

European Union Seventh Framework Programme

IDEAS

ERC Starting Grant



Ethio-SPaRe

**Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia:
Salvation, Preservation and Research**



Second Mission

November-December 2010

Report

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Hamburg University
2010

Ethio-Spare 2nd Field Research Trip (November – December 2010).
Public Report

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Editorial note

A consequent transcription commonly applied to Ethio-Semitic languages is used for Ethiopian terms and names in the text below. Since the report is meant for broader public, the *apparatus* is limited essential information. For the indigenous terms or persons left here without explanation, additional data and references can be easily found in the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* (s. the bibliography below).

During the period 16.11.-17.12.2010 the team of the Ethio-SPaRe project continued the field research work, focusing mostly on the *wärädas* of Gulä Mäkäda and Ganta ʾAfäšum (Eastern Təgray Zone); in addition a few sites in ʾƏndärtä and Kələttä ʾAwləʾalo were visited. The team included the members of the project from Hamburg University¹, representatives of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (TCTA)², officials from the Eastern Tigray Diocese and respective *wärädas* church administration offices³. Within the five weeks of intensive work, the team was able to visit 26 sites⁴, many of them completely unknown or difficult to access, benefitting from the excellent cooperation between the TCTA, the local church administration and communities. The team recorded a few hundreds of manuscripts, several dozens of objects, as well as a lot of historical information about the sites. Below follow some brief observations about the sites visited, accompanied by photos of some of the most remarkable manuscripts and objects. All dating and descriptions are preliminary. The full-scale evaluation of the results will require substantial time and is carried out at the Hiob Ludolf Center for Ethiopian Studies in Hamburg. The copies of the material will be soon available also in the TCTA (Mäḡälä) and the Eastern Tigray Diocese office (ʾAddigrat).

1. ʾAgamyo Qəddus Mikaʾel

The site of ʾAgamyo Mikaʾel can be reached via ʾAddigrat – Zäla ʾAmbäsa road, then through the road from Zäla ʾAmbäsa to Säbäya. The tradition links the foundation of the church to the reign of King "*ḥašäy Gäbrä Mäsqäl*"⁵, but recounts that it was founded by the local people only. The church (s. figs. 1, 2) has the status of *gätär*⁶. Despite the phonetic discrepancy, the name "ʾAgamyo" is locally explained as the old ("original") variant of the former province name ʾAgamä. The church was in the area of influence the Gundä Gunde monastery, which is proved by the representations of ʾabunä ʾƏstifanos and ʾabunä Mäzḡäbä Səllase⁷ in the church, and the

¹ Dr. Denis Noslitsin (the principal investigator and head of the project); Dr. Stéphane Ancel and Vitagrazia Pisani M.A. (research fellows).

² The field coordinator Mäsärät Haylä Səllase and the field assistant Məḥrätä ʾAb ʾAfäwärq; head of the Agency Käbbädä ʾAmarä Bälay acting as project coordinator.

³ Fəššum Gäbru, the representative of the Eastern Tigray Diocese; *liqä təguhan* Baḥta Täklä Haymanot, *mälakä ḥeywät* Bərhanä ʾArägawi from the church office of Gulo Mäkäda *wäräda*; *mälakä məḥrät* Täḡlay Gäbrä ʾAb from the church office of Ganta ʾAfäšum *wäräda*; for a few days only, the representatives of the church offices in Wəqro and Mäḡälä. The field work was opened and concluded by the coordinating meetings in the TCTA and the Eastern Tigray Diocese with His Grace ʾAbunä Maqaryos.

⁴ Below, a short description of the work at all sites is presented, with the exception of only four: Bet Marya ʾAddigrat (on the outskirts of ʾAddigrat), ʾAbunä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus *gädam*, Däbrä Şəge ʾIyäsus Gwaḡgot (Ganta ʾAfäšum *wäräda*); Mäʾag(g)o ʾAmanuʾel (around Näḡaš; *wäräda* Kələttä ʾAwləʾalo).

⁵ Quite popular in Ethiopia, "Gäbrä Mäsqäl" was the name (or one of the names) of several Ethiopian monarchs from the half-legendary successor of 6th-cent. Kaleb; it was another name of Lalibäla, ʾAmdä Şəyon I, and some others (s. EAE II, 623b-24b).

⁶ Today, three types of the church institutions are formally distinguished in the Ethiopian Orthodox Täwəḥədo Church: most of the individual churches are registered as *däbr* ("church, cathedral"); some others as *gätär* (usually translated as "chapel"). Monastic communities which are formally recognized as such are referred to as *gädam* (equivalent to "monastery"). However, today the status may be historical: if a monastic community gets dissolved and disappears, but its church remains, being served by the secular clergy, it can retain the status of *gädam*. (For the historical definitions and ethymologies, s. EAE II, 6a-7a; 641b-42a; 714b). Further in the report, unless a remark on its status is provided, an institution is considered to be of *däbr*-type.

⁷ The monks who lived in the 15th and 17th cent., respectively. Cp. EAE II, 390a-91b; III, 893b-94a.

presence of the *tabot*⁸ of ʾabunä ʾEṣṭifanos. Among the books in the possession of the church, there is a 19th-cent. copy of the Vita of ʾEṣṭifanos (from the time of King Yoḥannēs IV, 1872-89), a fine “Golden Gospel” book (s. fig. 3; first half of the 17th cent.?), and several samples of the “protective literature” (s. fig. 4; the picture of the cross in a [19th-cent. ?] collection of the “protective texts”⁹).



Fig. 1. ʾAgamyo Mikaʿel



Fig. 2. ʾAgamyo Mikaʿel

⁸ The so-called “altar tablet”, the most sacred object found in each Ethiopian church. *Tabots* are consecrated by bishops. A *tabot* is preserved in the closed part of the church (*māqdās*); it is absolutely prohibited for lay person, to see the *tabot* or enter the place where it is kept (cp. EAE IV, 802a-06b).

⁹ A version of the Book of the Disciples, the Prayer of the Virgin on Golgotha and Doctrina Arcanorum.



Fig. 3. 'Agamyo Mika'el, Golden Gospel



Fig. 4. 'Agamyo Mika'el, Ardə`ət

2. Däbrä Qəddusan 'Abunä Mamas 'Agärhəse gädam

The site of 'Abunä Mamas 'Agärhəse is located close to the Eritrean boarder. It can be conveniently reached by the road 'Addigrat – Zäla 'Ambäsa; one has to turn left at the monument to the soldiers of the 11th Regiment, pass the village called 'Agärhəse, and reach the edge of the plateau, the site where currently a new church is being built. Steps roughly cut in the rock lead downstairs, to the picturesque site with the church Däbrä Qəddusan 'Abunä Mamas standing under the cliff. The rectangular church is built in the traditional Təgrayan style; it is sheltered by the rock (fig. 5), resembling the “church-in-cave” type of structures. The site seems to be ancient. Around the church, holes and small caves can be seen in the rocks, being former graves and dwellings of the monks. The most interesting architectural feature of the site are two structures built on the vertical slope: two masonry walls, apparently hiding the caves or cavities behind, with windows (fig. 6). Formerly used by the local monastic community, today these structures are deserted and hardly accessible. Historically the site appears to have been the main center of the

veneration of ʾabunä Mamas (commemorated on *Taḥśaś* 30)¹⁰, a 14th-cent. Ethiopian saint, contemporary of Kings Säyfä Arʿad and Dawit. The foundation of the church is ascribed to the saint. The church possesses several copies of the Vita of ʾabunä Mamas, the oldest one (fig. 7) originating from the time of King Täklä Giyorgis I¹¹.



Fig. 5. ʾAgärhese ʾAbunä Mamas



Fig. 6. ʾAgärhese ʾAbunä Mamas

¹⁰ Cp. very scanty information Kinefe Rigb-Zelleke 1978:82, no. 102 (he should not be confused with St. Mamas, who was martyred in 275, in Caesarea). For another church of Mammas, in Şädäya (Wärʿi Läkä), s. Sauter 1976:161, no. 803, and MS, EBW-2005.194:001 and other pictures (s. “Mamas” in MS, “Index of places”). Mamas was that monk whose grave 14th-cent. Bäşälotä Mikaʾel had visited, according to the Vita of the latter, during his wandering in Təgray, Gulo Mäkäda. However, Gwəgwəda, the name of the specific place mentioned in the Vita of Bäşälotä Mikaʾel, is not known in Agärhese any more (cp. ACD I, 187/423).

¹¹ The last powerful Gondärine king, who ruled for several distinct periods from 1779 to 1800.



Fig. 9. ʿAraʿro Täklä Haymanot, new and old churches



Fig. 10. ʿAraʿro Täklä Haymanot, Golden Gospel

4. ʿAddi Qolqwal Giyorgis

The site of ʿAddi Qolqwal Giyorgis can be reached through the road Zäla ʿAmbäsa – Säbäya and a short walk uphill. The rectangular church is built in the traditional Təgrayan style (fig. 11), and is half hidden behind big cactus-trees (Tgn. *qolqwal*). Administratively, it is considered *gäṭār*. Local tradition remembers neither a foundational story, nor names of the church founders. It refers only to the 19th-cent. *däḡḡazmač* Wəbe Ḥaylä Maryam and Metropolitan Sälama II, who renovated or re-established the church. At a first glance, ʿAddi Qolqwal Giyorgis does not feature in the historical sources, yet its manuscripts hint to substantial age of the church and the role it had played in the past. The “Golden Gospel” book of the church (figs. 12-13) can be preliminary dated into the late-15th/16th cent. Besides, the church possesses a few other impressive manuscripts (originating possibly from the same period, and having been donated on the same occasion) such as *Gəbrä Ḥəməmat* (the Rite for the Passion Week; fig. 14), *Gädlä Sämaʿətat* (“Vitae of the Martyrs”, commissioned by a certain ʿabunä Pēṭros) and ʿ*Orit* (Octateuch; fig. 15). The church library is partly in poor condition, and the oldest manuscripts badly require urgent conservation measures.



Fig. 11. ሳAddi Qolqwal Giyorgis



Fig. 12. ሳAddi Qolqwal, Golden Gospel



Fig. 13. ሳAddi Qolqwal Giyorgis, Golden Gospel



Fig. 14. ሩAddi Qolqwal, *Gəbrä Həmamət*



Fig. 15. ሩAddi Qolqwal, *Octateuch*

5. ሩƏmbäyto Täklä Haymanot

ሩƏmbäyto Täklä Haymanot is located near ሩAddi Qolqwal, just below the same road. Like a few other sites of the area, the church is located in a chilly and humid valley, covered with thick green grass and trees, with a *šäbäl*-source of water nearby. According to the local tradition, it was founded by “goytana Ḥaylu” in the time of King Tewodros II¹⁴. The members of the clergy recount the tradition about the history of the church, and also remember by heart the genealogy of “goytana Ḥaylu”. The church has a *gätär* status, and is linked to another church dedicated to *ʾabunä Yəmʾata*, located nearby. An old teacher of *qəne*, *ʾaqqwaqwam* and *zema* lives at the church; being a native of the place, he studied many years in Gondär (Bäʾata) and then returned to ሩƏmbäyto. The church might be an ancient sanctuary only re-established in the 19th cent., but no traces of an older foundation could be discovered. A first half 19th-cent. manuscript of the *Vita* of *ʾabunä Täklä Haymanot* (fig. 16) proves at least the time of the dedication to the saint; the right side of a 19th-cent. dyptic (fig. 17), unusually, shows together *ʾabunä Yəmʾata* (left) and *ʾabunä Täklä Haymanot*.

¹⁴ Probably, Ḥaylu Təwäldä Mädhən of Ḥamasen is meant (d. 1876). Being on the political scene of Ḥamasen and adjacent areas since 1830s, he was one of the closest allies of King Tewodros II (1855-69).

6. ʾAmbasät Kidanä Məḥrät

The church of ʾAmbasät Kidanä Məḥrät is easy to reach by the ʿAddigrat – Zäla ʾAmbäsa road; it is located just before the small town of Faṣiy. The site accommodates two churches: one is Kidanä Məḥrät, rectangular, built in the traditional Təgrayan style in 1943 E.C.; another is the old rock-church dedicated to ʾabunä Libanos¹⁵. According to the local tradition, the *tabot* of Kidanä Məḥrät (“Covenant of Mercy”) was formerly located below the contemporary building, in a church which was founded in the old times by ʾabunä Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi and King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. This church is said to have been later destroyed by “Queen Gudit”, and re-established by ʾabunä Libanos. In 1943 E.C. a new church was built in a more accessible place and closer to the main road. A monastic community is said to have existed at the Libanos church, but disappeared long time ago. The “Golden Gospel” book of the church ʾAmbasät Kidanä Məḥrät dates probably into late 18th - early 19th cent. (fig. 18; “Genealogy of Christ” from the Gospel of Luke). Apart from the church library, ʾAmbasät is remarkable for its specialists of traditional binding, as well as for the manuscripts with “protective texts” (fig. 19) and “protective scrolls” owned by some of the local people. The church owes much of its fame also to ʾaläqqa ʾAsfaw, a traditional scholar, intellectual, scribe and author (d. 1970s).

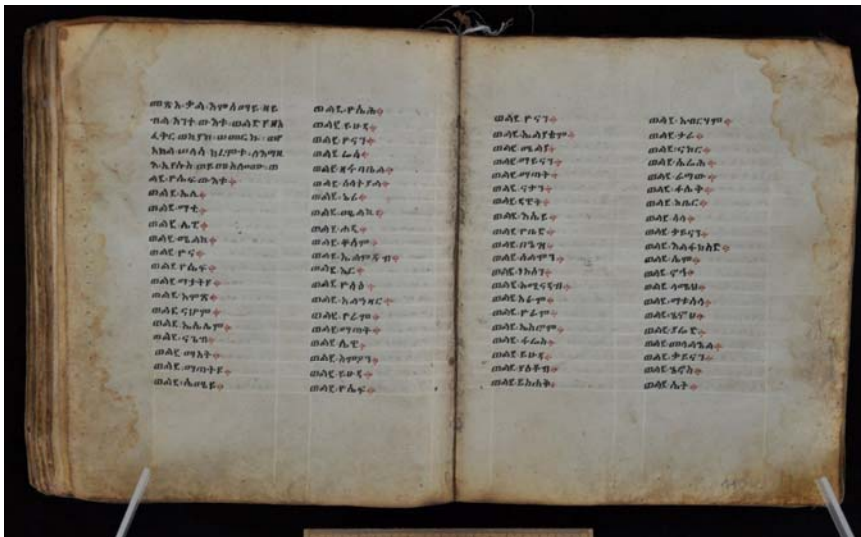


Fig. 19. ʾAmbasät Kidanä Məḥrät, Golden Gospel

7. Däbrä Dammo gädam

The team was lucky to spend a few days surveying the monastic library of the famous Däbrä Dammo monastery. Even though the accident of 1990s¹⁶ inflicted heavy losses upon the books of the monastery the library still preserves a number of manuscripts of great value. Many of the codices seen in Däbrä Dammo are remarkable thanks to the outstanding quality of writing, miniatures and fine bindings: s., e.g., a 17th-cent. manuscript of the *Arägawi mänfäsawi* (“The Spiritual Elder”, a work of the monastic literature) with Gəʿəz text and Amharic commentaries on the margins (fig. 20); unique pre-15th cent. Psalter (fig. 21); fragment of a calendaric treatise in added into the 18th-cent. manuscript of *Qerellos* (lit. “Cyril”, a patristic collection; fig. 22); a miniature from the 18th-cent. *Taʾamrä Maryam* (“Miracles of Mary”) (fig. 23). Today, there is no scribal or manuscript making tradition in the monastery itself, but a few professional scribes and painters live and work in the surrounding area. Cultural influence that Däbrä Dammo exerted upon the entire region was (and still is) very strong and manifold, it requires a detailed study. The veneration of Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi, the founder of the monastery, spread to the extent that nearly

¹⁵ Sauter 1963, no. 6.

¹⁶ S. *Ethiopian church...* 2009:97.

every church in the region possesses his Vita. Also the monastery itself is remarkable due to the complex administration of the monastic life, and sophisticated architecture of the complex buildings of the monastic compound, still unrecorded and unexplored.

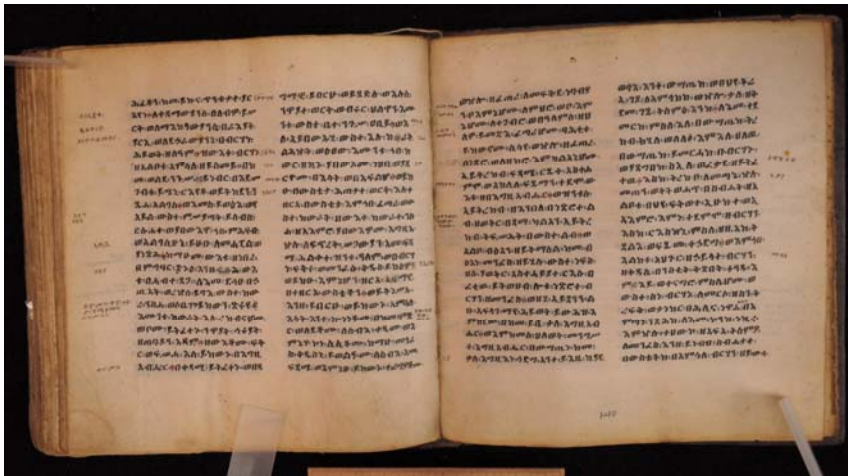


Fig. 20. Dābrā Dammo, Arāgawi Mānfāsawi



Fig. 21. Dābrā Dammo, Psalter

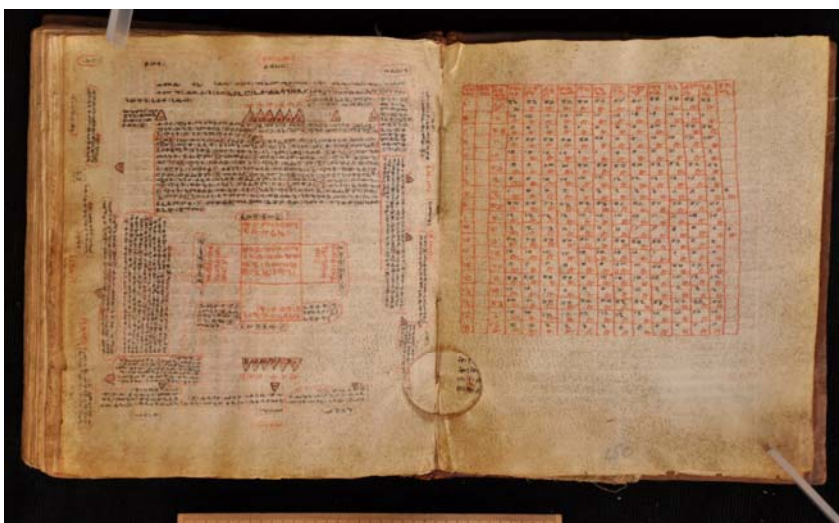


Fig. 22. Dābrā Dammo, Qerellos



Fig. 23, Däbrä Dammo, Miracles of Mary

8. Ḥzära Däbrä Məhrät Qəddəst Maryam

The church Ḥzära Maryam is located not far from Däbrä Dammo, and can be conveniently reached through a small side road which starts at the settlement called Ḥzära. The rectangular church is built in the traditional Təgrayan style. The compound of the church incorporates a few unusually big, massive structures: the gate house and two-storey ṣəqa bet. Local tradition narrates that the place had been a site of religious veneration in the pre-Christian time (Ḥorit). The Queen of Sheba is said to have spent a night at this place during her trip; because of this, a temple was established here. King Bazen, on the 10th year of his reign, renewed the sanctuary and reestablished it as church. The 15th-cent. *imam* Aḥmäd Graḥ is said to have come closely to Ḥzära, but his army was chased away by a strong wind. The “Golden Gospel” book of the Ḥzära church approximately dates into the late 15th- 16th cent. (fig. 24).



Fig. 24. Ḥzära Maryam, Golden Gospel

The area around the city of ሶAddigrat (sites 9-15)

Despite having been established as urban center in early 18th cent. only, ሶAddigrat itself shows a remarkable concentration of antiquities and historical sites. Surveying the area of today's ሶAddigrat and its immediate surroundings (administratively in the Ganta ሶAfäšum wäräda), the team could observe traces of at least three cultural layers: pre-medieval, medieval and pre-modern (the Solomonic period), and modern (starting from the time of ስaylä ሶellase). Quite a number of places show the presence of all three layers, proving a very long tradition of religious veneration. The team of the project mostly concentrated on the historical legacy of the medieval and pre-modern period – manuscripts, local traditions, and paraphernalia.

9. Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʼel Nəḥbi gädam

The church of Qəddus Mikaʼel Nəḥbi is located on the outskirts of ሶAddigrat, on the slope of the mountain, overlooking the city. Beneath the church, there is a cave in the cliff which might have been used as a dwelling in prehistoric times. An Aksumite remain, a massive stone bowl, lies in the church compound. Local tradition does not specify the time of the foundation, but tells that Yəshāq, the founder of Gundä Gunde and adherent of the Stephanite movement, established the monastic community at the church of Nəḥbi before going to the area where he founded later Gundä Gunde. As other churches and monasteries of the area, the monastic community of Nəḥbi was favored by *däḡḡazmač* Subagadis Wäldu¹⁷, but it declined in the early 20th cent. During the Italian period another church dedicated to Zärʼa Buruk was established nearby, under the administration of Qəddus Mikaʼel Nəḥbi. Formerly, there was a traditional school with scores of students and teachers, but a few years ago local church education tradition was interrupted. The most interesting manuscripts of Nəḥbi Qəddus Mikaʼel are linked to the figure of *däḡḡazmač* Subagadis and are good examples of late-Gondärine scribal art and miniature painting: a sumptuous copy of *Dərsanä Mikaʼel* (“Homily of St. Michael”, fig. 25), finely written and illustrated *Täʼamrä Maryam* (“Miracles of Mary”, fig. 26), and *Gädlä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus* (“The Vita of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus”) (fig. 27).



Fig. 25. Qəddus Mikaʼel Nəḥbi, *Dərsanä Mikaʼel*

¹⁷ *Däḡḡazmač* Subagadis (or Säbagadis) Wäldu, from the Irob people, rose to power in the region and was able to consolidate his sway over entire Təgray by 1816; however, in 1831 he was defeated and killed at May ሶIslamay, by the allied forces of *Yäḡḡu* lords and Wəbe ስaylä Maryam of Səmen.



Fig. 26. Nəḥbi, Miracles of Mary

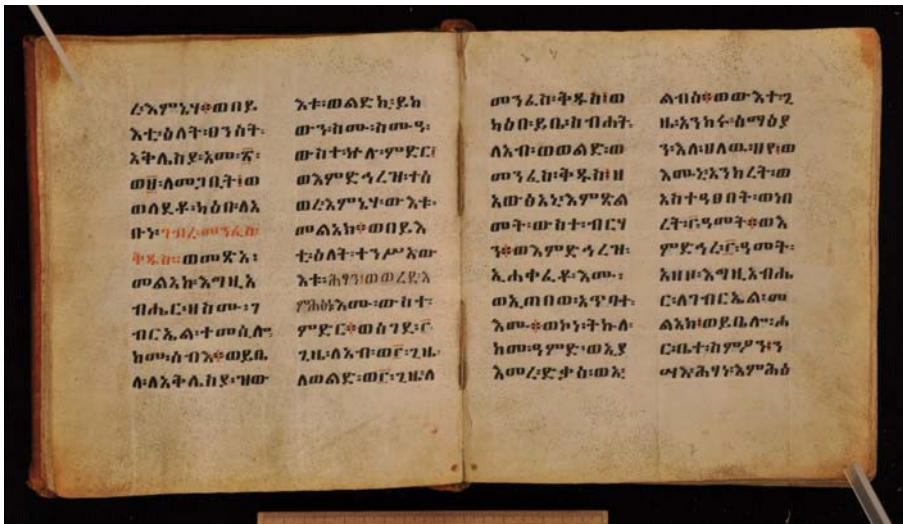


Fig. 27. Nəḥbi, *Gädlä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus*

10. Däbrä Gännät Qəddəst Maryam Gänaḥti

The church of Qəddəst Maryam Gänaḥti is located close to ṢAddigrat, behind the educational center of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the Italian military cemetery. The church is relatively new, rectangular, built in the traditional Təgrayan style (s. fig. 28). Remains of an older foundation (s. fig. 29) can be seen in the church yard. According to local tradition the church was founded by King Säṣaldoba in 430. The oldest manuscript of the church library appears to be the “Golden Gospel” book (fig. 30; 16th-cent.?); the church possesses also other interesting and valuable manuscripts. Local tradition preserves an elaborate oral account about the ruler Kəndših, his son Kätay, “*māḥonni*” ṖAkḫadom and his daughter Ğir Baḥra¹⁸, the story which is linked to the folk etymology of the place name (by means of word *gäna* “[not] yet, still”). The story apparently correlates with genealogies inscribed in a few manuscripts as *Additiones*. Locally Gänaḥti is sometimes referred to as the place of birth of *däğğazmač* Subagadis.

¹⁸ For *təgre mäkwännən* ṖAkḫadom and traditions related to him, s. EAE I, 166b.



Fig. 28. Qeddäst Maryam Gänahti



Fig. 29. Gänahti, Aksumite pillar



Fig. 30. Qeddäst Maryam Gänahti, Golden Gospel

11. Şərha Şəyon Betä Həwaryat

The church of Betä Həwaryat is situated close to ʿAddigrat. It has a *şəbäl*-source, and appears quite common, at a first glance. It does not feature in historical sources. Apparently, the site is very old. Four stone columns from the Aksumite time are kept in the *mäqdäs* of the church¹⁹, and one more stone object has been noticed in the entrance house. Local tradition does not remember who established the sanctuary. A monastic community is said to have existed here but disappeared long ago. At least two manuscripts hint to an important role the church might have played in the past, and to an ancient tradition of religious veneration: an old collection of liturgical hymns (s. fig. 31; late 15th/16th cent.?)²⁰ and an old *Senodos* (fig. 32; of the same period?).

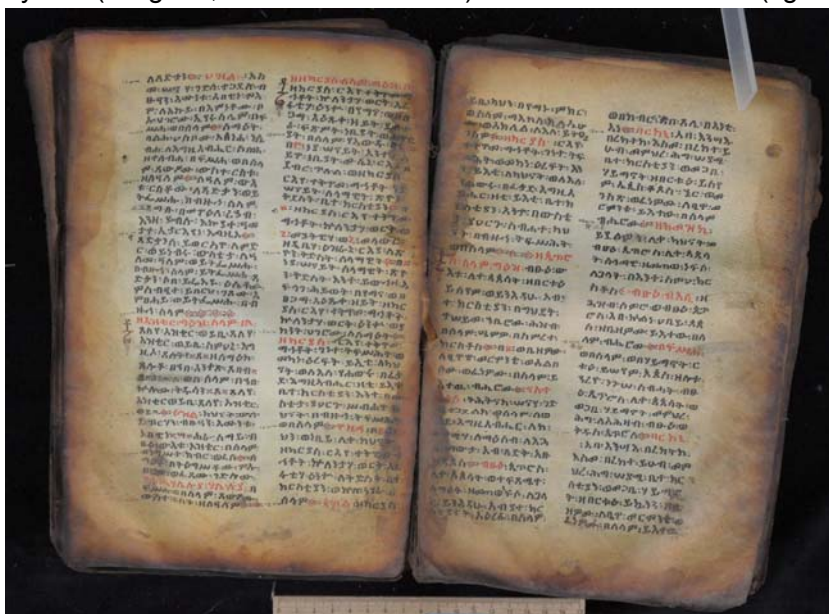


Fig. 31. Betä Həwaryat, Collection of hymns



Fig. 32. Betä Həwaryat, *Senodos*

¹⁹ S. Plant 1985:199-200 (no. 135), and index. *Mäqdäs*, or “holy of the holies” is the closed part of the church in which the *tabot*(s) are preserved (s. EAE IV, 765a-67b).

²⁰ S. mentions of *liqä päpasat ʾabunä Pēṭros* on the *recto*-side. Most probably, the title *liqä päpasat* refers here not to a Coptic, but an Ethiopian hierarch. *ʾAbunä Pēṭros* was the head of Ethiopian church in the second half of the 16th cent. He was thus a contemporary of the Kings Minas and powerful Säršä Dəngəl (1563-97), and, indeed, in the Chronicle of Säršä Dəngəl he is referred to as *liqä päpasat* (s. EAE IV, 138a).

12. Däbrä Məhrät Qəddus Mika'el Bə'atti *gədam*

Small Däbrä Məhrät Qəddus Mika'el Bə'atti *gədam* is located on the outskirts of ʿAddigrat, on the rock just above the site where buildings of the future ʿAddigrat University are now constructed (planned to be opened next year). The site (fig. 33) can be reached through a spectacular staircase hewn in the rock (fig. 34). The church itself is said to be old; the monastic community was established by *däğğazmač* Subagadis only in the early 19th cent. After the revolution of 1974, however, land possessions of the monastery were confiscated, and the monastic community declined. A short history of the foundation is reflected in its books, among others, in an early 20th-cent. copy of the Miracles of Mary in which an older folio with miniatures was included (s. fig. 35).



Fig. 33. Qəddus Mika'el Bə'atti

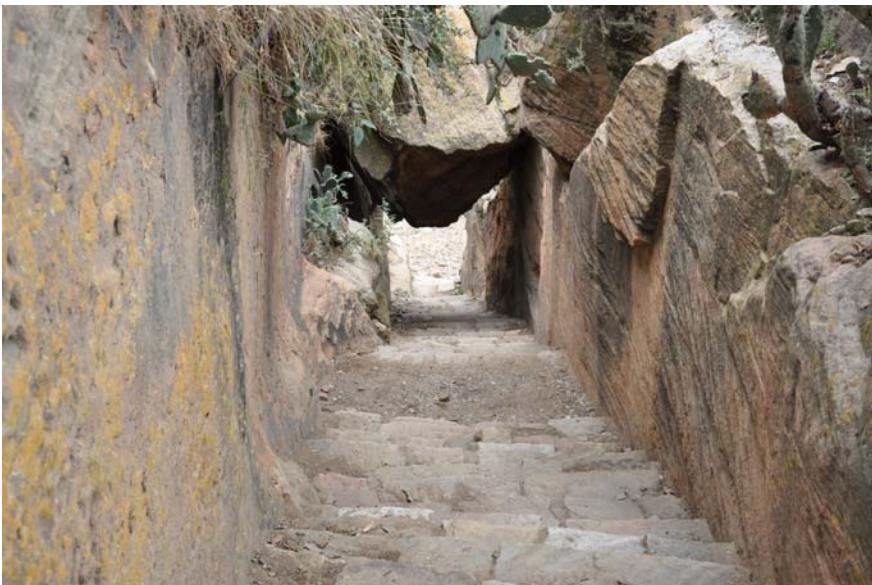


Fig. 34. Qəddus Mika'el Bə'atti

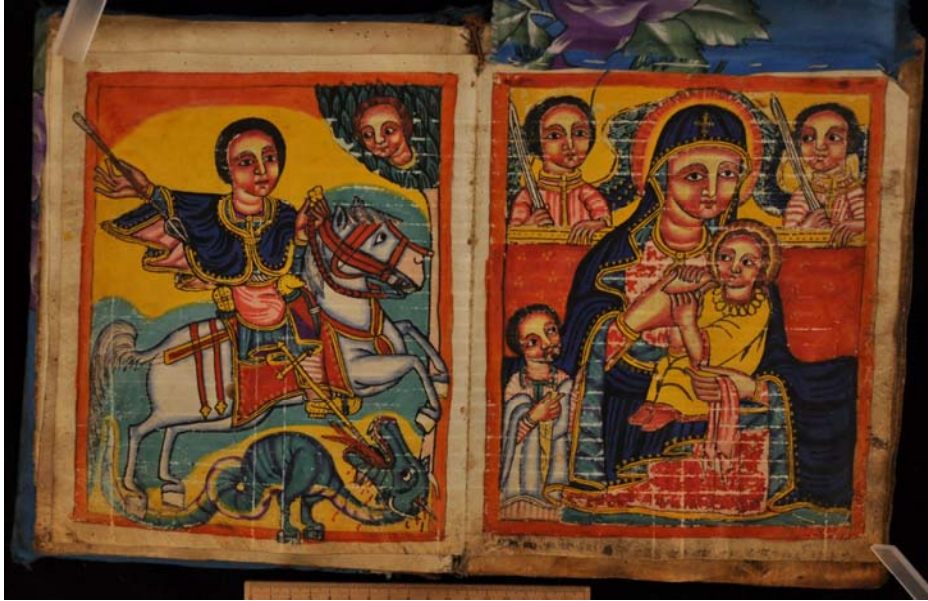


Fig. 35. Qəddus Mika'el Bāṣatti, Miracles of Mary

13. Mādḥane ʿAlām Ḷāḥat

The church of Mādḥane ʿAlām Ḷāḥat can be easily reached through the main road ʿAddigrat – Zāla ʿAmbāsā. The church itself is in the process of reconstruction. Local tradition claims foundation by King Sāʿaldoba, but nothing supportive of such an early dating was discovered at the site. The collection of the church, though small, includes fine pieces of the late 17th/18th-cent. Ethiopian scribal art (cp. fig. 36; a 18th-cent. manuscript of the Miracles of Mary, with a miniature showing two saints [added later?]).



Fig. 36. Mādḥane ʿAlām Ḷāḥat, Miracles of Mary

14. Dābrā Məḥrāt Kidanā Məḥrāt Lāḡay

A big church Dābrā Məḥrāt Kidanā Məḥrāt Lāḡay is located some 2 km far from Ḷāḥat. Though uncertain about the foundation time, local tradition refers to King Kaleb. Indeed, the church appears to be located near an unexplored archaeological site. Among the oldest manuscripts of the collection, there was a 15th-cent. (?) manuscript of the Miracles of Mary, with flyleaves and a miniature originating from much older books (fig. 37). Among the other remarkable manuscripts of the collection, there are a Missal (fig. 38) and a Vita of Libanos both from the 17th cent. (fig. 39;

with the infixed *Sālam*-hymn), a 19th-cent. illuminated *Dərsanä Mikaʿel* (fig. 40), an early 17th-cent. Vita of St. Kiros (fig. 41) etc.



Fig. 37. Lägay, *Miracles of Mary*



Fig. 38. Lägay, *Missal*



Fig. 39. Lägay, *Gädlä Libanos*



Fig. 40. Lägay, *Dersanä Mika'el*



Fig. 41. Lägay, *Gädlä Kiros*

15. Däbrä Gännät Qəddəst Maryam Si'ät

The well-known church of Däbrä Gännät Qəddəst Maryam Si'ät²¹ can be reached after a short drive on the main road to Mägälä and a ca. 40-min walk upwards. The site is located at the foot of the mountain. The recent, rectangular church dedicated to Kidanä Məhrät stands below, and the old church dedicated to St. Mary is located above, hewn in the rock. Many holes and small caves can be seen in the vertical rock around the entrance, formerly used as burials or dwellings of the monks (s. fig. 42). In the church, one can see traces of white-washed old wall paintings. Apart from the architecture, the most interesting object in the church is the big wooden door covered with thick parchment painted on one side. The church possesses an extensive and interesting collection of manuscripts, including a 15th-cent. (?) “Golden Gospel” book with painted canon tables (fig. 43)²², in a new binding but complete and in a good condition, and a few more books originating from the same and later periods (cp. fig. 44²³). In addition, the church possesses a rare, precious devotional image painted on parchment (cp. fig. 45).

²¹ Cp. Sauter 1976:163, no. 1012; Plant 1985:100-01 (no. 100). Si'ät is today's pronunciation of the name; the older variant attested in the manuscripts is Sa'et.

²² Reported already in Plant 1985:168.

²³ Two folios from a copy of the *Haymanotä ʾAbäw* (“Faith of the Fathers”), dated into 17[5]6 A.M. in the colophon (fol. rb), with extensive *Additiones* (fol. rc).



Fig. 42. Däbrä Gännät Qeddest Maryam Si'ät



Fig. 43. Si'ät, Golden Gospel



Fig. 44. Si'ät, Haymanotä 'Abäw



Fig. 45. Siṣāt, devotional image on parchment

16. Däbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Maryam Qiṣat

Maryam Qiṣat can be reached after some 30min driving on the main ṢAddigrat - ṖAksum road, and a new side-road to Qiṣat which is still under construction. At the edge of the escarpment one has to descend and walk under the cliffs of the escarpment, in the hot valley. Maryam Qiṣat is an ancient rock-hewn church²⁴. Local tradition does not specify the name of the founder and the time of foundation, but refers to the establishment of the sanctuary in the pre-Christian period (ṖOrit). Further on, the tradition preserves an account connecting the name of the place, Qiṣat, with the word for *Catha edulis* (ṡat, qat) which, according to the local people, grows at this place. As elsewhere in the region, a remarkable feature is the local veneration of Zärṗa Buruk and Gäbrä Nazrawi²⁵.



Fig. 46. Maryam Qiṣat, icon

²⁴ Lepage – Mercier 2005:126-129.

²⁵ From what the local people told us, it was not possible to confirm the role of Gäbrä Nazrawi as the founder of the church, as described in Lepage – Mercier 2005:126-129. One of the *tabots* of the church is dedicated to Gäbrä Nazrawi, and the church has a very recent copy of his Vita. The local people are aware that Gäbrä Nazrawi whom they venerate was from Şäwa. A detailed study is necessary to ascertain the identity of this saint. Indeed, he may represent a conflation of several figures who were active in different regions, in different times (cp. EAE II, 626a-27a). In any case, one should notice that exactly during the Gondärine (especially in the late 17th-first half of the 18th cent.) time, several non-Təgrayan saints (esp. Täklä Haymanot, Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, and several others) became popular in North Ethiopia.



Fig. 47. Maryam Qiʿat, picture book

Among the interesting and valuable items preserved in the church, there is a non-Ethiopian icon painted in the late-Byzantine style (fig. 46)²⁶, as well as a late Gondärine (late 18th or early 19th cent.?) “picture book” (fig. 47).

17. Däbrä Gännät Kidanä Məhrät Mäḳodʿä gädäm

The monastery of Kidanä Məhrät Mäḳodʿä (fig. 48) is difficult to access. It is located under the same rocky escarpment as Qiʿat; it can be reached and after at least 1h of difficult walk from the village called Rahya. On the way to the place, one can admire a magnificent view, with many churches scattered below, here and there, including the historical church of Azäba (to be reached, however, through Hawzen). At the end of the way, one has to surpass the crest (*kəsad*) connecting the escarpment with a huge protruding rock, descend along the dry river bed and cross it to the other side.



Fig. 48. Kidanä Məhrät Mäḳodʿä

²⁶ Painted in the post-Byzantine style, 16th cent., probably of Cretan origin (information courtesy of R.Zacharuck, A.Neubauer, Ikonen-Museum Frankfurt).

As most of the sites mentioned above, Kidanä Məhrät Mäkod^ᶜä does not appear to have been mentioned in the sources. Local tradition does not specify the time when the monastic community was first established. The oldest manuscripts of the community date into the time of King Ləbnä Dəngel (r. 1508-40). Some other books were acquired by the community further in the 17th (s. fig. 49)²⁷ and 18th cent. (fig. 50)²⁸. At least in the late 17th century Mäkod^ᶜä was probably a flourishing monastery. It was associated with Gundä Gunde, this being demonstrated by the presence of a *tabot* and a manuscript of the Vita of Mäzgäbä Səllase, one of the prominent Gundä Gunde abbots (fig. 51)²⁹. Today, a small monastic community struggles for survival, setting up the cultivation of vegetables and fruit-trees (fig. 52).



Fig. 49. Kidanä Məhrät Mäkod^ᶜä, *Miracles of Mary*



Fig. 50. Kidanä Məhrät Mäkod^ᶜä, *Synaxarion*

²⁷ Holy monks [of Däbrä Gännät Mäkod^ᶜä]; a miniature (late 17th cent.?) infixed in a later manuscript of the *Miracles of Mary*.

²⁸ A copy of the *Synaxarion* (first half of the 18th cent.?) donated by a certain Mäzmurä Dəngəl contains readings for the second half of the year, and the unusually extensive and emotional “donation note” (columns vb-ra).

²⁹ The site is not mentioned in Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1975 (s. page 85, no. 114).



Fig. 51. Mäḳodʿä, *Gädlä Mäzḡäbä Šəllase*



Fig. 52. Mäḳodʿä, plantation

18. Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʿel Märgaḥəya

The remote church of Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʿel Märgaḥəya can be reached through the main road ʿAddigrat - ʾAksum, after a short drive on a side-road (starting after Məgullat) and a difficult walk downwards, from the new church Gäbrä Nazrawi ʾAgazna (fig. 53). Local tradition recounts that the church was founded in the time of King “ʾAlʾadoba, father of ʾAlʾador, father of Kaleb”. The study of the church library did not support such an early date; however, a few remarkable samples of Ethiopian manuscript culture were discovered: cp. fig. 54 (miniatures from a *Dərsanä Mikaʿel*, second half of the 19th cent.³⁰), fig. 55 (a collection of prayers; first half of the 17th cent.?). Like in a few places mentioned above, a remarkable feature of the area is the veneration of Gäbrä Nazrawi, a Šəwan saint, with copies of his Vita found in Gäbrä Nazrawi ʾAgazna.

³⁰ Donation of *ras* Səbḥat ʾArägawi, the governor of ʿAgamä (1844-1914; s. EAE IV, 587b-89a).



Fig. 53. Däbrä Sälam Qəddus Mikaʿel Märgahəya

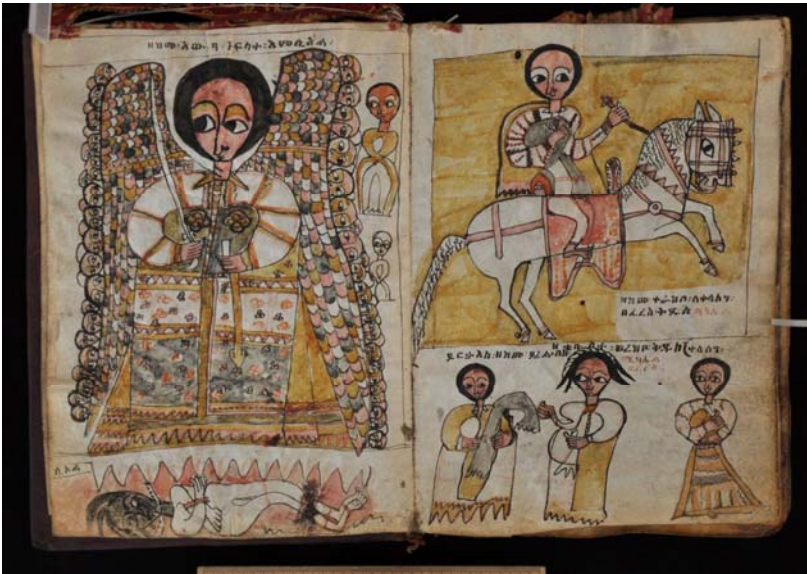


Fig. 54. Märgahəya, *Dərsanä Mikaʿel*



Fig. 55. Märgahəya, prayer book

19. Däbrä Bərhan Yoḥannəs Mätməq Dəbla

The church of Däbrä Bərhan Yoḥannəs Mätməq Dəbla can be reached after some 20 min of driving on the ḥAddigrat – Mägälä road, and a short drive on a stony side-road. The church is situated in a valley, surrounded by mountains. Some time ago, the local community dismantled the walls of the old church of Dəbla intending to construct another church around the old *mäqdäs*. However, the TCTA stopped the work, as it was undertaken without proper consultation with and permission of the Agency. Local tradition claims that the church was founded in the time of King Sälfadoba. The church library includes a few valuable manuscripts, among them a sumptuous *Dərsanä Mikaʾel* (fig. 56), a complete and well-preserved 17th-cent. Missal (fig. 57), and a unique late 17th-cent. (?) codex containing the Vitae of Täklä Haymanot and ʾEwostatewos (fig. 58).



Fig. 56. Dəbla, *Dərsanä Mikaʾel*



Fig. 57. Dəbla, Missal



Fig. 58. Dəbla, Gädlä Täklä Haymanot

The area around Nägaš (sites 20-21)

At the concluding stage of the field work, the team visited a group of the churches located around Nägaš (*wäräda* Kələttä ?Awlāʿalo): Däbrä Täwahaḍo Kidanä Məhrät Kädiḥ Maryam, Däbrä Gännät Qəddus Mikaʿel Bäläsa (sites 20-21).

20. Däbrä Täwahaḍo Məhrät Kädiḥ Maryam

Kädiḥ Maryam is a big church situated just near the road. The present building is quite recent (fig. 59), but local tradition claims that the first church was constructed by the “artisans of Greece” (*ṭəbbäbtä Şərʿ*), and it still preserves an account about the “Righteous of Kädiḥ” (commemorated on 24 *Tahśas*)³¹. However, no indigenous texts meant for the liturgical veneration could be discovered. The place is an archaeological site which remains unexplored. The library of the church preserves the manuscripts from recent period (s. fig. 60; incipit of a late 19th-cent. Missal).



Fig. 59. Kädiḥ Maryam

³¹ Cp. Getatchew Haile 1988-89; Brita 2010, s. index.



Fig. 60. Kädiḥ Maryam, Missal

21. Däbrä Gännät Qəddus Mikaʿel Bäläsa

The church of Qəddus Mikaʿel Bäläsa is also located on the main road, several minutes before Kädiḥ. According to local tradition, the church was founded by the famous *ras* Mikaʿel Səḥul (ca. 1691-1777). An unusually spacious compound, with a *šəbäl*-source, accommodates two churches. One new, rectangular, is built in the traditional Təgrayan style; to its left, encircled by the bush, there stands another one, wattle-and-doub round church, built at the latest in early 20th cent. (?). Liturgy is celebrated in the new church only. Luckily, when the new church was built, the people decided to preserve their old one. It is still well kept, with the sophisticated woodwork of the roof fully intact, with some paintings visible on the walls inside and outside (fig. 61). Among the books of the church, a finely illustrated *Dərsanä Mikaʿel* was discovered (fig. 62), as well as a manuscript of the Vita of Kiros (fig. 63), donated by *däğğazmač* Gwangul Maru³².



Fig. 61. Qəddus Mikaʿel Bäläsa, old church

³² One of the sons of *däğğazmač* Maru (d. 1827; s. EAE III, 807)?



Fig. 62. Bäläsa, *Dərsanä Mikaʾel*



Fig. 63. Bäläsa, *Gädlä Kiros*

22. Dərba Däbrä ʾAbunä Yasay

The last site visited during the field season was the church of Dərba Däbrä ʾAbunä Yasay (*wäräda* ʾEndärta). The site can be reached after some 20 min of difficult driving on the side-road from May Mäkdän. The new large rectangular church, standing on the elevated, stony bank of the river (dry during the dry seasons), was completed a few years ago. The old church stands some 500m away next to the river, half-hidden in the canyon. The founder of the church is said to have been ʾabunä Yasay, a late 14th-cent. Ethiopian monk, whose Vita is still unpublished. Among the books of the church, there is a large-format Gospel book from the time of *däğğazmač* Wäldä Rufaʾel³³ (fig. 64; frontispiece miniature and the beginning of the Gospel of Mark), one large-format *Gäbrä Həmamət*; a finely written *Mäşhafä Gənzät* (“The Book of the Funeral Ritual”)

³³ Wäldä Rufaʾel was a nephew of the powerful *ras* Wäldä Šəllase. After the death of the latter (1816) he tried to consolidate the power in his hands, but had to leave the way for *däğğazmač* Subagadis Wäldu who by 1822 became the ruler of Təgray.

dating into 1779-95, from the time of King Täklä Giyorgis³⁴ (fig. 65); two manuscripts of the Vita of ʾabunä Yasay, the oldest dating, however, into the late 17th - early 18th cent.

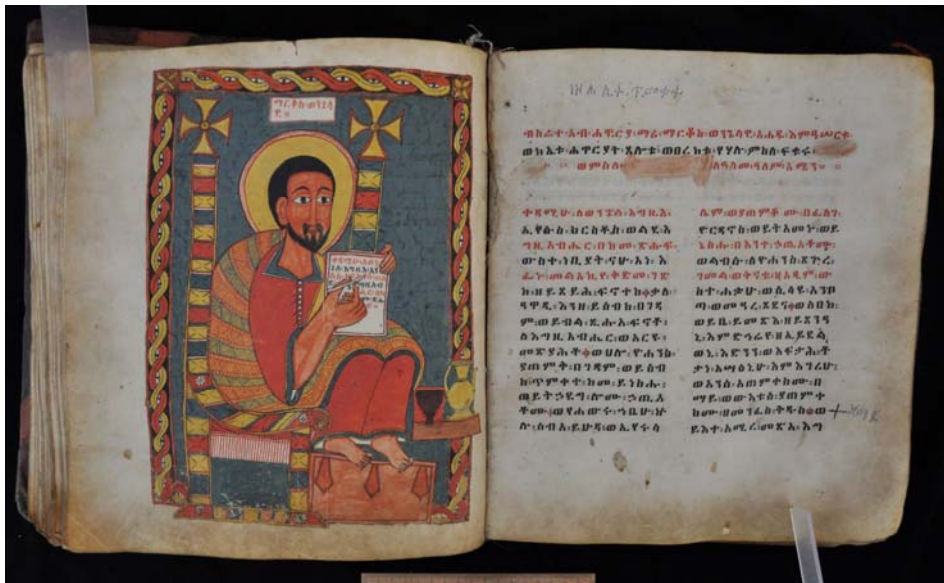


Fig. 64. Derba Däbrä ʾAbunä Yasay, Golden Gospel



Fig. 65. Derba, Mäṣḥafä Genzät

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