introduction" only¹⁴ whereas Gérard Colin refers to *le style 'fleuri'* of the *gädl* in general.¹⁵

Paolo Marrassini adopted Cerulli's idea about rhymed "introductions" as a marker of style and extended it further to other *gädlät* datable to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the introduction to the *Life* of Yoḥannäs Məśraqawī, but developed it too little to be clear. Additionally, he introduced a different way of describing the "introductions": the number of lines and the last syllable/vowel.¹⁶ However, in his further works Marrassini did not use the notion of *le style 'fleuri'* and to my knowledge did not discuss "introductions" to the *gädlät* any further.

The last European scholar to challenge Cerulli's interpretation of the rhymed "introduction" was Joseph Tubiana. Driven by his interest in the Agaw language, he developed an interest in King Lalibäla's history and delved into the "*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection". Upon familiarizing himself with Gəʿəz poetry and mastering the art of reciting Gəʿəz texts in the Ethiopian manner, Tubiana came to the realization that the beginning of the "*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection" is rhymed, suggesting that it might be a poem of an unknown genre. Marcel Cohen, on Tubiana's behalf, corresponded with Cerulli seeking his opinion, to which Cerulli reiterated his previously stated view: it is not a poem but rhymed prose, imitating Arabic. Tubiana remained unconvinced. Without accepting or rejecting Cerulli's verdict, he proposed continuing the research to

¹³ See the introduction by Cerulli to the edition by Stanislas Kur, in Kur, 1965, p. iv: "La longue introduction aux Actes, écrites dans le style 'fleuri' typique des ouvrages littéraires éthiopiens de la deuxième moitié du XV^e siècle suggère déjà de dater notre texte de cette période".

¹⁴ Kur, 1968, p. xii: "3. Nos Actes ne contiennent pas l'introduction en prose rimée dans le style 'fleuri', typique des ouvrages littéraires éthiopiens de la deuxième moitié du XV^e siècle". Note that the text actually does contain a rhymed introduction, see Marrassini, 1981, p. XLVII.

¹⁵ Colin, 1987, p. xii: "'caractère du gadl': Il est un des meilleurs représentants de ce style 'fleuri' qui s'épanouit au quinzième siècle dans les biographies de moines".

¹⁶ Marrassini, 1981, p. xlvi.

ascertain whether “there is no poem in a freer form than the simple *qəne*”,¹⁷ which he believed could be applicable to the beginning of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection”.

What can be concluded thirty years later? A swift analysis of 30 scholarly introductions and what I prefer to call preambles to *gädlät*¹⁸ (instead of “introductions”) leads to the following conclusions.

1. Editions that appear starting from 1990 do not contain any discussion of preambles to *gädlät*. The latest discussion I could trace takes place in the 1987 edition of the *Life* of Giyorgis of Säglä by Colin.¹⁹

2. Among the consulted texts, only translated texts appear to lack preambles. This makes preambles preceding *Gəʿəz Lives* seem more like a peculiarity of *Gəʿəz gädlät*. Further analysis is required to ascertain whether all preambles consistently include rhyme or not.

3. Preambles indeed do not have any particular connection to the saints’ biographies and, as such, could be shifted from one saint’s biography to another. However, the only “shifted” preamble I have identified is the preamble to the *Life* of Krəstos Šämra.²⁰ It is shorter and differs in gender (but not always), yet everything in it finds a correspondence in the *Preamble*²¹ of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection”.²² The rest of the consulted preambles are similar in content but still differ in their choice of vocabulary, which stresses the particularity of the connection between the preambles of the *Life* of Krəstos Šämra and of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection”.

4. The length of preambles can range from a few lines to eight pages.²³ The *Life* of Lalibäla is the only one that is preceded by a “dozen pages”²⁴ or some 35 folia and will be discussed below.

¹⁷ Tubiana, 1994, p. 297.

¹⁸ Allotte de la Fuye, 1958; Bausi, 2003; Cerulli, 1943; Cerulli, 1956b; Colin, 1987; Colin, 1990; Colin, 2010; Conti Rossini, 1896; Conti Rossini, 1901; Conti Rossini, 1910; Conti Rossini, 1912; Conti Rossini, 1938; Getatchew Haile, 2006; Kur, 1965; Kur, 1968; Kur, 1972; Lusini, 1996; Marrassini, 1981; Marrassini, 2003; Raineri, 1983; Raineri, 1998; Schneider, 1972; Tedros Abraha, 2007; Turaev, 1905; Conti Rossini, 1955.

¹⁹ See Colin, 1987.

²⁰ Cerulli, 1956b, pp. 1–3.

²¹ Perruchon, 1892, pp. 1–7 (text), 65–72 (transl.) or Valieva, 2019, pp. 262–88. On what is the *Preamble* of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection” see further in this article.

²² See Valieva, 2019, pp. 185–89.

²³ See Turaev, 1955.

²⁴ Turaev, 1902, pp. 30–31.

5. I cannot pass judgment on whether rhymed preambles should be regarded as rhymed prose, as argued by Cerulli,²⁵ or as poems, as suggested by Tubiana.²⁶ At times, when the rhyme appears and disappears, it seems we are dealing with poems incorporated into the prose. Cerulli's hypothesis that the more or less abundant use of rhymed prose should be considered a characteristic of fifteenth-century style²⁷ appears to be outdated.

2. – *First six textual units of the "Gädlä Lalibäla collection"*

What exactly precedes the *Life* of Lalibäla proper in the "*Gädlä Lalibäla collection*"? In the introduction to his *Vie de Lalibela, roi d'Éthiopie*, based on MS London, BL Or. 718, nineteenth century, Jules Perruchon noted the following:

This *Life* of Lalibäla is composed of several detached chapters, written in the form of sermons or edifying conversations, as the author himself declares at the end that he has composed this story solely to edify the faithful and strengthen them in faith. This manuscript begins with two true sermons, which serve as an introduction. The first, starting with a long invocation to God, contains considerations on the great sanctity of Lalibäla, whom the author, in his hyperbolic language, calls a mountain of gold, a mountain of silver, of fine pearls and sapphire, an admirable hill of myrrh and incense; the second contains a profession of faith similar to our Apostles' Creed, and it is for this reason that I deemed it necessary to reproduce it.²⁸

²⁵ Cerulli, 1956a, p. 84: "prosa rimata".

²⁶ Tubiana, 1994, p. 297.

²⁷ Cerulli, 1956a, pp. 84–85.

²⁸ Perruchon, 1892, p. xxxii: "Cette vie de Lalibela se compose de plusieurs chapitres détachés, rédigés en forme de sermons ou d'entretiens édifiants, car l'auteur déclare lui-même à la fin qu'il n'a composé cette histoire que pour édifier les fidèles et les fortifier dans la foi. Ce manuscrit commence par deux sermons véritables, qui servent d'introduction. Le premier, qui débute par une longue invocation à Dieu, renferme des considérations sur la grande sainteté de Lalibela que l'auteur appelle dans son langage hyperbolique une montagne d'or, une montagne d'argent, de perles fines et de saphir, une colline admirable de myrrhe et d'encens; le second contient une profession de foi semblable à notre Symbole des Apôtres et c'est pour ce motif que j'ai cru devoir la reproduire".

What Perruchon calls here “several detached chapters” possibly corresponds to my understanding of several textual units.²⁹ The textual units preceding the *Life* of Lalibäla are distinct in terms of their content, *mise en texte*, and sometimes include supplications at the end.³⁰

Perruchon’s edition includes only two of these ‘detached chapters’, contained in MS London, BL Or. 718 fols 1–8, while fols 9–34 were skipped. These two “chapters” correspond to what I term as the first textual unit, or the *Preamble*³¹ proper (*Introduction* in Perruchon,³² መቅደም, i.e. “Preamble” in the scholarly community of Lalibäla town’s edition),³³ and partially to what I term as the second textual unit, or *Jesus and His redeeming fire* (*Deuxième introduction* in Perruchon,³⁴ አቀድም ፡ አእኩቶቶ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር, i.e. “First, I thank God” in the scholarly community of Lalibäla town’s edition).³⁵ I cannot fully agree with Perruchon’s suggestion to consider the first six textual units as sermons, as they contain very few “edifying” elements, and instead represent poetical compositions closely rooted in Scripture that celebrate Christian (or sometimes more precisely royal) virtues of the king. Besides the sixth textual unit, where the text can be divided into paragraphs each starting with the name Lalibäla, in textual units 1–5 the name Lalibäla is added or omitted in various passages across manuscripts which suggests its auxiliary nature.

As I have evoked above, the first textual unit, the *Preamble* is in word-to-word parallelism with the preamble to the *Life* of Krəstos Šämra.³⁶ In between passages parallel with the preamble to the *Life* of Krəstos Šämra, §§ 25–45

²⁹ See Valieva, 2019, p. 17. I gave the following working titles: *Preamble, Jesus and His redeeming fire, Teaching about saints, Eulogy of Lalibäla as the one who entered the Heavenly Jerusalem, Eulogy of Lalibäla as the one who accomplished the Word of the Gospel, Praise for Lalibäla*. Note that they are slightly modified from what I offered in my thesis

³⁰ For my definition of a “textual unit” and methodology I elaborated see my thesis, Valieva, 2019

³¹ In what follows, I will refer to the first textual unit of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection” with an uppercase P in italics, *Preamble*, whereas general preambles will be referred to with a lowercase p without any special formatting, preamble.

³² Perruchon, 1892, pp. 1–7 (text), 65–72 (transl.).

³³ *Gädlä Qəddus Lalibäla*, 2007, pp. 5–10; 2010, pp. 24–37.

³⁴ Perruchon, 1892, pp. 7–10 (text), 72–76 (transl.).

³⁵ *Gädlä Qəddus Lalibäla*, 2007, pp. 11–13; 2010, pp. 316–20.

³⁶ Cerulli, 1956b, pp. 1–3.

contain a clear allusion to Enoch,³⁷ (noted by Perruchon as “considerations on the great sanctity of Lalibäla, whom the author, in his hyperbolic language, calls a mountain of gold, a mountain of silver, of fine pearls and sapphire, an admirable hill of myrrh and incense”), which is interpolated with a commented quotation from the New Testament linked to Saint Lalibäla.

The *Preamble* is what one might expect as the prelude of a *gädl* in Gəʿəz hagiography, which commonly begins with a rhymed piece on the creation of the world and would correspond in the scholarly discussion to the “introduction”.

1. The *Preamble* of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection”³⁸ reads as follows:

(beginning of the *Preamble*) በሰመ : አብ : ወወልድ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ፩ : አምላክ : ሥላሴ : ዋሕድ : ዕሩይ : ዘኢይሰደቅ : ታሉት : ዘኢይነፍድ : ዘሀሎ : እምቅድም : እምክዋኔሁ : እንዘ : ኢይትበዐድ ። [...]

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God, One Equal Trinity, Indivisible Trinity, who does not come to an end Who existed from the beginning, without being-altered from its essence [...]

And ends as follows:

ሰአሉ : ሊተ : ከመ : የሀበኒ : ልሳነ : ጥበብ : ከመ : አእምር : ዘእነብብ : እሰመ : አነ : ሕጹጽ : ልብ : እሰመ : እሰከ : ይእዜ : ኢገሰሰኩ : ማእዘንተ : ነገረ : ዜናሁ : ለዘእትናገር : በእንቲአሁ ። እሰመ : ነዋህ : ነገሩ : ወልጎት : ክሥተተ : ምሥጢሩ ። ወባሕቱ : እነግረከሙ : በሐሳብ : ክህልኩ : እንዘ : እትአመን : በንይለ : ጸሎትክሙ : ወበጸሎቱ : ለዝንቱ : ብእሲ : ኮከበ : ክብር : ጽባሐዊ : ዘይሀይድ : ብርሃኑ : ብርሃነ : ካልአን : ከዋክብት ። እንዘ : አብ : ይረድእ : ለወጢን : በሉብም : ወእንዘ : ወልድ : ያጸንዕ : በአስተሰናኦ ። ወመንፈስ : እንዘ : ይከውን : ፈጽሜ : ኅይለ : ቃል : በአስተታልዎ : በሰላመ : ዚአሁ : አሜን ።

Pray for me that He may give me a well instructed tongue, that I know what to say, because I am of limited understanding, for until now I have not touched (even) a corner of the account of the story, which I am going to talk about. Because the account is long and the revelation of its mystery is profound. But I will tell you to the degree that I am able, believing in the power of your prayers and prayers of this man, the glorious morning star,

³⁷ See Dillmann, 1851, pp. 28–29. For why “Enoch” and not the “Book of Enoch” see Erho, 2023. On Enoch in Gəʿəz literature see forthcoming article by Ted Erho.

³⁸ The Gəʿəz text and its English translation of the “*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection” are based on my critical edition, which is in progress. I do not provide any paragraph reference or page for they will be still altered

whose light outshines the light of (all) other stars. While the Father helps to begin with intelligence and the Son strengthens (it) in harmony with it, and while the Holy Spirit thereupon becomes the perfection of the power of the word by His peace. Amen. (end of the *Preamble*)

In what follows the end of the *Preamble*, instead the *Life* (*gädl*) starting with **ንትመየጥኪ ፡ ኅበ ፡ ጥንተ ፡ ገድሉ ፡**, “Let us turn to the beginning of the life” of the *Life* of Lalibāla proper, one finds five other textual units. These other five textual units do not exhibit any parallelism in any other *gädl*, looking mostly like eulogies. They are difficult to summarize, little (if at all) known, and too long to be presented here (if we take MS London, BL Or. 718 as a reference, the first six textual units occupy 34 folia out of 115 (on f. 115rb ends the *Life* of Lalibāla). That is why, to give the first idea of their nature, I will list them providing some lines from each of the textual units:

2. *Jesus and His redeeming fire*

አቀድም ፡ አእኩቶቶ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ በእንተ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡
 ዘውእቱ ፡ ወልዱ ፡ ወቃሉ ፡ ለአብ ፡ ዘበሕፅነ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ ሠረጸ ፡ ፍሬ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ዐቃ
 ቤ ፡ ሥራይ ፡ ዘወረደ ፡ እምሰማያት ፡ ከመ ፡ ይደይ ፡ ርጢኖ ፡ ዲበ ፡ እለ ፡ ቈሰሉ ፡
 በንስኩት ፡ አርጭ ፡ አሰዋር ፡ ወአልህምት ፡ አትቡዕ ፡ ወአእኩስ ፡ ፈኒዎ ፡ መንፈስ ፡
 ኅበ ፡ ነቢያቲሁ ፡ ዘያጌብርሙ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይበልዎ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ አጽንን ፡ ሰማያቲክ ፡ ወ
 ረድ ፡ አንሥእ ፡ ኅይለክ ፡ ወነዓ ፡ አድኅነ ፡ አምላክ ፡ ኃያላን ፡ ሚጠነ ፡ ግስሶሙ ፡
 ለአድባር ፡ ወይጠይሱ ፡ ምንትኑመ ፡ ግሰቶሙ ፡ ለአድባር ፡ ወጢሰቶሙኒ ፡ እምከ
 መሰ ፡ ጤሱ ፡ ይጠፍኡ ፡ [...]

I shall begin by thanking God for Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Son and the Word of the Father, Who in the womb of the Father came forth as a fruit of praise, a physician, Who descended from the heavens to cast His balm upon those who are wounded by the bites of beasts, oxen and cows, male and female, sending the Spirit to his Prophets, Who makes them say to Him, ‘O Lord, incline your heavens and descend, raise up your power and come redeem us. Lord of Powers, restore us. Touch the mountains and they will smoke’. What is this touching of mountains and their smoking? Even they smoke, they vanish. [...]³⁹

3. *Teaching about saints*

ወዝንቱኒ ፡ ፅፀ ፡ ገነት ፡ ርጢብ ፡ ዘስሙ ፡ ላሊበላ ፡ በዘትረ ፡ ቃሎሙ ፡ ተሰቂኖ ፡ ጸ
 ገደ ፡ ምዑዘ ፡ ወበሐብለ ፡ ሐረኅሙ ፡ ተእኒዞ ፡ ፈረየ ፡ ሐዋዘ ፡

³⁹ Cf. Ps 44:26, Ps 104:32/Ps 144:5.

በከመ ፡ ይትከሠት ፡ ይእዘ ፡ ፍሬ ፡ ምግባሩ ፡ ፍድፋድ ፡ ሶበ ፡ ንጎልፍ ፡ ንስቲተ ፡
 ወፍሬሁሰ ፡ እኮ ፡ ዘአሐዱ ፡ ዕፀ ፡ ገነት ፡ እላ ፡ ዘዘ ፡ ዚአሁ ፡ ኅበሪሁ ፡ ወዘዘ ፡ ዚእ
 ሁ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ዘዘ ፡ ዚአሁ ፡ አሰካሊሁ ፡
 በከመ ፡ ይትወወቅ ፡ ዘገነታት ፡ ፍሬያት ፡ በበ ፡ መዐዛሁ ፡ ወበበ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወበበ ፡
 ኅበሪሁ ፡ ።
 ፍሬ ፡ ወይንኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወጥላሊሁ ፡ ወመዐዛሁ ፡ ወዬናሁ ።
 ፍሬ ፡ ሮማንኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወአምሳሊሁ ፡ ወመዐዛሁ ።
 ፍሬ ፡ ከርካዕኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወአምሳሊሁ ፡ ወጣዕመ ፡ መዐዛሁ ።
 ፍሬ ፡ ተመርትኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወአምሳሊሁ ፡ ወጣዕመ ፡ መዐዛሁ ።
 ወፍሬ ፡ መልጶጶንኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወአምሳሊሁ ፡
 ወፍሬ ፡ ዕንጉታትኒ ፡ ካልእ ፡ አርአያሁ ፡ ወአምሳሊሁ ፡
 ወከማሁኬ ፡ ዝንቲኒ ፡ ብእሴ ፡ አምላክ ፡ ላሊበላ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ዘተመሰለ ፡ ወ
 ዓሌ ፡
 እንዘ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ነባርያን ፡ ዘተመሰለ ፡ ነባሬ ።
 እንዘ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ መኳንንት ፡ ዘተመሰለ ፡ ተኩናኔ ። [...]

And this green garden tree, named Lalibāla, flourished sweetly, being irrigated by the spring of their words. Enveloped by the strings of their branches, he blossomed delightfully.
 Likewise, the fruit of his great deeds will be revealed now, as we progress a bit further. His fruit is not akin to that of a garden tree's; it possesses its own colour, shape, and cluster.
 In the manner that the fruits of gardens are known each according to their scent, shape, and colour.
 Grape [vines'] fruit differs in its shape, freshness, scent, and aroma.
 The fruit of an apple tree differs in its shape, appearance, and scent.
 The fruit of an almond tree differs in its shape, appearance, taste, and fragrance.
 The fruit of a date palm differs in its shape, appearance, taste, and scent.
 The fruits of melons differ in shape and appearance.
 The fruits of mandrakes differ in shape and appearance.
 Similarly, Lalibāla, this man of God — although a king, acted like a servant;
 although a lord of inhabitants, acted like an inhabitant;
 and although a lord of judges, he acted as someone to be judged. [...]

4. *Eulogy of Lalibāla as the one who entered the Heavenly Jerusalem*

ወዝንቲኒ ፡ ገብረ ፡ መስቀል ፡ ፩ ውእቲ ፡ እምኔሆሙ ፡ እምእለ ፡ ቦኡ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ኢየ
 ሩሳሌም ፡ ሰማያዊት ፡ አግዓዚት ፡ ብሔረ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ዘኢይጎልፍ ፡ እንተ ፡ ውስቲ
 ታ ፡ ቈላፍ ፡ ዘኢተገዘረ ፡ ቍልፈተ ፡ ልቡ ፡ በመጥባሕተ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ወአኮ ፡ ቍ
 ልፈተ ፡ ነፍስቲ ፡ በመጥባሕት ፡ ሥጋዊት ፡ ወሀገራሰ ፡ ኅበ ፡ ቦኡ ፡ ላሊበላ ፡ ኢትፈ
 ቅድ ፡ ከመ ፡ ያብርህ ፡ ላቲ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ፀሐይ ፡ ወወርኅ ፡ ወኢብርሃን ፡ ከዋክብት ፡ እ

ስመ ፡ ብርሃነ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ያበርህ ፡ ላቲ ፡ ውብርሃነ ፡ በግዑ ፡ ውስቴታ ፡ ኀደ ረ ፡ ምስለ ፡ አብያጺሁ ፡ ብርሃናዊያን ፡ [...]

This Gäbrä Mäsqäl is one of those who entered the free heavenly Jerusalem, land of light, through which those who are uncircumcised in heart by the circumcision of faith, and not in body by circumcision of the flesh, will not pass.⁴⁰ The city into which Lalibāla entered does not require the sun or the moon to shine upon it, nor the light of the stars, for the light of God illuminates it and the radiance of the Lamb abides there with its luminous companions. [...]

5. *Eulogy of Lalibāla as the one who accomplished the Word of the Gospel*

ወዝንቱሰ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ ክቡር ፡ ኮኩብ ፡ ጽዱል ፡ ዘዋንሶሱ ፡ መልዕልተ ፡ አዩር ፡ በጤ ሎ ፡ እምሕሊና ፡ ዘበምድር ። አልቦ ፡ ዘገብረ ፡ ምግባራተ ፡ ዘያምዕያ ፡ ለመንፈሰ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ወአልቦ ፡ አመ ፡ ሰሰለ ፡ መንፈሰ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ እምኔሁ ፡ እምአመ ፡ ተ ወልደ ፡ እምከርሠ ፡ ጥምቀት ፡ እስመ ፡ ኢተግሕሠ ፡ እምቃለ ፡ መጻሕፍት ፡ ዘውእ ቱ ፡ እስትንፋሰ ፡ መለኮት ። [...]

And this glorious Man, a shining star which adorns the top of heaven, having annulled an earthly intelligence. None of his deeds inspired anger of the Spirit of God, at no time was the Holy Spirit away from him, since he was born from the womb of baptism, for he did not turn away from the word of the Scriptures, which is an inspiration of the Divinity. [...]

6. *Praise for Lalibāla*

ወበዝ ፡ ካዕበ ፡ ላሊበላ ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ኢትዮጵያ ፡ ወምክሐ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ አድያሚሃ ፡ ተመሰሎሙ ፡ ለትጉሃነ ፡ ሰማይ ። እስመ ፡ ኢወሀበ ፡ ንዋመ ፡ ለአዕይንቲሁ ፡ ወኢድቃሰ ፡ ለቀራንብቲሁ ። ወኢዕረፍተ ፡ ለመላትሒሁ ፡ እስከ ፡ ይረክብ ፡ መካኖ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ። ወማኅደሮ ፡ ለአምላክ ፡ ያዕቆብ ። ወከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ መዘምር ፡ ኢይሁቦን ፡ ንዋመ ፡ ለአዕይንትዮ ፡ ወኢድቃሰ ፡ ለቀራንብትዮ ፡ ወኢዕረፍተ ፡ ለመላትሕዮ ፡ እስከ ፡ እረክብ ፡ መካኖ ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ። ወማኅደሮ ፡ ለአምላክ ፡ ያዕቆብ ። ወኮና ፡ አዕይንቲሁ ፡ ዐዘቅተ ፡ አንብዕ ፡ ዘኢይነጽፍ ፡ ነቅዑ ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ነቢይ ፡ ወአንበርኩ ፡ አንብዕዮ ፡ ቅድሚከ ፡ በከመ ፡ አዘዝከ ፡ [...]

And in this, Lalibāla, blessed king of Ethiopia and glory of all its confines, became similar to the vigilant ones of the heavens. For he allowed no sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids, no rest to his cheeks until he found a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the God of Jacob. As the psalmist says, ‘I

⁴⁰ Cf. Ezek 44: 9; Jer 9:26; Rm 2:29; Eph 2:11.

will allow no sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, or rest to my cheeks, till I find a place for the Lord, a dwelling for the God of Jacob'.⁴¹ His eyes became a well of tears which did not reduce its flow, as the prophet says, 'I put my tears in front of You as You ordered'. [...]'⁴²

Only after the end of the Praise for Lalibäla we finally read the long expected ንተመዋጥኪ ፡ ንበ ፡ ጥንተ ፡ ንድሉ ፡, "Let us turn to the beginning of the life ...".

3. – Conclusion

Although preambles are common in Gəʿəz hagiographic literature and beyond, the textual units that precede the *Life* of Lalibäla, besides the *Preamble* and probably partially *Jesus and His redeeming fire* (parts edited by Perruchon as first and second introductions, and as such, formed our understanding of preambles) seem to be very different from all other known preambles. Their closer examination should help to better understand the level of intertextuality of these 'historically irrelevant' texts, revealing the writers' background. For the moment, two hypotheses can be formulated:

Hypothesis 1: Textual units 2–6 of the "*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection" represent an adapted re-elaboration based on texts that ceased to circulate or are to be identified.

Hypothesis 2: Textual units 2–6 of the "*Gädlä Lalibäla* collection" represent a form of Gəʿəz composition that did not enjoy popularity in later times.

Further analysis is required to suggest any diachronic development of preambles or their atemporality and, consequently, their use for dating *gädlät*.

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⁴¹ Cf. Ps 132:4–5.

⁴² Cf. Ps 56:8.

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*Again on MS EMMML 8509 from Ṭana Qirqos:
Unconventional Orthography and Textual Content*

1. – *Introduction*

MS EMMML 8509 is a large-size parchment codex transmitting an archaic form of hagiographical-homiletic collection, among which the earliest original productions of Ethiopic literature are found.¹ Although widely known to specialists, the manuscript is very little explored. The dating of the manuscript is unknown.² On the grounds of textual, paleographical, and orthographical evidence, it can be attributed to the thirteenth century or earlier.

At the time of its discovery and documentation, the manuscript was preserved in the monastery of Ṭana Qirqos, located on an island close to the eastern shore of Lake Ṭana (Figs 1–2).³ It was microfilmed in April 1986 by the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library project, thanks to a grant from the

¹ Dimensions: 40.5 cm × 30.5 cm; 172 leaves (Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987, pp. 9–10). A digital description of this manuscript is also being developed by Marcin Krawczuk on the basis of secondary literature in Alessandro Bausi, ed., *Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: Eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung* / Beta maṣāḥaft, accessible here: <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/EMML8509/main?hi=8509> (accessed: 23 October 2025).

² Several datings have been proposed over the years, none of which grounded on convincing arguments. Sergew Hable-Selassie dated the codex to the eleventh–twelfth cent., taking as a *terminus post quem* the then presumed (and now no longer accepted) dating of the Gospel books of Abba Gärīma, which Jules Leroy had attributed to the tenth–eleventh cent. (Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987, p. 23). A few years later, Gianfranco Fiaccadori proposed the first half of the fourteenth cent. (Fiaccadori, 1993, p. 150), based on the age of the other archaic homiliaries, on which see below. Getatchew Haile claimed that “Sergew’s analysis of MS EMMML no. 8509 leaves no doubt that the manuscript is of the Aksumite era” (Getatchew Haile, 2016, p. 22).

³ The monastery flourished in the fourteenth century under King ʿAmdā Ṣəyon, but its foundation was certainly earlier. Local traditions claim that the island was the oldest Christian site of the area and home to the Ark of the Covenant for six centuries before being brought to Aksum, see “Ṭana Qirqos” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 857b–58b (by V. Six).

Ford Foundation for the period 1984 to 1986.⁴ Soon after microfilming, Sergew Hable-Selassie dedicated a special contribution to the manuscript, issued in the *Quaderni di Studi Etiopici*.⁵ In providing an essential sketch of the textual contents of the book, Sergew Hable-Selassie paved the way for a comparative study of this typology of collection. MS EMLL 8509 was in fact the third exemplar to be reported of an archaic and rare type of homiliary that already included MS EMLL 1763 from Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos (early fourteenth cent.), extensively studied by late Getatchew Haile,⁶ and MS London, BL Or. 8192, commissioned by King Dawit I (r. 1380–1413) for the church of G^wənäg^wənä in Eritrea.⁷ These three codices, defined *trigemini* by Delio Vania Proverbio,⁸ have been further supplemented by the discovery of similar material in other fragmentary manuscripts, digitised in the church of ʿUra Qirqos (Təgray),⁹ and by the recent documentation of the homiliary of Däbrä Ṣəyon Abunä Abrəham in Gära^calta (Təgray).¹⁰ In the last decade a new awareness has

⁴ Stewart, 2017, p. 461.

⁵ Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987. The scholar drew attention on the peculiar paleographic features of the book, which matched those independently recorded by Donald M. Davies in some early manuscripts (Davies, 1987) and more thoroughly documented in some recent contributions by Denis Nosnitsin, also in cooperation with other scholars (see fn. 18). Such features have been extensively described and do not need further comments here.

⁶ Getatchew Haile and Macomber, 1981, pp. 218–31. Numerous energies were invested by Getatchew Haile since the late 1970s in exploring the textual content of EMLL 1763 and resulted in editions of numerous homilies, in particular of early native pieces of Ethiopic literature; see Getatchew Haile, 1979, 1980, 1981a, 1985, 1990, 2017, 2018.

⁷ Strelcyn, 1978, pp. 89–92. A first notice is found in Strelcyn, 1974, p. 34.

⁸ Proverbio, 2001, p. 518 n. 3.

⁹ MSS Ethio-SPaRe UM-030, UM-037, UM-045, UM-046, and UM-050. They mostly consist of loose and disarrayed leaves belonging to several books mixed together. It is certain that they included more than one homiliary. A virtual reconstruction of the contents and original sequence of leaves of one pre-fifteenth-century homiliary is proposed in Villa, 2025. The reconstructed manuscript has shelfmark UM-050b and the new foliation is given in brackets in the commentary to the content description below. The reconstruction is now incorporated in the Beta maṣāḥəft research environment and the images are available in high resolution in the viewer at <https://www.betamasaeft.eu/ESum050b>. It is hoped that the philological reconstruction will be followed at some point in the future by the physical reassembling of the textblock.

¹⁰ MS YC-001. Fifteenth-century manuscript, executed by a certain Gäbrä Maryam and commissioned by Abunä Abrəham himself (cf. *subscriptio* on fol. 170rb). The numbering of the folios follows the order, certainly disturbed from the original one, in which it was photographed. It is not known whether the manuscript is complete or not.

emerged towards this typology of multiple-text manuscripts, which are at the same time unique pieces and homogenous representatives of a specific corpus. Each of these books hosts a non-canonized but variable number of works of homiletic and/or hagiographical content selected and arranged in a “modular” way as to cover the most important festivities of the liturgical calendar.¹¹ With 86 texts, MS EMLL 1763 is the largest collection of the list, then followed by Däbrä Şəyon, YC-001 (no less than 64 texts), EMLL 8509 (58 texts) and London, BL Or. 8192 (37 surviving texts); the number of texts of the ʿUra Qirqos collection is difficult to ascertain given the current condition of preservation of the parchment materials. Also, this specific form of collection has received growing attention in recent times because it shows a dynamic attitude towards the ancient Aksumite heritage and witnesses a process of reworking of Late Antique excerpts within literary forms typical of the medieval period.

The manuscript is currently hardly accessible in its physical form, which makes it impossible to survey many of its material characteristics.¹² Despite its importance for the study of early Ethiopic literature and scribal practice, it has tangentially figured in few studies and has been very rarely consulted for critical editions. Therefore, this contribution intends to fill a long-standing gap in the field and provide a precise identification of the texts transmitted.¹³ Such an overview might serve as a basis for future editions and stimulate reflections on the distribution of these texts.

¹¹ Bausi, 2010.

¹² The codex can only be observed in surrogate form at the National Library & Archives Agency of Ethiopia (NALE) in Addis Ababa, while no updated information is extant on its present condition. According to a recent visit by Rafał Zarzeczny, in 2016 the manuscript was still located in the library of Ṭana Qirqos (Figs 3–4). It is to be hoped that digitisation initiatives of Ṭana Qirqos’ library holdings will enable this important artefact to be more properly documented, also in view of the fact that microfilms tend to deteriorate over time.

¹³ The ‘Clavis Aethiopica’ (CAe) repertory, developed by the Beta maṣāḥəft project, is particularly valuable in this respect. The collation of the incipits has facilitated precise correspondences with works already recorded and indexed in the Beta maṣāḥəft database, while the collation of the explicits has made it possible to verify whether the texts were complete or incomplete, a circumstance which has brought the total of texts to 58 compared to the 57 counted by Sergew Hable-Selassie. The last text to be identified is a fragmentary copy of the *Gädlä Azqir* (Bausi, 2022, p. 136 fn. 53), which stands out as this text is traditionally transmitted within another archaic collection, that of the *Gädlä sāmaʿtat*, or ‘Acts of the Martyrs’. The compresence and distribution of homilies and hagiographies in ancient books is a phenomenon which claims for further investigation.

2. – *A conservative cursus of homilies*

Like EMLL 1763, the present manuscript documents different and parallel phenomena of conservation of ancient, i.e. Aksumite, material. Both homiliaries include texts also regularly copied in the *Qerallōs*, that is the patristic collection translated in Aksumite times (texts nr 5, 42). In addition, both homiliaries accommodate pieces recognized or suspected of being excerpted from early Greek-based works which disappeared at a later time (texts nr 9, 10).¹⁴

Also, it can be noted that native homilies are statistically more frequent in EMLL 8509 than in any other homiliary,¹⁵ and that the overall number of texts is higher in EMLL 1763 due to the greater presence of translated homilies (e.g. by John Chrysostom and Ephrem), not local productions. This can be interpreted assuming that the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary was produced before some newly translated homilies began to circulate in Ethiopia and paralleled (and eventually replaced for specific liturgical “slots”) some local productions.

The same phenomenon can be observed through the lens of Chrysostom’s popularity in the early homiliaries. Chrysostom knew an extraordinary fortune in Ethiopia and was widely translated from Arabic from the fourteenth century onwards.¹⁶ Yet, he is represented irregularly in this early generation of homiliaries. Contrary to the other collections, EMLL 8509 has only one text attributed to the prolific author (nr 41).¹⁷ A plausible explanation is that

¹⁴ This has been positively demonstrated for text nr 9 (anonymous homily on Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria, see Bausi and Camplani, 2016; Bausi, 2019, pp. 73–74) and has been hypothesised for text nr 10 (anonymous homily on Frumentius, bishop of Aksum, see Villa, 2017).

¹⁵ A quick survey shows that genuine productions, penned by native scholars (i.e. the Ethiopian bishops Menas, Tewofṣos, Elyas, Lulāyanos, Yoḥannās, and the elusive “Orthodox”) or transmitted anonymously but centered on a local saint, are the majority in EMLL 8509, contrary to EMLL 1763. As known, the “Orthodox” (Rətu‘a Haymanot) indicates one or more likely several authors who, as stated in the incipit of text nr 20, did not give their real names for reasons of modesty. This or these author(s) was/were certainly different from the compiler(s) of the texts transmitted in a later homiletic collection also called *Rətu‘a Haymanot* and datable, at least in its primitive nucleus, to the second half of the fourteenth century; see Getatchew Haile, 1981b, pp. 112–13, “Rətu‘a Haymanot” in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 382b–83b (by Getatchew Haile), and now Erho, 2024.

¹⁶ Lusini, 1988a. Detailed overviews of the homilies transmitted in *Gə‘əz sub nomine Chrysostomi* are offered in Proverbio, 1998, pp. 59–90, and in “John Chrysostom” in *EAE*, vol. III (2007), p. 294b nr 33 (by W. Witkowski).

¹⁷ It is the “Homily by John Chrysostom on Mt 26:39 (*Pater si possibile est*)”, also attested in the *Māṣḥafā gəbrā ḥəməmat* or the Lectionary of the Holy Week (Proverbio, 1998, pp. 71–

EMML 8509 predates the other homiliaries or that certain monastic communities, in particular Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥṣṭifanos, were more exposed to new influences than Ṭana Qirqos. In general, the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary seems somewhat conservative in various respects as compared to the other homiliaries.

3. – *Unconventional features and non-standard forms*

A peculiar feature of MS EMLL 8509 is the presence of hundreds and hundreds of unconventional or even ‘odd’ spelling forms, deviating from those of the standard Gəʿəz language (= SG). Such phenomena mostly involve irregular or defective vocalization. In this respect, the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary is not a unicum. Several manuscripts with a high density of unconventional orthography have been brought to light and studied in the recent past.¹⁸ All of them come from Təgray and certainly are of considerable age. However, as compared to the other small-size and fragmentary sources, EMLL 8509 undoubtedly appears to be the most extensive repository of such ‘idiosyncratic’ forms, and, despite the difficulty of research, a promising candidate for an in-depth statistical study of these scribal phenomena.

Given the density of these non-standard forms and the existence of certain serialities—to be verified with precision—it does not seem appropriate to reject them as mere scribal errors. It is clear that an interpretation of these discrepancies is challenged by numerous difficulties. First, the evidence is often contradictory since the orthographic practice is not consistent throughout the manuscript.¹⁹ Also, any explanation depends on whether the deviation is interpreted paleographically, or linguistically, or again as a mere sight error.

72). Text nr 36 is also attributed to Chrysostom in EMLL 8509, while all other homiliaries ascribe it to Ephrem (see the section on the textual content below).

¹⁸ Like the Däbrä Maʿšo fragment (added as a flyleaf to the later MS Ethio-SPaRe MY-002, see Nosnitsin and Bulakh, 2014), the fragment of a chant manuscript from Məʿasar Gʷəḥila Mikaʿel (Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014), and the fragments of a chant manuscript from Agʷāza Däbrä Šaḥl in Gäʿalta (Nosnitsin, 2016; Nosnitsin, 2018). A detailed survey of the archaic linguistic features attested in the *Aksumite Collection* (MS UM-039) has been recorded in Bausi, 2023.

¹⁹ A marked discontinuity in the distribution of certain features implies, as emphasised in Bausi, 2023, pp. 163–64, that they are not due to the copyist’s initiative (the *patina*), but are inherited (*fonds*). In fact, if such features had been added by the copyist of EMLL 8509, they would be present with a certain degree of homogeneity throughout the codex. On *patina* and *fonds* (or *core*), see Trovato, 2017, p. 231.

In order to illustrate the most salient features of the manuscript and formulate hypotheses on their linguistic implications, a preliminary analysis was conducted on portions corresponding to the incipit and explicit of all texts and the full text of some sample homilies.²⁰

A form like **ወተንግእኩ** for SG **ወተንግእኩ** (twice in nr 56) might well be rejected as a scribal error. But it can also be better explained palaeographically as one of the many examples of “partial vocalization”, that is an intentional use of the first order for the others, as attested in several inscriptions and early manuscripts.²¹ MS EMMML 8509 offers abundant examples of “partial vocalization”, with a statistical preference for the first order of **መ** for any of the others, in particular in the preposition ³*am-*, which is often rendered as **እመ**.

Again, a form like **ንካህል** *nəkahl* for SG **ንካህል** *nəkhal* (nr 16) might also be considered a sight error. But such a form matches with the common—yet not systematic—spelling form **ስባሕት** *səbaht* instead of SG **ስብሐት** *səbhat* (nr 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22).²² Such a metathesis between *a* and the laryngeal *h/h* can be treated phonologically and possibly originates from a substratum effect of the scribe’s language, in which the laryngeal was probably very weakly or no longer pronounced, like in several modern Ethio-Semitic languages.

Again, cases of missing *status constructus* such as **መንግሥት ፡ ሰማያት** (nr 1, 2, 4, 15, 49) and **ሊቅ ፡ ጳጳሳት** (nr 5, 8, 9, 56) can be interpreted palaeographically as a consequence of insufficient distinction between the first and sixth orders of certain graphemes like **ቀ** and **ተ**. Such a neutralization is attested in very early manuscripts like that of the *Aksumite Collection*,²³ but it is not typical of EMMML 8509, where all orders are well marked. Numerous other examples leave no doubts that another explanation is required in the domain of the syntax. It seems that the *status constructus* was left intentionally unmarked in certain syntagmata perceived as unitary and therefore not in need of a special marking.

²⁰ Homilies nr 6 (homily by Menas, bishop of Aksum, on *Abba Yoḥanni*), 9 (anonymous homily on Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria), 10 (anonymous homily on Frumentius, bishop of Aksum), 40 (homily by Philo of Carpasia on the Pascha), and 56 (homily attributed to Astona, bishop of Rome, on the observance of Sunday).

²¹ Such as the Däbrä Ma’šo fragment (Nosnitsin and Bulakh, 2014, p. 577).

²² Also with suffix **ስባሕትሁ** (16 twice) and **ስብሐትሁሙስ** (20). To these, one can also add **አጋዕዜ** *aga’ze* (10) instead of the expected *ag’azi*. Numbers in brackets indicate the text in which the form is attested; see below the section on the textual content.

²³ Where the head of the leg is slightly inclined leftwards in all orders (Bausi, Brita, Di Bella, *et al.*, 2020, p. 149).

Other phenomena could be due to the interference of local varieties spoken by the scribe or by the authors of the text/translation of the text. Could these varieties be the ancestor of Tigrinya or Amharic? This would explain the occasional presence (and coexistence) of Tigrinisms or Amharisms in the manuscript. Amharisms are for instance the pronominal form (cf. fn. 33 below), several occurrences of ማኑ *mannu* instead of መኑ *männu* “who” (nr 16, 17, 25, 30, 47, 53, 54); the form የቆ “he knew him” in nr 13 (in early Gəʿəz, ʿwq is restricted to imperatives and other non-indicative usage). Potential Tigrinisms are the negative form አይ- (nr 6, on this form see below), the form ርኤኩ *rəʿeku* (nr 20), several forms of T-stems of the pattern ይጎንበብ *yətnəbbäb* (nr 21).²⁴

Instances of multiple interpretation are not uncommon and require a critical evaluation of the non-standard forms. Beyond recording all forms, it is crucial to establish correlations between them, in order to determine the most likely underlying principle. Some phenomena deserve to be discussed in detail.²⁵

3.a. HaC- > HəC

Enno Littmann already noted that in Epigraphic Gəʿəz (EG) the shift *ä* > *ə* appears sporadically in a closed syllable after ʿ, and documented forms of “broken” plurals such as ʿəḥzab, ʿəḥmar, ʿəḥgur, plus ʿəngäbenawe.²⁶ Such a shift, considered as a regional feature, has also been detected occasionally in two early parchment fragments.²⁷ Although the graphic difference between አ and አ is sometimes quite subtle, EMLL 8509 provides many examples of ʿaC > ʿəC in closed syllable.²⁸ The phenomenon also involves other laryngeals: in

²⁴ Bausi 2023, pp. 165–66. Is it possible to correlate the presence of linguistic influences with the provenance of individual texts? For instance, can it be that Tigrinya influence is restricted to texts composed in Aksum? It is noteworthy that the ʿay-negation is documented only in one original composition, the homily by Menas of Aksum for the commemoration of *Abba Yoḥanni*.

²⁵ We will avoid presenting widely known phenomena such as forms with archaic *-e* endings (scarcely attested in this manuscript) or the non-application of the known rule of the laryngeals *-əHa-* > *-äHa-*.

²⁶ See Littmann, 1913, p. 31; Drewes, 1991, pp. 387–88; Bausi, 2005, p. 153.

²⁷ In the Məʿsar G^wəḥila Mikaʿel fragment (አሱተማሰለ in Nosnitsin and Rabin, 2014, p. 73) and in the Däbrä Maʿšo fragment (አልዐ twice in Nosnitsin and Bulakh, 2014, p. 572).

²⁸ Here some sample cases: ወእንጽሐ (6) instead of SG ወአንጽሐ; እፍቅሮ (6) instead of SG አፍቅሮ; በአምጣን (6) instead of SG በአምጣን; እላ (6, 14, 42, 47) instead of SG አላ; እስማቴሆሙ (6, 10, 20), in one case (6) preceded by the erroneous reading እስሙ which presupposes scrib-

text nr 6 the name of *Abba* Yoḥanni is systematically spelled **ዮሐን**; several verbal forms follow a peculiar pattern when the third radical is a laryngeal, like **በጽሕት** (nr 43) instead of SG **በጽሐት** and **መጽእት** (nr 47) instead of SG **መጽአት**. One is tempted to explain all these forms with a single phonological rule *HaC- > HəC* operating in closed syllable. However, this is not the only possible explanation: since the manuscript also contains numerous forms of change *a > ə* in open syllables and/or in syllables containing no laryngeals,²⁹ it remains to be verified whether this is a general phenomenon of sporadic change *a > ə*.³⁰

3.b. The negative prefix

The SG negative prefix is obviously *ʔi-* in all positions. Among the spelling forms exhibited by EMMML 8509 there are forms that can be explained as an effect of a partial vocalization, where **አ** stands for **ኢ**. Some cases are less clear: those with **ኢይ-** *ʔiy-* (like **ወኢይሰማዕኩሙ** and **ወኢይሰማዕክሙ** “you have not heard”, nr 56, for SG **ኢሰማዕኩሙ**), and especially those with **አይ-** *ʔay-* (like in **አይሕንጽ**, nr 6, for SG **ኢሐነጸ** “he did not build” and **አይቦአ**, nr 6, for SG **ኢቦአ**).³¹ It is very attractive to correlate these latter forms with the negative prefix *ʔay-*, which is not unknown in Ethio-Semitic. Not only is it found in Tigrinya, as part of the circumfix *ha ʔay...-n*, but is also attested in the EG corpus. In the inscriptions, in fact, the negative is expressed with both *ʔi-* and its allomorph **ʔay-*, the latter only before *yə-*, the 3rd sing. masc. prefix of the imperfect and jussive forms.³² In our restricted corpus *ʔay-* occurs before a perfect. Therefore, despite the formal identity, it remains dubious whether it represents a late survival of the ancient epigraphic *ʔay-* or rather a

al uncertainty due to the presence of a *ʔə*-form already in the antigraph; **ወእስጎወ** (9) instead of SG **ወአሥሐወ**; **ወእንገሥ** (10) instead of SG **ወአንገሥ**; **እሙ** (14, 21, 38, 43) instead of SG **አሙ**; **ዘእንበበ** (55) instead of SG **ዘአንበበ**; **ወእንትሙሰ** (56) instead of SG **ወአንትሙሰ**; **እርአይክሙ** (56) instead of SG **አርአይክሙ**.

²⁹ E.g. **ድረሰ** (7) instead of **ደረሰ**; **ምንፈሰ** and **ትሰፈዎሙ** (8) instead of **መንፈሰ** and **ተሰፈዎሙ**; **ኢትጥፍእ** (9) instead of **ኢትጠፍእ**; **ቅዳማዊት** (15) instead of **ቀዳማዊት**; **ቅዳሜ**, **ጽጋ**, **ግነት** (16) instead of **ቀዳሜ**, **ጸጋ**, **ገነት**; **ድቂቅኪ** (24) instead of **ደቂቅኪ**.

³⁰ Whatever phonetic explanation is put forward, the phenomenon itself is remarkable and must have been rather widespread, since it most probably accounts for the modern Amharic **ቅዳሜ** ‘Saturday’ instead of the expected **ድቀዳሜ**. I am grateful to the reviewer for his/her precious comments on this topic.

³¹ Spelling *ʔiy-* for *ʔi-* may well be the result of the same phenomenon mentioned below in fn. 37.

³² The two forms were then leveled: Tigre and SG only have *ʔi-*, and Tigrinya has *ʔay...-n* (Bulakh, 2012, p. 391).

potential Tigrinism (see fn. 24), or again an archaizing restitution of a marker perceived as erudite.

3.c. Prepositional and suffix pronouns in *ə*

Several texts display a series of personal pronouns of the first and second person which are based on a **ል-** *la-* prepositional stem instead of **ለ-** *lä-* or **ሊ-** *li-*. These forms seem to have a certain frequency throughout the corpus considered.³³ Also, the pronominal suffix for “us” or “our” appended to nouns and prepositions is sometimes **-ገ** *-nə* instead of **-ገ** *-nä*.³⁴

3.d. Consonantal orthography

As known, the most conspicuous feature in the evolution of the Gəʿəz consonantal system affects the transmission of laryngeal and sibilant phonemes, which merge in the latter stage of the language. As a consequence, in almost all the manuscript corpus the following sets of graphemes appear interchangeable: **አ/ዐ**, **ሀ/ሐ/ኀ**, **ሠ/ሰ**, **ጸ/ፀ**. While some early manuscripts seem to preserve an accurate memory of the ancient orthography, consistent with the EG data pool and corroborated by etymological comparison,³⁵ this is not the case of EMLL 8509, where fluctuation and inconsistencies between the said sets of consonants are the norm. Obviously, any text of the collection must be considered in itself. This stands true not only because each text might have independently inherited its specific orthography from its own antigraph, but also because preservation of the ancient consonantal orthography only makes sense for texts tracing back to the Aksumite age (fourth–seventh cent.): it is not surprising at all to find inconsistencies and exchanges in texts translated from Arabic (which, as much old as they are, are all post-Aksumite), while a consistent and etymologically reliable orthography might potentially be suggestive of a very old age, for instance, for native homilies like those transmitted under the authorship of one of the bishops of Aksum.

Finally, no surprise if the EMLL 8509 extensively displays neutralization between the first and the fourth orders after a laryngeal (e.g. alternation **ኀ/**

³³ **ልነ** (17, 23, 38 twice, 50) for SG **ለነ**; **ወልከሙ** (29) for SG **ወለከሙ**; **ወልተሰ** (32) for SG **ወለተሰ**; **ልከሙ** (37, 57) for SG **ለከሙ**; **ልከ** (40) for SG **ለከ**; **ልነሂ** (25, 40) for SG **ለነሂ**. These *la-* forms call to mind the Amharic prepositional suffix pronouns appended to verbs.

³⁴ **በእንቲአን** (6, 38) for SG **በእንቲአኑ**; **ኪያን** (27) for SG **ኪያኑ**; **እግዚእንሂ** (28) for SG **እግዚእነሂ**; **ዚአን** (32) for SG **ዚአኑ**.

³⁵ As shown, e.g., in the Däbrä Maʿšo fragment (Bulakh, 2014, p. 205) and in the Abba Gärima Gospels (Bulakh, 2024).

ጎበ), for the well-known rule $H\check{a}/H\bar{a} > Ha$ was already operative as early as the sixth century.³⁶

4. – Preliminary conclusions

In conclusion, a major challenge is to disambiguate as much as possible truly orthographic phenomena like “partial vocalization”³⁷ from linguistic phenomena due to the influence of either the substratum or the contemporary pronunciation of $G\check{e}\acute{a}z$, which at this period appears to be largely reflected in the writing. Another challenge is to distinguish what is *patina*, that is the formal layer due to the initiative of the copyist who applied his own writing and formal standards, and what is *fonds* (or *core*), that is the layer transmitted and inherited from the ancestors of each single text.

Extensive fluctuation and heterogeneity in the spelling inform that this manuscript predates the establishment (or re-establishment) of a codified orthographic standard, which will be adopted exclusively in the scribal tradition from the fourteenth century on. This standard, represented by MS EMLL 1763, possibly was the result of institutionally encouraged homogenisation. It is therefore likely that the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary is the earliest known witness to this typology of homiletic collection and that the manuscript is dated to the thirteenth century at the latest. The manuscript is, together with the codex of the *Aksumite Collection*, one of the largest ancient (pre-fourteenth century) non-biblical codices known so far. Contrary to the *Aksumite Collection*, the Ṭana Qirqos homiliary also contains a number of original $G\check{e}\acute{a}z$ pieces for which it is the earliest witness survived to us.

However, orthography does not support an exceptionally old age of the manuscript, since all phonological phenomena of late $G\check{e}\acute{a}z$, like consonantal

³⁶ On this rule, see Diem, 1988, pp. 252–54. Interestingly, the same fluctuation seems to affect to a certain extent *w*: **ዘዋሃብከ** (1) for SG **ዘወሀበከ** “that he granted to you”, **ወዋሀበኑ** “he gave us” (35) for SG **ወወሀበኑ**, **ፈነዋ** “he sent” (56) for **ፈነወ**. Since in almost all cases it is the verb *wāhabā* “to give”, with a laryngeal as second radical, one might assume that the spelling **ዋ** is used to mark a regressive assimilation of the vowel across the laryngeal (*wāhabā* > *wahabā*, spelled as <*wāhaba*>). The last example **ፈነዋ** “he sent” seems to contradict this hypothesis, although the chain **ፈነዋ ፣ እግዚአ ፣ ብሔር**, with ^o immediately after the verb, leaves open the possibility that the laryngeal played a role here too.

³⁷ A different orthographic phenomenon which deserves further investigation is the employment of *y* and *w* in correspondence of stressed *i/e* and *u*: e.g., **በድንገሪዶተ** (23) instead of SG **በደኃሪተ**; **በአብውይ** (45) instead of SG **በአቡዮ**. See also the negative prefix ^ጎ- for ^ጎ- mentioned above in **ወአይሰማልኩሙ** and **ወአይሰማልኩሙ** “you have not heard” (nr 56) for SG **አሰማልኩሙ**.

merging and neutralization of the vowel length, are widely attested. In addition to these, the manuscript displays certain tendencies which will be later abandoned in medieval Gəʿəz, like the sporadic passage $a > ə$, the pronominal series in $lə-$, and perhaps the presence of the allomorph $ʾay-$ as a negative marker. It is not clear at this stage whether these tendencies are to be considered as regional or archaizing features.³⁸

5. – Description of the textual content

The manuscript contains 58 textual units. Clavis identifiers,³⁹ incipit (*Inc.*), explicit (*Expl.*) and a short note containing textual witnesses and bibliographical references are provided for each textual unit. The bibliography has been kept to a minimum and mostly provides references on the edition and translation of the Ethiopic text. Bibliographic references on the Classical and Oriental versions of individual texts, which require separate study, have not been considered or have been considered exceptionally. No information has been provided on the structural features of the manuscript. Their description is dependent on direct examination of the artefact, which is impossible without a research stay in Ṭana Qirqos. To date, scholars must still rely on the preliminary information provided almost forty years ago by Sergew Hable-Selassie.⁴⁰

Editorial signs used in the incipit/explicit are the following: ☒ text illegible due to erasure or general damage; [...] text is present but illegible in the microfilm; [text] text reconstructed by the cataloguers; a^{text} text added *supra lineam*.

1. Fols 1ra–4rb: Homily by the “Orthodox” on John the Baptist (CAe 6600).

Inc. ex abrupto from fol. 1va (fol. 1r is nearly illegible): ... ወእምድኅረ ፡ ክልኢ ፡ መዋጋዕል ፡ ፀንሰተ ፡ እልሳቤጥ ፡ ወከብትት ፡ ርእሳ ፡ ጅ ፡ እውሬኅ ፡ እስመ ፡ ለሀቅት ፡ ይእቲ ፡ ወበርእስእኒሃ ፡ እስመ ፡ ፀንሰት ፡ አሰኅራ ፡ አዝማዲሃ ፡ ወቴቤ ፡ ከመዝኑ ፡ ረሰይኒ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ እመ ፡ ሐወጸኒ ፡ ያእትት ፡ ዘንጊጎ፡ እ ምሰብእ ፡ ወበሰዱስ ፡ ወርጋ ፡ በእልሳቤጥ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ፀንሰተ ፡ ይእቲ ፡ ተፈኅወ ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ ምልአክ ፡ እም

³⁸ On the variety of plausible explanations, see Marcel Cohen in Grébaud, 1931–1934, p. 27; Bausi, 2023, p. 167.

³⁹ Next to each title is provided the ‘Clavis Aethiopica’ (CAe) reference number and, when existing, the ‘Clavis Patrum Graecorum’ (CPG) reference number. The former allows to find the corresponding work record in the Beta maṣāḥəft database (see <<https://betamasafeft.eu/works/list>>).

⁴⁰ Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987, pp. 9–10.

ኃበ ፡ (from now cf. EMMML 1763, fol. 5ra) እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ኅበ ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ወዘ
እቤ ፡ ዝኩ ፡ ቅዳማዊ ፡ ይልሀቆ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ በመዋዕል ፡ ትስጉቱ ፡ በመዝሙ-
ር ፡ ይነግር ፡ ወበእንተዝ ፡ ተባሃለ ፡ ዘይንእሶ ፡ የዓቢዮ ፡ በመንግሥት ፡ ሰማያት ፡ እስ
መ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ ወምድር ፡

Expl., fol. 4ra: በከመ ፡ ይብል ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ በትወድሶቶሙ ፡ ለጻድቃን ፡ ይትፌ
ሥሐ ፡ አሕዛብ ፡ ዘመጠነዝ ፡ ክብር ፡ ዘዋሃብከ ፡ (fol. 4rb) እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አኅዜ ፡
ኩሉ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሐዳ ፡ አብ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወአኩቲት ፡ ዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜ
ን ፡ ወይብል ፡ ኩሉ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1117 (varia, 2), pp. 3–11; EMMML 1763 (1), fols 3ra–vb, 5ra–9rb;
Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 54 (= Conti Rossini 169) (VI.b), fols 110ra–117rb (Conti
Rossini, 1913, p. 42, nr 169); London, Eth. Windsor II, fols 33r–104r (Ullendorff,
1953, p. 74); Ethio-SPaRe UM-045 (II-1), fols 4ra–vb and 6ra–11vb; Lucchesi 52
(2), fols 16ra–24rb (Zarzeczny, 2020, p. 638); YC-001, fols 2ra–4vb.

2. Fols 4rb–6va: Homily by Menas, bishop [of Aksum], on the True Cross (CAe 6513).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 4rb): ። በብዓለ ፡ መስቀል ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘሚነስ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ ነገር ፡ በእንተ ፡ ክቡር ፡ መስቀል ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ጳውሎ-
ስ ፡ ሐዋሪያ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይንጽር ፡ እንተ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አብ ፡ እፍቂሮ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ወ
ኂሩት ፡ እንተ ፡ አርአየ ፡ ዘላዕሌነ ፡ በዋሕድ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ይጽውዓነ ፡ ኩልነ ፡
በአኩቲት ፡ ወበሰባሕት ፡ ከመ ፡ ነፌነ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡

Expl., fol. 6va: ወእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በኅይለ ፡ መስቀሉ ፡ ይባርከነ ፡ ለኩልነ ፡ ወ
ያብዝኅ ፡ ፍረ ፡ ጻድቃን ፡ ከመ ፡ ይከፍለነ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ ሰማያት ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ ኢየሱ-
ስ ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወእኒዝ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ወይ
እዜኒ ፡ ወዘለፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (3), fols 10rb–vb, 4ra–vb, 11ra–14ra; EMMML 9185, fols
23ra–b, 25ra–26rb; Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 54 (= Conti Rossini 169), fols 118vb–
125va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045 (II-7), fols 77rb–78vb, 12ra–15vb, 76ra–vb, 75ra,
leaves in disorder; YC-001, fols 7ra–9vb. Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 2018, pp.
112–25.

3. Fols 6va–9vb: How Helen found the true Cross (CAe 6171).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 6va): በእሌን ፡ ምንባብ ፡

Inc.: ወኮነ ፡ በመዋዕል ፡ ቅስጥንጥኖስ ፡ አቢያ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ ፈራሂ ፡ እግዚ
አ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወእምነ ፡ ንግሥት ፡ ወፍራሂት ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይእቲ ፡ እልን ፡ ስ
ማ ፡ ወብዙኅ ፡ ኃልያ ፡ በልባ ፡ እፎ ፡ ሠናየ ፡ ኃሠሥቶ ፡ ለዕዕ ፡ ቡሩክ ፡ ዘእግዚአ ፡ ብ
ሔር ፡ ትፀልቦ ፡ ውስቴቱ ፡ ወኃሂሣ ፡ ወእንቢባ ፡ ወአስተሓሚማ ፡ ዘከመ ፡ ትከውኖ ፡
ሰብእ ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡

Expl., fol. 9vb: ለእለ ፡ ይእምኑ ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ ዕድው ፡ ወእንስት ፡ ይግብሩ ፡ ት
ዝካረ ፡ ጸልቦ ፡ ወበወርኅ ፡ አርጥንዮስ ፡ አመ ፡ ፲፱ወ፯ወኩሎሙ ፡ ለእለ ፡ ይዜክርዎ ፡
ለጸልቦ ፡ ይረክቡ ፡ ክፍል ፡ ምስለ ፡ ወላዲቱ ፡ ለእግዚአነ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (6), fols 23ra–27ra; EMLL 9185, fols 19rb–23ra; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045 (II-6), fols 75ra–vb and 79rb–vb; YC-001, fols 9vb–13rb. Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 2018, pp. 150–61; cf. also Witakowski, 2001; Guerrier and Grébaud, 1925–1926.

4. Fols 9vb–15ra: Homily by Menas, bishop of Aksum, on the 70 Disciples and 318 Holy Fathers of Nicea (CAe 6514).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 9vb): **፡ በብዙኃን ፡ መንባብ ፡**

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ሚናስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ በእንተ ፡ ሰብዓ ፡ አር ድእት ፡ ወበእንት ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ አብው ፡ እለ ፡ በኔቅያ ፡ ተጋብኡ ፡ ፫፻፲፬ወ፰ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ኄር ፡ ከዊኖ ፡ በሀላዌሁ ፡ ዘኩሉ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አብ ፡ (fol. 10ra) ፍቂዶ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ያድሳን ፡ ወውስተ ፡ አእሚሮ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ያገብእ ፡ ፈነወ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዋሕድ ፡ ወልዱ ፡ ከመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዘይእምን ፡ ቦቱ ፡ አይተሐጉል ፡ እለ ፡ ይረክቡ ፡ ሕይወተ ፡ ዘለዓለም ፡

Expl., fol. 15ra: **ወበርዓድ ፡ ይክፍለነ ፡ ለኩልነ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ ሰማያት ፡ በሞገሥ ፡ ወበአፍቅሮት ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ምስለ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ወአኃዜ ፡ ወምስለ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡**

Cf. EMLL 1763 (7), fols 27rb–33va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045 (II-9), fols 80ra–vb, 81ra–b; YC-001, fols 13va–17vb.

5. Fols 15ra–16ra: Homily by Cyril, archbishop of Alexandria, on the sons of Zebedee (CAe 6598, CPG 5246).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 15ra): **በድቂቅ ፡ ዘበዲዮስ ፡**

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቀርሎስ ፡ ሊቅ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ዘእለ ፡ ክስንድርያ ፡ ዕለት ፡ በዓለ ፡ ዮሕንስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ በቅድመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ገብኤ ፡ ዘርቱዓን ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ እመክሮሙ ፡ ወእመስባሓቶሙ ፡ ለቅዱሳን ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ነገር ፡ ይውሕድ ፡ እስመ ፡ ኩኑ ፡ ብሩሃን ፡ ወስተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ወነገሮሙ ፡ ነገር ፡ ሕይወት ፡ በከመ ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ ወሶበኒ ፡ ይትናገሩ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ መስጥር ፡ ይደገሉ ፡ ለኩሉ ፡ ነገራቶሙ ፡

Expl., fol. 15vb: **ይድሳኑ ፡ እምራራት ፡ መዋግዶሙ ፡ ለዕልዋን ፡ ወይበጽሕ ፡ ወስተ ፡ ዛሕን ፡ መርሶ ፡ ዘይእቲ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘጽድቅ ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ለዓለመ ፡ (fol. 16ra) ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወይብሉ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወእሜን ፡**

Cf. EMLL 1763 (8), fols 33vb–34vb; YC-001, fols 17vb–18va. Also found in the Aksumite patristic collection called *Qerellos*; ed. in Weischer, 1979a, pp. 54–61; for a more extensive bibliography, see Zarzeczny, 2020, pp. 434–35.

6. Fols 16ra–17rb: Homily by Menas, bishop of Aksum, on *Abba* Yohanni (CAe 4051).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 16ra): **ዘአባ ፡ ዮሕኒ ፡**

Inc. ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁፅ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ሚናስ ፡ ኤጰስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ በእንተ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁፅ ፡ አባ ፡ ዮሐኒ ፡ ሶበ ፡ ተዘከር ፡ ሶቤሃኬ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ መግባር ፡ ሠናይ ፡ ናጥሪ ፡ ስሚዕነ ፡ ሥና ፡ ሕይወቶሙ ፡ በአማን ፡ ኑዛዜ ፡ ንረኩብ ፡ እስመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ በመሳሌያት ፡ ሰሎሞን ፡ ዝከረ ፡ ጸድቅ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ውዳሴ ፡ ወይትገብር ፡ እስመ ፡ ዘይዘክሮሙ ፡ ቦቱ ፡ አርአየ ፡ እምቅዱሳት ፡ መጻሕፍት ፡

Expl., fol. 17rb: ወንሐውር ፡ በመዓዛሆሙ ፡ ለቅዱሳን ፡ ከመ ፡ ንርኩብ ፡ ሣህል ፡ ወግሀይት ፡ በዕለት ፡ ኩኖኔ ፡ በኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወ(fol. 17rb)እስከ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወይብሉ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (10), fols 35vb–37va; EMMML 7602, fols 108ra–109ra; EMMML 9185, fols 34va–37ra; Paris, BnF Éth. 132, fols 42ra–43rb; Roma, ANL CR 125 (XIII.4), fol. 5ra (fragm.); Ethio-SPaRe UM-046 (I-37), fols 191va–194vb; Ethio-SPaRe ADMY-003, fols 3ra–7va; YC-001, fols 18va–19va. See Nosnitsin, 2018, pp. 299–300.

7. Fols 17rb–19rb: Homily by the “Orthodox” on Michael the Archangel (CAe 3962).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 17rb): ። በሚካኤል ።

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘድረሰ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ብፁፅ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ሚካኤል ፡ ሊቅ ፡ መላእክት ፡ መፍተውኒ ፡ እኃውየ ፡ ንዘከር ፡ ዕባዩ ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወኒሩት ፡ ዘወልድ ፡ ወክብር ፡ ወዓቅም ፡ ዘመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ እስመ ፡ በኅብረት ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ ትገብሩ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ፍጥርት ፡ ዘበ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ ወዘበምድር ፡ ወዘመትሕነት ፡ ምድር ፡ እስመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ መድኃኒኑ ፡ በወንጌል ፡ በከመ ፡ ሰማይ ፡ ከማሁ ፡ በምድርኒ ፡

Expl., fol. 19rb: ወአድኅነ ፡ ወጸልዩ ፡ በእንቲአን ፡ ከመ ፡ ናስምር ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ ወንርኩብ ፡ ሞገሥ ፡ በኃቤሁ ፡ በይእቲ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ ቅዱሳኒ ሁ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ወክብር ፡ በአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለመ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. YC-001, fols 72ra–76vb. The homily has a wide circulation as it is traditionally transmitted in the *Dərsanā Mika’el* collection, mostly as monthly reading for 12 Miyazya and occasionally for 12 Taḥśaś (cf. Vatican City, BAV Aeth. 121 (3), cf. Grébaut and Tisserant, 1935, p. 489). Ed., tr. in Budge, 1894 e in Tāsfa Gäbrä Šəllase, 1954 E.C., pp. 107–14; cf. also Marrassini, 1987, p. 83.

8. Fols 19rb–21rb: Homily by the archbishop Doroteos/Dəratewos on Menas the Martyr (CAe 1616).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 19rb): በሚናስ ፡

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁፅ ፡ ድራቲዮስ ፡ ሊቅ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ በእንተ ፡ ብፁፅ ፡ ሚናስ ፡ ስማዕት ፡ ብፁፅ ፡ ሐዋሪያ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡ ይነግር ፡ ወይቤ ፡ (fol. 19va) ሀለው ፡ እለ ፡ ትእምኑ ፡ ትስፈዎሙ ፡ ንዋየ ፡ ዘኢየሱስትሪኢ ፡ አማን ፡ መንክር ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ በላዕሌ ፡ ቅዱሳኒሁ ፡ እስመ ፡ በላዕሌሆሙ ፡ ይትናገር ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡

Expl., fol. 21rb: ወናዕርፈሙ ፡ ዘበ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ አምላክ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ እግዚ
እነ ፡ ወመድኃኒነ ፡ እምኩሉ ፡ መናግንቲሁ ፡ ለሰይጣን ፡ ወንሃሉ ፡ ምስሌሆሙ ፡ ለእ
ለ ፡ በዕርፍት ፡ ወናኢኩቶ ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ይድሉ ፡
ስባሕት ፡ ወክብረ ፡ ወአኩቲት ፡ ወዓቢይ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜ
ን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (13), fols 57vb–60rb; YC-001, fols 29ra–30vb (here attributed to Dərotewos); EMLL 9185, fols 42va–44rb (here Dəratəyotəs). Cf. also Zarzeczny, 2025, pp. 143–44.

9. Fols 21rb–22rb: Anonymous homily on Peter, Archbishop of Alexandria (CAe 6522).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 21rb): ። በጴጥሮስ ። ወበማሪ ቆስ ።

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ጴጥሮስ ፡ ወማሪቆስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ ነገረ ፡ ሲኖደስ ፡ ዘሕግ ፡ ከመ ፡
ማሪቆስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ ቡአ ፡ እለ ፡ ስክንድሪያ ፡ በሰቡዕ ፡ ዓማቱ ፡ ለኔሎስ ፡ ወሤመ ፡ እን
ደኖስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ወዓሥርቱ ፡ ወክልኤቱ ፡ ቀሳውስተ ፡ ወሰብዐቱ ፡ ደያቀኑናት ፡
ወወሀቦሙ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ ስርዓት ፡ እመከመ ፡ ሞት ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘእለስክንድሪያ ፡ ይት
ጋብኡ ፡ ቀሳውስት ፡ ወለዘ ፡ ሐርይዎ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ እመውስቲቶሙ ፡ ያነብሩ ፡ ላዕሌ
ሁ ፡ እዴዊሆሙ ፡ በሃይማኖቱ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡

Expl., fol. 22rb: ወኮነ ፡ ሰማዕት ፡ በቅድመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ወኮነት ፡ ዕለቱ ፡ ለብፁዕ ፡
ጴጥሮስ ፡ ሊቅ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ወመጋቢ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ውስተ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ሕይወት ፡ እን
ተ ፡ ኢትዮፍእ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ ወበዘ ፡ ይመጽእኒ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ። = ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (18), fols 79rb–80va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-037, fols 125va–126vb (*inc.*) and 105r-v (*expl.*). Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 1980. The text “proves to be nothing else but a collage of excerpts” from a portion of the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria*, a historiographical text translated from Greek in the Aksumite age (Bausi and Camplani, 2016, p. 253). On the role of this text for understanding how an Ethiopic corpus of literary productions emerged in the post-Aksumite age, see Bausi, 2019, pp. 71–74.

10. Fols 22rb–23rb: Anonymous homily on Frumentius, bishop of Aksum, concerning the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia (CAe 1612).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 22rb): በአባ ፡ ሰላማ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ፍራሚንጦስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘእክሱም ፡ ጽህ
ቅ ፡ ኮነኒ ፡ ለንገራትክሙ ፡ በዘ ፡ ኮነ ፡ ክርስቲና ፡ ብሔርክሙ ፡ በከመ ፡ ጽሑፍ ፡ በዘ ፡
ኮነ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ በሓውርትክሙ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ አሐዱአ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ ዝበሙ ፡ ሜረጴዮስ ፡ ሊ
ቅ ፡ ጥብብት ፡ ጸሀቀኣ ፡ ይርእይ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ብሔረ ፡ አጋዕዜ ፡ ወእምጽአ ፡ ምስሌሁ ፡ ክ
ልኤቱ ፡ ድቂቅ ፡ እምእዝማዲሁ ፡ ወእስማቲሆሙ ፡ ለአሐዱ ፡ ፍራሚጥኖስ ፡ ወለካል
ኡ ፡ ኤዴስዮስ ፡ ወብጽሐ ፡ ሐመሮሙ ፡ ሐይቀ ፡ ባሕር ፡ ርእየ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዘፈትወ ፡ በብ
ሔር ፡ አጋዕዜ ፡

Expl., fol. 23rb: በእንተ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ አኃዊየ ፡ ናክብራ ፡ ለዕለት ፡ ትዝኅሩ ፡ ወኩል ክሙ ፡ ንኢሳን ፡ ወዓቢያን ፡ ጽህቁ ፡ ላዕለት ፡ ትዝኅሩ ፡ ለብፁዕ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ አቡነ ፡ ከመ ፡ ዓቢይ ፡ ብዓል ፡ ንግብር ፡ ከመ ፡ ይብጽሐነ ፡ ጸሎቱ ፡ ጽህቁ ፡ ጸጋሁ ፡ ለእግዚእ ነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ምስለ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ። ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (21), fols 84va–86ra; YC-001, fols 48vb–49vb; EMMML 6620, fols 12v, 18, 23, in *scriptio inferior* (Erho, 2025a, p. 420). Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 1979; a new edition is under preparation by Aaron Butts. On the relationship between this text and other accounts on the Christianization of Ethiopia, see Marrassini, 2014, pp. 55–56; Villa, 2017. In all likelihood the homily relies on an Aksumite translation of an excerpt taken from Socrates Scholasticus’ *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Villa, 2017).

11. Fols 23rb–24vb: Homily by Jacob [of Serug] on the Annunciation and on the blessed Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, for the First Sunday of Advent or ‘the preaching of Christmas’ (CAe 1633).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 23rb): በስብክት ፡ ጌና ።

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘአባ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ሰብክት ፡ ጌና ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ወአልሳቤጥ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዝውእቱ ፡ ቃል ፡ ዘኢይትነገር ፡ ሀበነ ፡ ቃል ፡ ዘይዚምር ፡ ስብሐትክ ፡ በብዓለ ፡ ኅቡእ ፡ ዘሰምረ ፡ ይትክሰት ፡ ከሰት ፡ በላዕሌየ ፡ ርእሰክ ፡ ከመ ፡ እስብክ ፡ ዜናክ ፡ ኅቡእ ፡ በቃል ፡ ልዑል ፡ ፀንሰ ፡ ልብየ ፡ ወእጸውረክ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ሐልናየ ፡ ይነግር ፡ አፉየ ፡ በቃል ፡ ኅብ ፡ ዘሰምዕ ፡ ልድቱ ፡ እንክ ፡ አእሕቱተ ፡ ብክ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡

Expl., fol. 24vb: ወአርተዓት ፡ ፍኖት ፡ አልሳቤጥ ፡ ብጽሕት ፡ ከ። ትረእይ ፡ መንክረ ፡ ዓቢይ ፡ ፀኒስ ፡ ሕዲስ ፡ ተወክፈት ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ወአእምረት ፡ መ ፡ ከሉ ፡ ዘይቤላ ፡ መልአክ ፡ እሙን ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ለዓለ። ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (19), fols 80va–82rb; EMMML 9185, fols 15ra–16ra; London, BL Or. 774 (1), fols 6ra–7vb; London, BL Or. 775 (1), fols 2ra–4vb; Gundä Gunde 64 (1), fols 1ra–3va; Gundä Gunde 158 (1), fol. 1r–v (fragm.); UNESCO X.80, from Dima Giyorgis, fols 1ra–2vb; Ethio-SPaRe AP-005 (I-1), fols 3ra–4rb; Ethio-SPaRe MGM-003 (I-1), fols 1ra–3rb; YC-001, fols 45vb–47ra. Ed., tr. in Tedros Abraha, 2019, pp. 82–93. Tedros Abreha rightly observes that, given the age of the surviving witnesses, Guidi’s proposal to date the translation of Jacob of Serug’s homilies to the age of Zär’a Ya’qob should be backdated by at least a century, and most likely even more.

12. Fols 24vb–26vb: Homily by Jacob [of Serug] on the Visit of Mary to Elizabeth, for the Second Sunday of Advent or ‘the Light’ (CAe 1683).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 24vb): በብርሃን ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘአባ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ዘብርሃን ፡ ወሐረት ፡ ትረእያ ፡ ለአረጊት ፡ እ። ብሊት ፡ ፀንሰት [፡] እስመ ፡ እሚን [፡] ቃል ፡ ዘሰምዓት ፡ እምልአ። ትራክባ ፡ በበይናቲሆን ፡ ድ። ግል ፡ ወአረጊት ፡ ብሂል ፡ ጽ። ሕ ፡ ወምዕራብ ፡ ተራክቡ ፡ ትኣምኑ ፡

ድንግል ፡ ጽባሕ ፡ ፳ትጸንሰ ፡ ፀሓይ ፡ ጽድቅ ፡ ወአሳቤጥ ፡ እንከ ፡ በምዕራብ ፡ ዝትጽ
ወር ፡ ኮክብ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ፳መጽእ ፡ ጽባሕ ፡ ወትኣመ። ፡ ለመዕራብ ፡ ወድንግፀ ፡

Expl., fol. 26vb: ወኢይደሉ ፡ እዴቅ። ፡ ወአንቲ ፡ ትትልእክ ፡ [ንጉ]ሥ ፡ ት
ጸውሪ ፡ ወአነ ፡ ኢይክል ፡ እረአይ ፡ ትቁ። ፡ እሙ ፡ ለንጉሥ ፡ ቅድማየ ፡ ትለእ
ክኒ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰ። ት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (20), fols 82rb–84va; EMLL 9185, fols 16ra–17va; London, BL Or. 774 (2), fols 7vb–10ra; London, BL Or. 775 (2), fols 4vb–8va; Gundä Gunde 64 (2), fols 3vb, 48ra–49vb, 4ra–vb; Gundä Gunde 158 (2), fols 1v–4r; UNESCO X.80, from Dima Giyorgis, fols 2vb–5ra; Ethio-SPaRe AP-005 (I-2), fols 4va–6rb; Ethio-SPaRe MGM-003 (I-2), fols 3rb–6ra; YC-001, fols 47ra–48vb; BAV, Pont. Coll. Et. 1 (4), fols 28ra–29rb (fragm.). It is the second part of the preceding homily; ed., tr. in Tedros Abraha, 2019, pp. 94–109.

13. Fols 26vb–28va: Homily by Jacob [of Serug] on the Vision of Joseph, for the Third Sunday of Advent or ‘the Shepherd’ (CAe 1666).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 26vb): ። በኖላዊ ፡

Inc. ድርሳን ፡ ዘአባ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ተይጠት ፡ ትግብእ ፡ ቤታ ፡ ወሪያም ፡ እመድ
ኅረ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ እስመ ፡ በጽሐ ፡ ጊዜ ፡ ተወልድ ፡ ለታ ፡ እምለዋዊያን ፡ ተወፊ ፡ ዮ
ሴፍ ፡ ወአእመረ ፡ ከመ ፡ ፅንሰት ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ድንግፀ ፡ ድቅ ፡ በራእየ ፡ ሐዲስ ፡ ወእን
[ከረ]ት ፡ ድንግል ፡ ንጽሕት ፡ ወም[ል]እት ፡ ቅድስና ፡ ወአርአያሃ ፡ [ክ]ብር ፡ ወትሐ
ቱ ፡ ወግሩም ፡ ወብሩህ ፡ ወበድንግልና ፡ ስ[ር]ግውት ፡ ክልንታሃ ፡

Expl., fol. 28va: ወበመግባረ ፡ ያቆ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ከመ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡
ወእቱ ፡ ቡሩክ ፡ ወእቱ ፡ ኅቡእ ፡ ዘትከስት ፡ ከመ ፡ ያሕይዎ ፡ ለአዳም ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብ
ሓት ፡ ወአከብቱት ፡ ምስለ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓ
ለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (23), fols 88rb–90va; EMLL 9185, fols 17va–19rb; London, BL Or. 774 (3), fols 10ra–12vb; London, BL Or. 775 (3), fols 8vb–12rb; Gundä Gunde 64 (3), fols 4va–7vb; Gundä Gunde 158 (3), fols 4rb–6va; UNESCO X.80, from Dima Giyorgis, fols 5rb–7rb; Ethio-SPaRe AP-005 (I-3), fols 6ra–8ra; Ethio-SPaRe MGM-003 (I-3), fols 6ra–8vb; YC-001, fols 51va–53ra; BAV, Pont. Coll. Et. 1 (5), fols 29va–31rb (fragm.). It is the third part of Jacob of Serug’s homily on the Annunciation; ed., tr. in Tedros Abraha, 2019, pp. 110–25.

14. Fols 28va–30rb: Homily by the bishop Basil concerning the Archangels Michael and Gabriel (CAe 4116).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 28va): በገብርኤል ፡

Inc. በጸለጡተ ፡ ሚካኤል ፡ ወገብርኤል ፡ ሊቀ ፡ መላእክት ፡ (fol. 28vb) ድርሳን ፡
ዘበሲልዮስ ፡ ሰ ፡ ቆጵስ ፡ ዘርቱፅ ፡ ሃይማኖቱ ፡ በእንተ ፡ መላእክት ፡ ወመለከት ፡
በእንተ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ አልቦ ፡ እመ ፡ ትግብ ፡ ቤት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ እንዘ ፡ ከመዝ ፡ ቃላ
ት ፡ እንዘ ፡ ሚር ፡ ትረሲ ፡ ዘመከብብ ፡ ቃል ፡ ዘይብል ፡ ኢይመልእ ፡ እዝን ፡ በአጽ

ሚኒ : ግብር : ገበርነ : በሐሴባ : ኅይልነ : ኢኮነ : መጠነ : ውእቱ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : እላ : መጠነ : ንክል : ንሕነ : እስመ : ዘማእክለ : ሰማይ : ወምድር :

Expl., fol. 30rb: ወለኩሉ : ሕዝብ : መድኃኒት : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : አብ : መሕረታት : ዘሎቱ : ስባሕት : ወእኩቱት : ወዕበይ : ወትድላ : ወመለኮት : በምድርኒ : በሰማያት : በባሕርኒ : ወበቃልያት : ለዕለም : ዓለም : አሜን ።

Cf. Paris, BnF Abb. 54 (CR 169) fols 91vb–95vb; EMMML 1763 (22), fols 86ra–88ra; YC-001, fols 50ra–51rb; EMMML 6620, fols 17, 24, 83, 85, 88, 90, in *scriptio inferior* (Erho, 2025a, p. 420).

15. Fols 30rb–34vb: Homily by the “Orthodox” on the Nativity (CAe 6550).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 28va): በጌና :

Inc.: ድርሳን : በበዓለ : ጌና : ቅድስት : እንተ : ይእቲ : ልድቱ : ለመድኃኒነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : ዘደረሰ : ርቱፅ : ሃይማኖቱ : በይእቲ : ዕለት : ብዙኅ : ምሕረቱ : ወኅይል : ፍቁሩ : ወብዔለ : ወጽጋሁ : ዘእግዚአ : ብሔር : ዘመንገለ : ሰብእ : ዘከመ : ጌንወነ : መድኃኒት : ናእኩቶ : ለጸጋዊ : ለዘ : ዓበይት : መጥነዚ : ዓቢየ : ሠናይቶ : ጸገወነ : ወእመይእዜኒ : ዓቢየ : መንግሥት : ሰማያት : ይሴገወነ : እስመ : ዘመጥነዚ : አበሳ : አበስነ : በስሕተቱ : ለዕደው : ወበዕድቱ : ተእዛዝ : ወተሰደ : እመገነት : ቅዳማዊ : ብእሲ :

Expl., fol. 34vb: ወበዓለምሂ : ዘይመጽእ : አክሌላ : ወዕሴተ : ወመንግሥተ : ሰማያት : ዘለዓለም : ኦ : ብፁዕ : በመጽአተ : ዚኣሁ : ስብሓቲ(fol. 34vb)ሁ : ለአብ : ወወልድ : ወመገፈስ : ቅዱስ : ዘሎቱ : ስባሕት : [ኅ]ይል : ወዕበይ : ወይእዜኒ : ወዘልፈኒ : ወለዓለም : ዓለም : አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (24), fols 90va–96va; EMMML 9185, fols 122rb–126vb; YC-001, fols 95ra–99ra; EMMML 6620, fols 130, 133, 140, 143, 169, 170, in *scriptio inferior* (Erho, 2025a, p. 420).

16. Fols 34vb–36va: Homily by Theophilos/Tewofəlos, [bishop] of Aksum, on the Nativity (CAe 6517).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 34vb): ። በሰንታ : ጌና :

Inc.: ድርሳን : ዘቴፌሎስ : ። ስ : ቆጶስ : ዘአክሱም : ማኑ : ይግር : ኅይል : እግዚአ : ብሔር : ወይገብር : ከመ : ይስማዕ : ኩሎ : ስብሓቲሁ : አይ : ለሳን : ይክል : ዜንዎ : ዕቢይ : ስባሕቲሁ : ለእግዚአ : ብሔር : ኅፍቱ : ዘገብረ : በሳዕለ : ሰብእ : ቅዳሜ : እንዘ : አልቦ : ፍጥረት : ለሐኮ : ብእ። : በእመሳሌሁ : ወገጸ : ዚኣሁ : ወወሀቦ : ጽጋ : ይኩኖ : ኢመዋቱ : ወዘኢይማስን : ወለኩሉ : ዘሀሎ : ውስተ : ምድር : ረሰዮ : መኩንነ : አንበሮ : ውስተ : ግነት : ከመ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : ሠርዕ :

Expl., fol. 36rb: ወአፍቂሮቱ : ለእግዚአ : ብሔር : ወሰብአ : ከመ : በዝኩቱ : ንካህል : ከመ : ዘዳግመ : ወጽአቱ : በብሩህ (fol. 36va) ገጽ : ንትብሎ : ወንርክብ : ሃህለ : በኃቤሁ : አመ : ይመጽእ : በስባሕቲሁ : ይኳንን : ሕያዋነ : ወመውታን : ሎቱ : ስባሕት : ወለዓም : ዓለም : አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (26), fols 100ra–102rb; YC-001, fols 100va–102rb.

17. Fols 36va–39rb: Homily by Jacob [of Serug], the “Orthodox”, on the Nativity (CAe 6605).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 36va): በሕፃናት ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘርቴዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘአባ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ልደቱ ፡ ለመድኃኒነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ መነክረ ፡ ዓቢዩ ፡ ገበረ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በልደ ተ ፡ ወልዱ ፡ ዘመጽአ ፡ ለክሥተተ ፡ ያድኅን ፡ ዓለም ፡ በትሕትናሁ ፡ ድንግል ፡ ጸረቶ ፡ በክርሳ ፡ በጎል ፡ ሰከበ ፡ ወማኑ ፡ ይክል ፡ ነግሮቱ ፡ ዘአይትናገረ ፡ አብራክ ፡ ሐፀናሁ ፡ ወ እድው ፡ ሐቀፋሁ ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ መንክር ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ለዘ ፡ ይሊቡ ፡ እመ ጥብ ፡ ተሰሰዩ ፡ ወበበዓት ፡ ኅደረ ፡

Expl., fol. 39rb: ወበሕፀና ፡ ዘወለደተ ፡ ማሪያም ፡ አሥተፈስሐ ፡ ወአብርሃም ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ሰባሕት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ዘፈነወ ፡ ልነ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይሕይወ ፡ ቦቱ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወይብል ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (27), fols 102rb–106ra; EMLL 9185, fols 117ra–119vb; YC-001, fols 102rb–105ra.

18. Fols 39va–42va: Homily by the “Orthodox” on Stephen the Martyr (CAe 6579).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 39va): በእስጥፋኖስ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘርቴዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘድርሰ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ሰማዕት ፡ እስጥፋኖስ ፡ ቀዳሚ ፡ ሰማዕት ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡ ሐዋርያ ፡ ንዋይ ፡ ኅሩይ ፡ ይንግር ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ እቀድም ፡ አእኩቲቶ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በእንተ ፡ እግዚአ ነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ እስመ ፡ ተሰምዐ ፡ ሃይማኖትክሙ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ በሓውሮተ ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ በሐግ ፡ እምቅደመ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሐደግ ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ ላእክ ፡ ንጹሓነ ፡ ክህናት ፡ እለ ፡ ይተለአኩ ፡ ለቅዱስ ፡ መሥዋዕተ ፡

Expl., fol. 42rb: ወንሕነ ፡ በይእቲ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ግርምት ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ እለ ፡ ያፍቅሩ ፡ ምጽአተ ፡ ዚኣሁ ፡ ወይጸውዕዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አምላክነ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ወጽንዕ ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ (fol. 42va) ለዓለም ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወይብሉ ፡ ኩሎ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (28), fols 106rb–110rb; YC-001, fols 105ra–107vb; ed., tr. in Labadie, 2024, pp. 133–44.

19. Fols 42va–45ra: Homily by Abba Elyas, bishop of Aksum, on Abba Mäta^c or Libanos (CAe 1294).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 42va): ። በአባ ፡ መጣዕ ፡ ምንባብ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁዕ ፡ ኤጵስ ፡ ቆጵስ ፡ አባ ፡ ኤልያስ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ መንኩስ ፡ አባ ፡ መጣዕ ፡ ዘውእቱ ፡ ሊባኖስ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ንንግረክሙ ፡ አጎዊነ ፡ ወዘከመ ፡ ሐይዎ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ምድር ፡ ወዘከመ ፡ ተዓገለ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ምድር ፡ ዘመጣዐ ፡ ትዕግሥት ፡ ኄር ፡ ብእሲ ፡ መስተዓገሢ ፡ እምነበ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ሰምረ ፡ በ

ቱ፡፡ ወስመ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ወስመ ፡ እሙ ፡ ንግሥት ፡ አብዕልት ፡ ጥቀ ፡ በዲበ ፡ ምድር ፡ አንጸየ ፡ ሎቱ ፡ ምርዓተ ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ለብፁዕ ፡ ሊባኖስ ፡ ኃጸየ ፡ ሎቱ ፡ ፫፻ ፡ ገብረ ፡ ድንግል ፡

Expl., fol. 45ra: ብፁዕ ፡ መጣዕ ፡ ዘአፍሪካ ፡ አፈቅሮ ፡ አኩቲት ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ወልል ፡ ወዓቢይ ፡ ወመንግሥት ፡ ሣህለ ፡ ወምሕረት ፡ በሰማይ ፡ ወበምድር ፡ ስባሕት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ፡ ስረዩ ፡ ባርከኒ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (29), fols 110rb–113va; EMMML 7602, fols 126ra–128ra; EMMML 9185, fols 120ra–122ra; Ethio-SPaRe UM-037, fols 168ra–173vb; EMMML 6620, fols 81, 92, in *scriptio inferior* (Erho, 2025a, p. 420). Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 1990, cf. also Bausi, 2003, p. xxiv.

20. Fols 45ra–50ra: Homily by the “Orthodox” on the Incarnation, for the Epiphany (CAe 6580).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 45ra): በአጳፋንያ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በብዓለ ፡ አጳፋንያ ፡ እንተ ፡ ይእቲ ፡ አስተርአዮ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ በሥጋ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ወኢሰመየ ፡ ስሙ ፡ በአፍቂር ፡ ትሕትና ፡ ወኢብፍቃዶ ፡ ተወዲሶ ፡ እስመ ፡ ቦቱ ፡ ቀደመተኒ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ እለ ፡ ኢጸሐፉ ፡ እስማቲሆሙ ፡ ወስብሓቲሆሙስ ፡ ዘዘመሩ ፡ መዝሙር ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘ፴፪ ፡ መዝሙር ፡ ወእንዘ ፡ አይበልዎሙ ፡ ዘእገሌ ፡ ተደመሩ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ዘ፻፲፬ ወ፰ ፡ መዝሙር ፡ ምስለ ፡ እለኩቱ ፡ ዘ፴፪ ፡ ወኩነ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ድሙር ፡ ፻፶ ፡ መዝሙር ፡

Expl., fol. 50ra: ወርኢኩ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ከመ ፡ ርግብ ፡ ወረደ ፡ እምሰማይ ፡ ወነበረ ፡ ዲቤሁ ፡ ለልየ ፡ ርኤኩ ፡ ወአነ ፡ ሰማዕቱ ፡ ከመ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ወልደ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ወገይል ፡ ወመንግሥት ፡ በሰማይኒ ፡ ወበምድርኒ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

No leaves are missing between fols 47v and 48r, contrary to what stated in Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987, p. 10. Cf. EMMML 1763 (31), fols 114vb–121vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-037, fols 173vb–180vb, 182ra–194vb; YC-001, fols 107vb–113ra.

21. Fols 50ra–51va: Homily by Theophilus/Tewofelos, bishop of Aksum, on the Wedding in Cana of Galilea, for the Epiphany (CAe 6518).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 50ra): በሰንታ ፡ አጳፋንያ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በብዓለ ፡ አጳፋንያ ፡ በቃና ፡ ዘገሊላ ፡ ዘይትንበብ ፡ ዘደርሰ ፡ ዘቴዎፍሎስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ። ሰምዑ ፡ ፍቁራን ፡ ኢሲያስ ፡ ርእየ ፡ ዕበየ ፡ ጸጋሁ ፡ ለአምላክነ ፡ ዘንጽሐ ፡ እምነደ ፡ እሳት ፡ ወርእየ ፡ ሱራፊን ፡ ወምልእ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ሳዕሌሁ ፡ ወነጸረ ፡ መጽሐቱ ፡ ወእስተርኤዮቱ ፡ ለዋሕድ ፡ ለወ(fol. 50rb) ልደ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይጸርጎ ፡ ወይዜንዋ ፡ ለኢዮሩሳሌም ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ አብርሃን ፡ አብርሃን ፡ ኢዮሩሳሌም ፡ ብጽሐ ፡ ብርሃንኪ ፡

Expl., fol. 51rb: ወነበረ ፡ ዲቤሁ ፡ እስመ ፡ አሐዳ ፡ ክብሮሙ ፡ ወአሐደ ፡ ጎይ ሎሙ ፡ ወመጽአ ፡ ቃል ፡ እምሰማይ ፡ ዚይብለ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ወልድየ ፡ ዘአ (fol. 51va)ፈቀር ፡ ወኪያሁ ፡ ሰመርኩ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰባሕት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (32), fols 121vb–123rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-30, fols 5ra–7rb (end); Ethio-SPaRe UM-037, fol. 197va–b (beginning); YC-001, fols 113ra–114ra.

22. Fols 51va–52va: Homily by Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria, on the Incarnation of the Word, on the third (Sunday?) of Epiphany (CAe 6370).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 51va): በእሉስ ፡ አጳፋኒያ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በጥልቀተ ፡ አጳፋኒያ ፡ ዘእተናሲስ ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ዘእለክስንድር ያ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ተሰጉቱ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ቃለ ፡ ንአምን ፡ ወልደ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ እምቅድመ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ መዋዕል ፡ እምአብ ፡ ዘተወልድ ፡ ወበድጎሪ ፡ መዋዕል ፡ በእንተ ፡ መድኅኒተ ፡ ዚአነ ፡ እማሪያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ ተወልደ ፡ በሥጋ ፡ በከመ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ሐዋሪያ ፡ ይመህሮ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ ሶበ ፡ በጽሐ ፡ ዕድሜ ፡ መዋዕል ፡ ፈነወ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወልዶ ፡ ወከዊና ፡ እምብእሲት ፡ ወውእቱመ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወልደ ፡

Expl., fol. 52rb: ወእትሰግድ ፡ ከመ ፡ ዘእግዚአ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ሥጋ ፡ ለእለንቱ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ታወግዞሙ ፡ ቅድስት ፡ እንተ ፡ በኩልሂ ፡ እንተ ፡ ሐዋሪ (fol. 52va)ያት ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ተአመና ፡ ለክቡር ፡ ሐዋርያ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይሰብክ ፡ ዘማህረ ክሙ ፡ እመዘ [] ማህርኩክሙ ፡ ወጉዝ ፡ ለይኩን ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰባሕት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (33), fols 123rb–124va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-030, fols 7rb–9va; YC-001, fols 119vb–120va. Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 2017. The homily is an elaborated version of the letter *Ad Iovianum de Fide* by Apollinaris of Laodicea (Ps.-Athanasius), CPG 3665 (PG 28, cols 25–29), also found in the *Qerellos*; ed. in Weischer, 1993, pp. 120–26. Another Ethiopic recension of the same text is transmitted in the *Haymanotä Abäw* (“Fides Patrum”), see Zarzeczny, 2020, p. 378.

23. Fols 52va–56vb: Homily by Menas, bishop of Aksum, on the Dormition of the Virgin Mary (CAe 1646).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 52va): በማሪያም ፡ በሐጋይ ፡ ድርሳን ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁዕ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጳስ ፡ ሚናስ ፡ ዘእክሱም ፡ በእንተ ፡ ቅድስት ፡ ወላዲት ፡ አምላክ ፡ ድንግል ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ሐዋሪያ ፡ ጳውሎስ ፡ ንዋየ ፡ ጎሩይ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ወላክክ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ መለኮቱ ፡ በመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ተፍሥሑ ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ በእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወካዕበ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ተፈሥሑ ፡ ወበክልኤትኒ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ ተፈሥሑ ፡ ወዘእንበለ ፡ ጽርዓት ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ ጸልዩ ፡ ወትረ ፡ አእኩቱ ፡ መፍተወ ፡ ልነ ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ ንት ፈሣሕ ፡ በእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ፍቁራንዩ ፡ ፈድፋድ ፡ እስመ ፡ ክፈልነ ፡ ዛቲ ፡ በዓል ፡ ዓቢይ ፡ ዕልት ፡ ብርሀት ፡

Expl., fol. 56vb: **ወበርትዕተ ሃይማኖት ፡ ናስምሮ ፡ በቅድሚያ ፡ በኩሉ ፡ መዋዕለ ፡ ሕይወትነ ፡ ከመ ፡ ንርኩብ ፡ ሣህለ ፡ ወግህደት ፡ በድኅሪይተ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ግርምት ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ በእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰባሐት ፡ ምስለ ፡ አቡቡ ፡ እኒዝ ፡ ወሰብሐት ፡ ወዕበይ ፡ ምስለ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።**

Cf. EMMML 543 (68), fols 149ra–150ra; EMMML 1763 (34), fols 124va–129rb; EMMML 2461 (1.66), fols 238vb–240rc; EMMML 3873 (13), fols 108vb–109^{bis}vb; EMMML 4279 (6), fols 30rb–33rc (*expl. ex abrupto*); EMMML 4355 (6), fols 58ra–79rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-30, fols 9va–12vb (beginning), 53va–rb (fragm.); Gundā Gunde 29 (3), fols 24r–30r, 37r–v, 42rv, 76r–77v, 83r–v; Lucchesi 1 (69), fols 147ra–148ra (Zarzeczny, 2020, p. 289); YC-001, fols 141va–145rb.

24. Fols 56vb–59ra: Admonition by bishop Theophilus/Tewofəlos on fasting, for the Sunday before Lent (CAe 6621).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 56vb): **። በድራረ ፡ ጾም ፡**

Inc.: **በድራረ ፡ ጾም ፡ ቃል ፡ ተግሳጽ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ቴፍሎስ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ጾም ፡ ከመ ፡ ታአምሩ ፡ ንነግረክሙ ፡ ወንዜንወክሙ ፡ ወንዜክረክሙ ፡ ሕገ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘታአምሩ ፡ እስመ ፡ ታአምሩ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ሥርዓት ፡ ቤት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ወሕገ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወትእዛዙሙ ፡ ለቅዱሳን ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ታአምሩ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ ወእንስት ፡ እስመ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ወልደ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ኢሰያስ ፡ ነቢይ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ ድቂቅኪ ፡ መሁራን ፡**

Expl., fol. 58ra: **ከመ ፡ ንርኩብ ፡ ሣህል ፡ ወምሕረት ፡ እመ ፡ ይመጽእ ፡ በሰብሐቲሁ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰብሐት ፡ ወእኒዜ ፡ ለኣብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።**

Cf. EMMML 1763 (37), fols 134vb–137ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (1), fols 2ra–5rb; YC-001, fols 145rb–147rb.

25. Fols 59ra–62vb: Homily by the “Orthodox” on fasting, for the first Sunday in Lent (CAe 6582).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 58ra): **በቀዳማይ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ ጾም ፡**

Inc.: **በቀዳመይት ፡ ሰንበት ፡ ጾም ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅድስት ፡ ጾም ፡ ፋስካ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ለሐንጻ ፡ ማእመናን ፡ እስመ ፡ መፍትወ ፡ ናእመር ፡ ኅይላ ፡ ለጾም ፡ ወብቀጫታ ፡ ወዘከመ ፡ ቅሩባን ፡ ኅበ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አምላክ ፡ ትሩሲዮሙ ፡ ለእለ ፡ ይኅሥሥዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወማኑ ፡ እምንተ ፡ እለ ፡ እም(fol. 58rb)ኃበ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ትማህሮሙ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩኑነ ፡ እምርሕተ ፡ ልነሂ ፡ ወእለ ፡ ለሌሆሙኒ ፡ በጾም ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይትቀነዩ ፡ ወይትሕረሙ ፡ እምኩሉ ፡ መባልዕት ፡**

Expl., fol. 62va: **እለ ፡ አፍቀርዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወዐኅበ ፡ እለ ፡ ያፈቅርዎ ሰ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ፍሥሐ ፡ ሎሙ ፡ ክብር ፡ ሶበ ፡ ይርእዩ ፡ ዘይትቀነይ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ እዳዊክ ፡ ገብራኒ ፡ ወልሐኳኒ ፡ አልብወኒ ፡ (fol. 62vb) ወእትማህር ፡ ትእዛዝክ ።**

Cf. EMLL 1763 (40), fols 139vb–143vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (2), fols 5va–11rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-45, fols 45ra–50ra (= UM-050b, fols 1ra–6ra); YC-001, fols 147rb–153va.

26. Fols 62vb–66vb: Continuation of the preceding homily, for the first Sunday in Lent.

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 62vb): በካዕበ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ ጾም ፡

Inc.: እለ ፡ ይፈርሁክ ፡ ይርአዩኒ ፡ ወይትፌሥሐ ፡ ነዋ ፡ ሰብዓቱ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ አቅረብኩ ፡ ነገራቲሆሙ ፡ ወዘከመ ፡ ተቀንዩ ፡ በጾም ፡ ወበትንርምት ፡ ለአምላኩሙ ፡ ወአስማቲሆሙ ፡ አብራሃም ፡ ወይስሐቅ ፡ ወያዕቆብ ፡ ወሞሴ ፡ ወዕዝራ ፡ ወዳንኤል ፡ ወዳዊት ፡ እስመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዘይኩን ፡ ሃሎ ፡ ወዘይትገበርሂ ፡ በምጽአቱ ፡ ለክርስቶስ ፡ አቀደሙ ፡ አርእዮ ፡ ነቢያት ፡ በከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ መጽሕፍ ፡ አልቦ ፡ ዘገብረ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዝኢነገረ ፡ ለንቢያቲሆ ፡ ቀደምት ፡

Expl., fol. 66vb: ወይእዜኒ ፡ አኃዊነ ፡ ንሕነሂ ፡ ንጹም ፡ በፍቃድነ ፡ ወንጽህቅ ፡ ናስምር ፡ በጾም ፡ ከመ ፡ ንርከብ ፡ ዕሴተ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ እለ ፡ አስምርዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይክፍልነ ፡ መንግሥተ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ ወድርገተ ፡ ምስለ ፡ መላእክት ፡ ከመ ፡ ንፌኑ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (41), fols 143vb–148vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (3), fols 11rb–17va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045, fols 50ra–vb, 51ra–56vb (= UM-050b, fols 6ra–13vb).

27. Fols 66vb–68ra: Anonymous homily for the third Saturday in Lent (CAe 6623).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 66vb): በቺ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ አይሁድ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ሰባ ፡ ንተዌፌይ ፡ ጾመ ፡ ዘሃልስ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ በእንተ ፡ ዘይቤ ፡ በወንጌል ፡ አሜሃ ፡ ወፀአ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ግዳም ፡ እመንፈስ ፡ ከመ ፡ ያምክሮ ፡ ዲያብሎስ ፡ ተንፍኅ ፡ ቀርን ፡ ይእዜሂ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ዘየባሉ ፡ ቃሉ ፡ እምኩሉ ፡ ቀርን ፡ ከመ ፡ መፍቅርያንሃ ፡ ትጼውዕ ፡

Expl., fol. 67vb: በንጹሕ ፡ ሕልና ፡ እንዘ ፡ ንዐቅብ ፡ ሥጋነ ፡ በንጹሕ ፡ በእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ከመ ፡ ውእቱኒ ፡ ርእዮ ፡ ኪያን ፡ ይዕቅብነ ፡ እለንቱ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይስተዳለወን ፡ ለመንግሥተ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ዘ(fol. 68ra)ሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (43), fols 152vb–154ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (4), fols 17vb–19rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-030 fols 40va–b (= UM-050b, fols 14ra–b, end); YC-001, fols 59ra–60ra.

28. Fols 68ra–71ra: Anonymous homily on Fasting, for the third Sunday in Lent (CAe 6700).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 68ra): በቺ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡

Inc.: በስመ : አብ : ወወልድ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ድርሳን : ዘበእንተ : ጾም : ስምዑ : አኃዊኒ : ፍቁራን : ወሉዳ : ለቤት : ክርስቲያን : ንዜንወክሙ : ዘበእንተ : ጾም : እስመ : ብዙኅ : ትረድእ : ወብዙኅ : በቀዳሚት : ባቲ : ወፍሬ : ጸማሃኒ : ሥፍይ : እስመ : እግዚእንሂ : ወመድኃኒን : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ :

Expl., fol. 71ra: ዘእንበለ : አበሳ : በእግዚአ : ብሔር : አብ : አምላክነ : ወበወልድ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : ከመ : ውእቱኒ : ርኢዮ : ኪያነ : የስተዳልወነ : ለመንግሥተ : ሰማያት : በእግዚእነ : ወመድኃኒን : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : ዘሎቱ : ሰብሓት : ወጽንዕ : ለዓለም : ዓለም : አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (44), fols 154ra–157ra (text on fol. 155rb–va has been erased almost completely); London, BL Or. 8192 (6), fols 25rb–30ra; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 59ra–66vb (= UM-050b, fols 17ra–23vb); YC-001, fols 153vb–156ra.

29. Fols. 71ra–73ra: Homily by the “Orthodox” on Fasting, for the fourth Sunday in Lent (CAe 6587).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 71ra): በ፬ : ሰንበት :

Inc.: ድርሳን : ዘርቱዐ : ሃይማኖት : በእንተ : ጾም : ሞገሱ : ለእግዚእነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : ወፍቅረ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : ወተድመርተ : መንፈስ : ቅዱስ : የሁለ : ምስለ : ኩልክሙ : አኃዊነ : ፍቁራን : ዘታአምሩ : ንዝክርክሙ : በእንተ : እልንቱ : መዋዕል : ቅዱሳት : አጽዋመ : ፋሲካ : ወንዑ : እንተሙ : አኃዊነ : ፍቁ(fol. 71rb)ራን : ዘታአምሩ : ንዜክርክሙ : በእንተ : እልንቱ : መዋዕል : ቅድስተ : አጽዋም : ፋሲካ : ወንዑ : አንተሙ : አኃዊነ : ንሰምዖ : ለብፁዕ : ዳዊት :

Expl., fol. 72vb: እመቦ : ዘይወጎጥ : አጸንዑ : ቀውመ : በእግዚአ : ብሔር : ይቀጥቅጡ : ለሰይጣን : ፍጡን : በታሕት : እገረ : ከመ : ወልክሙ : መዊአ : ወተዕግ (fol. 73ra)ሥተ : ጸጋሁ : ለእግዚእነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : የሁለ : ምስለ : ኩልክሙ : አሜን : ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (47), fols 162rb–164rb (anonymous); London, BL Or. 8192 (8), fols 31va–34rb (anonymous); Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 69ra–73ra (= UM-050b, fols 26ra–30ra); YC-001, fols 156ra–157va. Ed., tr. in Krawczuk, 2023.

30. Fols 73ra–75va: Homily by Gregory/Gorgoryos, the presbyter of Antioch, on the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11–32), for the fifth Sunday in Lent (CAe 6415).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 73ra): በ፭ : ሰንበት :

Inc.: ድርሳን : ዘገርጎዮስ : ቀሲስ : አንጾኪያ : በእንተ : ምሳሌ : ዘሀሎ : ውስተ : ወንጌል : በእንተ : ዘሐርቱም : ወልድ : ነጊዶ : ርሐቀ : ዘደርሰ : በመዋዕል : አጽዋም : ለእለ : ይበወኡ : ዐብየ : ክርስቲያን : መፍትወመ : ወተረ : ንሰብክ : ፍቀረ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : ዘላዕለ : ሰብእ : እስመ : ቦቱ : ነሐዩ : ወንተሐወሰ : ወንጌሉሂ :

Expl., fol. 75rb: ወእትሜንዩ : አነኒ : አጥርየ : ነጽሕት : እደወ : ድልዋተ : ለተመጥዎ : ውእቶን : በሐረይ : ዘንተ : ኩሎ : እንዘ : ይጸርኅ : አበ(fol. 75va)ስ : ይቤ :

አቡሁ ፡ ለአግብርቲሁ ፡ ማኑኬ ፡ ውእቶሙ ፡ አግብርቲሁ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ላእከነ ፡ ተእዛ ዙ ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (53), fols 173vb–176va; London, BL Or. 8192 (9), fols 34rb–38rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 73ra–79ra (= UM-050b, fols 30ra–36ra); YC-001, fols 159va–162ra. The text is a translation of a Greek homily attributed to John Chrysostom, see CPG 4577 (PG 59, cols 515–22).

31. Fols 75va–77vb: Continuation of the preceding text, for the sixth Sunday in Lent.

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 75va): [...]ት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡

Inc.: አምጽኡ ፡ ፍጡንክሙ ፡ አልባሰ ፡ ቀድወ ፡ ወአልብሎ ፡ ወአምጽኡ ፡ ልብ ሰ ፡ ዘእምላዕሉ ፡ ተአነመ ፡ እምጽኡ ፡ ልብሰ ፡ ዘእምየርዳኖስ ፡ ተአንመ ፡ አምጽኡ ፡ ልብሰ ፡ ዘእምእሳተ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ወአልብሰም ፡ አልብሰም ፡ አልባሰ ፡ ለዘ ፡ ርእሱ ፡ አዕረ ቀ ፡ አልብሰም ፡ ለዘ ፡ ዳብሎስ ፡ አዕረቆ ፡ አልብሰም ፡ ለዘ ፡ ይነግሥ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ፍጥረ ተ ፡ አሰርግውም ፡ ለዘ ፡ በእንቲአሁ ፡ አሰርገውኩም ፡ ለዓለም ፡

Expl., fol. 77vb: ወተቀበሉም ፡ ምስለ ፡ ቡሩሃት ፡ ወጥሉላት ፡ መኃትው ፡ እንዘ ፡ ትትፈሥሐ ፡ ወትጸርኑ ፡ ወትብሉ ፡ ቡሩክ ፡ ዘይመጽእ ፡ በስሙ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ወክብር ፡ በዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ። = ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (54), fols 176va–179rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (10), fols 38rb–41vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 79ra–84vb (= UM-050b, fols 36ra–41vb); YC-001, fols 162ra–164va.

32. Fol. 78ra–b: Anonymous homily on Mt 11:28–30 (“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened”), for the sixth Saturday in Lent (CAe 6745).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 78ra): ሰንበት ፡ አይሁድ

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በእንተ ፡ ዘይቤ ፡ በወ[ንግል ፡] ንዑ ፡ ኅቤየ ፡ ሥሩሓን ፡ ወ[አነ ፡] አ ዕርፈክሙ ፡ መፍቀሬ ፡ [ሰ]ብእ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ መድኃኒነ ፡ ወ[በ]እንተዝ ፡ ኮነ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ወበ [ተ]መሰሎ ፡ ዚአን ፡ አርአየ ፡ ፈቀ። ፡ ላዕለ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ወበከመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ሕ ጥሪያ ፡ ለኩ ሉ ፡ ይፈቀድ ፡ ይድ። ፡ ወይመጽኡ ፡ ውስተ ፡ አእምሮ ፡ ጽድቀ ፡ ወለኩሉ ፡ ለል ሁ ፡ ይጸወዕ ፡ አንዘ ፡ ይብል ፡ ንዑ ፡ ኅቤየ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ሥሩሓን ፡

Expl., fol. 78rb: እንዘ ፡ ንነግር ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኤርሚያስ ፡ ነብይ ፡ ነዋ ፡ ኢጸመውኩ ፡ ተልዊየ ፡ ድኅሬክ ፡ ወዕለተ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ አተመኔኩ ፡ ወመዝሙርሰ ፡ ይነግር ፡ ተለወተ ፡ ነ ፍሲየ ፡ ድኃሬክ ፡ ወልተሰ ፡ ተወክፍተኒ ፡ የማንክ ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ዘ ሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ። = ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (55), fol. 179rb–vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (11), fol. 42ra–vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 84vb–85vb (= UM-050b, fols 84vb–85vb); YC-001, fols 65ra–va.

33. Fols 78va–80vb: Anonymous homily on the True Cross (CAe 1650).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 78va): ። በመስቀል ፡ ዘጸም ፡ መ ንባብ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ መስቀል ፡ ዘጎሥሥት ፡ እሌን ፡ ንግሥት ፡ በመዋዕል ፡ ያ
 ዝያን ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ይትኔብብ ፡ በብዓል ፡ መስቀል ፡ ወዓርግት ፡ ውስተ ፡
 መዓርግት ፡ መዓርግሃ ፡ ለኢዮሩሳሌም ፡ ወረክብቶ ፡ ለብእሲ ፡ ልሁቅ ፡ ዘስሙ ፡ ሳሙ-
 ኤል ፡ ወሐተትቶ ፡ ወትቤሎ ፡ ዝኑ ፡ ቤተ ፡ አምላክ ፡ እስራኤል ፡ ኅበ ፡ ይሰግድ ፡ ኩ-
 ሉ ፡ ብርክ ፡

Expl., fol. 80va: ወእለ ፡ ተአመኑ ፡ በመስቀሉ ፡ አራዊት ፡ ምድር ፡ ይኅዙ ፡ ወእ-
 ልቦ ፡ ዘይ፳፻ ሰዮሙ ፡ ወያኢኩቱ ፡ ፈጣ(fol. 80vb)ሪሆሙ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስባሓ-
 ት ፡ ወክብር ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለ-
 ም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Subscr., fol. 80vb: ተፈጸመ ፡ በዝዩ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ መስቀል ፡ ዘጸም ፡ ዘኃ-
 ሥሥት ፡ እሌን ፡ ንግሥት ። ጽልዩ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይስረይ ፡ ሊት ፡ ኃጢአቲዩ ፡ ወጊጋይ ፡ ወ
 ይድምርኒ ፡ ምስለ ፡ እለ ፡ እስምርዎ ፡ ወዘገድፍኩሂ ፡ ስረዩ ፡ ሊተ ፡ እስመ ፡ ሕጹጽ ፡
 ለእእምሮ ፡ ጽልዩ ፡ ላዕሌየ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይመሐረኒ ፡ በቅድሚሁ ፡ ወበዝዩሂ ፡ ቀሊል ፡ ጸር ፡
 ወአርዑት ፡ ስረዩ ፡ ስረዩ ፡ ስረዩ ፡ ወዝክሩኒ ፡ በጸሎትክሙ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አ-
 ሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (48), fol. 164rb–166vb; EMMML 9185, fols 27ra–29rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 150ra–152ra (end); YC-001, fols 157va–159rb. Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 2018, pp. 162–71.

34. Fols 80vb–82va: Homily by the “Orthodox” for Palm Sunday (CAe 6588).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 80vb): ። በሆሳዕኛ ፡ መንባብ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘድርሰ ፡ በመዋዕል ፡ አጽዋም ፡ እዝከረ ፡ ዘቀ-
 ዲሙ ፡ ሕገ ፡ ቃል ፡ ነቢያት ፡ ዘተሰውጥ ፡ ላዕሌሆሙ ፡ ጽጋሁ ፡ ለመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለ
 ለ ፡ አሐዲ ፡ በበ ፡ አምጣን ፡ ዘይክሉ ፡ በከመ ፡ ተውህበሙ ፡ እምነብ ፡ አብ ፡ ጸጋዌ ፡ ዘ
 ይሁብ ፡ ለኩሉ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ኢያንኪ ፡ እምዝግብ ፡ ዘኢይቀብል ፡ ወእመፈልፈል ፡ ዘኢይ-
 ነጽፍ ፡

Expl., fol. 82rb: ዘተብህላ ፡ በኢሰ<ይ>ያስ ፡ ነብይ ፡ ዘይቤ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ንሥእ ፡ ደ-
 ዌነ ፡ ወጸረ ፡ ሐማምነ ፡ ተምህርተ ፡ ሰላምነ ፡ ወ(fol. 82va)በቅሶሰለ ፡ ዚአሁ ፡ ሐይው-
 ነ ፡ ቅሶሰልነ ፡ በክርስቶስ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰብሓት ፡ ወእኅዝ ፡ ለዓለም ፡
 ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (57), fols 182ra–184vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (13), fols 46ra–50rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 91ra–97ra (= UM-050b, fols 48ra–54ra); YC-001, fols 67va–68vb.

35. Fols 82va–85ra: Homily by Ephrem for Maundy Thursday (CAe 6687); see Fig. 5.

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 82vb): ። በጸሎት ፡ ሐሙስ ፡

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘአባ ፡ አፍሬያም ፡
 ዘይትነብብ ፡ በጸሎተ ፡ ኅሙስ ። ፍሥሓ ፡ ጸውዓትነ ፡ ንትፌሣሐ ፡ ባቲ ፡ ወለተ ፡ ንጉ-
 ሥ ፡ ሃቢ ፡ አኩቴት ፡ ለእግዚእኪ ፡ ፍሥሓ ፡ ዘበአማን ፡ ዘመጸእ ፡ ከመ ፡ በፍሥሓ ፡ ይ

ትፌሥሐ : ለዘመደ : ሰብእ : እጌለ : እጌለ : እምሕያው : ለስሬየት : ኃጢአቶም : ብዓል : በጽሐት : ንዑ : ንትፌሣሕ : ባቲ : ወናልዕል : ቃልነ : በአኩቴት : ንበ : በኩር : ለሕማም : እንዘ : ንብል : ምሕረትከ : ዘአብጽሐትነ : ለዝንቱ : ፍሥሐ :

Expl., fol. 85ra: ስብሐት : ሎቱ : ለወልድ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : ዘእትሐተ : ርእሱ : ዘእንተ : መድኃኒትነ : ወዋሀበነ : ዝንተ : ሥርዓት : ትሕትና : ከመ : ንሕዩው : ቦቱ : ዘሎቱ : ስብሐት : ወአኩቴት : ምስለ : አቡሁ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ወይእዜኒ : ወዘልፈኒ : ወለዓለም : ዓለም : አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (58), fols 184vb–187ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (14), fols 50rb–53vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 97ra–vb, 99ra–103vb (= UM-050b, fols 54ra–59vb). The homily is also attested in some manuscripts of the *Gabrä həməmat* (e.g. EMMML 2140, fols 66v–71r).

36. Fols 85ra–87ra: Homily by Ephrem (here said by John Chrysostom), for Easter Eve (CAe 6689).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 85ra): በመኃተው : ፋስካ :

Inc.: በስመ : አብ : ወወልድ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ድርሳን : ዘማ(fol. 85rb)ኃተው : ፋስካ : ዘዚአሁ : አፍ : ወርቅ : ፍቁራን : በዛቲ : ዕለት : ኖመ : መድኃኒነ : ምስለ : ምውታን : ወኃወጸሙ : ለሕያዋን : ወወረድ : ሲኦል : ከመ : ይርአዮሙ : ለምውታን : በዛቲ : ዕለት : እግዚአ : ለአዳም : ወረድ : ኃቤሁ : ወጽውዖ : ለአዳም : ወይቤሎ : አይቱ : ሃሎከ : አዳም : በከመ : ይቤሎ : ቅዲሙ : ጽውዖ : ሰምዖ : አዳም : ቃሉ : ለወልድ :

Expl., fol. 87ra: ስብሐት : ለኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : ምድኅነ : ዓለም : ዘበ : መስቀሉ : አድኃኪ : ወለአቡሁ : ወለመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ወይእዜኒ : ወዘልፍኒ : ወለዓለም : ዓለም : አሜን : ወአሜን : ወይብሉ : ኩሉ : ሕዝብ : አሜን : ወአሜን : ስረዩ : ዘገድፍኩ ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (60), fols 188vb–190rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (15), fols 54ra–56rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 103vb–107vb (= UM-050b, fols 59vb–63vb). In all these witnesses the text is attributed to Ephrem.

37. Fols 87ra–92rb (*olim* 91rb): Homily by the “Orthodox” for Easter Sunday (CAe 6589).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 87ra): በበዓል : ፋስካ :

Inc.: ድርሳን : በዓል : ፋስካ : ቅድስት : ዘደረሰ : ርቱዕ : ሃይማኖት : ለሕዝብ : ርቱዓን : ሃይማኖት : ለእለ : ተቀደሱ : በክርስቶስ : ኢየሱስ : ወተሰመዩ : ቅዱሳን : ወለኩሎሙ : እለ : ይጌውዑ : ስሙ : ለእግዚአ : ብሔር : ለእግዚእነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ : በኩሉ : በሐውርቲሆሙ : ወለነሂ : ምስሌሆሙ : ሰማም : ልክሙ : ወፍሥሐ : እምኀበ : እግዚአ : ብሔር : አቡነ : ወእግዚእነ : ኢየሱስ : ክርስቶስ :

Expl., fol. 92rb (*olim* 91rb): ወኢይትምልከ : ከመ : በግዕ : ወይስሐቅ : ኢይተምልከ : ከማሁ : ወእቱኒ : ኢይተምልኩ : ወናሁ : ትፍቅዱ : ወትድኃኑ : እምዕልውት : ወኢትፍቅዱ : ታምልኩ : ሰብእ : ብሩሃ : ጽሐፍኩ : ልክሙ : ከመ : ትለብው : ወኢትሐሥሁ : ካልአ : አምላክ : እምአብ : ወወልድ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ ።

The sequence of the leaves is perturbed and some leaves have double foliation: following the reordering of the leaves, a new numbering was added and the previous numbering was crossed out. The sequence is the following: 89r (*olim* 90r), 89v (*olim* 90v), 90r (*olim* 89r), 90v (*olim* 89v), 91r (*olim* 92r), 91v (*olim* 92v), 92r (*olim* 91r), 92v (*olim* 91v). Cf. EMMML 1763 (61), fols 190rb–195va; London, BL Or. 8192 (16), fols 56va–63vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 107vb–118va (= UM-050b, fols 63vb–74va).

38. Fols 92rb (*olim* 91rb)–96ra: Continuation of the preceding homily, for Easter Monday.

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 92rb, *olim* 91rb): # በሰንታ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡

Inc.: ወዘከመሰ ፡ ሐመ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በእንቲአን ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ሥጋሁ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይፈዲ ፡ ልነ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ዕዳነ ፡ እንተ ፡ ስሕተቱ ፡ ለአዳም ፡ እንዘ ፡ ኪያሁ ፡ ይወቅስ ፡ ልነ ፡ ሰይጣን ፡ ኩሎ ፡ ጊዜ ፡ ቅድመ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ እንተ ፡ እመ ፡ ያስሕቶሙ ፡ ለአዳም ፡ ወለሔዋን ፡

Expl., fol. 96ra: ወእምህር ፡ ለዘብእ ፡ ኩሎ ፡ መግባራተ ፡ ሠናይ ፡ ከመ ፡ ያክህለኒ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ እግባር ፡ ወአዕቀብ ፡ በሃይማኖት ፡ ርትዕት ፡ እንዘ ፡ ንበርህ ፡ ኩልነ ፡ ናዐርግ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (62), fols 195va–199rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (17), fols 63vb–69rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-050, fols 118vb–122va, UM-030, fol. 41ra–vb, UM-037, fols 91ra–94va (= UM-050b, fols 74va–82va).

39. Fols 96ra–98va: Homily by Theophilus/Tewofəlos on the Apostles and on the Thief on the right hand (CAe 6524).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin, partially illeggible (fol. 96ra): [...] ፋሰካ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁዕ ፡ አባ ፡ ቴፍሎስ ፡ ዘበእንተ ፡ ሐዋሪያት ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ፈያታዊይ ፡ ዝእምየማን ፡ በጽሐ ፡ ዘመን ፡ ወ(fol. 96rb)ጊዜ ፡ ወመፍተው ፡ ንበል ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኢሲያስ ፡ ነቢይ ፡ ትትፌሣሐ ፡ ሰማይ ፡ ወትትሐሰይ ፡ ምድር ፡ ወያንጥበጥብ ፡ አድባር ፡ ተፍሥሕተ ፡ ወአውግርኒ ፡ ርቱዐ ፡ እስመ ፡ ተሳህሎሙ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ለሕዝቡ ፡

Expl., fol. 98va: ወንቅናእ ፡ በሃይማኖት ፡ ወንስሓሁ ፡ ለዝኩ ፡ ፍያታዊይ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይክፈለኒ ፡ ምስሌሁ ፡ በዳግም ፡ መጽአቱ ፡ በጸጋሁ ፡ ለዘ ፡ ሞተ ፡ ወተንሥእ ፡ መድኃኒነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (63), fols 199rb–201vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (18), fols 69rb–72va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-037, fols 94va–97vb (= UM-050b, fols 82va–85vb, beginning).

42. Fols 106va–110rb: Homily by Epiphanius bishop of Cyprus on the True Faith (CAe 6594).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 106va): # በዓርብ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘእጲ ፍኔስ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ ዘሃገር ፡ ቄጳሮስ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘንጽሖት ፡ ርግብ ፡ ወቅድስት ፡ ድንግል ፡ ዘይእቲ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ትአምን ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አብ ፡ ፍጹም ፡ ወልድ ፡ ፍጹም ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ፍጹም ፡ ኅቡር ፡ ህላዌ ፡ ሰላሴ ፡ ወልድ ፡ ዘበአማን ፡ አምአብ ፡ ዘተወልድ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ እዘከር ፡ እምአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ትሂሉ ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ ወአልቦ ፡ ዘይተዌሰከ ፡ እላ ፡ በአሐቲ ፡ ኅብረት ፡

Expl., fol. 110rb: ወትአመነ ፡ በአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አልቦ ፡ ኅውስ ፡ ወሱተ ፡ መለኮት ፡ እላ ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ በአማን ፡ ፍጹምት ፡ ፍጹም ፡ አብ ፡ ፍጹም ፡ ወልድ ፡ ፍጹም ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ መለኮት ፡ አሐዱ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወአኅዜ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (66), fols 209rb–212vb. The text is also transmitted in the *Qerallōs*, ed. in Weischer, 1979b, pp. 26–47; it corresponds to chs 14–18 of the *Expositio fidei* in the *Panarion* by Epiphanius (CPG 3765, PG 42, cols 877–85), cf. Zarzeczny, 2020, p. 438, with bibliography on the other Oriental versions.

43. Fols 110rb–113va: Homily by Tewofəlos, bishop of Aksum, on Easter (CAe 6519).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 110rb): # በ፯ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ቲዮፍሎስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ በእንተ ፡ ብዓለ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡ በጽሕት ፡ ዓባይ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ወቅድስት ፡ ተንሣኤሁ ፡ ለክርስቶስ ፡ እንተ ፡ ተዓቢ ፡ ወትንግሥ ፡ ለኩሉ ፡ መዋዕል ፡ እንተ ፡ ባቲ ፡ አርአየ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ምሕረቶ ፡ በላዕሌነ ፡ ወፍቅሮ ፡ ፈድፋድ ፡ እንተ ፡ ባቲ ፡ ተሥዓረ ፡ ሰይ (fol. 110va) ማን ፡ ወሰብእ ፡ ተጸውዐ ፡ እንተ ፡ ባቲ ፡ ሞት ፡

Expl., fol. 113va: ንርኩብ ፡ ገጸ ፡ እመ ፡ ንትራኩብ ፡ ለዘ ፡ ተንሥአ ፡ እምውታን ፡ ወይመጽእ ፡ ይኳንን ፡ ሕያዋን ፡ ወመውታን ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ መስለ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወእስለ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (67), fols 212vb–215vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (22), fols 85va–89vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045, fols 112va–118vb (= UM-050b, fols 103va–109vb).

44. Fols 113va–115vb: Homily by Tewofəlos, bishop of Aksum, for the end of the Easter Week (CAe 6520).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 113va): # በጥልቀት ፡ በዓለ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፁዕ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ቴፍሎስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ ዘሰሙን ፡ ፋሰካ ፡ በቀዳሜ ፡ አዘዙሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ለድቂቅ ፡ እስራኤል ፡ ይግበሩ ፡ ብዓለ ፡ ፍሰካ ፡ ወኢኮነ ፡ ለተድላ ፡ መባልዕት ፡ ወኢኮነ ፡ በሰካር ፡ ዘይትገብአ ፡ እለ ፡ በሰ

ብሓት ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይገብሩ ፡ ብዓለ ፡ ወይዜክሩ ፡ ምንክሮ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ዘትካ
ት ፡ በብሔር ፡ ግብጽ ፡ ዘአዘዙሙ ፡ ይግብሩ ፡ ፋሰካ ፡ ወይቤሎሙ ፡ ትኩንክሙ ፡ ዛ
ቲ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ለተዝካር ፡

Expl., fol. 115vb: ዕቀ፳፻፳፻ ፡ ሃይማኖትክሙ ፡ ዘከመ ፡ ተጥመቁሙ ፡ በስመ ፡ አ
ብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ይደሉ ፡ አኩቴት ፡ ወዕቢይ ፡ ወክብር ፡ ለ
አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወይብል ፡
ኩሉ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (68), fols 216ra–218ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (23), fols 89vb–92vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045, fols 118vb–122vb (beginning), 33ra–rb (end) (= UM-050b, fols 109vb–114rb).

45. Fols 115vb–118vb: Homily by Tewofəlos, [bishop of Aksum], for the midpoint of the Easter season (CAe 6741).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 115vb): ። በረክብ ፡ መንባብ ።

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ትፍሎስ ፡
ዘመንፈቀ ፡ ኅምሳ ፡ ዓቢይ ፡ ግብር ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ፍቁራንዩ ፡ ትሕትና ፡ ወፍድፋድሰ ፡ ት
ብቀሳዕ ፡ ለዘ ፡ አጥሪያ ፡ ወተልዕለው ፡ ለሰብእ ፡ እምድር ፡ ውስተ ፡ ሰማይ ፡ ወትረ(fol.
116ra)[ሰዩ] ለሰብእ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይት[መሰ]ሎ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ወእ[ትሐ]ተ ፡ ርእሱ ፡ ከመ ፡
አር[አያ] ፡ ገብረ ፡ ወዘንተ ፡ አርአ[...] ሐዋሪያ ፡ ከመ ፡ ንሐሊ ፡

Expl., fol. 118vb: ንሰማዕ ፡ ኪያሁ ፡ ቃል ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ዘይቤ ፡ ንዑ ፡ ቡሩካኑ ፡ በአ
ብውይ ፡ ትረሱ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ ዘድልው ፡ ለክሙ ፡ እምቅድመ ፡ ይትፈጥር ፡ ዓለም ፡
ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወውልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወእስከ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡
አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (71), fols 227ra–230ra; EMLL 9185, fols 146ra–148rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (24), fols 92vb–96vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045, fols 33rb–vb (beginning), 123ra–128rb (end) (= UM-050b, fols 114rb–120rb).

46. Fols 118vb–124ra: Homily by the “Orthodox” for the feast of the Ascension (CAe 6590).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 118vb): በብዓል ፡ አርብዓ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳነ ፡ በብዓል ፡ አርብዓ ፡ እንተ ፡ ይእቲ ፡ ዕርገቱ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡
ክርስቶስ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ሰማይ ፡ (fol. 119ra) [ወንብረ]ቱ ፡ በዩማን ፡ አብ ፡ ም[ልዕል]ት ፡
ኩሉ ፡ ስም ፡ ዘይ[ሰመ]ይ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ስምዑ ፡ ዝንተ ፡ [ኩ]ልክ
ሙ ፡ አሕዛብ ፡ ወ[አጽ]ምኡ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ እ[ለ] ታ]ፈቅርዎ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ [ብሔ]ር ፡
ወእለ ፡ ትፈቅዱ ፡ [ታእ]ምሩ ፡ ምንክሩ ፡ ወት[ጽሀ]ቁ ፡ ዘለለ ፡ መዋዕሌ[ሁ] ፡ ግብር ፡ ዘ
ገብረ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ውስተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ትለብው ፡

Expl., fol. 124ra: ለኢየሱስ ፡ ይሰግድ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ብ፳፻፳፻ ፡ በሰማይ ፡ ወበምድር ፡
ወበ ፡ ቅላያት ፡ ወኩሉ ፡ ልሳን ፡ ይትአምን ፡ ከመ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ እግዚእ ። ዘ
ሎቱ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ወአኩቴት ፡ ወክብር ፡ ምስለ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡
ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (74), fols 240vb–245vb.

47. Fols 124ra–126ra: Homily by Tewofəlos, bishop of Aksum, for the Sunday after the Ascension (CAe 6521).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 124ra): **፡ በሰንበት ፡ ደኅረ ፡ በዓለ ፡ አርብዓ ፡**

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ቴዮፍሎስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ለበዓለ ፡ አርብዓ ፡ ይቤ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ በወንጌል ፡ ማኑ ፡ እምኔክሙ ፡ ብእሲ ፡ ዘቦቱ ፡ ምእት ፡ አባግዐ ፡ ዘተሐጉሎ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ በዲቤሆሙ ፡ አኮኑ ፡ ይኅድግ ፡ ፺ወ፱ ፡ በግዳም ፡ ወሐር ፡ ይሕሥሥ ፡ ዘተሐጉሎ ፡ እስከ ፡ ይረከብ ፡ ወረኪቦ ፡ ይጽውሮ ፡ ውስተ ፡ መታክፊሁ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይትፌሣሐ ፡ ወመጺኦ ፡ ቤቶ ፡ ይጼውዕ ፡ አዕርክቲሁ ፡

Expl., fol. 126ra: መጽእቶ ፡ እ፡፡፡፡ ፡ ኢይመጽእ ፡ በዩሀት ፡ ፡፡፡ትሕትና ፡ እላ ፡ ከመ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይትቁ፡፡፡፡፡፡ ፡ ከሎ ፡ ዘአተወ ፡ ወይር፡፡፡፡፡ክ ፡ በእንተ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ክሡተ ፡ ይነግር ፡ ወአልቦ ፡ ዘይከልኦ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡፡

Cf. EMMML 1763 (75), fols 245vb–247rb.

48. Fols 126ra–138vb: Homily by the “Orthodox” on the Pentecost (CAe 6585).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 126ra): **[ቡብ]ዓለ ፡ ኃምሳ ፡ መንባብ ፡**

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በብዓለ ፡ ኃምሳ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ለርቱዓን ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ እስመ ፡ ፍሥሐ ፡ ሊተ ፡ ተናግሮ ፡ ቃላቲሁ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወንግር ፡ ምግባራቲሁ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወበዕለ ፡ ጽጋሁ ፡ ለመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወእዜኑክሙ ፡ ኅይሉ ፡

Expl., fol. 138vb: ወአእኩቶ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በእንተ ፡ ከሎ ፡ ምንከራቲሁ ፡ ወቀዱሳኒሁ ፡ ወኔሩቱ ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያኑ ፡ እፌኑ ፡ ሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወአዕርግ ፡ አኩቱት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡፡

One leaf is presumably missing between fols 135v and 136r (Sergew Hable-Selassie, 1987, p. 10). The homily consists of two sections, separated in the manuscript by the words **በዝየኪ ፡ ቁም ፡** accompanied by a small decorative element (fol. 133rb). The two sections are transmitted separately in other homiliaries: the first part (fols 126ra–133rb) corresponds to EMMML 1763 (76), fols 247rb–253vb; London, BL Or. 8192 (26), fols 99ra–107vb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045, fols 131vb–132vb, 134ra–135vb, 34ra–vb, 136ra–137vb, 40ra–vb, 35va–rb (reversed order), 36ra–37vb, 41ra–vb, 38ra–39vb, 42ra (= UM-050b, fols 123vb–137ra); the second part of the text (fols 133rb–138vb) corresponds to EMMML 1763 (77), fols 253vb–258rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (28), fols 113ra–119va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-045 fols 31va–b, 45ra–vb, 149ra–vb, 32ra–vb, 47ra–48vb, 133ra–vb, UM-046, fol. 217rb (= UM-050b, fols 144va–151ra).

49. Fols 138vb–139vb: Homily by Lāliyanos, bishop of Aksum, on *Abba Gärima* (CAe 1286).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 138vb): በአባ ፡ ገሪማ ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘአባ ፡ ገሪማ ፡ ዘብፁዕ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ለሊያኖስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ ዘበእንተ ፡ አብው ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ በፍሥሓ ፡ ንርኢ ፡ ዮም ፡ ስና ፡ ለቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ወርኤነ ፡ ተዝካሮ ፡ ለብፁዕ ፡ አቡነ ፡ ወኩልነ ፡ አስተገብአነ ፡ ለስብሐት ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በኩሉ ፡ ይሴበሐ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡

Expl., fol. 139vb: ውስተ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ ሰማያት ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ጸሊ ፡ አኃዊየ [ጥዑያ]ን ፡ ተሃልው ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ በእኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (78), fols 258rb–259rb (here the author is said Luləyanos); London, BL Or. 8192 (29), fols 119vb–120vb (here the author is indicated as Elyas); Ethio-SPaRe UM-046, fols 217rb–218vb (here Liliyanos) (= UM-050b, fols 151rb–152vb). Ed., tr. in Getatchew Haile, 1985.

50. Fols 139vb–146ra: Homily by Menas, bishop of Aksum, on the Apostles (CAe 6515).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 139vb): ። በሐዋርያት ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ ኤጳስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ሚናስ ፡ ዘአክሱም ፡ ዘበእንተ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ ወውዳሴ ፡ ትምክሖት ፡ ልነ ፡ ለሐዋርያት ፡ ይዜኑ ፡ ክብሮሙ ፡ ዮም ፡ ዘወንጌላዊያን ፡ ምንባቤ ፡ እስመ ፡ ይቤ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ እለነቱ ፡ ዓሥርቱ ፡ ወክልአቱ ፡ ፈነዎሙ ፡

Expl., fol. 146ra: ወይከፍለነ ፡ ለኩልነ ፡ መንግሥተ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ በሞገሥ ፡ ወበአፍቂርተ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ለእግዚአነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ምስለ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ወአኅዜ ፡ ወምስለ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ። ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፈኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMLL 1763 (79), fols 259rb–264rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (30), fols 120vb–128va; Ethio-SPaRe UM-046, fols 218vb–225vb, 228ra–232ra (= UM-050b, fols 152vb–164ra).

51. Fols 146ra–151ra: Homily by the “Orthodox” on the Disciples of the Lord (CAe 6586).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 146ra): ዘማኅበር ።

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዘድርሰ ፡ በእንተ ፡ አርአድአት ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ለቅዱሳን ፡ ወሰማዕት ፡ ዘእምቅዱሳት ፡ መጻሐፍት ፡ በእንተ ፡ ዕባዮሙ ፡ ወሥነ ፡ ገድሎሙ ፡ ለሰማዕት ፡ እቅድመ ፡ አእኩቴቶ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ በእንተ ፡ እግዚአነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ እስመ ፡ ተሰምዕ ፡ ሃይማኖቶሙ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዓለም ፡

Expl., fol. 150vb: ሕዳጥ ፡ ቃላት ፡ እለ ፡ ጽሐፍኩ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ብዙኅ ፡ ዘእ(fol. 151ra)መ ፡ ተጽሐፍ ፡ እንዘ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ይርድእ ፡ ወቃሉ ፡ ያጽንዕ ፡ በተእምርተ ፡ ዘይ

ትሉ፡ ዘሎቱ፡ ስብሐት፡ ወጽንዕ፡ ለአብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወይእዜኒ፡ ወዝልፍኒ፡ ለዓለም፡ ወለዓለም፡ አሜን።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (80), fols 264va–268rb; London, BL Or. 8192 (31), fols 128vb–134rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-046, fols 232ra–233vb, 226ra–227vb, 234ra–238rb (= UM-050b, fols 164ra–172rb).

52. Fols 151ra–152vb: Homily by Severus [of Antioch], the Orthodox, on the Virgin Mary (CAe 1665).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 151ra): **፡ በማሪያም፡ ዘክረምት፡**

Inc.: በስመ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ድርሳን፡ ዘቅድስት፡ ማሪያም፡ ወላዲት፡ አምላክ፡ በእንቲአሃ፡ ዘደረሰ፡ ሳውሮስ፡ ርቱዕ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ አኃዊን፡ ንሐሊ፡ በልሳን፡ በእንተ፡ ማሪያም፡ ቅድስት፡ ድንግል፡ ወላዲት፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ወንርአይ፡ ባቲ፡ መሥጥር፡ ዘምንክር፡ ዘተፈጽም፡ በላዕሊሃ፡ ወምስለ፡ ፍርሃት፡ ወበንጽሐና፡ ናክብር፡ ብዓላ፡ በመንፍስ፡ ወበስብሐት፡ ወበማኅሌት፡ ዘመንፍስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወመግባር፡ ንጹሕ፡

Expl., fol. 152va: ወህዩንታ፡ ኩሉ፡ ማኅበረ፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ትስእል፡ ወታስተቤቀኦ፡ ምሕረተ፡ ወማህል፡ ወስረዮት፡ ኃጢአት፡ ወይእዜኒ፡ አኃዊየ፡ ፍቁራንየ፡ ንግብር፡ ብዓላ፡ ወናክብር፡ ብዓላ፡ በስብሐት፡ ወበማኅሌት፡ ዘመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወይእዜ(fol. 152vb)ኒ፡ ወዝልፍኒ፡ ወለዓለም፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን።

Cf. EMMML 1763 (82), fols 270vb–272ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (32), fols 134rb–136rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-046, fols 238va–241rb (= UM-050b, fols 172va–175rb); YC-001, fols 83rb–84rb. It is the Ethiopic version of the *Homilia Cathedralis* XIV by Severos of Antioch, presumably translated directly from Greek (Proverbio, 2001, p. 518). According to Witakowski, it may correspond to the Syriac Homily 67, cf. “Severos of Antioch”, in *E Ae*, vol. IV (2010), p. 639a (by W. Witakowski).

53. Fols 152vb–153vb: Anonymous homily on Abraham and Isaac, being a narrative on the Aqedah or ‘Binding of Isaac’ (CAe 6599).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 152vb): **ዘአብርሃም፡**

Inc.: ድርሳን፡ ዘቅዱስ፡ ወብፁዕ፡ አቡነ፡ አብርሃም፡ ወዝንጹሕ፡ ወቅዱስ፡ ይስሐቅ፡ ወልዱ። ይቤ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ለሰራዊቲሁ፡ ብየ፡ ዓርክ፡ በምድር፡ ወይቤልዎ፡ ማኑሃ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወይቤሎሙ፡ አብርሃሜሃ፡ ወተንሥእ፡ ሰይጣን፡ ወነበቦ፡ ቅድመ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ወይቤ፡ ምንተ፡ ውእቱ፡ ሰብእ፡ ከመ፡ ተዘክሮ፡ ወእጌለ፡ እምሕያውኒ፡

Expl. ex abrupto, fol. 153vb: ወይቤሎ፡ አብርሃም፡ አምሐልኩክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ በስብሐትክ፡ ከመ፡ እትዋቀስ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ እምስ፡ ትትዋቅስ፡ ምስሌየ፡ አግብአ፡ ሊተ፡ መዕቀብናክ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ አብርሃመ፡ መንተ፡ ውእቱ፡ መዕቅብናየ፡ እ[...]

The text concludes abruptly due to loss of leaves after fol. 153v, as already noted by Serge Hable-Selassie, 1987, p. 10, in correspondence of §16 in Erho’s edition (cf. *infra*). Cf. EMMML 1763 (83), fols 272rb–273ra; London, BL Or. 8192 (35), fols 141vb–143rb; Ethio-SPaRe UM-046, fols 249va–b, 251ra–252vb (= UM-050b, fols 183va–185vb); YC-001, fols 86ra–vb. Ed., tr. in Erho, 2025b.

54. Fols 154ra–155ra: Acts of Azqir, or *Gädlä Azqir* (CAe 1425).

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ወብፁዕ ፡ አቡነ ፡ አብርሃም ፡ ወዘንጹሕ ፡ ወቅዱስ ፡ ይስ ሐቅ ፡ ወልዱ ፡ ይቤ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ለሰፊዊቲሁ ፡ ብዩ ፡ ዓርከ ፡ በምድር ፡ ወይቤ ልዎ ፡ ማኑሃ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ወይቤሎሙ ፡ አብርሃሜሃ ፡ ወተንሥአ ፡ ሰይጣን ፡ ወንብቦ ፡ ቅድመ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወይቤ ፡ ምንተ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ሰንእ ፡ ከመ ፡ ተዘክሮ ፡ ወእጌለ ፡ እምሕያውኒ ፡

Expl., fol. 155ra: ወኮነ ፡ ጥልቆሙ ፡ ሥልሳ ፡ ወሰማንቱ ፡ ወኮነ ፡ ተዝካሮሙ ፡ እመ ፡ ጅወ፬ ፡ ለወርጎ ፡ ሐዳር ፡ በጽርእ ፡ ወይብጽሐነ ፡ ጸሎቶሙ ፡ ወይክፍልነ ፡ መክፍልቶሙ ፡ ለኩሎሙ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ ወሰማዕት ፡ በቅድም ፡ እግዚአን ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Subscr., fol. 155ra: ሰረዩ ፡ ወአስተሰርዩ ፡ በእንቲአነ ፡ ወተዘከሩ ፡ በጸሎተክሙ ፡ ወጸልዩ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይክፍለነ ፡ መክፍልቶሙ ፡ ለቅዱሳን ፡ ሰማዕት ፡ ዘገድፍኩ ፡ ወዘወሰኩ ፡ ሰረዩ ፡ ሊተ ፡ ወተዘክሩኒ ፡ በጽሎተክሙ ፡ ወባርኩኒ ፡ ወበርከተክሙ ፡ ይብጽሐኒ ፡ ሰረዩ ፡ ሊተ ። አነ ፡ ገብርኮሙ ፡ ሕኢዝየብሱስ ።

The text is acephalous due to material loss. The text, the only hagiographic piece transmitted in the manuscript, has been recently identified by A. Bausi (Bausi, 2022, p. 136 n. 53). Ed., tr. in Bausi, 2017, with a list of all textual witnesses to the work. The *subscriptio* is also edited and translated in Bausi, *ibid.*, where the name of the scribe, enigmatically written Ḥ፩፶፯፻፱፳፱, is reconstructed as Ḥ፩፶፯፻፱፳፱ Iyäsus, a perfectly understandable and attested name.

55. Fols 155rb–162ra: Homily by Yoḥannæs, bishop of Ethiopia, on the Virgin Mary (CAe 6493).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 155rb): ። በማሪያም ፡

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘቅድሰት ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ እሙ ፡ ለእግዚአን ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ አብ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ ዘኢቲዮጵያ ፡ በሰላም ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ አሜን ። ብዙጎ ፡ ይትፈሣሐ ፡ ዘዘርአ ፡ ዘርኡ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ግራሃቱ ፡ ወርአዩ ፡ ወበቀል ፡ ከመ ፡ በቀል ፡ ቅዱው ፡ ወይርኢ ፡ ወፍሬሁ ፡ ከመ ፡ ሠናይ ፡ ኮነ ፡ ወይዓጽድ ፡ በትፍሥሕት ፡ ወይጉንኩ ፡ በኃብ ፡ ዓውድ ፡ ወያክይዱ ፡ ወያኣትው ፡ ወይወድዩ ፡ ውስተ ፡ መዛግብቲሆሙ ፡

Expl., fol. 161vb: ወንግበር ፡ ፍቃዱ ፡ ከመ ፡ ንርክብ ፡ ሞገሥ ፡ በቅድመ ፡ ምንባረ ፡ ስብሐቲሁ ፡ በጸሎተ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ ወጸሎተ ፡ ማሪቆስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ ወጸሎተ ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ በጽጋሁ ፡ ወመሕረቱ ፡ ለአምላክነ ፡ ወመድኃኒነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ።

Subscr., fol. 161vb: ወተፈጽመ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ ዘብፅዕት ፡ ማሪያም ፡ ቅድስት ፡ ድንግል ፡ እሙ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ አባ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ ዘአዲቶ (fol. 162ra) ጲያ ፡ ዘእንበበ ፡ ዘሰምዕ ፡ ብሉ ፡ ይምሕሮሙ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ወደስርይ ፡ ሎሙ ፡ ኃጢአቶሙ ፡ አሜን ።

Cf. EMMML 543 (67), fols 145vc–149ra; EMMML 1763 (73), fols 233va–240vb; EMMML 2461 (1.32), fols 104rb–109rb (for 7 *Nahāsē*); EMMML 2461 (1.65), fols 234ra–238vb (for 21 *Terr*); EMMML 3873 (5), fols 35rb–40rc; EMMML 8897, fols 160vb–165va (16); London, BL Or. 692 (3), fols 20rb–28ra (cf. now Zarzeczny, 2016, p. 129); Paris, BnF Abb. 158 (= Conti Rossini 56) (3), fols 39ra–45ra; Vatican City, BAV Aeth. 268 (3), fols 28va–35vb (Van Lantschoot, 1962, p. 470); Ṭānāsee 45 (I.3), fols 20va–25vb; Däbrä Tabor Betä Ləhem, *Dersanä Maryam* (16), (Bombeck, 2005a, pp. 426–47); Gundä Gunde 29, fols 10va–23vb, 38ra–39vb, 83r; Lucchesi 1 (34), fols 62rc–65rc (Zarzeczny, 2020, p. 280); YC-001, fols 122vb–128ra. Ed. in Bombeck, 2005a, pp. 426–47; tr. in Bombeck, 2005b, pp. 206–16; a fragmentary edition based on the mentioned MS Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 158, fols 42r, l. 3–44r, l. 12, is published in Arras, 1974a, pp. 56–61, with Latin tr. in Arras, 1974b, pp. 43–46; a synopsis of this edition is found in Erbetta, 1981, p. 619.

56. Fols 162ra–164ra: Homily attributed to Astona, bishop of Rome, on the observance of Sunday; see Fig. 6.

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 162ra): በሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡

Inc.: በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ድርሳን ፡ በሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ዘይትንብብ ፡ ድንገረ ፡ ወንጌል ። እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ የሃሉ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩልክሙ ፡ ወምስለ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ። አነ ፡ አስቶና ፡ ሊቅ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ዝሮሜ ፡ ሀገር ፡ እንዘ ፡ ሃሎኩ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ጳድቃን ፡ ወቤተ ፡ ስምዖን ፡ ወኬፋ ፡ ሐዋርያት ፡ በሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ቅድስት ፡ ፈነዋ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ተአምራው ፡ ወመንክረ ፡ አዕፁባት ፡ በሮሜ ፡ ሀገር ፡ በሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ቅድስት ።

Expl., fol. 164ra: ዘኢየሱስ ፡ ወዘኢጌስ ። ቅዱም ፡ ወርጉም ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ወቦቱ ፡ እዝን ፡ ሰሚዕ ፡ ዘቦቱ ፡ ይሰማዕ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ስብሓት ፡ ወአኩቲት ፡ ወክብር ፡ ለእግዚእ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ለአብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ወለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ።

This text is actually a shorter recension of the widely known “Letter fallen from Heaven” (*Mäṣḥafä tomar*), an apocryphal narrative concerning the Sunday observance, cf. CANT 311, BHG 812. The Ethiopic version stems from an Arabic model and often accompanies the patristic collection said *Haymanotä Abäw* (“Fides Patrum”); see “Ṭomar: Mäṣḥafä tomar”, in *EAE*, vol. IV (2010), pp. 970a–71a (by W. Witakowski); Zarzeczny, 2020, pp. 417–18). The shorter recension, presumably translated from a Greek model, is also attested in EMMML 378 (2), fols 23v–28v; Vatican City, BAV Comb. G.1 (= Raineri 167) (2), pp. 27v–38v (19th cent., Raineri, 2000, pp. 164–65); Comb. G.2 (= Raineri 168) (2), pp. 48v–68v (20th cent., here attributed to Jacob of Serug, Raineri, 2000, pp. 165–71); ed., Ital-

ian tr. in Raineri, 2000, pp. 166–70. The name of Astona is given as Æston in MS BAV, Comb. G.1 and as Æsfænton in MS BAV, Comb. G.2.

57. Fols 164ra–171va: Homily by the “Orthodox” on the Sabbaths (CAe 1269).

Liturgical reading on the upper margin (fol. 164ra): ሜ በሰንበት ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡

Inc.: ድርሳን ፡ በእንተ ፡ ሰንበታት ፡ ዘደረሰ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ለማእምናን ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ ሰምዑኒ ፡ ጥቢባን ፡ ወእጽምኡኒ ፡ ሥናየ ፡ ማእምራን ፡ እስመ ፡ ልክሙ ፡ ፪፻፲፡ ተሰምዕዎ ፡ ለዝንቱ ፡ ንገር ፡ በከመ ፡ ይብል ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ጥብብ ፡ ንንግሮሙ ፡ ለጥቢባን ፡ ወእኮ ፡ ጥበባዝ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ዘንግሮሙ ፡ ጥበባ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ንግሮሙ ፡ ይብል ፡ ነቢይ ፡ እመ ፡ ነገርኩክሙ ፡ እንተ ፡ ጽብሐት ፡ ዘይከውን ፡ አዘክር ፡ ዘእምዓለም ፡ ጉልልቄ ፡ ኪያሁ ፡ እንከ ፡ ግብራቲሁ ፡ ለእግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡

Expl., fol. 171va: ወበፍቃደ ፡ አሥምሮቱ ፡ ለክርስቶስ ፡ ናክብር ፡ ሰንበቱ ፡ ከመ ፡ ንባእ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ዕርፍቱ ፡ ወመንግሥቱ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወልድ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ዘሎቱ ፡ ሰብሐት ፡ ወእኒዝ ፡ ምስለ ፡ አቡሁ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወይእዜኒ ፡ ወዘልፍኒ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ዓለም ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ፡ ወይበል ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ሕዝብ ፡ አሜን ፡ ወአሜን ፡ ፡ ፡

Cf. EMMML 1763 (11), fols 37va–48va; Vatican City, BAV Borg. Aeth. 2 (25), fols 177r–185v (Grébaut and Tisserant, 1935, pp. 775–76); Berlin, Staatsbibl. 41, fols 71rb–88vb; YC-001, fols 38ra–45va. Ed., tr. in Lusini, 1988b, with analytical commentary in Lusini, 1989; new edition, with a historical study of doctrinal context and composition of this homily, in Lusini, 1993, pp. 15–33, 129–75.

58. Fols 171vb–172rb: excerpt from Lk 1:1–26.

Inc.: ወንጌል ፡ ሉቃስ ፡ ዝእስመ ፡ ብዙኃን ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ይንግሩ ፡ ወይመህሩ ፡ በእንተ ፡ [ግ]ብር ፡ ዘአመኑ ፡ በላዕሌኒ ፡ እለ ፡ ቀደሙኑ ፡ ርእየቶ ፡ ወተበእከዎ ፡ በቃሉ ፡ ርትዓኒ ፡ ፍተኒ ፡ አትለዎ ፡ እመጥን ፡ ጥየቀ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ በበ ፡ መትለው ፡ አጽሕፍ ፡ ለከ ፡ ዓገዘ ፡ ተኖፊል ፡ ፡

Expl. ex abrupto, fol. 172rb: ወእምዝ ፡ ፈጺ ፡ መዋዕለ ፡ አብሬቱ ፡ አተወ ፡ ቤቶ ፡ ወእመድኅረ ፡ ክልኤ ፡ መዋዕል ፡ ፀነሰተ ፡ ኤልሰበጥ ፡ ብእሲቱ ፡ ወከብትት ፡ ርእሳ ፡ ኃመስተ ፡ ወርኅ ፡ እንዘ ፡ [ተብ]ል ፡ ከመዝኑ ፡ ረሰየኒ ፡ [እግዚ]አ ፡ [ብሔር ፡ እመ ፡ ኅ]ወፀኒ ፡ [ያ]ትት ፡ [እ]ምሰብአ ፡ ወበ[ሰ]ዱሰ ፡ [ወርኅ] ፡ ተፈነወ ፡ መልአከ ፡ ገብኤል ፡ እምኃበ ፡ እግዚአ ፡ ብሔር ፡ ህገረ ፡ ገሊላ ፡ እንተ ፡ ሰማ ፡ ናዝሬት ፡

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Fig.1: View of the Ҙana Qirqos church. Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny, 17 September 2016.



Fig. 2: View of the Ҙana Qirqos church entrance.
Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny, 17 September 2016.



Fig. 3: view of the sacristy building where manuscripts and other ecclesiastical items are kept. Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny, 17 September 2016.



Fig. 4: Interior of the sacristy; manuscripts are stored in a wooden cupboard. Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny, 17 September 2016.



Fig. 5: Incipit page of the Homily by St Ephrem for Maundy Thursday (fol. 82v). Photo taken at the National Library & Archives Agency of Ethiopia (NALE), Addis Ababa. Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny.



Fig. 6: Incipit page of the Homily attributed to Astona on the observance of Sunday (fol. 162r). Photo taken at the National Library & Archives Agency of Ethiopia (NALE), Addis Ababa. Photo by Rafał Zarzeczny.

ANAÏS WION

***The Anointing of the Kings and the Liturgy of Hosanna
in Aksum: Two Mirroring Rites, Witnesses of Medieval Times***

Memory flowed, above all, through two channels: ritual and recital
Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi¹

1. – *Introduction*

The rite of the anointment of the king was already perceived as old and archaic in Ethiopia at the beginning of the Gondarine period, as evidenced by the reservations expressed by the sovereign Susānyos in 1607 about the solemnity of certain aspects of the rite, which he nevertheless performed in Aksum, in search of legitimacy.² This rite, distinct from and supplementary to the enthronement rite, has been performed infrequently but consistently from the thirteenth century to at least the early eighteenth century. The protocol remained largely unchanged, with the most suitable location for the rite being the ancient city of Aksum. What factors contributed to the long-term preservation of this rite?

A significant number of contributions made during this conference on the pre-medieval Ethiopian period have emphasised the legitimacy that the Zagwe kings, who reigned between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, found in Aksumite antique ‘culture’, understood in its broadest sense. In light of the aforementioned contributions, my research question can be formulated as follows: how did the memory and history of an Aksumite era survive the centuries in such a way that it could still be activated and recognised as ‘authentic’ and empowering during the Medieval, the Pre-Modern and even the Contem-

¹ Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, 1982, p. 11.

² Based on comments by Pedro Páez (Páez 2011, I, pp. 156–60).

porary periods in Ethiopia? In order to provide some insight into this question, two rites that are unique to the city of Aksum will be presented: the rite of the anointing of the kings and the rite of Palm Sunday, also known as Hosanna. The first rite is particularly uncommon, as the anointment is not a coronation but an optional additional ceremony. It has been performed on just eleven occasions between the thirteenth and the end of the nineteenth century, with only five ceremonies taking place in Aksum.³ In contrast, the second rite, that of Palm Sunday, is performed every year one week prior to Easter, forming part of the liturgical calendar. Nevertheless, this universal Christian celebration exhibits a distinctive character in Aksum.

Exceeding what they were initially thought for, i.e., respectively anointing a King and celebrating the Coming into Jerusalem of Christ before the Passion week, both rites have strong memorial and social features. Furthermore, both rites are interlinked and reflect one another. By analysing these two rites in their historical and social contexts, it will be demonstrated how rites can act as conveyors of a long-term memory due to their archaic features and conservative nature, as well as their role in structuring the urban society of Aksum. Thus far, rites have not been employed as sources for the writing of Ethiopian history. However, the analysis of written sources in conjunction with fieldwork in Aksum, where oral traditions were collected and the city's topography observed, has yielded new insights into the mechanisms of authority transmission and the evolution of social structures over centuries.

This paper forms part of a wider examination of the role played by Aksum in the long-term history of Ethiopia.⁴ One of the objectives is to historicise the grand continuist narrative of the Ethiopian Christian state. Indeed, as I was researching the medieval and pre-modern history of Aksum, it became evident that this city is paradoxically both a shadow area of the meta-narrative and an over-exposed point. From a central position, the capital city of the Aksumite Kingdom from the first to the seventh century gradually became a peripheral location within the geopolitical structure of the Christian Kingdom,

³ The anointment is attested for the following kings: Lalibäla (ca. 1185–ca. 1225); Zärʿa Yäʿqob (1434–1468) in Aksum; Bäʿädä Maryam (1468–1478); ʿEskändər (1478–1494); Šäršä Dəngəl (1563–1597) in Aksum; Susənyos (1607–1632) in Aksum; Iyasu I (1682–1706) in Aksum; Bäkaffa (1721–1730); Iyoʿas (1755–1770); Yohännəs IV (1871–1889) in Aksum and Ḥaylä Səllase (1930–1974).

⁴ This is the topic of the book submitted for a Habilitation defense in September 2023, under the title: « Le sacré et l'archive. Institutions aksumites et administration du royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie au Moyen-Âge et à la période moderne ». It will be published as soon as possible, at CNRS éditions, collection Zena.

with its centre shifting southward during the Zag^we period. Subsequently, following the ascension of the Amhara kings to the throne and from the thirteenth century onwards, the northern region of Təgray was progressively marginalised, while the centre of the kingdom was relocated to the Amhara and Šāwa regions. Nevertheless, Aksum asserts that it possesses the Ark of the Covenant, with its principal church dedicated to Şəyon—that is, the Ark itself—and to Maryam (the Virgin Mary). It also holds the highly esteemed status of *gäbäz*. Additionally, it is regarded as the oldest Ethiopian church and the first episcopal see.⁵ More concretely, the antique and monumental ruins of the Aksumite period serve as a tangible reminder that Aksum, in its distant past, was a place of considerable power and affluence. To rephrase the research question in terms of social history, the objective is to understand how those who lived in Aksum and were responsible for perpetuating its greatness coped with the geographical marginalisation of their city. This study aims to elucidate the impact of Aksum's pre-eminent symbolic role on the Christian kingdom and the communities residing in Aksum and its surrounding areas. At the scale of regional and local history, further questions emerge, such as how did the society and people of Aksum transmit their own history? What was such a history like, if there was any? This paper will observe how Aksum was used as a symbol of power during the early thirteenth century and how this moment of glory has been preserved throughout centuries until contemporary times, albeit in fossilised forms. As many essays in this volume are dealing with the use of Aksumite symbols during the Zag^we dynasty, this premise will not be repeated here.⁶

Aksum is an exceptionally ancient settlement, celebrated for its extensive archaeological heritage, encompassing stelae, churches, palaces, and monumental graves. These ancient ruins and monuments, dating from the Aksumite Kingdom period, have been subject to numerous modifications, reuse, and displacement, ultimately contributing to the transformation of the city and its principal church, Maryam Şəyon, into a prominent setting for religious and political ceremonies.⁷ Despite (or because of?) the rarity of the royal anointment ceremony, some monuments serve as evidence of its importance, giving

⁵ See Wion, 2024 for the analysis of the *gäbäz* status and the history of the Episcopal See in Aksum.

⁶ See in particular Derat's contributions, in this book and since many years (particularly Derat, 2009; Derat, 2018; Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.* 2020), that have grounded the history of the Zag^we period.

⁷ Hiluf Berhe, 2015.

it a central position in the town's geography. Indeed, within the Maryam Şəyon church compound are twelve impressive stone thrones. These thrones are referred today to as the Judges' thrones, while two additional stone structures are identified as the royal throne and the bishop's throne. All inhabitants of Aksum are familiar with these monuments and are aware that they served a crucial role during the anointing of Kings. They are massive tangible manifestations of the town's prestigious privilege and bind with royal power (see Fig. 1). Monuments are not alone to act as conveyors of memory. They are but the most stable and visible layer of an ancient past that, for a long period of time, had a role in the present and could be reactivated. But to reactivate the past, a society needs rites to be performed, written or oral texts to document the protocol of the rites, and people in charge of accomplishing those rites. The intellectuals of Aksum, belonging to the clergy and to the social elites, were and still are memorialists in charge of what became known in the literature as the *Book of Aksum*, a very formalized and structured compilation of texts of various natures which bears the history of the city and of its most important church, *gəbāz* Maryam Şəyon.⁸ The *Book of Aksum* is copied after, in most known manuscripts, the *Kəbrä nägəšt* or "Glory of the Kings".⁹ In Aksum, the *Book of Aksum* is designated under the name *Kəbrä nägəšt*, as it is thought as a continuation of the latter. To make a long history short, the *Kəbrä nägəšt* narrates how ʿĪbn ʿĪlhakim, son of Biblical King Salomon and the Ethiopian Queen of Saba, became king, first of Israel and then of Ethiopia. Because of this double enthronement, ʿĪbn ʿĪlhakim received twice the anointment, in Jerusalem and then in Ethiopia and this rite is what interest our analysis here. He is the one who carried with him the Ark of the Covenant, since then said to be kept in Ethiopia. This text, brought in Ethiopia at the time of King Lalibāla, grounds the Ethiopian Christian throne in a Davidian genealogy.¹⁰

The first part of the *Book of Aksum* compilation, which contains three well defined parts plus a fourth one, very distinct from one manuscript to the

⁸ See Wion, 2009; Wion, 2017. The sequential order of the texts in this compilation is important, as I have demonstrated in these two articles.

⁹ The complete manuscript copies known so far are (with the abbreviations I have been using in my various analysis): EMMML 50 (E50); Oxford, Bodl. 93 (B93); Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 225 (A225); Paris, BnF Éth. Abb. 97 (A97); a manuscript photographed by the Deutsche Aksum Expedition in Aksum in 1906, photos today preserved at the Messbilarchiv in Berlin (DAE); a manuscript photographed before 2005 by Prof. Helmut Ziegler, most probably in Aksum (Z).

¹⁰ See amongst other the very long and detailed introduction to the French translation of the *Kəbrä nägəšt* that gives the literary context of this composite text, in Beylot, 2008.

other, is quite stable: first the documents follow a formalised order from one copy to another, and second the textual variances are minor.¹¹ The prescriptive text describing the anointment ceremony is preserved only in the *Book of Aksum* in which it comes always in second position. The first text is a material and quantitative description of the church of Maryam Şəyon—before its destruction during the sixteenth century—, a description that opens the sequence of the *Book of Aksum* and allows us to visualise the church and its ancillary buildings.¹² Following this zoom in on the Maryam Şəyon church building, the text describing the anointing rite describes the surroundings of the church where a scene of the utmost symbolic importance is played out: the royal consecration. This is the protocol of the royal anointment.

2. – *The royal anointment: an ancient rite of Ethiopian Christian power (sixth and eleventh–twelfth centuries)*

In the Old Testament, and specifically in the *Books of Kings*, the anointment of David is a sign of the divine election of the kingship of Israel, thus distinguishing it from other forms of political power.¹³ The anointing elevates the royal investiture by consecrating its direct link with God. Many Christian kingdoms adopted this biblical model. In recent decades, studies of the role of anointing in the Capetian monarchy and the Byzantine Empire have laid the

¹¹ This first part of the *Book of Aksum* contains: two diagrams representing Aksum at the center of the northern regions; a description of the church of Maryam Şəyon before its destruction (CR I-2); the *Şər'atä q'wərḥat*, or protocol of the anointment of the king; a list of the kings of Aksum; a list of the Ethiopian kings from Bazen to Ya'qob (1603); a list of the kings of Israel in Ethiopia; the restauration of the rite of anointment by Zär'a Ya'qob then by Šärsä Dəngəl (CR III-1); a genealogy from Adam to Salomon, then from Əbn Əlhakim to Šärsä Dəngəl. I am referring to the edition and translation of the *Book of Aksum* by Conti Rossini, 1909–1910, quoting first the section in which the document is published, using Roman numerals, and then the document number itself, using Arabic numerals. Therefore, CR I-2 refers to the second document in the first section.

¹² Document I-2 in Conti Rossini, 1909–1910.

¹³ It was in fact Saul who was anointed first by the prophet Samuel, in a first attempt to establish a king for Israel (1Sam 10:1). But when Saul disobeyed Yahweh's orders, particularly as regards the ritual prescriptions, Samuel was asked to find and anoint another king. This was David, who was anointed three times, first by Samuel while Saul was still reigning (1Sam 16), then as king in Hebron after Saul's death (2Sam 2:4), and finally before all the elders of Israel (2Sam 5:2–3). Only then did he take Jerusalem, settle there and bring in the Ark of the Covenant. His son Solomon was also anointed by the priest Zadok (1Kings 1:33). The theme of anointing is also extremely widespread in the various books of the Old Testament. Anointing is given to kings, but also and above all to priests and prophets

foundations for a historical anthropology that examines the history of monarchies through the prism of this rite in a variety of ways.¹⁴ In the Ethiopian context, one of the assets of the anointing rite is that Christians, Jews and Muslims accept it as the act that makes political power total, including its religious, spiritual, magical and possibly eschatological dimensions.¹⁵

We know that Ethiopian kingship is based on the Davidic model, but can we historicize this phenomenon and determine its stages? Does the rite of anointing have ancient roots in the ideology and practices of Ethiopian Christian rulers? An Aksumite ruler—most certainly Kaleb who reigned during the sixth century—explicitly presented himself as invested with the glory of David. The inscription RIÉ 195, found at Marib in Yemen, contains a string of biblical quotations recently deciphered by Pierluigi Piovaneli. He demonstrates convincingly that this sovereign is associated with a Davidic tradition. First of all, a quotation from Isaiah 22:22–23 attests that this Aksumite king reigned thanks to the “glory of David”. Then the inscription quotes Psalm 20, according to which the king upheld by Yahweh, i.e., the anointed king, is His Messiah. However, the epigraphic inscription does not refer to the stanza of Psalm 20 that explicitly mentions the anointed king, but to the following two stanzas.¹⁶ The hypothesis that the sovereign mentioned in the epigraphic inscription was an anointed king is therefore based on conjecture, which needs to be substantiated. Yet the Greek text of the *Martyrdom of Arethas*, which is almost contemporary with the reign of Kaleb, makes a curious slip of the tongue: it compares the Ethiopian king to David where a strict biblical analogy should have referred to Saul. According to the Greek text: “[Bishop Timothy] urges [Kaleb] (...) to lead an expedition as Samuel had urged David against Amalek”.¹⁷ According to the biblical text, it is Saul whom Samuel urges to fight against Amalek (1Kings 15, 17–18) but the authors of the text considered

¹⁴ As early as 1921, Marc Bloch made the rite of anointing and its relationship to the supernatural and the miraculous powers of French and British kings an object of history (Bloch, 1924). See also among the abundant literature on the subject: Kantorowicz, 1956; Lewis, 1986; Dagron, 1998; Valensise, 1986.

¹⁵ Dagron (or those he quotes) has shown the difference between the notions of *malik* and *khalifa* in the Koran, *malik* being the *de facto* king, exercising earthly power, whereas *khalifa* is the successor of the Prophet. King David is named *khalifa* of God by virtue of his anointing, which shows the importance of this sign of divine election in Islamic culture and its weight in the legitimacy of the exercise of power

¹⁶ Piovaneli 2013, pp. 21–23.

¹⁷ Detoraki 2007, p. 260 (transl.).

that the model for the Ethiopian king was manifestly David. The later Arabic and Gəʿəz versions of the *Martyrdom of Arethas* rectify this error and return to a stricter biblical analogy. Was Kaleb then already an anointed king in the Davidic tradition? It would seem so.

Jumping over the time gap between ancient and medieval sources, let's turn to the Zagwe kings. It is certain that they received the rite of anointment, but how? The first available source is the "testament" of Bishop Mika'el, preserved in the Gospel of the church of Amba Mika'el, which testifies that this metropolitan anointed seven kings during his episcopal office in Ethiopia in the first half of the thirteenth century.¹⁸ Royal anointing was probably practised systematically, since seven kings—some of whom must have reigned for very short periods—were anointed. It was then the bishop who performed the royal anointing. The verb used in this document is the verb to anoint (*qābʿa*), which tends to show that it is the action of anointing with oil itself that is considered to be at the heart of the rite. The Coptic bishops may have arrived from Egypt with consecrated oil, *meron*, intended for anointing consecrated objects and used in the ritual of baptism.¹⁹ Perhaps they were also able to bless oil in Ethiopia itself to obtain this holy oil.²⁰

We know for certain that King Lalibāla was an anointed king. A wooden altar dedicated by King Lalibāla and preserved in Däbrä Sina Golgota, one of the rock churches on the site of Lalibāla, reveals the importance that this sovereign gave to his status as an anointed king.²¹ Moreover, the hagiographic texts that have preserved the memory of King Lalibāla from at least the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries make his anointing a crucial moment in the recognition of his legitimacy to the throne. This episode is narrated at the end of the *Life of Lalibāla*, a text which is ancient and dates from before the reign

¹⁸ Derat 2018, p. 42; Derat, Fritsch, Bosc-Tiessé, *et al.* 2020.

¹⁹ Ongoing research by Martina Ambu (FNRS) and Perrine Pilette (CNRS) shows that holy oil may have been prepared at an early date, in Egypt, at Wadi Natrun, for Ethiopia and perhaps specifically for royal anointing. According to Perrine Pilette, the first recension of the *Life of Gabriel II Ibn Turayk* (1131–1145) in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* mentions a *balsam sulṭānī*, or "royal balsam", an expression that disappears from subsequent recensions because it was probably misunderstood. Personal communication on 29 May 2020 followed by a discussion with Martina Ambu and Perrine Pilette during a seminar on 2 June 2020.

²⁰ Cf. "Meron", in *EAE*, vol. V (2014), pp. 425b–27a (by Emmanuel Fritsch).

²¹ The text engraved in the wooden altar of Däbrä Sina Golgota reads: (...) ወዓዲ ፡ ከፍልከኒ ፡ መንግሥተ ፡ ዝዓለም ፡ ወቀባዕከኒ ፡ ቅበዓ ፡ መንግሥተ ፡ (...) "And you [Lord] have shared with me [Lalibāla] the kingship of this world and anointed me with the anointing of kingship", from Gigar Tesfaye, 1984, p. 117; Bosc-Tiessé, 2010, p. 76.

of Zār^ʿa Ya^ʿqob.²² He was in fact anointed a first time with the royal anointing (*qəb^ʿa māngəšt*) by God himself.²³ Then this anointing is confirmed in a ceremony performed by the then reigning king, Lalibāla’s brother and predecessor, so that he officially transmits the kingship to him (*həgg la-mār^ʿa māngəšt*).²⁴ On this occasion he receives his reigning name, Gäbrä Mäsqäl, or “Servant of the Cross”, which had been given to him earlier by Christ himself. The rite is described as being reduced to a simple tonsure, with the king shaving Lalibāla’s hair to signify that he is now king in his own right. They both enter thereafter the palace riding mules. One has to note the very clear separation made by the hagiographers of King Lalibāla between a divine royal anointing and an earthly tonsure rite. In the latter, no religious actor is involved, it is described as a purely lay ceremony, performed from king to would be king. The scene does not take place in an identified place.²⁵

However, there is a huge discrepancy between the rite as described, very briefly, in the hagiography of King Lalibāla, and the protocol describing the rite of the shaving and the anointment of the kings in Aksum, well known thanks to the *Šər^ʿatä q^wərḥat* and that was, most certainly, as I will demonstrate, already in use during the reign of Lalibāla or was, at least, revived and modified by him.

3. – *The Šər^ʿatä q^wərḥat or Regulation for the Shaving [of the Head]: a rite of transformation performed by the dignitaries of Aksum*

The Gəʿəz text of the *Šər^ʿatä q^wərḥat* was edited and translated by August Dillmann in 1884 from the manuscript in the Bodleian Library in Oxford which *Ras Mikaʿel* had copied and gave to James Bruce, MS Bruce 93.²⁶ Be-

²² I refer to the *Gädlä Lalibāla* in the plural on the basis of the analyses in Nafisa Valieva’s doctoral thesis, which identified “textual units” from different moments in the versions of this hagiography and also confirmed a dating that would not be later than the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. See Valieva, 2019, p. 23 for information on the dating and Valieva, 2019, pp. 19–21 for a summary of the passage on the anointment and tonsure. Her thesis, defended in 2021, is available online on the University of Hamburg website. <<https://ediss.sub.uni-hamburg.de/handle/ediss/8986>>

²³ Perruchon, 1892, pp. 22–23, 40–41 (text), 88–89, 107 (transl.).

²⁴ Perruchon, 1892, pp. 41–44 (text), 109–10 (transl.).

²⁵ Aksum is never mentioned in *Gädlä Lalibāla* except as an addition in one of the versions (MS EMMML 6931) in which the future queen, Mäsqäl Kəbra, is waiting in Aksum while her husband is in Jerusalem, see Valieva, 2021, p. 146.

²⁶ Dillmann, 1884, pp. 18–20, 74–76; about MS Oxford, Bodl. 93, see Wion, 2009.

ing already edited, Carlo Conti Rossini excluded this text from his edition of the *Book of Aksum* in 1909–1910. It then passed relatively unnoticed in Ethiopian studies, and until now only the unpublished academic study by Jean-François Sciarrino in 1994 has shed any light on this essential text.²⁷ French and French-speaking historians have since largely assimilated this pioneering work. In accordance with Ethiopian usage, this text is not given an internal title, as the copies have no paratext and the text does not designate itself. Nevertheless, royal sources contemporary with and slightly later than the last redaction of the text, during the fifteenth century, designate the anointing ceremony by two terms: *həggä q^wərhat* and *śər^catä q^wərhat*, “rite of tonsure” or “tonsure ceremony”, both of which can be used to name the text. According to internal evidence, this protocol was already operating during the reign of Lalibäla, as we will see in detail later.

The rite can be understood as a sequence of actions that change the status of the king. The steps are the following: reception of the “King of Şəyon” by the daughters of Şəyon; gold donation by the king to the twelve “men of the rite” (*säb^a həgg* who are the *betä agbaz*) and then, penetrating inside the largest enclosure of the Maryam Şəyon church compound;²⁸ gifts to the king from the elites of Aksum and the Təgray provinces; the king and the twelve *säb^a həgg* remain alone on the stone thrones, the twelve dignitaries are performing the rite: sprinkling with holy water, anointing, shaving of the head of the king; they penetrate in the inner enclosure of the church and burn the royal hair on a stela, then come back to inform the king that the rite has been performed; the king enters the sanctuary alone; the king returns to the thrones, then they all come back to the outside of the church enclosure; mutual blessing with dignitaries, bishops and military. This is clearly a “rite of passage”, according to the typology created by Van Gennep in a pre-structuralist way, and still very useful to understand the different phases of a ritual of transformation of a social status.²⁹

We will here focus firstly on who is performing this rite, as the aim of this demonstration is to understand how the memory of an ancient social structure has been preserved—and of course modified—through centuries, based on the

²⁷ Sciarrino, 1994.

²⁸ The number twelve is a strong symbolic number in the biblical texts: it firstly refers to the twelve sons of Jacob-Israel, founders of the twelve tribes, then paralleled in the New Testament by the twelve apostles.

²⁹ Van Gennep, 1909. I have used the theory of Van Gennep to analyse the rite of anointment in Ethiopia (Wion, 2023, pp. 72–81).

knowledge and the prestige of the rituals specifically held in Aksum. Twelve men are performing the rites on the person of the king: the *säb^ʿa ḥəgg*, a term that can be rendered as “people of the rite” or “people of the law”, *ḥəgg* being linked with religious law and rite and being a central concept for the duties of the social elite of Aksum, until now. They are also named *betä agbaz* or “house of the *gäbäz*”, and we will come back later on this term. The *säb^ʿa ḥəgg* are waiting for the king outside of the church and welcoming him. Then he is throwing gold at them, as a form of retribution for what is going to happen next. They accompany the king inside the compound, and they sit on the thrones. They accomplish the rite, called *mäsṯir* in the text which is a term coming from Greek and designating a sacrament, literally, a mystery, something that cannot be known and belongs to the sacred. The importance of these twelve dignitaries is particularly stressed and their ritual roles are explained in great details. To add more information about them, four partially overlapping lists of the twelve “men of the rite” encompass the *Šər^catä q^wərḥat*, enumerating the twelve dignitaries and precisising their names, their roles and titles, and sometimes their symbolic attributes. They are the twelve men—or their descendants—who came from Jerusalem with the first king of Ethiopia and they have guaranteed since then the ritual law (*ḥəgg*). A comparative analysis of these lists allows to better understand their structures, their respective roles, and to glimpse certain elements of construction of the texts. Four lists frame the text: two introduce it (SQ§1 and SQ§2) and two close it (L1 and L2, see table below). The mirror effect is reinforced, as we will see, by the internal symmetry of these lists. Such formalism has the effect of enhancing the regulatory character of the protocol text of the *Šər^catä q^wərḥat*. Listing the twelve dignitaries in these lists confers an official, administrative status to the entire text, through the ordering of reality that they propose and which acts with authority. The list plays a role as much by what it exposes as by how it does it.³⁰

³⁰ In bold, the titles known to have existed at the court of the Zag^we kings. Underlined are the products brought as presents to the King during the rite, testifying of the capacity to levy tribute by the Aksumite elite. There are almost no textual variances in between the six known copies of those lists.

SQ§1 [historical, narrative and Aksumite list]	SQ§2 [protocolar and Aksumite list]	List 1 [protocolar and royal list]	List 2 [historical and royal list]
the people of the law (<i>sābʿa ḥəgg</i>) who went with [ʿIbn ʿElhakim] to the country of Ethiopia. And these are their names:	And when the head-shaving (<i>qʷərḥat</i>) of the king takes place, they stand setting up their customary charges (<i>šərʿatatihomu</i>)	<i>Šərʿatā betā māngəšt</i>	These are the twelve houses that arrived in Ethiopia with ʿIbnā ʿElhakim the son of King Solomon.
the governor of the people (<i>mālʿākā ḥəzb</i>) who is ʿIllā Aqäyatat...	[ʿI]lä Aqäyatat: <u>wild animals, domestic animals and poultry which are eaten</u>		
... and <i>qälabas</i> who are counselors (<i>māmakərt</i>);	And the <i>qälabas</i> brings <u>flowers from the wilderness and fruits from among those that are eaten, and all sorts of grains except taff</u> (sic);		2 ³¹ . <i>qälabas</i>
and the bearer of the vessel <i>māʿasäre</i> (<i>šäware nārg māʿasäre</i>) who is the bearer of the ointment of the kingship ³²	bearer of the vessel (<i>šäware nārg</i>) with the perfume which is the ointment of the kingship	The bearer of the vessel (<i>šäware närke</i>) and the bearer of holy water (4) ³³	1. <i>šärag māʿasäre</i>

³¹ The numbering is present in the list. I have re-organised the sequence in order to fit with the comparative table.

³² There is no direct evidence that the anointment took place at the beginning of the Solomonic dynasty. Nevertheless, the few known wall paintings that can be dated to the reign of Yəkuno Amlak (1270–1285) bear witness to the presence in the ruler's very close entourage of a dignitary whose title is *šäware närke*, in which we can see a contraction of *šäware nārg māʿasäre*. This is a sign that the anointing rite had either an active value at the time—that is, it was still practiced and the bearer of the vessel for the ointment played a role in it—or that this title existed only as a remnant of an ancient rite of the royal administration. Claire Bosc-Tiessé pointed out to me the presence of this dignitary on the wall paintings of the church of Waša Mikaʿel. The patron of this church, Mähari Amlak, was a close associate of King

SQ§1 [historical, narrative and Aksumite list]	SQ§2 [protocolar and Aksumite list]	List 1 [protocolar and royal list]	List 2 [historical and royal list]
ø	the daughters of Şəyon are bringing <u>water, honey-wine (mes)</u> and <u>incense (səhnätä)</u>	the daughters of Şəyon bearing fans, threads and golden <i>mäzräga</i> (12)	
and the presbyter [in charge] of the <i>gäbäz (qäysä gäbüz)</i> (...) who took Şəyon out and carried it to the land of Ethiopia (...) Azaryas ³⁴	the <i>qäysä gäbüz</i> (...) stands carrying the Ark of the Law (<i>tabotä həgg</i>)	Le <i>qäysä gäbüz</i> (...) as priest of Şəyon (7)	
the archdeacon (<i>liqä dəyaqonat</i>) who took Şəyon out and carried it to the land of Ethiopia (...) Əlməyas	(...) the <i>liqä dəyaqonat</i> stands carrying the Ark of the Law (<i>tabotä həgg</i>)	(...) <i>liqä dəyaqonat</i> as priest of Şəyon (8)	7. <i>liqä dyaqonat</i>
Arnes who is <i>mä'asare</i> in charge of the whip made of silk (<i>härir tiṭe</i>)	the <i>mä'asare</i> with the whip of silk	<i>liqä məşani</i> with the golden whip (6)	8. <i>liqä məşani</i>

Yəkuno Amlak, as evidenced by his presence alongside him in the paintings of Gännätä Maryam. Cf. Mercier, 2002, pp. 143–48. See also on the continuity of the administration of Yəkuno Amlak's government with that of his Zag'e predecessors, Derat, 2009, p. 75.

³³ The numbering is mine and reflect the actual order of the list L1.

³⁴ Chapter 87 of the *Kəbrä nägästä* goes: “And this is the text we brought with us, the whole Law of the Kingdom (*həggä mängəstä*) and the commandment of God which Sadoq, the chief of the priests (*liqä kahənat*), when he anointed me [Əbn Əlhakim] with the royal anointing (*qəb'a mängəstä*) in the sanctuary of God [in Jerusalem], while he had in his hand the horn of the anointing oil (*qärnä qəb'a əfrät*) of the priests and royalty. They have done for us what is in his Law and we have been anointed, Azaryas for the priesthood and I for the kingship and Əlməyas, spokesman of God, guardian of the Law (*'aqqabe həgg*), that is, guardian of Şəyon and ear of the king in every way of justice. And they commanded me to do nothing without their advice (...)”. The mention of Azaryas and Əlməyas in list SQ§1 is a direct quotation of the narration of the *Kəbrä nägästä*.

SQ§1 [historical, narrative and Aksumite list]	SQ§2 [protocolar and Aksumite list]	List 1 [protocolar and royal list]	List 2 [historical and royal list]
Ames who is the bearer of the umbrella	And the <i>šawāre kəbr</i> “bearer of the glory” stands with his umbrella	<i>däqqä šārg^wa</i> the bearer of the umbrella, supplier of the lion, supplier of the food. (2)	6. <i>däqqä šārg^wa</i>
<i>Ḍewa Šārg^wäy</i> who is a friend	And <i>Šiwa Šārg^wäy</i> is bringing milk and wine;	<i>Šewa Šārg^wäy</i> the friend (1)	4. <i>šäʔät šārg^wäy</i>
Dälkämäy			10. <i>dälkəme</i>
<i>nəgušä həzbäy</i> [who is] administrator (<i>mägabe</i>) of the house of the king			9. <i>nəguš həzbäy</i> ³⁵
Räqmä Asra ³⁶ <i>awfari</i>	the <i>awfari</i> with the horse		3. <i>liqä saf</i> of the horses
Däqqä Saf <i>məsk^wäy</i>	the <i>liqä mäk^wasä</i> with the mule	Häsg^wa ³⁷ , bearer of the <i>qāra gämāro</i> and the golden bridle and the imported mules. (5)	11. <i>məsəg^we</i> 12. <i>həsəg^we</i>
		(...) ³⁸	

An internal comparison between these four documents shows similarities, first as to the genres they are belonging to: SQ§1 and L2 have both historical

³⁵ *Dälkämäy* / *dälkəme* and *nəguš[ä] həzbäy* are titles who are not known in any other sources. The mention of those rare titles in SQ§1 and L2 attest of the archaic features of these two lists.

³⁶ This is probably the origin of the widespread title of *raq məsäre*. It would come from a deformation of the proper name Rāqmä Asra of SQ§1 formed from the noun *mäʔasäre* used in several titulatures and whose meaning or etymology is obscure. In any case, this primitive form Rāqmä Asra is a further indication that the SQ§1 list bears witness to ancient customs and titles.

³⁷ This is an archaic title used under the Zag^we dynasty, cf. “Häsg^wa” in *E Ae*, vol. V (2014), p. 341a–b (by Alessandro Bausi).

³⁸ The list does not end here but the following elements cannot be compared with the four lists framing the *Šərʿatä q^wərhat*.

pretensions, while SQ§2 and L1 are more protocolar. But the comparison reveals also differences which make it possible to put forward hypotheses as to their roles and their origins, and possibly insert them into a timeline. It can be demonstrated that the two first lists (SQ§1 and SQ§2) voices the elite from Aksum and keep trace of a time when this elite was closely associated with the Zagwe power, while L1 and L2 are posterior rewriting of these two ancient lists associated with the rite of the unction of the Kings.

4. – *The ancient elite of Aksum mentioned in royal deeds by King Lalibäla*

Various hints tend to show that lists SQ§1 and SQ§2 testify of the structure of an ancient elite from Aksum. First, some of the titles, namely *liqä diyaqonat*, and *qäysä gäbäz*, occur also in two donations of land granted by Lalibäla to religious institutions in Eastern Təgray and kept in the Golden Gospel of the monastery of Abba Mätta^c or Däbrä Libanos of Ham, in the region of Šəmāzana.³⁹ Referring to those two documents is primordial as they are amongst the most ancient administrative documents preserved in Təgray. They have been edited first by Conti Rossini in 1901, I will therefore refer to them as CR6 and CR7, the numbers under which they appear in this *editio princeps*. First let us introduce the place where were kept, until now, those documents. The monastery of Abba Mätta^c was an important institution in the network of royal churches in the north, closely associated with the government of Lalibäla and the family of his wife Queen Mäsqäl Kəbra. This monastery played the role of archival center for Eastern Təgray for many centuries. The two land donations that interest us here both contain some lists of royal dignitaries that spell out the titles, functions and names of the great officials of the kingdom, according to the already classic pattern of a royal written deed. Listing prelates, court dignitaries and members of the aristocratic elite contributed to the solemnity of the act of royal donation, as much as it helped to date it and anchor it in the political reality in which the donation was made. These “grands” (literally *abäyt*) are enumerated following a hierarchical order. First come the Coptic metropolitan (*pāpas*) and his spokesman, followed by one or more bishops (*epīs qoṗosat*) probably Ethiopians.⁴⁰ Then come the Ethiopian

³⁹ These are documents no. 6 and 7 in the edition by Conti Rossini, 1901, pp. 177–219 (translation in Derat, 2018, pp. 49–58). The corpus has been taken up for a future re-edition and translation by Nafisa Valieva as part of the EthioChrisProcess project. Part of it is already online on the Beta Mašāhəft project website.

⁴⁰ Derat, 2018, p. 18; Ambu, 2021, pp. 182–83.

dignitaries, with in the first rank the *‘aqqabe sä’at* who was then the abbot of the monastery of Däbrä Libanos of Ham. Next comes an archdeacon (*liqä zäyaqonat* or *liqä diyaqonat*), an office of great symbolic importance in royal rites. Then comes a dignitary with the title *qäsä* (or *qäysä*) *gäbäz* Şəyon, which can be translated as priest of *gäbäz* Şəyon, which are respectively the status and the consecration of the church of Aksum.⁴¹ The churches of Abba Mätta/Däbrä Libanos of Ham and of *gäbäz* Şəyon are the only two religious institutions whose superiors appear in this list. The ensuing dignitaries are members of the court, with only one explicitly holding a religious office, the king’s priest. All the others were provincial governors, amongst which the *liqä Aqäytat*, which is also to be found, albeit under another form, in our lists.

4.a. The *qäysä gäbäz* and the *liqä diyaqonat*: priests of Şəyon and bearers of the Ark of the Covenant

The *qäysä gäbäz* Şəyon and the *liqä diyaqonat* are found very high up in the hierarchy of dignitaries presiding over these two royal donations. Both were then dignitaries of high rank. Both are also fundamental figures in the rite of anointment. If the *Şər’atä q’ərḥat* itself does not make any distinction between the twelve “men of the rite”, the lists display their names, titles and roles with great attention. In SQ§1 and SQ§2, the *liqä diyaqonat* and the *qäysä gäbäz* are in charge of carrying the Ark of the Covenant. SQ§1 recalls the narration written in the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, while SQ§2 actualises this ancient past and set both of them in action. In another words, they do carry the Ark of the Covenant during the ceremony, as their ancestors have done while coming from Israel to Ethiopia at the time of King Solomon. As they are said to be descended from the high priest and chief deacon who carried the Ark of the Law from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, by virtue of this ancestry, they are authorized to be in contact with it.⁴²

⁴¹ I choose to associate *gäbäz* with the term Şəyon and to read the genitive only where it is explicitly expressed, i.e., after the word *qäs* or *qäys* meaning priest. According to this interpretation, *gäbäz* Şəyon would be the designation of the religious institution to which the priest was assigned, a prestigious institution since it is the second to appear in this list of dignitaries.

⁴² It is nowadays difficult to imagine that *liqä diyaqonat* and *qäysä gäbäz* could have been unique titles with elitist functions. They have lost their importance as titles attached to Aksum and became disseminated in the ordinary ecclesiastical titulary. All Ethiopian Orthodox churches of some importance may today have a *qäysä gäbäz* in charge of its material affairs and a *liqä diyaqonat* who presides over the groups of deacons.

4.b. From *mäl'ākā ḥəzb* ʾĪllä Aqäyṭat to the modern *liqä Aqäyṭat*: a glimpse into the evolution of titles and roles

In the lists associated with the *Šər'atä q'ərḥat*, the first of the twelve dignitaries is the “governor of the people (*mäl'ākā ḥəzb*) who is ʾĪllä Aqäyṭat (...) adviser” according to SQ§1. Meanwhile, according to SQ§2, he is: “[ʾĪ]lla Aqäyṭat [who brings] wild and domestic animals, poultry, which are eaten” The title *mäl'ākā ḥəzb*, which seems to designate the function of ʾĪllä Aqäyṭat, is totally unusual in court titulature. It is only encountered in the text of the *Kəbrä nägäšt*. There are indeed few transfers between the SQ§1 list and the *Kəbrä nägäšt* (chapter 43, that institutes the new government of Ethiopia, composed of twenty-two men coming from Jerusalem). As we have seen above, amongst them are the two clerics in charge of transporting the Ark of the Covenant, the *liqä diyaqonat* and the *qäysä gäbäz*. Similar to our lists are also the *šawäre kəbr* (“bearer of the glory”) and the *däqqä šärg'a*, both being ancient titles or functions, which had become obsolete during the medieval times. The similarities between chapter 43 of the *Kəbrä nägäšt* and the lists in the *Šər'atä q'ərḥat* are therefore striking. It remains difficult to understand how these circulations took place. Did these lists draw on common sources, reflecting an ancient titles order in the north of the kingdom? Much remains to be understood about the uses of the texts in order to get a sense of their intertextuality.

The noun ʾĪllä Aqäyṭat disappears completely from the other lists, whether L1, L2 or others.⁴³ The first thing that strikes one is the formation of this name with the anteposed particle ʾĪllä, known in the ancient royal names of the Aksumite period. Why such an archaism? Is it a genuine relic of a very ancient royal name or, on the contrary, an attempt to increase the prestige of a name by

⁴³ Lists of twelve dignitaries coming from Israel are many in Ethiopian administrative literature and could be considered as a genre *per se*, even if, as I hope to demonstrate, they did initially have different functions. The one compiled in the *Šər'atä gəbr* seems a synthesis of the four lists of the *Šər'atä q'ərḥat* (see the edition in Kropp, 1988). The list contained in the *Šər'atä mängäšt* witnesses another tradition, see the (truncated) edition of the text by Dillmann, 1884, pp. 78–79 based on MS Oxford Bodl. 28 (Bruce 92), then by Varenberg, 1915, pp. 11–12 and the translation by Guidi, 1922, pp. 68–70. This is the document labelled SMI-1 in Kropp, 2011. The full text begins with the sentence “*ḥəgg* and *šər'at* of the kingdom who came from Jerusalem with ʾĪbnä Hakim son of Solomon who is Menelik and with him came out twelve *bä'alä ḥəgg* who are the *ḡan masäre*, judge (*bä-fəṭḥ*) who is *qañ wämbär* with the silk whip, the *əgr žaq'əne*, the *žan ḥädäna* with the Ten Commandments and holy water (...). Then those who were made judges in the time of ʿAmdä Šəyon (...).”

endowing it with antic royal attributes? The memory of royal Aksumite names in ʿĪllä, attested by epigraphy and numismatics, found its way into the medieval period and was preserved by Ethiopian intellectuals in the lists of kings, themselves copied in the *Book of Aksum* and that were therefore part of the history kept and transmitted by the memorialists of Aksum. I hypothesise that ʿĪllä Aqäytat is a modification of an earlier term because other sources mention a real title: the *liqä Aqäytat*, which reads “chief of the Aqäyt”. As seen above, the royal deeds CR6 and CR7 preserved in Däbrä Libanos of Ham and dated to King Lalibäla mention someone bearing the title *liqä Aqäytat* among the great men of the kingdom who attend and/or legitimate these donations. It thus seems that the *mälʾakä həzb ʿĪllä Aqäytat* of lists SQ§1 and SQ§2 could be a version, either older and fallen into disuse, or on the contrary a reinvention in prestigious and archaic form, of *liqä Aqäytat*. Either way, we could have a recognition of a very ancient power. The fact that it disappears from the other lists L1 and L2 shows the gradual disuse of this name or the restriction of its influence. It may be that his power had waned, as he was unable to withstand the local and national reorganisations that took place after the thirteenth century and the dynastic change at the head of the country. He was gradually no longer considered an important dignitary at a national level and also lost prestige at a local level, although perhaps in a different timeframe. Nonetheless, as we will see later on, another social stratification specific to Aksum recognize the preeminence of another chief named *mälʾakä*: the *mälake Aksum* is, since at least the fifteenth century up to the present time, the leader of the main traditional lineage having land rights as well as social and ritual functions in Aksum city. There is here an echo from ancient times, even if the steps of transformations of these distant voices are hard to understand.

The toponymy helps to anchor the ancient power of the *mälʾakä həzb ʿĪllä Aqäytat / liqä Aqäytat* in the vicinity of Aksum. ʿAddi Aqäyt is actually a territory located in the large fertile plain to the east of Aksum and belonging in *gʷəlt* status to the church of Maryam Şəyon, which concretely means that the church could levy taxes on this rich land.⁴⁴ We can therefore assume that ʿĪllä Aqäytat or the *liqä Aqäytat* was the main customary chief of the Aksum region, or at least he still was in the thirteenth century when he was among the “great men” of the kingdom. As Aqäytat could be a plural form of Aqäyt, *liqä Aqäytat* could be understood as “chief of the people of Aqäyt”.

The last element proving that some of the twelve dignitaries were local chiefs is the fact that they are collecting and bringing food and drinks, pre-

⁴⁴ ʿAd or ʿAddi is a very common term to designate a settlement in Tigrinya.

sumably for the banquet following the rite of unction. Lists SQ§2 and L1 are ceremonial texts that associate each of the dignitaries with a function in the royal ceremonial. SQ§2 no longer contains the proper names of the original dignitaries, as does SQ§1, since the aim is to update and anonymize the list so that it can be used at all time to perform the ritual. Four dignitaries do have to bring animals to be eaten, fruits and vegetables, cereals, water, beverages such as mead, wine and milk. This is the highly original aspect of this list, which is a sign of its specifically Aksumite nature, since it alone specifies the contributions in kind that certain dignitaries must make, most likely for consumption at the banquet that inevitably concludes the ceremonies, although this is not specified in the text of the *Šar'atä q'ərḥat*. SQ§2 is therefore a protocol for local taxation, enumerating the food and local products brought to the anointment. It shows the capacity of those dignitaries to levy taxes and reveals the regional power of this Aksumite elite.

4.c. The “bearer of the vessel for the ointment” or *šaware narg mä'asäre*

The links between the two thirteenth-century donations (CR6 and CR7 from Abba Mätṭa^c) and the SQ§1 list concern, to finish with, the title of *šaware narg mä'asäre* (“bearer of the vessel for the ointment”) which contracted in later medieval usage into *šārag mä'asäre*. This title remained organically linked to the anointment since he is the bearer of the oil with which the sovereign is anointed. The fact that the *šārag mä'asäre* is the only dignitary who, of all those mentioned in the rite, has survived the centuries and remained in a pre-eminent position at the court of Christian sovereigns until the contemporary era, shows the importance of the primitive stratum of the rite consisting of gestures borne on the sovereign himself.⁴⁵

These first two lists, SQ§1 and SQ§2, give voice to the elites of Aksum and the surrounding regions. SQ§1 transmits an earlier version, depicting a royal elite among whom the political and religious authorities of Aksum played a leading role. SQ§2 builds on this, demonstrating the local elite's ability to levy taxes, thereby enabling them to structure and control territories. Above all, it concerns the Aksumite administration and its management of the rite.

⁴⁵ The term *masäre* itself is used during the fifteenth century in other titles such as *raq masäre* or *yä-bästä əgre masäre*. These three titles shaped after *masäre* are found together in the deed of King Zar'ä Ya'qob in favour of feeding the court clergy (MS London, BL Or. 481, fol. 154, in Kropp, 2005).

By examining these lists and cross-checking them with documents produced in the Zag^we period, we can conclude that in the thirteenth century Aksum was a place of primordial power. Aksumite dignitaries were, in the thirteenth century, very much integrated into the close entourage of the ruler than they were in the fifteenth century. This finally provides a solid basis for showing that the gradual disinvestment of royal power in the north was at the expense of an ancient elite that did not survive in this ancient form and gradually disappeared from court practice, even though certain titles persisted until the sixteenth century.

5. – *From the Christ entering into Jerusalem to the king entering in Aksum Şəyon*

Now that its actors are better identified, we shall come back to the rite of anointment and examines it as a performance. Before the king enters the church in Aksum, he is stopped by a silk thread, a symbolic demarcation that requires him to stand still and state his identity. The daughters of Şəyon who call out to him are inspired by a biblical model in which we recognise the personification of the city of Jerusalem. “Whose king are you?”, the rhetorical question they ask the sovereign is intended to secure recognition of the king's legitimacy from the inhabitants of the town of Aksum, the city being elevated to the rank of Ethiopian Jerusalem. The setting is inspired by the Old Testament and takes its inspiration from Ps 24 (23):8–10, in which Israel acknowledges divine sovereignty: “O princes, open the gates! Rise up, eternal gates: let the King of glory enter! Who is this King of glory? It is the Lord, the strong, the valiant, the Lord, the valiant in battle. O princes, open the gates! Raise the eternal gates: let the King of glory enter! Who is this King of glory? He is the Lord, the God of the universe; he is the King of glory”.⁴⁶ This psalm is part of the Palm Sunday liturgy in Eastern liturgies (Coptic, Ethiopian, Melkite-Greek). It prefigures Christ's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem, an episode in which Christ, riding on a donkey, is welcomed as his sovereign by the people of Jerusalem, either as “King of Israel” (Jn 12:13) or as “Son of David” (Mt 21:09 and Mk 11:10), since Christ is descended from a Davidic lineage. The dialogue that allows the Messiah-King to enter Jerusalem in the Ethiopian Palm Sunday liturgy is even more theatrical than the text of Psalm 24.⁴⁷ There is a symbolic and operative parallel between the Palm Sunday liturgy celebrat-

⁴⁶ Daniel Assefa, 2012 for an analysis of this psalm in the Ethiopian context.

⁴⁷ Fritsch, 2001.

ing the entry into the city of Jerusalem of Christ, son of David, recognised as king by the city's inhabitants, and the rite of royal anointing which elevates a sovereign to a higher status, that of a king whose authority is granted by divine power and who is recognised as such by his people and his government. In both cases, the link between political power and divine power is made: Christ changes his status in the eyes of the people of Israel thanks to his messianic entry into the city of Jerusalem; the Ethiopian king changes his status in the eyes of his people when the city of Aksum, which is Şəyon, accepts him as "king of Şəyon".

The reference to Palm Sunday is explicit in the text of the *Şər'atä q'ərḥat*. More precisely, it says that King Gäbrä Mäsqäl renewed the anointing rite by introducing elements of the Palm Sunday liturgy:

And having observed all this, King Gäbrä Mäsqäl renewed and increased it when the priest Yared was with him. He began a second law (*ḥəgg*) and made it according to the rite (*ḥəgg*) of Hosanna and he prescribed that the people should carry branches of date palm (*a'ḏuqä bāqält*), palm and olive.

King Gäbrä Mäsqäl was assisted by the priest Yared, who is recognised as the Ethiopian priest credited with inventing the liturgical hymns.⁴⁸ While it is clearly stated that the rite was modified to bring it closer to a Christian festival, the historical context is not the easiest to place in time. Gäbrä Mäsqäl is a royal name that was borne by several sovereigns. A medieval ruler bearing this name was Lalibäla, and it is quite reasonable to think that he had an interest in renewing an enthronement rite that was both a royal and a Christian rite. His hagiography and the wooden altar of Däbrä Sina Golgota, in the churches complex of Lalibäla, bear witness to the fact that he was an anointed king and received the rite of tonsure. Moreover, his hagiography states that he and his brother and predecessor went to the palace to perform the rite of anointing, both mounted on mules. This prosaic detail actually echoes the biblical scene of Christ's entry into Jerusalem, mounted on a donkey to show the irenic nature of his kingship, a scene that is re-enacted during the Palm Sunday rite in Aksum. As I have demonstrated, certain elements of the *Şər'atä q'ərḥat* are

⁴⁸ Can the mention of the priest Yared help to shed light on the historical context of this liturgical addition to the rite of anointment? This is actually a rather perilous task, as the main dating element linked to Yared is the mention of King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. Yared is also strongly associated with the town of Aksum, as he is said to have been born there. The risk of circular reasoning is high. Too little is known today about this saint's life for it to be used as a historical element.

found in documents contemporary with the reign of Lalibäla,⁴⁹ in particular titulatures that subsequently fell into disuse such as *liqä Aqäyitat*, *liqä diyaqonat* and *qäsä gäbäz Şəyon*, who were very important in the anointment ceremonial and at the court of Lalibäla but who no longer had a pre-eminent role as royal officials in the post-Zagwe period. There is therefore a strong presumption that the sovereign Gäbrä Mäsqäl to whom the text credits a ceremonial renewal was indeed the famous Zagwe king of the thirteenth century. Not to add the fact that the *Kəbrä nägäšt*, that so much insists on the authority of the unction, was first translated under his reign as clearly attested by its colophon. What interest would this ruler have had in introducing a parallelism between Christ's messianic entry into Jerusalem and the royal anointment at Aksum? There are at least three reasons for such an innovation. Firstly, it superimposes a Christian narrative on the Old Testament narrative, which is always a major issue for Christian political philosophies. Secondly, it offers the figure of the king a model of particular value, the anointment no longer being merely Davidic but also Christ-like. Thirdly, and this is what particularly interests us here, the city where the anointment took place was compared to Jerusalem, and even became Jerusalem, at least for the duration of the rite. The introduction of the Palm Sunday liturgy into the anointment ceremony allows Aksum to be compared to the city of Şəyon in two ways, through the possession of the Ark (referring to the Old Testament) and through the city where the Jesus Christ was welcomed as a king (this time referring to the New Testament).

6. – Qeros, meros: *sung relic from a Coptic liturgy*

In Ethiopia, the Palm Sunday festival is called Hosanna or *bäqält*, literally “branches”. Archaic elements give to the rite of Hosanna as played out in Aksum a solemn aspect and contribute to the theatre of primacy. The children who open the Sunday procession carrying palms sing two words over and over again: “*Qeros, meros*”. The biblical analogy is clearly that of the children welcoming Christ in Jerusalem, but the terms *qeros* and *meros* have no explanation for the Aksumite clergy, who repeat them orally, generation after generation. This is actually an evolution of a fragment of Coptic liturgy. The Greek text *Evloghimenos o erchomenos en onomati Kiriou* (εὐλογημένος ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι Κυρίου)—“Blessed be he who comes in the name of the

⁴⁹ These are the two deeds of donation already mentioned above, dated to his reign and preserved in the Golden Gospel of Däbrä Libanos of Ham (documents no. 6 and 7 in Conti Rossini, 1901).

Lord”—is sung in the Coptic Church during the Feast of Palms at the beginning of the Saturday evening service.⁵⁰ The Coptic liturgical books specify that with this song, the bishop or patriarch was accompanied in a grand procession from his cell to the church. Today, the Coptic clergy simply sing this text in church. As this phrase is sung with many vocalisations and repetitions, it is possible that the Ethiopian tradition retained only the phonemes *qerosmeros*, from the single term *erchomenos* (ἐρχόμενος) which means “he who comes”.⁵¹ These two words indicate a fossilisation of the Coptic liturgy in the Aksumite Palm Sunday rite. Should this be seen as a trace of the Coptic bishop’s presence in Aksum during the anointment and/or the Palm Sunday rite? It is difficult to answer this question diachronically. There is nothing to prevent the Coptic bishop from having been present at Aksum for the Palm Sunday ceremony from time to time over the centuries. The real question is that of the time, necessarily ancient, when Aksum was the seat of the Ethiopian bishopric. I answered it as best I could in another publication and showed that during the first centuries of Ethiopian Christianity, Aksum was very probably the episcopal see.⁵² This was much taken up and even reconstructed by medieval Ethiopian historiography, and it is certain that Aksum was considered to be the seat of the primitive episcopate in the centuries that followed, all the more so as the centres of power, both ecclesiastical and religious, moved away from Aksum. Preserving traces, however small, however misunderstood, however distorted, of this glorified past was also favoured by the context: Aksum had to be able to continue to bear witness to its Christian antiquity. This may partly explain why the anointment rite, renewed by the Zagwe dynasty and particularly by King Lalibäla, includes extracts from the Palm Sunday rite into the anointment rite. If we assume that during the thirteenth century, the rite of Palm Sunday in Aksum had preserved traces of ancient practices, testifying to the strong presence of Coptic ecclesiastics in Ethiopia, including some passages in Greek, then the phrase “blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord” or *Evloghimenos o erchomenos en onomati Kiriou* is perfectly suited to

⁵⁰ I would like to warmly thank Father Wadid from the Egyptian monastery of Saint Macarius and Ugo Zanetti for finding out what the mysterious terms *qeros* and *meros* meant and for their subsequent clarifications. Personal communication in October 2021.

⁵¹ John 12:13 goes “the next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’, ‘Blessed is the king of Israel!’” (<https://biblehub.com/text/john/12-13.htm>).

⁵² Wion, 2024.

welcoming the sovereign to the holy city. This centuries-old practice of a Coptic hymn is thus a real marker of the ancient link between the Ethiopian church and the Coptic church, and for historians it testifies to the ancient importance of a Coptic clergy and therefore probably of the Egyptian bishop in Aksum. A simpler hypothesis would be to disconnect this rite from the town of Aksum and to perceive it as a trace of King Lalibäla's policy, exportable elsewhere in his day, but preserved only on the site of Aksum. In any case, the question is: why was this ancient rite preserved in Aksum, and how?

7. – *Hosanna in Aksum: an annual rite keeping alive the Law* (həgg)

According to the Gospel, Christ was welcomed as king and messiah by the people of Jerusalem, who spread palms and cloaks in his path and greeted him with cries of "Hosanna", which means "of grace" in Hebrew. During his royal entry into the city of Jerusalem, Christ rode on a donkey rather than a horse to show that he was arriving with no warlike intentions and that he was reigning over a kingdom of peace. In Aksum, the social and religious rite of Hosanna is characterised by several very specific elements.

During the thirteenth century, King Lalibäla introduced elements of the Palm Sunday liturgy into the rite of the royal anointment in Aksum (Psalm 23). At the other end of the chronological frieze, in the last years of the nineteenth century, the sovereign Menelik II commissioned court ecclesiastics to travel to Aksum to observe the Palm Sunday rite and replicate it in the liturgy of the church he had just founded in ሂንቲዕቲ in order to strengthen the authority of this new royal foundation.⁵³ There is therefore a long-standing symbolic link between the anointment of Ethiopian kings and the annual Palm Sunday rite as practised in Aksum. The analogies between Jerusalem and Aksum, both holy and royal cities, and between the Ethiopian sovereign and Christ the King, give these two rituals their shared symbolic power. My hypothesis is that the annual Palm Sunday ceremony regularly reactivates elements of the exceptional rite of royal anointment. This mirror effect reinforces the porosity between the rite of the royal anointment, which contains elements of the Palm Sunday rite, and the Palm Sunday rite in its particular form at Aksum.

It also reinforces the elite structure which is very specific to Aksum. Indeed, seven lineages descending from seven ancestors possess some land ten-

⁵³ Mers'ë Hazen Walde Qirqos, 2004, pp. 19–21.

ure in the city and its outskirt, known under the unique word of *q^wəlz*.⁵⁴ Their existence can be traced back to the fifteenth century, and has of course been submitted to changes and evolutions. They are known today under the name of *balabbat*. What is of interest for us here is the fact that, at least since the seventeenth century, they did have the responsibility for organizing the rite of Hosanna. The Palm Sunday rite therefore guarantees the possibility of quickly reactivating the elements of the royal anointment, should this be necessary. In this way, the memory of the ancient rituals and their guardians is preserved over the long term. The previous analysis of the lists framing the *Šār^catä q^wərḥat* has provided an insight into how an ancient Aksumite elite had maintained its pre-eminence among the kingdom's elite by retaining honorary functions during this ritual. The four lists of dignitaries attached to the *Šār^catä q^wərḥat* show that in the thirteenth century, Aksumite dignitaries were very much inserted into the royal court, and then gradually lost this immediate proximity to power while preserving a trace of this glorious past in the protocol of the anointment at Aksum. However, the anointment rite was rarely performed, less than ten times between the fifteenth and the end of the nineteenth century. The rite of Palm Sunday, this time an annual one, allows the various players to reactivate their privileges at a pace that is much more conducive to perpetuating a collective memory. The Christian ceremony of Palm Sunday or Hosanna allows the Aksumite elite, now called the *balabbat*, to reaffirm their rank and privileges.⁵⁵

7.a. The responsibility of the seven lineages in the rite of Palm Sunday in Aksum

The liturgy is spread over two days, with vespers on Saturday (*wazema*) followed by a service starting at 3am on Sunday and continuing into the morning, with the blessing of the palms, which the faithful then take home. A written document attests that descendants of seven lineages have long been in charge of the Palms ceremony in Aksum. It is copied in a single manuscript of the *Book of Aksum* (MS EMMML50) that entered the collection of the Gondarine church of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase during the reign of King Iyasu I (1682–1706).⁵⁶ It concerns the organisation of the Palm Sunday rite in Aksum. The text of the E50 (folio 158) reads as follows:

⁵⁴ The names of the seven ancestors and therefore of the lineages are the following: Mälake Aksum; Näfas; Akoro; Bäḡə^o; Yəfärəhba; K^wäd^wä; Maybḥi. See Wion, 2022.

⁵⁵ On the seven lineages of the elite families in Aksum, see Wion and Noûs, 2022.

⁵⁶ On MS EMMML 50 see Macomber, 1975, p. 54; Heldman, 2011; Wion, 2015.

እሌ ፡ እሙንቱ ፡ ጌቤተ ፡ አግባዝ ፡ እለ ፡ ይጸውሩ ፡ በቀልተ ፡ ሆሳዕና ፡ ጅግ
ብሮሙ ፡ ወዕሩያን ፡ ኩሎሙ ፡ መላኬ ፡ አክሱም ። ወልደ ፡ ነፋስ ፡ ወል
ደ ፡ ዓኩሮ ። ወልደ ፡ በግዖ ። ወልደ ፡ ይፈርሀባ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ኩድኩ ። ወል
ደ ፡ ማይብሒ ።

Each of the seven houses of the *gäbäz* (*betä agbaz*) must carry the branches of Hosana (*bäqältä hosa'na*). This is their duty and it is divided equally between them: Mälake Aksum; Wäldä Näfas; Wäldä Akoro; Wäldä Bägə'o; Wäldä Yəfärəhba; Wäldä K^wädäk^wä; Wäldä Maybhi.

Betä agbaz could be translated as “house of *gäbäz*”, if we accept that the unusual term *agbaz* is a plural of the noun *gäbäz*.⁵⁷ But its use in the plural form raises questions. The two terms, *betä agbaz*, are found also in the *Šər'atä q^wərḥat*, where it refers to the “men of the Law” or *säb'ä ḥəgg* who came with ʿEbn ʿElhakim from Israel and whose descendants in Ethiopia are the twelve dignitaries who perform the anointment ceremony. We have shown that they are assimilated to the dignitaries of Aksum. In the document in manuscript E50 dating from the end of the seventeenth century at the latest, there is a substantial change in the designation of the *betä agbaz* compared with the *Šər'atä q^wərḥat*: there are now seven of them, identified by the names of their ancestors, and they are in charge of carrying the branches during the Palm Sunday celebrations. The E50 document, for its part, probably stems from investigations carried out in Aksum by Gondarine royal officials during the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706) to document as accurately as possible the rites and traditions of the holy city and import them to Gondar, in order to make the royal foundation of Däbrä Bərhan Šöllase a new holy place and house the Ark there.

While there was indeed a semantic evolution, there is also a continuity claimed by the *balabbat* today.⁵⁸ Indeed, they do insist that they have an obligation to perform the Palm Sunday rite in order to preserve the ancient law of Aksum. They use the term *ḥəgg*, which refers to both law and rite, and is the central term of the *Šər'atä q^wərḥat*. This law links the history of Ethiopia with

⁵⁷ The document detailing the duties for the liturgical service of the monastic church of Pāntalewon, located just above the town of Aksum, lists contributors and among them the “priests of the *gäbäz*” or *qäsawəst agbaz*. This is another mention of this term for which I was unable to ask the clergy of Pāntalewon or Aksum for an explanation, having discovered this text after my return to Təgray was impossible due first to the Covid pandemic (2020) and then above all and unfortunately to the civil war (2021–2023).

⁵⁸ See the many oral interviews done in Aksum between 2009 and 2018 on this topic. They should be available online, with the soundrecords and the French translation, on the platform Cocoon (HumaNum).

that of Israel: Aksum became the heir and guardian of this law through the presence of the Ark of the Covenant. It is constitutive, and at the same time devoid of any constraint apart from the need to perpetuate its memory and ensure its preservation. This formal, almost abstract aspect is perhaps one of the most astonishing effects of this preservation of a memory of the times of ancient Judaism by a Christian society.

7.b. A liturgical rite involving a *məštir* (mystery) in private and lay places

The two-day ritual of Palm Sunday must be described step by step in order to understand the central importance of this liturgical moment in the reproduction of the social memory of Aksum.⁵⁹ It all begins on Saturday in the early afternoon when a procession leaves the church of Maryam Şəyon and heads towards the house of the *balabbat* who is in charge of the festival that year, as the seven lineages are in charge alternatively. The procession is composed as follows: children carry palm branches and, dressed in colourful livery, march at the head chanting the words *qeros, meros*. Behind them, a donkey and her foal walk, richly caparisoned in coloured and embroidered fabrics.⁶⁰ This first part of the procession partly mimics Christ's entry into Jerusalem. This is followed by dignitaries from Maryam Şəyon Church and appointed persons carrying liturgical and precious objects, such as processional crosses, the Golden Gospel (which theoretically contains the church archives), liturgical crowns made of precious metals, or more specific paraphernalia, such as the *tuṭula*, a metal horn of fairly ancient manufacture. This object, probably originally a musical instrument, is held by a man who has the privilege of carrying it because of his genealogical ancestry.⁶¹ This is a transposition of the

⁵⁹ I should point out that I was never able to attend this festival for various reasons, firstly because I had not understood the importance of this moment for my investigation, then for reasons of academic calendar, and finally in 2020 and 2021 because of the pandemic and then, alas, the civil war. My work is therefore based on interviews and photographs and videos available on the internet, which I had representatives of the *balabbat* in Aksum comment on. See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HECeP9CeJj8>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJeHDkfWWw4>; <https://www.flickr.com/photos/56587123@N07/5858497120/>; or the photo of the man in charge of the *tuṭulla* by genealogy: <https://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/details-photo/parade-of-palm-sunday-aksum-province-of-tigray-ethiopia/L22-292894>.

⁶⁰ In reality, it is more often a mule and a donkey, so that the large size of the mule allows it to be seen by the crowds that gather to watch the procession.

⁶¹ See oral interview no 12.14 with *Liqā labas* Kiros Abbay, head of the Ak^waro lineage, in October 2018, on Cocoon: <https://doi.org/10.60714/COCOON.326663DD-1BA0-4E10-A663-DD1BA06E10EA>.

role of the dignitaries who accompany the anointment rite with their ceremonial objects, a reminder that there was an ancient royal administration in Aksum, coming from Jerusalem, which introduced the first ritual laws of royal power in Ethiopia. The procession also includes players of musical instruments. Then come the clergy, with important dignitaries if they are there, for instance the bishop of Təgray, and people of importance. This procession “brings gold to the house of the *balabbat*”, as it is said, as it makes its way with all the precious objects from the church of Aksum Maryam Şəyon to the house of the *balabbat* in charge that year, where the important members of the procession will receive food.⁶² Meanwhile, inside the house takes place a symbolic and ritual act kept out of sight and the details of which must remain secret. This involves placing seven palms (*siye*), symbolically representing the body of Christ, in a cloth resembling a shroud, as a foreshadowing of his death and the events that will take place on the Friday of Holy Week. The *balabbat* participate in the mystery of the ceremony by symbolically placing Christ in his shroud, like officiants whose house serves as an enclosed place to perform a ritual gesture withdrawn from the gaze of the crowd. In this way, their home becomes a sanctuary where a symbolic transformation takes place. This practice is probably unique in Christian Palm Sunday rites, as is the involvement of the families of the *balabbat* in the organisation of the festival. With this gesture, the *balabbat* also become analogues of the biblical figures Joseph and Nicodemus who carried Christ's body to the tomb. Both were Jewish notables from Jerusalem belonging to the Sanhedrin, the legislative assembly of the Jewish community of Jerusalem. Should we see this possible analogy as a tool to reinforce the role of “guardian of the laws” that the *balabbat* ascribed to themselves? As this part of the ceremony was little discussed in my interviews, this remains a hypothesis. Palm Saturday is called “Nicodemus Saturday” in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, so the link with the shrouding (in the literal sense of “putting in a shroud”) of Christ is well established. However, its symbolic and social use would need to be further documented. The fact remains that the *balabbat* perform a highly singular sacred rite within their house by this symbolic shrouding of Christ's body. The shrouded palms then leave the house, carried on the shoulders of a group of men and covered with a heavy red velvet sheet, as if for the burial of an illustrious person. The procession then proceeds to the sycamore (*da'ro*), either in

⁶² See oral interview no 6.1 and 6.2 with Ato Walda Giyorgis, head of the K^wäd^wä lineage, in October 2014, on Cocoon: <https://doi.org/10.60714/COCOON.29FD9133-677F-45B4-BD91-33677F15B410>.

the old town, to the east of the church, or to the west of the church. There, religious songs and sermons are sung. The children and young people who precede the procession continue to chant *qeros*, *meros* and when they reach the sycamore tree, they sing as they run around the tree and the crowd massed under its foliage. Then the procession reaches the grounds of the church of Aksum Maryam Şəyon where a religious service is held at nightfall (a vigil or *wazema*). The religious service resumes before dawn, at three in the morning, for the Palm Sunday Mass proper.⁶³ During this service, the Gospel account of Christ's entry into Jerusalem is retold and psalms celebrating the entry of a king into the holy city are sung. At the end of the service on Sunday morning, the branches that have been brought to the church are blessed and distributed to the faithful. At the end of this religious ceremony, the members of the clergy return to the *balabbat*'s house for lunch.

8. – *Conclusion*

Bringing to light the interest that Lalibäla, the most famous Zag^we king, had had in reviving and reforming the rite of the anointment in Aksum has revealed the links between the city of Aksum and the political power during the thirteenth century. In renewing the rite of anointment, King Lalibäla reactivated an ancient rite to strengthen his own legitimacy and the legitimacy of the Aksumite elite who was at this time fully associated with the royal court. This elite hold the titles of *qäysä gäbäz*, *liqä diyaqonat*, *liqä Ayqäytat*, *şäware närg mä'asare*, and was symbolically considered as the heirs of the twelve sons of the dignitaries from the court of the Biblical King Solomon who accompanied the son of the Queen of Saba and Solomon from Israel to Ethiopia. During the thirteenth century and to the initiative of King Lalibäla, elements of the rite of Palm Sunday were incorporated in the royal anointment rite in order to strengthen the parallelism between the Christ entry into Jerusalem and the change of status of the Ethiopian King, who became King of Şəyon. Both rites remained important in Aksum, the annual liturgy of Hosanna contributing to the prestige of the local elite, issued from seven ancient lineages. Aksum society has been using these two rites as vectors to preserve traces of its past and ancient prestige, anchoring itself in the biblical narrative, both Solomonic and evangelical, and scrupulously ensuring that the law (*həgg*) is renewed, annually for the Palm Sunday rite and exceptionally for the anointment rite.

⁶³ Fritsch, 2001, pp. 212–27; Chaillot, 2002, pp. 118–19.

The preservation and mutation of this ancient elite can be considered one of the strengths of Aksumite society, which, despite the progressive marginalisation of the city with regard to the southern relocation of royal power, was able to maintain its unique social structure by connecting it to local privileges and the most sacred royal rite. Texts, monuments and rites all contributed to the perpetuation of this specific identity.

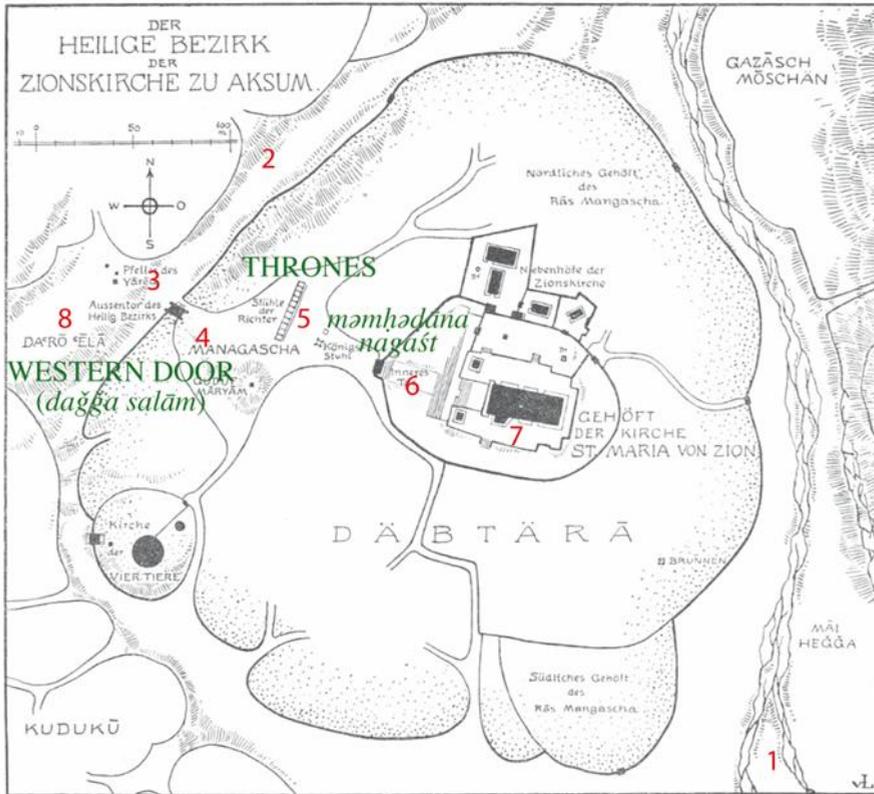
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| 1. <i>Mə'arāf</i> | 5. Shaving and anointment of the king |
| 2. The daughters of Şəyon are welcoming the king + the thread is cut | 6. Burning of the hair and benediction |
| 3. Gold given to the <i>beta agbāz</i> | 7. The king is alone in the sanctuary |
| 4. Gold given to the church | 8. Blessings |

Base map, Deutsche Aksum expedition, 1913 ; created by A. Wion

Fig. 1: Sequences of the rite of the anointment of the king in the church of Maryam Şəyon, Aksum.



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