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



Fifth Mission

May-June 2012

Report

(by Denis Nosnitsin, PI)



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Public Report

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Editorial note

A consequent transcription commonly applied to Ethio-Semitic languages is used for the Ethiopian terms and names in the text below. Since the report is meant for broader public, the *apparatus* is limited only to the very 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).



Fig. 1. Maryam Qorrar, church

In the period 07.05.-03.06.2012 the team of the Ethio-SPaRe project carried out its fifth field research season. Basing in Mäqälä, Hagärä Sälam and ʿAddigrat, the team was focusing on the historical sites of the Tämben and Gulä Mäḳäda *wärädas*. The team included the members of the project team from Hamburg University¹, representatives of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (TCTA)², and members of the administration of the respective church administration offices³. Within four weeks of intensive work, the team was able to visit 11 sites, and worked on 10 collections, of which 9 are briefly described here below. The restoration program of the project has also continued, with two restorers engaged in Mäqälä during two weeks. Below follow some brief observations on the churches and monasteries visited, and photos of the sites and the most remarkable manuscripts and objects. The full-scale evaluation of the results is being underway at the Hiob Ludolf Center for Ethiopian Studies in Hamburg. The digital copies of the collected materials can be consulted in the main office of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (Mäqäla) and in the Eastern Təgray Diocese (ʿAddigrat), and Southern Təgray Diocese (May Çäw). In the report below, all datings and conclusions should be considered as preliminary.

Tämben

The project team was able to extend its work area and studied some sites in Tämben, the north-western part of Təgray, particularly in the highland part of the region (Dägʿa Tämben).

Tämben is a well-known region of North Ethiopia. It is frequently mentioned in the Ethiopic sources throughout the Solomonic period, and gained a particularly significant importance in the 19th cent. when it became politically important during the reign of King Yoḥannəs IV (r. 1872-89)⁴. Tämben, located at distance from the major internal routes of Ethiopia (e.g., Gondär – ʾAksum; Mäqälä – ʿAddigrat – Red Sea coast, etc.) is known thanks to its traditionalist attitudes and conservative Orthodox culture. Tämben is also known as the area where the traditional manuscript culture is at a high level compared to many other regions and is still particularly vivid, with professional scribes and manuscript makers still active. Some of Tämben churches and monasteries have been well known to scholars ever since⁵, but nowhere have the manuscript collections been studied thoroughly. Some of significant religious centers remain hardly known to the scholars.

1. Däbrä Mädhānit Maryam Qorarr

Däbrä Mädhānit (ʾƏnda) Maryam Qorarr is a large monastery located some 10 km away from the town of Hagärä Sälam, and is easily accessible through a good road. The church is a recent massive, rectangular building (fig. 1); the monastic settlement extends behind its eastern and northern sides. Monks live in individual houses, mostly solidly built, two-stored (fig. 2), with spacious gardens. Stone walls of the compounds form true “streets” (fig. 3). There is also a large compound of the traditional church school attended by up to 90 students. The school is headed by *yäneta* ʿEzra Rädä, ca. 60 years old, who teaches all subjects of the traditional education with the exception of the exegesis (*mäṣḥaf bet*). Today, adult monks are no more than 15.

¹ D. Nosnitsin (PI), S. Ancel, V. Pisani, S. Hummel, M. Krzyżanowska (research fellows).

² Käbbäda Amarä Bälay (project coordinator), Mäsärät Haylä Səllase (field coordinator), Boggalä Täsämma, Dawit Mäkwännən (assistants).

³ *Märiḡeta* Hadära Tädla (from the church office of Tämben), one of the brightest ecclesiastics of Təgray; məmher ʿEzra of Ganta ʾAfäšum,

⁴ Cp. EAE IV, 852b-55b.

⁵ E.g., such famous sites as ʾƏnda ʾAbba Sälama, or ʾƏnda ʾAbba Yoḥanni, Mälfa, Mänäwe; s., e.g., a map in Plant 1973:185; s. also a number of Tämben sites in the database *Mäzgäbä seelat* (<http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca/>; M. Gervers, E. Balicka-Witakowska).



Fig. 2. Maryam Qorral, monk's house



Fig. 3. Maryam Qorral, path in the monastic settlement



Fig 4. Maryam Qorral, storage building.

There is also a large compound of the traditional school which is visited by up to 90 students. Today, adult monks are not more than 15. The *ṣəqa bet* stands on the northern side of the main church, near a tall round structure reminiscent of a church building, of unclear function; it was vaguely described as the “old church building” now used for the storage (fig. 4).

Local tradition ascribes the foundation of the monastery to a monk called Yāmanā ʔAb, during the time of Ṣamdä Şəyon I (r. 1314-44). The 14th-cent. ʔabunä Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁶ is the next prominent personage of the local history, the founder of the monastery ʔƏnda Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷, which used to dominate large area of Tāmben, and has retained substantial influence until now. Local tradition tells that Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷ was a native of Qorror and recounts about miracles that he worked there⁷, and how he was killed in Qorror on 16 *Yäkkatit*. A *tabot* dedicated to Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷ is kept in the church, and his commemoration is celebrated on the same date as the feast of St. Mary’s Covenant of Mercy (*Kidanä Məhrät*), i.e. 16 *Yäkkatit*⁸. The tradition mentions also *māmher* Gäbrä Maryam and the local ruler Ḥaylä Şəllase, the contemporary of Mənilək II⁹. Professional scribes used to live and work around Qorror¹⁰.



Fig. 5. Maryam Qorror, *Senodos*

⁶ EAE I, 42.

⁷ E.g., how he resuscitated ʔabba Bərhanä Həywät in Qorror. It was not immediately clear which role Qorror plays in the story as appears in ʔabunä Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷’s hagiography; at the first glance, it features neither in the Acts, nor in the miracles (cp. Conti Rossini 1938; one has to note, however, that both Qorror Maryam and ʔƏnda Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷ have the same name – Däbrä Mädhānit). Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1975: 59-60 (no. 2), lists a number of sites with manuscripts of his *Vita*, but the names of the church are given in a difficult way. “Qoraro, Şiré, Tigre” might refer to Qorror, though the team did not find manuscripts of his hagiography.

⁸ Obviously, the former main dedication of the monastic church was to Ṣabiyä ʔƏgzi⁷.

⁹ The foundation history is more precisely explained in an additional note, in one of the Qorror’s *Miracles of Mary* manuscripts. Here, the foundation is ascribed to King Ṣalām Sägäd (i.e., Fasilädäs, r. 1632-67) and ʔabeto Ṣosyos; also Ṣəççäge Yāmanā ʔAb is mentioned, being indeed a contemporary of Fasilädäs and native of Təgray (s. Cerulli 1944:173-75). The note mentions also some other later events and historical characters.

¹⁰ Today, the tradition has somewhat declined. The team members visited only one scribe, Ḥaylä Şəllase, who, however, is a local celebrity and even demonstrated his scribal art at the 21st International Fair of Books and Press (Geneva, Palexpo, 2007).

The collection of Qorrar is very extensive and manifold¹¹, with a few remarkable books. A substantial part of the collection dates to the 19th cent.; a number of books come certainly from the Gondärine time (1st half of the 18th cent.). The oldest book of the collection is exceptionally old; it is a copy of *Senodos*, written by a poorly trained, crude hand that can be dated possibly to the 15th cent. (?; fig. 5). The library once possessed, obviously, other old (pre 18th-cent.) books, but they perished, possibly during an extensive renovation of the library in the 19th cent. A few older leaves were brought from *ṣəqa bet*, and a few more were discovered with students who used them as school materials for learning to read.

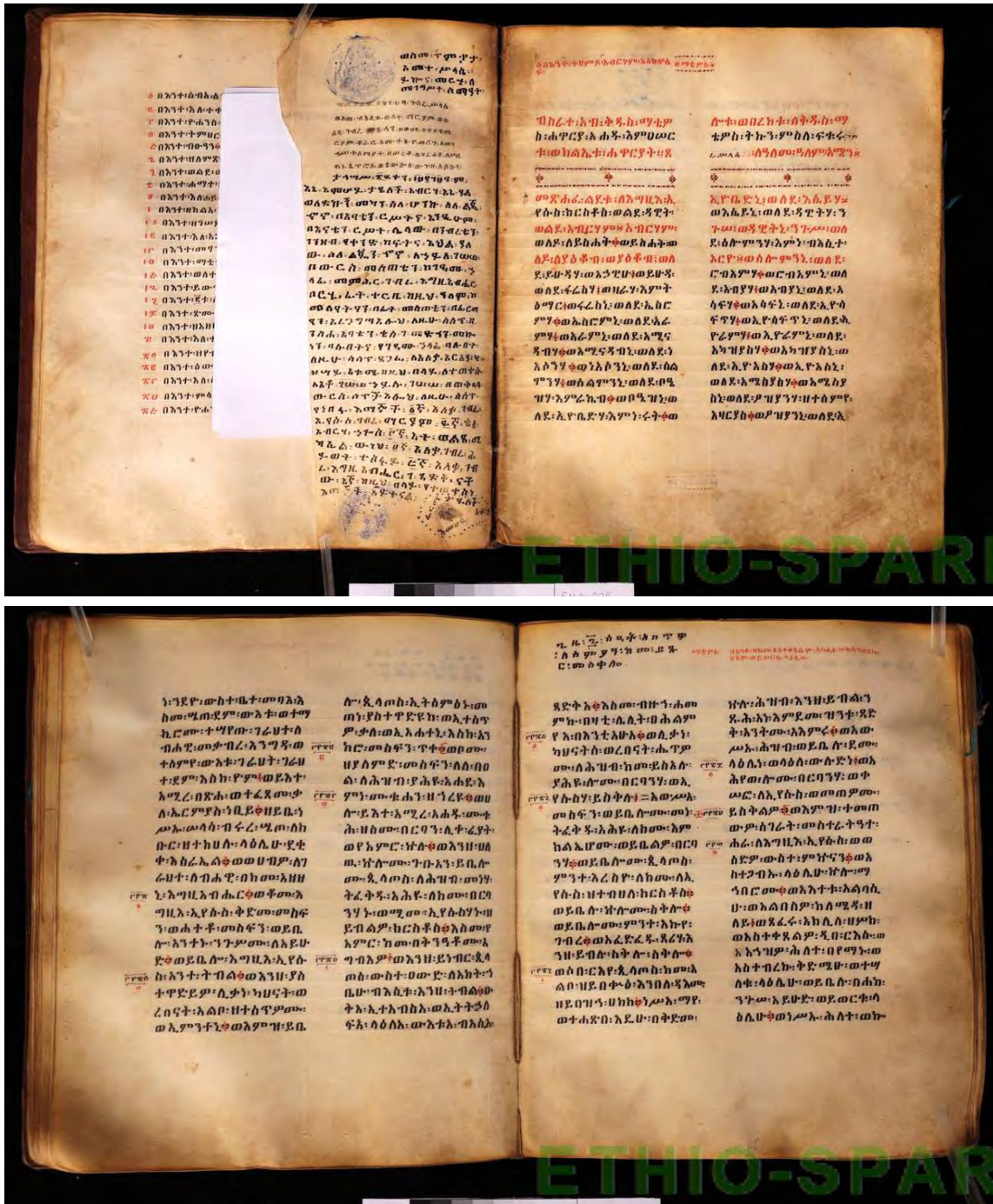


Fig. 6a-b. Maryam Qorrar, Four Gospels

¹¹ Local tradition claims that any item (including *tabots*) stolen from Qorrar would not go far away (not beyond the rive Gəwa), and would inevitably return to Qorrar.

The main Gospel book of the monastery, a finely written manuscript, can be dated to the second half of the 18th cent. (figs. 6a-b). The collection contains a substantial number of nicely written Psalters and manuscripts typical for a monastic library: a few exemplars of the single Gospel of John and copies of the *Wəddase ʾamlak* (“Praise of God”), the book of the monastic ritual *Šerʿatā mänäkosat* (fig. 7); some works considered as “monastic books”, like *Mar Yəshəḥaq* (“The Book) of Isaac (of Nineveh)”; a manuscript of the *ʾArägawi mänfäsawi* “Spiritual Elder”, the most frequent among the books of monastic literature, dated to the time of King Tewoflos (r. 1708–11), with a curious supplication if its later owner, a professional scribe who added, possibly, also the calendar table (figs. 8a-b).



Fig. 7. Maryam Qorrar, *Šerʿatā mänäkosat*



Fig. 8a. Maryam Qorrar, *ʾArägawi mänfäsawi*



Fig. 8b. Maryam Qorrar, Ḥarāgawi mānfāsawi



Fig. 9a. Maryam Qorrar, Gädlä Filḥos zä-Däbrä Bizän



Fig. 9b. Maryam Qorror, Gädlä Filpos zä-Däbrä Bizän

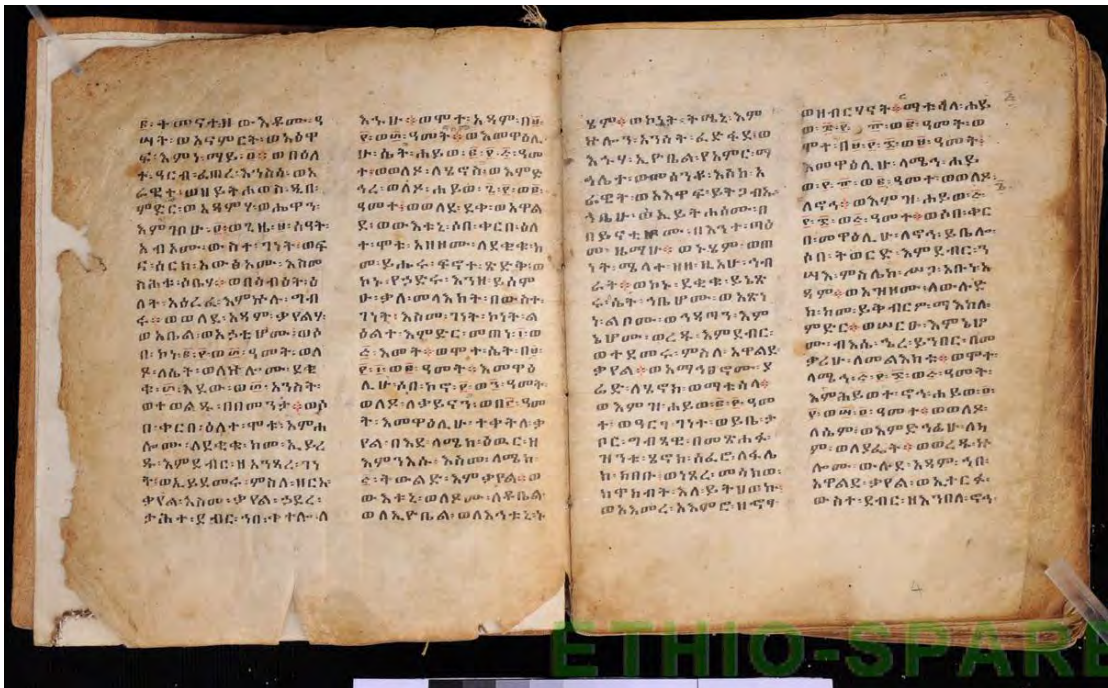


Fig. 10. Maryam Qorror, Chronicle of Giyorgis Wäldä 'Amid

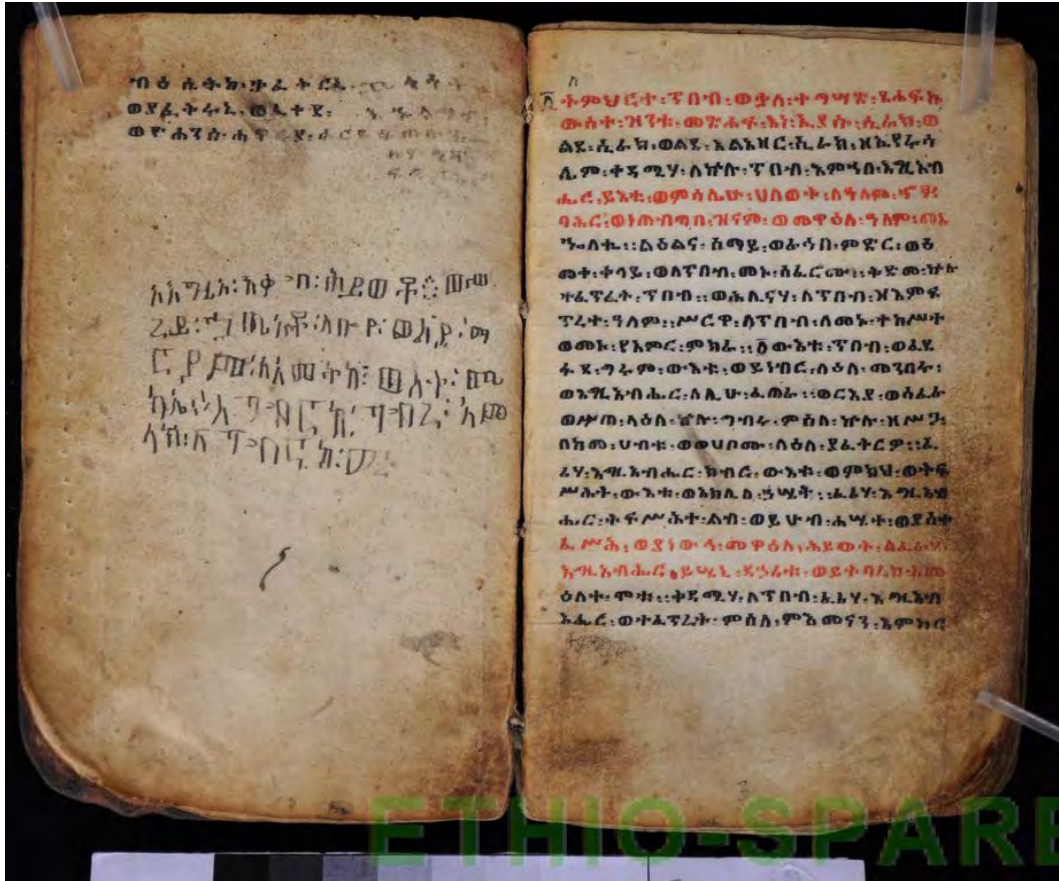


Fig. 11. Maryam Qorrar, Ecclesiastes



Fig. 12. Maryam Qorrar, Vision of Isaiah

The collection contained also a number of less common books, among others, e.g., a 19th-cent. (?) manuscript of the Acts of Filṗos of Däbrä Bizän¹², written, according to a short colophon, in the first year of King ʔlyoʔas, i.e. 1755 (fig. 9a¹³, fig. 9b); a 19th-cent. (?) manuscript with the translated Chronicle of Giyorgis Wäldä ʿAmid (Ġirġis al-Makīn b. al-ʿAmīd) (fig. 10); the Book Ecclesiastes (Wisdom of Sirach), exceedingly rare in the ecclesiastic libraries (fig. 11), and the Vision of Isaiah (fig. 12). Among masterpieces of the scribal and manuscript making art were a 18th-cent. (?) small-size manuscript with a collection of hymns, ʔEgziʔabəḥer nägśä (“The Lord Reigns...”) (fig. 13a, fig. 13b) and a huge (438 fols.) late 16th-cent. codex containing the *Mäšḥafä ḥawī*. The most amazing finding was a curious (19th-cent.?) manuscript made up of paper and



Fig. 13ab. Maryam Qorraq, ʔEgziʔabəḥer nägśä. Text and spine sewing.



Fig. 14ab. Maryam Qorraq, ʔEšäggəd lä-mäläkotekä..., codex layout

¹² The 14th-cent. founder and the first head of the monastery of Däbrä Bizän (Ḥamasen, in Eritrea). Over the centuries, Däbrä Bizän was the center of the so-called ʔEwostatean movement, the followers of *abunä* Ewostatewos and the doctrine of “two Sabbath days” (s. EAE II, “ʔEwostatewos”, “ʔEwostateans”, etc.).

¹³ The colophon is on verso-side; on the recto side, there is a posthumous miracle of ʔabunä Filṗos worked in the time of King Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508-40).



Fig. 14cd. 14b-d. Maryam Qorraq, *ʾƏsəggəd lā-mālākotəkä...*, binding

very thin parchment leaves, containing hymns *ʾƏsəggəd lā-mālākotəkä...* and *Mälkəʿa mädhane ʿalām*, laid out, unusually, in the shape of a cross. The manuscript was made up of only one quire sewn to a folded sheet of leather, to which a leather strip was attached through slits for closing and carrying the book¹⁴ (figs. 14a-d). A valuable piece of historical information comes from one of the *Haymanotä ʾabāw* manuscripts: a note recounts the history of Yoḥānnəs Kāma, one of the little known 14th-15th-cent. heads of Däbrä Libanos of Šāwa¹⁵. The note credits him, in particular, with the foundation of a church in Təgray which is today known as ʾƏnda Yoḥānnəs Kāma (Sāḫarti); future research must show if this story has indeed a historical background.

2. Kunale ʾArbaʿtu ʾƏnsəsa



15a-b. Kunale, church views

¹⁴ To my knowledge, the binding of the type has not been attested in Ethiopia yet.

¹⁵ Cerulli 1944:14143.



Kunale ʾArbaʿtu ʾƏnsəsa is a small round *gäṭär*-church situated in hot and humid lowland, not far from Hagära Sälam. The building, hardly visible from the outside, is surrounded by thick bushes and trees (figs. 15a-b). Despite the church’s main dedication to the Four Living Creatures, it is a local center of veneration of St. Kiros, and a *ṣäbäl*-spring “of ʾabunä Kiros” is located nearby (but the *tabot* dedicated to him was introduced very recently, around 1980 A.D.). The church seems to have been established in the time of King Yoḥannəs IV. The manuscript of the Homily of the Four Living Creatures (*Dərsanä ʾarbaʿtu ʾənsəsa*), written in the time of that King and, obviously, donated to the church

upon the foundation, contains a few interesting historiographic notes, on account of Tämben governors and especially Yoḥannəs IV. The Four Gospel book of Kunale is a well-known illuminated manuscript, with miniatures painted in a peculiar style. Dating probably to the second half 19th cent., written by a careful trained hand, the manuscript contains the name of the commissioner of the miniatures, a certain ʾabeto ʾAron. Being of high status, he was possibly linked to the local lineages, as a marginal note mentions him together with the “children of ʾAwʾalo”. The modest collection of the church contains a few interesting books, among them lavishly illuminated small codex with only one short hymn (*ʾO zä-wärädkä ʾəmsämay...*) and thirty seven miniatures (fig. 16).



Fig. 16. Kunale, ʾO zä-wärädkä ʾəmsämay...)

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3. Tānsəḥe Kidanä Məḥrät gädam

Tānsəḥe Kidanä Məḥrät¹⁶, the site of a rock-hewn church and a monastic community, is located to the north from Hagärä Sälam, half way to the famous monastery ʔEnda ʕAbiyä ʔƏgziʔ (Däbrä Mādḥanit). It is located in a deep, picturesque gorge, far below the average altitude of the highland. The monastery can be reached via a path going down along the slope. On the right side in the beginning of the path, local people show a small niche above in the rocky slope, where a local holy man ʔabba Bəṣuʕ is said to have lived in the first half of the 20th cent. and was still there during the Italian period. Just below that place, a pass leads to a huge cave formed by split rocks where another local holy man, ʔabba Yaʕqob, is said to have lived for an unspecified period. A stream falls down from the highland and flows below in the gorge; in this part, it is called Gäräb Şadəqan; below, it is called Gäräb (“river”) Gäbrä Mäsqaäl. The settlement of the monastic community is located in the rear of the gorge, and a rock-hewn church stands close to the waterfall (fig. 17). This area is difficult to enter as the monks do not favor visitors and do not allow females to enter, who may only descend up to the recently built church dedicated to the Trinity. Also today, a big part of the local community is very conservative and strongly opposes the presence of any foreigners.

Fig. 17. Tānsəḥe Kidanä Məḥrät, site view



Local tradition speaks of the foundation of the monastery by King Gäbrä Mäsqaäl, and the presence of a group of the “Righteous Ones” in the area (hence the aforementioned names of the river), but does not provide any tangible historical references. It was also reported that (the 4th- or 6th-cent.?) holy man Bəʔəse ʔƏgziʔabəḥer was active in the area, and lived somewhere “in a cave”, in the gorge¹⁷. More oral historical accounts may have been preserved by the local people and monks, but their investigation would claim substantial time.

¹⁶ Tānsəḥa, also Tānsəḥa, Tānsəḥe; elsewhere in the manuscripts, Tāsḥe, with the elision of the nasal -n-.

¹⁷ Called by the local tradition Bəʔəse ʔƏgziʔabəḥer, this figure apparently corresponds to “Bəʔəse Sälam of Mazba” in Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1978:67, no. 32; the note mentions in fact that the Vita of Bəʔəse Sälam exists in “Tānsi, Däga Tāmbén”, which is certainly Tānsəḥe. It is not known why the author of the article took the name “Bəʔəse Sälam”; the local tradition of Tānsəḥe refers to the name Bəʔəse ʔƏgziʔabəḥer only. It cannot be excluded that the article confuses two saints of partly similar names, one was active in Tāmben and another one far to the west, in Ṭaltal/Afar (the un-clarity went

The library of the Tānsəḫe Kidanä Məhrät is interesting, extensive and hints to a long and complex history of the site. The oldest manuscript of the library is the remarkable late 14th- or early 15th-cent. Gospel book with beautiful illustrations in an antique style, complete and still in good condition despite the damaged binding (figs. 18a-c); it is not an unknown manuscript¹⁸, but its antique features in the execution of the scribal work, decorations and binding have never been studied. A few fragments survived from other manuscripts that represent the early stage of the collection, like a 15th-cent. (?) *Senodos* (fig. 19), a *Gädlä ḥawaryat* (apocryphal “Acts of the Apostles”, fig. 20) and a few leaves of an old *Gädlä sāmaʿtat* (“Acts of the Martyrs”) manuscripts. Texts typical for monastic libraries are present in the 18th- or 19th-cent. manuscripts: *Wəddase ʾamlak* (“Praise of God”), the Book of the Monastic Ritual (*Šərfatä mänākosat*), two copies of the *ʾArägawi mänfäsawi* (“Spiritual Elder”), one of them with Amharic commentaries. An item hinting to Tānsəḫe as a former center of traditional learning is a manuscript containing the books of the “Small Prophets” (*Däqiqä näbiyat*) with extensive commentaries in Amharic (fig. 21).



Fig. 18a. Tānsəḫe Kidanä Məhrät, Four Gospels

further into the EAE I, 516b); also another figure could have been involved in the confusion, Adḫani/ Bəʾəse Sälam of the Vita of Libanos, a companion of the latter (Bausi 2003, s. index). We were informed that a manuscript(s) with hagiographic compositions about that saint had existed but perished. Perhaps, some elucidating hints will come to light when the other manuscripts of the collection have been studied.

¹⁸ S. the database *Mazgaba Seelat*, these and other items of the collection under “Maryam Tensehé”.

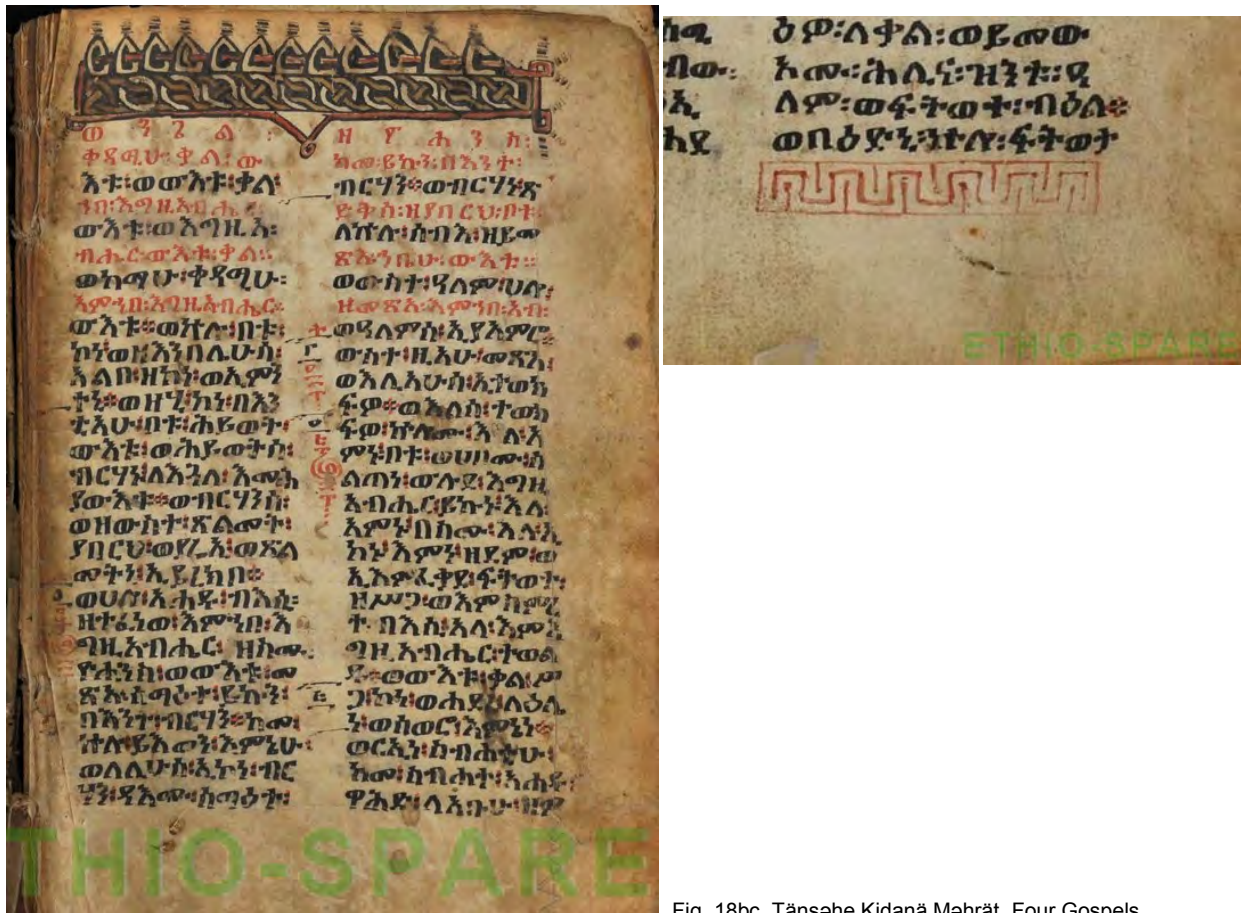


Fig. 18bc. Tänsəḫe Kidanä Məḥrät, Four Gospels

An 18th-cent. (?) copy of a single Gospel of John is, unusually, supplied with the traditional introduction for this specific Gospel, and adored with miniatures in a peculiar style (fig. 22), with Amharic legends naming instruments for writing and parchment making. The 19th-cent. manuscript production is represented by a richly illustrated copy of the Miracles of Mary (fig. 23a), donated by a certain “*ʾabunä Gäbrä Wäld*, son of *ʾabunä Täśfa Maryam*” (fig. 23b), and by a finely illuminated small-size copy of *ʾArdəʾət* (“The Disciples”) (fig. 24). The library possesses a second Gospel book from the time of Yohānnəs IV, donated by an individual. As in many other places in Tämben, quite a number of books entered the library in that period. An unexpected finding was a 19th-cent. Psalter in Amharic, in a version which could not be defined immediately, but it is different from the main one contemporarily in use in Ethiopia (fig. 25)¹⁹. The collection of Tänsəḫe Kidanä Məḥrät had, on the whole, a substantial amount of Amharic texts; yet the local ecclesiastics had no explanation as to the origin of these manuscripts or to who could need and use them.

¹⁹ Cp., e.g., *Mäzmurä Dawit*, Addis Abäba: Täśfa mattämiya bet 1953 E.C.



Fig. 19. Tänsəḥe Kidanä Məhrät, Senodos



Fig. 20. Tänsəḥe Kidanä Məhrät, Acts of the Apostles



Fig. 21. Tänsəḥe Kidanä Məhrät, "Small Prophets"



Fig. 22. Tānsəḥe Kidanā Mehrät, Gospel of John



Fig. 23a-b. Tānsəḥe Kidanā Mehrät, Miracles of Mary





Fig. 24. Tänsəḫe Kidanä Məhrät, Book of the Disciples

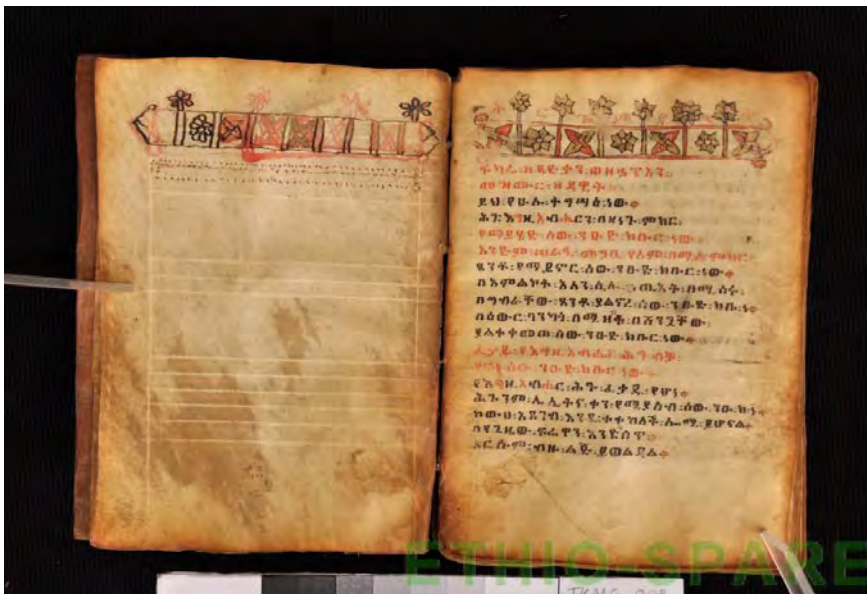


Fig. 25. Tänsəḫe Kidanä Məhrät, Psalter in Amharic

As to the group of *Şadəqan*, the early Evangelizers, vaguely mentioned by the local tradition²⁰, it turned out that a modest 19th-cent. manuscript in possession of the library contains the Vita of the so-called *Şadəqan* of Baräknaḫa²¹; also a *mälkə*-hymn in their honor has been discovered, copied into a small-size codex of miscellaneous content. However, the history of their veneration in Tänsəḫe is difficult to trace back; as it was the case in some other places, the ancient local indigenous tradition was somewhat side-lined, in the course of time, by more popular cults.

²⁰ Cp. EAE IV, 446a-47b.

²¹ Basically the same text as that published in Conti Rossini 1903. Cp. a reference to the “Righteous Ones of Tänkaḫe” (Brita 2010:7) which may well be corruption of Tänsəḫe.

4. Tängoga Däbrä Nazret Kidanä Məhrät

The monastery Tängoga (also Täng^wägwa) Däbrä Nazret Kidanä Məhrät is a big community located to the west from Mäqälä, close the western part of historical ʾĒndārta, apparently linked to the ecclesiastic communities in that area (May ʾAnbäsa being one of them, s. Report IV). Local tradition tells that the main church of Tängoga was founded by ʾabunä Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi, but a monastic community was established by King Yoḥannəs IV (r. 1872-89). The construction of the church is said to have taken 6 years. Today, the community of less than ten monks is very friendly and open to the researchers. The church was rebuilt some years ago; the monastic settlement was once extensive, but now some of the buildings – whose original functions are difficult to understand – are deserted and half-ruined, and thick bush has covered a part of the historical compound (figs. 26, 27)²². Local people mentioned that the caves of the hermits are hidden under the rocky slope above, but confirming this information was impossible. The monastery was greatly favoured by Yoḥannəs IV, as a number of other churches and monasteries in Tämben, but the exact context of these relations is for the moment hardly known.



Figs. 26-27. Tängoga Kidanä Məhrät, compound

²² Despite the decline, the monks still run a church school (reading and liturgy) with ca. 50 students.

The collection of the monastery is very extensive and complex, though to the most part dating to the 19th cent. The library possesses two late 18th- or 19th-cent. Four Gospel manuscripts. Both are finely written by similar but most probably different hands, and contain diverse documents. One of them contains a miniature (added later?) not very common for iconography of the Gospel books: St. Mark and *ʾabunä Tāklä Haymanot* (fig. 28). The third Gospel book, apparently dating to the late 19th cent., contains the monastic rules of Tägoga (*śərʿatä gädam*). Again, some manuscripts in the library of Tägoga point to the elevated level of traditional scholarship: collections of Old Testament and apocryphal books (Enoch, Job, Proverbs, Kings I; Micah, Esther, Tobit, Judith etc.; “Big Prophets”). The monastic literature is represented by works which are rare today in ecclesiastic libraries: a 18th- or 19th-(?) century manuscript with the collection of *Apothégmata partum* (Zena *ʾabāw*; fig. 29, explicit), a few manuscripts of the *Wəddase ʾamlak* (“Praise of God”). The veneration of Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi comes to expression though a couple of manuscripts with his Vita.



Fig. 28. Tägoga Kidanä Məhrät, Four Gospels

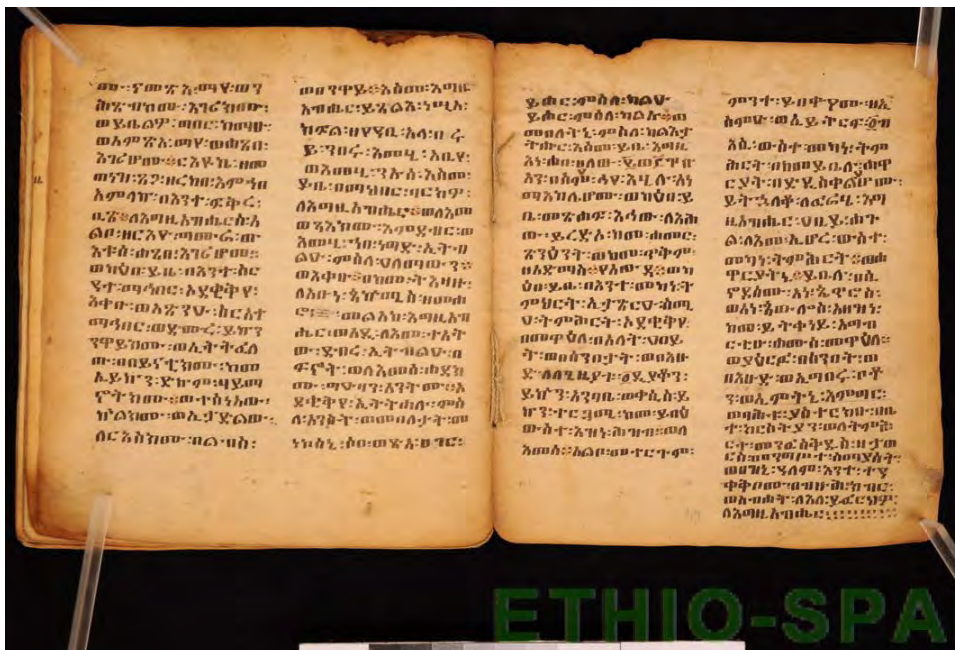


Fig. 29. Tägoga Kidanä Məhrät, Zena *ʾabāw*



Fig. 30. Tängoga Kidanä Məhrät, portrait of Yohannes IV in the manuscript of historiography

An interesting feature of the library of Tängoga is the presence of the manuscripts with historiographic works (otherwise rare): a manuscript with a “short chronicle” in Gəʿəz ending with the reign of King Susənyos (r. 1607-32); another one containing a collection of Amharic and Gəʿəz historiographic compositions including the so-called “Vision of King Ləbnä Dəngəl”²³, followed by a short “chronology of the Oromo rule”, the *ʾAnqäšä amin*²⁴, and a short text called *Ṭomärä ṭəy-yaqe* “Epistle of Questioning” in Gəʿəz, being a “letter” of Muslims outside Ethiopia to their coreligionists in Ethiopia (Argobba, Yäğğu, Wäräbabo, Wärähimano). The content of the manuscript appears to be reminiscent of the political agenda of Yoḥannəs IV’s reign; it is also decorated with the image of the latter (fig. 30).

5. ʾAräbay Maryam

A small, but well known *gätär*-church, is located on a windy hill northeast from the main road connecting Hagärä Sälam and Mägälä, and can be reached through a difficult rural road after an hour of driving. Local tradition claims the church foundation in the time of King Säyfä ʾArʿad (r. 1344-71) when the governor of Təgray was a certain Gäbru Gəmbäla²⁵; there was no obvious proof for that information. The church is said to have been attacked by the Italians who burned the books (in 1935-36?); the old church was finally destroyed in 1980s when the area became a battle ground during the anti-Därg war. A small, very modest round church was built instead (fig. 31). The church was visited by scholars before and known mostly thanks to the finely illuminated late 16th-cent. (?) Four Gospel book, a sample of good scribal work (fig. 32a); among its peculiarities

²³ Cp. Lusini 1994.

²⁴ By the 16th-cent. ʿEnbaqom, s. Van Donzel 1969; cp. EAE I, 278; EAE II, 280a-282a.

²⁵ *Təgre mäkwännən, baḥrā nəgaš* or *maʾəkälä baḥər*? No governors bearing such or similar name is known from the time of Säyfä ʾArʿad; however, *maʾəkälä baḥər* Gäbru is known from an ancient land charter, from 1305 (Conti Rossini 1901:199, no. 15), and a few others from a later centuries.

is a short Vita of *ʾabunä Tärbu*, written by a later and crude hand (fig. 32b)²⁶. Besides, the church collection is composed of mostly modest liturgical books today preserved, to the most part, in private houses. No one of them predates the 18th cent. (cp. a 18th-cent. Missal, fig. 33; crude 19th-cent. notes in endleaves of a 18th-cent. (?) Synaxarion, fig. 34).



Fig. 31. ʾAräbay Maryam, church view



32ab. ʾAräbay Maryam, Four Gospels

²⁶ This is the second manuscript containing the Vita of *ʾabunä Tärbu*, recorded by the project team. The saint is supposed to protect from the biting dogs, and otherwise known in the Coptic tradition (s. CE vol. 5, 1507, *ʾAbu Tarbū*). The short hagiographic composition looks like a Synaxarion (?) version of the Vita, but there is no commemoration for Tärbu in the editions of Ethiopic Synaxarion (the same situation in the Coptic tradition, s. *ibid.*).



Fig. 33. ṾArābay Maryam, Missal



Fig. 34. ṾArābay Maryam, notes in Synaxarion

6. May Bāṣatti ṾArbaṣtu ṾEnsəsa

May Bāṣatti Däbrä Gännät ṾArbaṣtu ṾEnsəsa is a small church located to the south from Hagärä Sälam - Mägälä road, dedicated to the Four Heavenly Creatures. According to local tradition, a pre-Christian sanctuary (*ṾOrit*) was on the site of the church as early as 30 years B.C.; after that, a church dedicated to the Four Heavenly Creatures was founded by the 4th-cent. saint BəṾəse ṾƏgziʾabəḥer, the same mentioned above (s. above, Tänsəḥe Kidanä Məḥrät). However, no apparent hints supporting the claim were seen at the site. The round church building is quite new (fig. 35); most probably a monastic community never existed there, but a few nuns usually live at the church. A *ṣäbäl*-source of St. Kiros and the Four Heavenly Priests is located in the vicinity of the church.

The books of the church library are partly scattered in private houses. The illuminated large size Four Gospel book is a known manuscript, datable probably to the 18th cent.; a certain Zärʾa



Fig. 35. May Bāṣatti, church view

Kəsoṣ (Krəstoṣ) is mentioned in the headings of the Gospels, being possibly commissioner of the scribal work, and qeṣ gābāz Gābrā Mikaʾel is depicted under the Crucifixion styled as one of the 24 Heavenly Priests and referred to as the commissioner of the miniature(s) (fig. 36). Fragments of older, 15th-cent. manuscripts (*Gəbrā ḥəməmat*, the Book of the Rite for the Holy Week) were discovered infixed in a late 18th-cent. (?) manuscript containing the Homily of the Four Heavenly Creatures (figs. 37a-d). Besides, among the most interesting books, the library of May Bāʿatti possesses also a 18th- or 19th-cent. (?) exemplar of the collection *Māftəḥe sārāy* (“Loosening of the Spells”), of the type found also in other places of Təgray (fig. 38); a composite manuscript with the Vita of Gābrā Mānfās Qəddus and the Homily of St. Michael, in which the first text has a colophon with the date 7173 year of mercy (= 1681 A.D.; the time of King Yoḥannəs I); a 19th cent. Psalter with a royal genealogy until King Yoḥannəs IV on an additional infixed folio.



Fig. 36. May Bāʿatti, Four Gospels

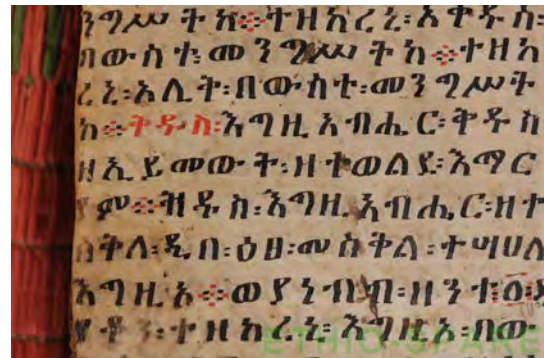


Fig. 37a-d. May Bāʿatti, Homily of the Four Living Creatures



Fig. 38. May Bäʿatti, *Mäṯteḥe šäray*

7. ʿAlʿasa Mikaʿel

A small church ʿAlʿasa/ʿAlaʿsa (Qəddus) Mikaʿel is located to the north from Hagärä Sälam - Mäḡälä road, not far from a big local market²⁷. The contemporary church building was constructed probably some 50-70 years ago (fig. 39); a *šäbäl*-source is hidden in a groove nearby.



Fig. 39. ʿAlʿasa Mikaʿel, church view

²⁷ Both Alʿasa and May Bäʿatti ʿArbaʿtu ʿEnsəsa are located in a *wäräda* that today is called Aynəbärkakən, in Təgrəñña meaning literally “We will not kneel down”, in commemoration of fierce battles that took place in the area during the anti-Därg war. Alʿasa is the outer margin of Tämben neighboring to ʿƏndäarta.



Almost nothing is known about the history of the church. Its Four Gospel book is a late 19th-cent. modest manuscript, donated to the church by “the children of ḲAlāsa”²⁸, with the traditional Introduction (*māqdām*) styled in the recent way and strange “geometric” drawing of an Evangelist (an unfinished miniature?; figs. 40a-c) However, the library encompasses a few older books. It was a surprise to find in ḲAlāsa the Vita of Nāḳkwəto Lā-ḲAb (fig. 41), a saintly king from the Zagwe-dynasty²⁹, in a manuscript datable at least to the first half of the 18th-cent. also containing the Dərsanā Mikaḳel³⁰. The text is acephalous, but only a small portion of the Vita is missing. For the rest, the collection is typical for a small rural church library, with no other interesting texts, but also with no signs of significant disturbance and renovation, with most books coming possibly from the time of the church’s (re-) foundation (in the 18th cent.?).

Fig. 40ab. ḲAlāsa Mikaḳel, Four Gospels

²⁸ The description possibly refers to the names of a few individuals which are mentioned in the supplications.

²⁹ EAE III, 1092a-93b.

³⁰ S. the edition, Conti Rossini 1943; cp. a recent summary in EAE III, 1092a-03a. So far, no witnesses of the Vita were identified as coming from Təgray; the people of ḲAlāsa were not able to provide any historical information on the history of Nāḳkwəto Lā-ḲAb’s veneration. The information that the church has a *tabot* of this Saint (“who refused the reign for the sake of piety”), and his commemoration (3 Hədar) is celebrated, could not be verified.

Fig. 40c (right). ?Al'asa Mika?el,
Four Gospels



Fig. 41 (below). ?Al'asa Mika?el. Gädlä Nä?akkweto Lä-?Ab



8. ?Agula^ᶜ Getesemani Kidanä Məḥrät

The only site in Kələttä ?Awla^ᶜlo studied by the project team during the field research, ?Agula^ᶜ Getesemani, or, in full, ?Agula^ᶜ Getesemani Qəddus Kidanä Məḥrät *gädam* is located at the outskirts of the small town of ?Agula^ᶜ.

Fig. 42.
 'Agula' Kidanä
 Məhrät,
 Church view



Fig. 43. 'Agula' Kidanä Məhrät, Four Gospels

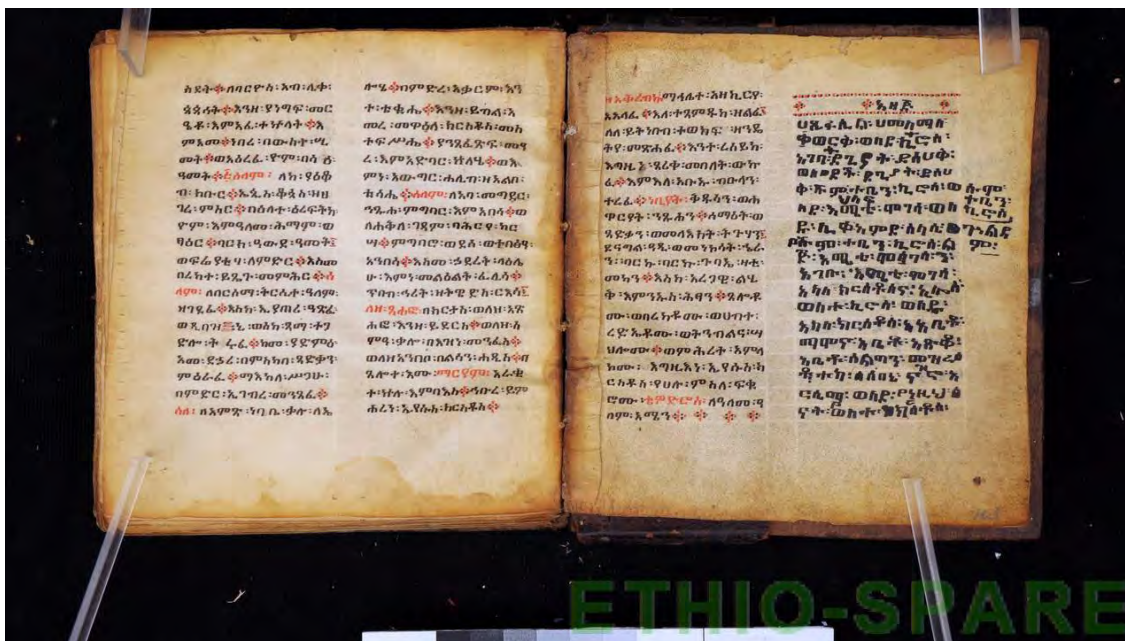


Fig. 44. 'Agula' Kidanä Məhrät, collection of hymns



Fig. 45ab. ጳጳሴ Kidanä Məhrät, Octateuch

The town hosts one of the archaeological sites that became known ever since³¹, but despite that, practically no work was conducted there. Ruins of an ancient sanctuary in ጳጳሴ were mentioned many times in connection with the Aksumite period, but more recent (19th-cent.) development of the site was lesser attended. ጳጳሴ was apparently a place of prominence in the early career of *däggazmač* Kasa, the future King Yoḥannəs IV (r. 1872-89), which is less known in the contemporary historiography. At a certain point, ጳጳሴ was made his residence and “political center”. A church which had existed there was reorganized and given a new status (*gädam*) as a monastic community was established there. A residence and a reception hall (*addaraš*)³² were built up at a short distance away from the church. Today, it is a fairly recent building (fig. 42); the physical traces of the monastic community are difficult to discern, but the church library was staffed with high-quality manuscripts, still well preserved today. It appears that a substantial number of the books show features suggestive of their common provenance.

The collection has two finely written 19th-cent. Four Gospel books, both containing numerous additional notes; one has many commentaries in Amharic showing traces of intensive dealing with the Gospel texts (fig. 43). A nicely executed collection of *sälam*-hymns has a traditional genealogy of Tämben rulers’ line as an additional note (fig. 44). A few books hint to the upper status of the library. A fine Octateuch manuscript has a “signature” of King Yoḥannəs IV (fig. 45ab); a valuable Synaxarion manuscript (for the second half of the year) has an extensive colophon which gives a very rare chance to trace back the history of the item. According to the colophon (fig. 46), the manuscripts was completed in Däbrä Rema³³ by scribe Mälkäʿa Krəstos, during the 35th (the last?) year of the reign of King Fasilädäs, and the fourth year of the tenure of Metropoli-

³¹ Cp. EAE I, 123.

³² Now in reasonable condition, both buildings have been recently repaired and restored.

³³ On Lake Ṭana, s. EAE IV, 364.

tan Kræstodulos, i.e. around 1666/67 A.D. The then head of Rema was *ʾabba* Zä-Mäläkot³⁴. The “migration” of the manuscript over many years can hardly be traced back; however, the codex appears in ʾAgula⁵, apparently as the result of Yoḥannēs IV’s attempts to equip the library of the new monastic community by the best books; and a donation note mentioning the King was inscribed (col. c) by the same hand as that in the Octateuch (s. above)³⁵.



Fig. 46. ʾAgula⁵ Kidanä Məhrät, Synaxarion

³⁴ He is not mentioned in the table of abbots compiled by E. Hammerschmidt (1977:168), but the chronology covers only a recent part of the history and has a large gap between the alleged 15th-cent. foundation and the early 18th cent. Only from that century the history of the monastery could be to a certain extent reconstructed, mostly on the basis of manuscripts (only 25) photographed by Hammerschmidt (ibid., 112-66).

³⁵ More interesting texts may be discovered in the library of ʾAgula⁵. Possibly a coincidence, there is at least one more manuscript pointing out in the direction of Ṭana area and Goḡgam; a fine 18th-cent. (?) manuscript containing quite a rare (*Qəbat*) composition known as *Ḥamärä haymanot* (collection of treatises on the theology of *Qəbat*-school, cp. EMMML no. 2163), with a document at the end that contains “a statement on faith” as spoken out by Metropolitan Yoḥannēs (probably, the Metropolitan ʾabunä Yoḥannēs who died in 1761).

9. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel

Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Qəddus Mikaʔel³⁶ is the only church in *wäräda* Ganta ʔAfašum that was investigated during the field trip. It turned to be another nearly unknown ancient site, located in the area between ʕAddigrat and Däbrä Dammo. The site can be reached through new asphalt road over the mountain crest Kəsad ʕAläg^wa; having descended, one has to drive some minutes, and then turn to the right and continue along the dry riverbed. The site is located not far from the road, but



Fig. 47. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel, view of the site



Fig. 48. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel

is nearly invisible from the outside and difficult to reach. The church compound, scattered on elevated grounds on both banks of the river, is complex and composed of a few structures, among them an entrance house and a gate-tower, the recent church (figs. 47-48), the fence of the old rock-hewn church just behind, burials, and ruins on the other side of the gorge (figs. 49-50). During the rainy season, the deep gorge is filled with a powerful stream of water that flows into the riverbed located below. During this period the site is hardly accessible.

³⁶ Meaning literally, in Təgrəñña, “the binding (or detention place?) of a thief”.



Fig. 49. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel, view of the site



Fig. 50. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel, view of the site

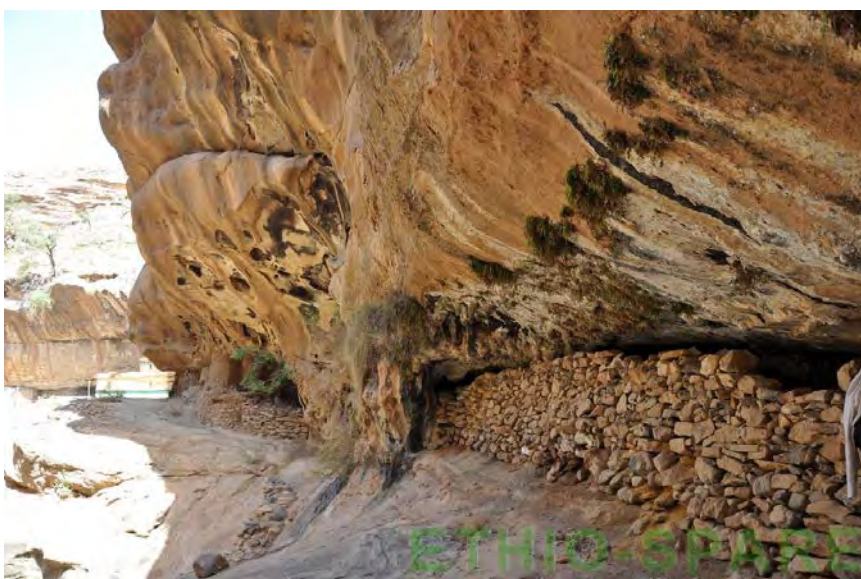


Fig. 51. Məʔəsar Gwəḥila Mikaʔel, burial site

A striking peculiarity of the site is the presence of the traditional old burial (fig. 51) still intact undisturbed as in most of the other places (where the old practice gave ground to cemeteries of the modern type): a several dozen meters long cavity under the rock was separated from the outside by a wall, and over many years dead bodies were piled in the space behind, and became dry and mummified. The burial is not used anymore; recent individual graves are scattered between the entrance structures. A monastic community is said to have existed there and the gorge appears to be suitable for hermitic life, but now only a few nuns live at the church. The local people are distinguished by extremely conservative attitudes, even though the area is going to host a few modern industrial installations in the nearest future.

No references to the site were discovered in the sources, at least at the first glance. The local tradition tells that the church was founded in a very remote time by a certain Noy. He had 12 children; most of them are not remembered by name, but from some of them local place names are said to have been derived: Sälšen

from Səllus; Kudo Zārʔay from Zārʔay etc. The name of the district, ʕAddi Qänäy, is explained as a contracted form from ʕAddi Däqqi Noy (“land of the children of Noah”). Both Noah and his children are said, vaguely, to have been buried at the site.



Fig. 52. Məʔəsar Gwehila Mikaʔel, old church

The rock church appears to be among the oldest structures of the type found in the region. Fortunately left nearly intact, it is situated just behind the new church. Its narrow and long yard is encircled by a wall. It is accessible though the



Fig. 53. Məʔəsar Gwehila Mikaʔel, old church

nave of the new church or though the entrance house on the other side of the yard, but this area is inaccessible for females. A cavity under the overhanging cliff is closed off by a stone wall, with a door and several windows (fig. 49, left). The space inside is separated by two columns linked with arches, in which wooden parts are used. The outer side of one column shows paintings, very faded and damaged; the wall above the central arch is also covered with rough, faded paintings (figs. 52-54). A new investigation of the structure with the participation of relevant specialists is underway.

The original *tabot* of the church (now of *gäṭär* type, with four *tabots*) is reportedly dedicated to the half-legendary brother Kings ʔAbreha and ʔAṣbəḥa. The library of the church appears to be



Fig. 54. Məʔesar Gweḥila Mikaʔel, old church

old, but very heterogeneous, and renovated in the course of the 20th cent. with the consequence that some old manuscripts survived only in fragments. Among them, a very old, badly damaged fragment was discovered, with the text still to be identified, possibly predating the 14th cent. (fig. 55). The oldest complete codex of the collection appears to be a late 15th or 16th-cent. homiliary (?), in recent, crudely prepared binding (fig. 56)³⁷. As a rare case, the collection possesses no Four Gospel book, but passages from the Gospels were found inscribed in other books. The collection possesses a sizable manuscript containing most of the New Testament books except Four Gospels (*Haddisat*). An interesting case is a recent copy of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles with an extensive colophon (fig. 57) which places the production of the

manuscript in the “12th year of King ʔlyasu” (ca. 1742, as probably King ʔlyasu II is meant?), and brings the donor (or one of the donors) of the manuscript, Tadewos, into relation with the church Märtulä Maryam (Goḡgam), through the donor’s “teacher” (*māmhər*) ʔlyosyas³⁸. Among the manuscripts with the hagiographic works, those two with Acts and Miracles of Gäbrä Mämfäs Qeddus (figs. 58-59, 17th and 18th cent., respectively?) appear to exceed in age those of the Vitae of



Fig. 55. Məʔesar Gweḥila Mikaʔel, old fragment

³⁷ Some other books of the collection bear traces of crude intervention that illuminated any remains of historical bindings.

³⁸ In the colophon said to be “of Märtulä Maryam”.

Fig. 56 (right). Məʿesar
Gwəhila Mikaʿel, homiliary



Fig. 57 (below). Məʿesar
Gwəhila Mikaʿel, collection
of New Testament texts



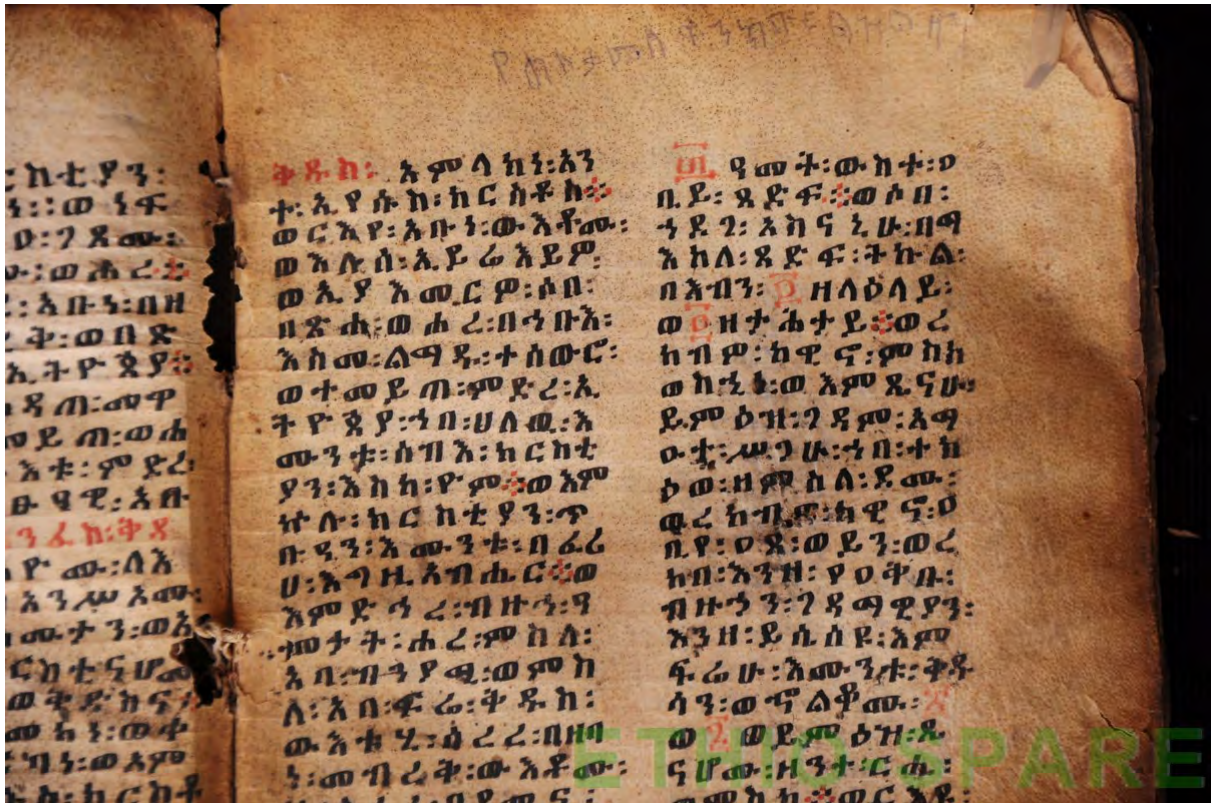


Fig. 58. Məʿəsar Gwehila Mikaʿel, Gädlä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qeddus

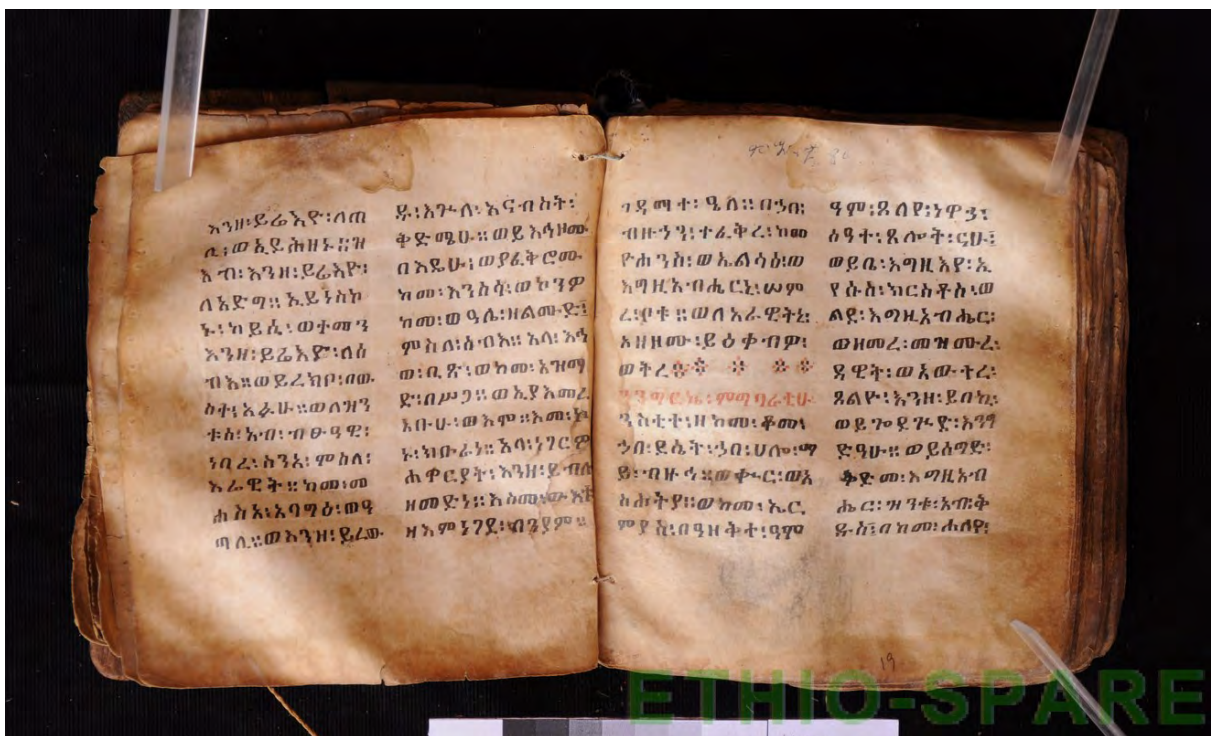


Fig. 59. Məʿəsar Gwehila Mikaʿel, Gädlä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qeddus

Mäṭaʿ/Libanos and Zä-Mikaʿel ʿArägawi. As in other areas around Däbrä Dammo, there were no signs of exceeding veneration of Zä-Mikaʿel ʿArägawi.

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