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



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November-December 2012

Report

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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. Qäqäma Maryam, view of the church

The Ethio-SPaRE project team had its sixth field research season in the period from 5 November to 6 December 2012 (after having taken part in the XVIII International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Dire Dawa, 29 October to 2 November 2012). Basing in Mäqälä, Hagärä Sälam and 'Addigrat, the team focused on the historical sites of the Kələttä Awla'lo, Däg'a Tämben and Ganta 'Afäšum wärädas. The team included of the members of the Ethio-SPaRE project based at Hamburg University, representatives of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (TCTA), and members of the administration of the respective church administration offices.¹ Within the five weeks of intensive work, the team was able to visit 17 sites and worked closely on 14 collections. The conservation program of the project has also continued, with four specialists engaged in Mäqälä during two weeks.² Moreover, an archaeological survey in cooperation with the specialists Università degli studi di Napoli L'Orientale was conducted within the framework of the sixth field research season (s. Appendix).³ Below follow brief observations on the churches and monasteries visited, and photos of the sites and the most remarkable manuscripts. 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 may be consulted in the main office of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (Mäqäla) and in the Eastern Təgray Diocese ('Addigrat) or the Southern Təgray Diocese (May Čäw). In the following report, all datings and conclusions should be considered as preliminary.



Fig. 2. Qäqäma Maryam, view of the compound

1. Qäqäma Qəddəst Maryam Däbrä Gännät gädam

The monastery Qäqäma Maryam is located in Däg'a Tämben wäräda between towns Hagärä Sälam and 'Abiy 'Addi, closer to the latter, at a distance of some 5 km from the main road in a difficult area. The monastic church, an elegant round building (fig. 1), lies on a stone hill

¹ Apart from the PI, the following persons went in the field or were involved in the project work: Hamburg University: S. Ancel, M. Krzyżanowska, S. Hummel; TCTA: Käbbädä Amarä (project coordinator), Mäsärät Haylä Səllase (field coordinator), Gərmay Fəssəha (field assistant); Eastern Təgray Diocese: Fəşşum Gäbru; local church administration: *māmhər* Haylä Maryam (the head of the church office of Kələttä Awla'lo wäräda); *māmhər* 'Ezra Gäbrä Mädhən (the head of the church office of Ganta 'Afäšum wäräda).

² The conservation team included Nikolas Sarris (Zakynthos, Greece), Marco Di Bella (Palermo, Italy), Robert Procter (London, UK), Teresa Zammit Lupi (Valetta, Malta).

³ Luisa Sernicola, Marco Barbarino.

surrounded by two streams full of water in the rainy season, with structures of the monastic compound partly hidden by trees (fig. 2). Šābāl-spring (of 'abunä Zä-Mika'el 'Arägawi) is located on the vicinity of the monastery.



Fig. 3. Qäqäma Maryam, 'Arganonä weddase



Fig. 4. Qäqäma Maryam, 'Arganonä weddase

The monastery at Qäqäma was founded by King Yoḥannēs IV (r. 1872-89). A small church founded by King Zär'a Ya'qob (r. 1438-68) is said to have existed long before that event. Reportedly, the history of the monastic community started with the first abbot 'abunä Gäbrä Giyorgis, an associate and close companion of King Yoḥannēs. Local tradition relates that the old church was "eaten by termites"; with the help of the King, Gäbrä Giyorgis had "300 'amole of salt" brought and spread on the church site. The salt was poisonous for the termites. Then a foundation for a new church (the present one) was laid on the spot. Local tradition tells a lot about the former wealth and strength of the community which counted some 50-60 monks⁴ and more

⁴ The candidates had to endure 4-5 years of novitiate; each year, 8-10 novices ("who wore black clothes") took monastic vow in Qäqäma.

than 10 church scholars, and received revenues from land possessions and salt trade. Now there are only some 10 monks living in the monastery.

A few (very worn) manuscripts may hint to the time prior to the rise of Gäbrä Giyorgis, such as two 17th-cent. (?) copies of the *'Arganonä wəddase* ("Harp of Praise") written by very similar hands (figs. 3-4), a Missal, copies of the *Wəddase 'amlak* ("Praise to God"), or a copy of the *Dərsanä sānbät* ("Homily of the Sabbath") from the time of King Täklä Giyorgis and Metropolitan Yosab⁵. However, local tradition focuses upon the role of *'abunä* Gäbrä Giyorgis as the first head of the community and does not recall much from the history prior to his advent.

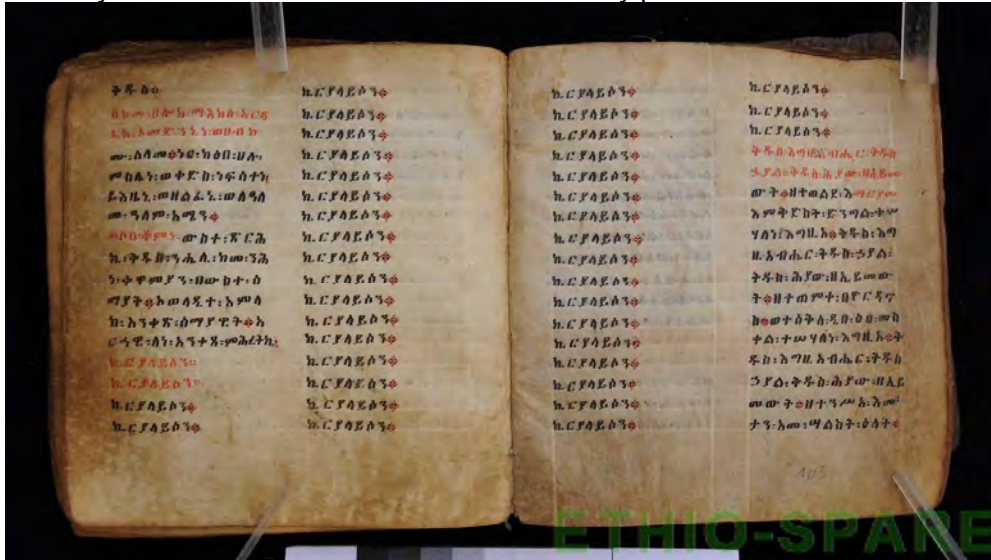


Fig. 5. Qäqäma Maryam, *Mäṣḥafä gizeyat*

An additional note in one of the Four Gospel books of the monastery reveals the year of Gäbrä Giyorgis's birth as 7309 from the "creation of the world" (=1817 A.D.)⁶. A quick look in the published Ethiopian annals has yielded no information on Gäbrä Giyorgis so far, with the exception of a note in an epistle of King Yoḥannəs appended to one of his chronicles known through the edition (Bairu Tafla 1977). Possibly referring to the head of Qäqäma, in a remark the King says: "...you invested him with the office like Abbate Gäbrä Giyorgis..."⁷ – indeed one wonders if "abbate" should be translated literally "my father" meaning of course the "spiritual father", i.e. confessor. The assumption is corroborated by a note in the aforementioned Four Gospel book which states that King Yoḥannəs donated the manuscript to Gäbrä Giyorgis, "his father in spirit" (*'abuhu zä-bä-mänfäs*). A number of books of various contents mention *'abunä* Gäbrä Giyorgis in donation notes and/or supplication formulas. Some of them can be dated to the time prior to his period, like the 17th- or early 18th-cent. *Mäṣḥafä gizeyat* (lit. "The Book of Periods", fig. 5)⁸ and a manuscript containing the *Zena ḥawaryat* ("Acts of the Apostles"). A fine Octateuch manuscript was written, according to the colophon, in the 32nd year of the reign of King Fasilädäs (r. 1632-67)⁹ (fig. 6a). The codex contains a few interesting though later pieces of evidence: a short note on Gäbrä Giyorgis stating that he was born one year after the death of *ras* Wäldä Šəllase of Təgray¹⁰, on 17 *Gənbət* 1808 E.C. (= 24 May 1815 A.D.)¹¹; a note on the

⁵ *'Abunä* Yosab II (d. 1803) was a contemporary of King Täklä Giyorgis I, who reigned six distinct periods in 1779-1800.

⁶ Cp. Chaine 1925:170.

⁷ Bairu Tafla 1977:173-74.

⁸ This manuscript includes as flyleaves a bifolio from an older (late 15th or 16th cent.?) with an excerpt from a liturgical book (a kind of lectionary).

⁹ More than one hand can be discerned in the main text of the manuscript, and their dating into the time of King Fasilädäs does not appear certain.

¹⁰ EAE IV, 1108b-10a.

¹¹ The note was compiled when Gäbrä Giyorgis was 80 years old, i.e. around 1895, long after the death of King Yoḥannəs IV.

monastery's land possession. Surprisingly, a historical note recounts the foundation of the famous church of Däbrä Bərhan in Gondär under King 'Iyasu I 'Adyam Sägäd (r. 1682-1706) (fig. 6b)¹², with two more documents by the same hand. The last document included in the manuscript is an extensive epistle on theological issues by Bishop Peṭros who was for a while appointed over Təgray¹³.

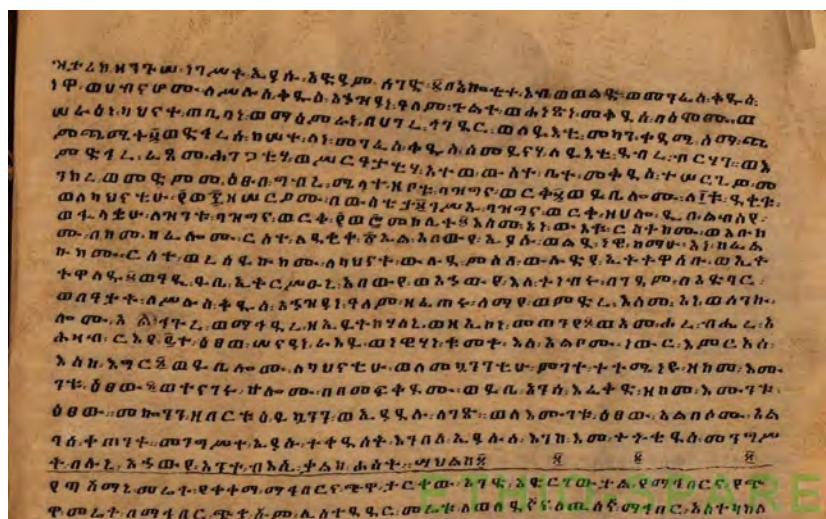
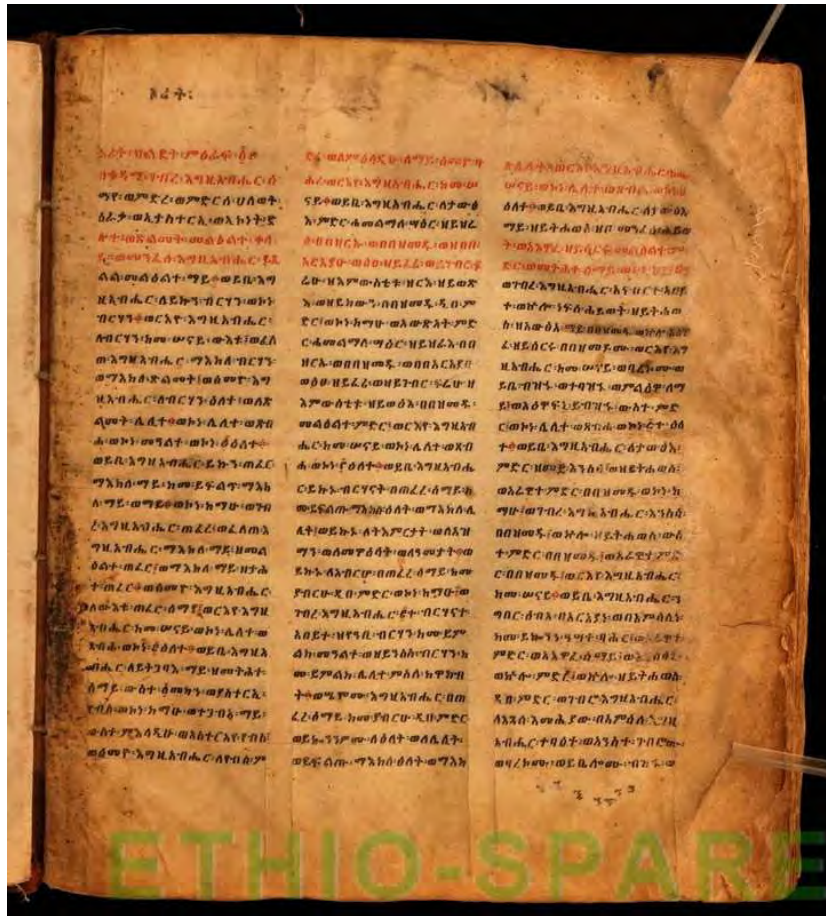


Fig. 6ab. Qäqäma Maryam, Octateuch and the historical note

¹² EAE II, 12b-14b (the church was founded in 1694).

¹³ EAE IV, 139a-40a; the document, stating that it was written in Qäqäma, bears the seal of Peṭros and is dated to 1897 E.C. (= 1905/06 A.D.).

The monastic literature is represented by at least two exemplars of 'Arägawi mänfäsawi ("Spiritual Elder"), one commented and one without commentaries; a commented *Filkäsyos*; an elegant long rectangular codex of the monastic ritual, *Šer'atä mänkwəsenna*. Less common works from Gäbrä Giyorgis's donation are represented by, e.g., the rarest 'Aksimarus¹⁴ and texts whose commented versions had limited circulation, like Song of Songs (fig. 7) (the manuscript includes also the Books of Kings and Amharic commentary to the Prayer of Faith). No doubt, those books hint to the high education level of 'abunä Gäbrä Giyorgis. An extensive note in the aforementioned Four Gospel manuscript lists the books donated by him and gives their total number as 101. Some other ecclesiastics are mentioned elsewhere in supplications formulas, colophons and the monastery's property inventories¹⁵, but their role in the history of the community and its library appears less significant. Very few manuscripts include pictures or drawings, like King David in a 19th-cent. Psalter (fig. 8), or the Acts of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus, a manuscript of the "lower status" though also donated by Gäbrä Giyorgis (fig. 9, the miniature was added at a later point, probably by another head of the monastery).



Fig. 7. Qäqäma Maryam, Song of Songs

In addition to the rich library, the monastery has a traditional school up to the level of *qəne*-poetry, attended by some 50 students. A scribal tradition still survives in the area, with a few scribes affiliated to the monastery (but only one of them being a monk). It is quite probable that the monastery was a significant center of the manuscript production in the 19th cent., though the issue requires a detailed study of the monastery's library.

¹⁴ In the same volume with the *Kidan zä-'əgzi'ənä 'Iyäsus Krəstos*, "Covenant of Our Lord Jesus Christ", a book of the canon law.

¹⁵ Another note in the same Four Gospel book mentions, e.g., a certain 'abunä Gäbrä Həywat and lists some 14 books that entered the library during his time; the following note mentions 'abunä Täsfä Maryam and some 5 books, and gives the entire number of the books as 130. The number indeed gives an idea of the collection's size. In the current state, the books (to which a certain number of paraphernalia can be added) are stored in a solid house but in great disorder which makes a survey of the books very difficult.



Fig. 8. Qäqäma Maryam, Psalter, King David



Fig. 9. Gädlä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus

2. Zala 'Ēnda 'Amanu'el gädam

Zala 'Amanu'el is a rock-hewn church located close to the border of Däg'a Tämben with Qolla Tämben, not very far from the main sanctuary of Tämben, the mount 'Ēnda 'Abba Sälama¹⁶. The church is known to scholars, but its manuscript collection hasn't been thoroughly studied¹⁷. Located on a stone outcrop and composed of several structures partly or completely cut in the rock and a built pronaos, the site (fig. 10) overlooks a wide and picturesque area (with the mount of 'Ēnda 'Abba Sälama in the background). The local people point to a house below in a valley, saying that it is "a house in which King Yoḥannēs IV was born"¹⁸. Local tradition claims that the

¹⁶ The site is located in a difficult area. It can be reached from both 'Abiy 'Addi or Hagärä Sälam; in the first case, a traveler will have a long walk on the sandy road (quite dangerous for a car); in the second case, there will be a long drive over a mountain crest, on a very rough road which may be blocked by boulders falling down from the slope.

¹⁷ The church was visited by R. Plant (s. Plant 1985:164, no. 111, "Emanu'el, Maybaha"). The PI was at the site in December 2009 together with M. Gervers and E. Balicka-Witakowska, but the time was sufficient only for visiting the church and having a very brief look at the manuscripts and paraphernalia. Since then, the conditions for inspecting the manuscript collection became very difficult since now the storage facility hosts a *tabot* and cannot be entered by non-priests.

¹⁸ That is the reason why the administrative name of the *qušāt*-district, Zala, has recently been changed into "Ḥaṣey Yoḥannēs". According to R. Plant, the church name is 'Amanu'el May Baha, and indeed May Baha is the name of King Yoḥannēs IV's birthplace mentioned in a few historical sources. However, during the visit of the team the toponym May Baha was not used by the people. The tradition about Yoḥannēs's birth (recorded in Plant 1985:164) has been recalled also during the visit of the Ethio-SPARE team, but the people did not mention whether King Yoḥannēs was baptized in the church of Zala.

present church was excavated by (a 13th-cent.) “King Lalibäla”¹⁹, and also recalls that a *tabot* was initially brought to Zala by a certain priest (*qes*) ‘Akililu. A small chapel in the vicinity is used for celebrating the feasts of St. George; during the rest of the time, the *tabot* of St. George is preserved in the main church, Zala ‘Amanu’el. A small monastic community exists at Zala, with some 4-5 monks living at the church.



Fig. 10. Zala ‘Amanu’el, view of the pronaos façade

The church possesses a considerable manuscript collection, but its historical part is relatively small. The oldest manuscript is a beautiful 15th-cent. *Mäṣṣafä gebrä ḥemamat* (“Book of the Rite of Passion Week”), still in a relatively good condition (fig. 11ab).



Fig. 11a. Zala ‘Amanu’el, *Mäṣṣafä gebrä ḥemamat*

¹⁹ The 13th-cent. King Lalibäla is probably irrelevant in this case, and local tradition assumes his role since the church is a rock-hewn one, “like Lalibäla churches”.



Fig. 11b. Zala 'Amanu'el, *Mäṣṣafä gebrä hemamat*

Another interesting manuscript contains what appears to be a compilation of the extracts from the *Wəddase Maryam* ("Praise of Mary"), Gospels, Psalms, and other texts; its content was described by the priests as *Mäṣṣafä gizeyat*, a kind of lectionary; it is not clear yet, if it is indeed the work which has been found in a few (usually monastic) collections, not mentioned in essays on the history of the Ethiopic literature, or simply a local term defining works of a certain type and function. The manuscript appears to be datable to the 17th cent., though an earlier dating cannot be excluded; the handwriting is unique, very calligraphic, by a very well trained hand (fig. 12). The codex includes an erased document, still at least partly readable, which appears to be a land charter referring to Abreha and Asbaha. Its script is of definitely late (18th cent.?) period. Unfortunately, the beautiful book was badly damaged by rodents; its binding has been destroyed, many leaves have been lost, many others have been misplaced.

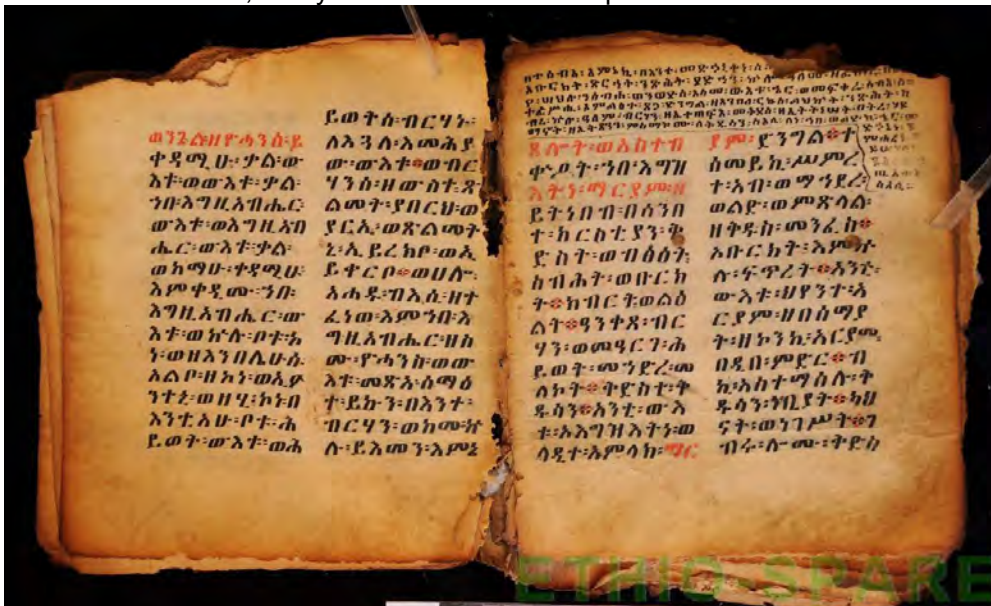


Fig. 12. Zala 'Amanu'el, *Mäṣṣafä gizeyat*

The Golden Gospel of Zala is a 17th- or early 18th-cent. (?) fine manuscript with a few peculiarities that the project team had not observed previously (fig. 13ab). An interesting feature of the collection is the presence of a 19th-cent. (?) manuscript containing the hagiography of the

evangelizer and first metropolitan of Ethiopia, 'abba Sälama Kästate Bərhan / Fəremnaṭos – Frumentius. It is a somewhat neglected piece of the Ethiopic hagiography attested in a few manuscripts only²⁰. The manuscript of Zala contains a text styled *dərsan* (homily), and one more narrative piece without any reference to the genre²¹, a collection of Miracles, and yet another one short narrative text on Sälama written on somewhat older leaves appended to the codex (fig. 14)²². The church also has a *tabot* of Sälama, and his *ṣābäl*-spring is in the vicinity. Sälama's veneration is quite vivid, with three annual feasts celebrated locally: *Hədar* 26 (his birth), *Tahsas* 18 (his consecration as bishop), *Hamle* 26 (his death). The liturgical use of the manuscript with his hagiography is also intensive, with the hagiography read in full on his birth and death feasts as well as on the 26th day of each month. Besides, Sälama's Miracles are read in the church during the morning *kidan*-prayer each day, and excerpts from his hagiography are read on Sundays.



Fig. 13ab. Four Gospels



Fig. 14. Zala 'Amanu'el, Gädlä Sälama Kästate Berhan

²⁰ Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1978:87, no. 129. Zala is not listed among the five locations where copies of the hagiography can reportedly be found (one of them is the library of a civil institution).

²¹ The first text is the same as published in Getatchew Haile 1979, only preceded by a short introduction.

²² Cp. the date of the conversion of Ethiopia (col. ra), which is here 245 E.C. This date accepted in the scholarly historiography is rather a different one (cp. EAE IV, 486b-87a), around 330 A.D., which also appears in the Ethiopian annals (in the first line in short chronicles). The dates around 245 E.C. are, however, in no way uncommon (cp., e.g., Guidi 1896:69, 91; 244 years from King Bazen, during whose time Jesus Christ was born, to Abreha and Aṣbəha) but have not receive sufficient explanation yet.

3. Rubakusa Qəddus Giyorgis gädam

Rubakusa (Rubakusa, Rubaksa, Rəbakwesa) Giyorgis is a monastery located to the northeast from Hagärä Sälam, in a big gorge not easy for accessing. The monastic church dedicated to St. George (fig. 15) is surrounded by a settlement but is reserved for monks only; laic people may attend service in a different church dedicated to St. Mary. One more church, dedicated to Täklä Haymanot and affiliated to the monastery, is located in the vicinity.



Fig. 15. Rubakusa, view of the church

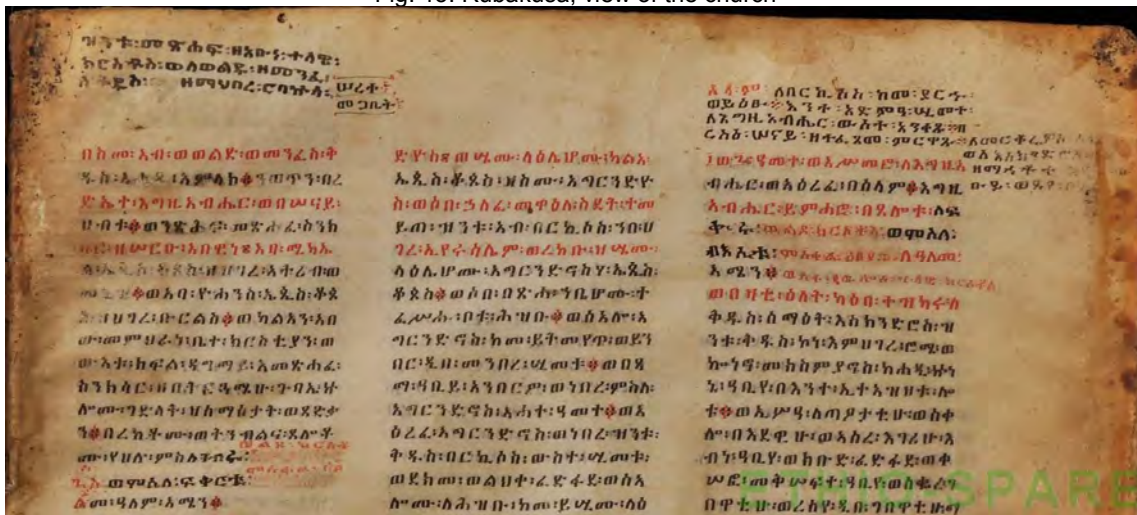


Fig. 16. Rubakusa, Sənkəssar

Rubakusa is an old foundation, well known to scholars²³. Local tradition explains the name as “the river of ‘Cush(ites)’”. A church is said to have existed ever since, but a monastic community was established by a late 17th- or 18th-cent. monk Tälawe Krəstos²⁴. Indeed a number of books

²³ S. the on-line database *Mazgaba seelat* (“Ruba Kusa”); on historical carpets of Rubakusa, s. Gervers 2004:292-93.

²⁴ ‘Abba Tälawe Krəstos is included in the register of Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1978:93, no. 154, but the information about him given in the entry (“Tälawe-Krestos... was a follower of *Abunä* Täklä Haymanot. He is believed to have been commander in-chief of the army of Motälämi, King of Damot. The monastery of Tälawe-Krestos was re-established by Iyasu I (1682-1706)”) does not agree, with the exception of a small part, with the information

contain subscriptions (donation or ownership notes, etc.) which mention his name; cp. an ownership note in a manuscript of the *Sənkəssar* (fig. 16) or his name in the Four Gospel book (cp. the heading for Matthew, fig. 17). A tentative chronology of the monastery's heads can be established on the basis of the note included in an early 19th cent. *Haymanotä 'abāw* ("Faith of the Fathers") which lists together with Tälawe Krəstos fifteen abbots²⁵. Another book commissioned by Tälawe Krəstos (*Mäšhafä gəbrä həmamət*, "Book of the Rite of Passion Week") assists for defining his chronology by means of a colophon (fig. 18) in which he appears as a "son of 'abunä Täklä Haymanot" and a contemporary of King 'lyasu I (r. 1682-1706), Metropolitan Marqos and 'əččäge 'Agnatəyos²⁶. Local tradition also adds that Tälawe Krəstos was from Qorraq (s. Report V) where his uncle Ma'qäbä 'Əgzi' was the abbot. A few other written documents prove that after Tälawe Krəstos the monastery remained an important center favoured and supported by different rulers. The church of St. George is known today thanks to its wall paintings made by the famous 19th-cent. artist 'Əstəzya²⁷, a contemporary of King Yoħannəs IV.



Fig. 17. Rubakusa, Four Gospels

gathered by the team in Rubakusa. Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke mentions Rubakusa as the only place where a copy of his hagiography is found; however, also this information could not be confirmed, as it turned out that at least today the library of the community does not possess a Vita of Tälawe Krəstos.

²⁵ The note is styled *Zena 'əräftomu wä-mätaliwä simätomu* ("History of their repose and sequence of their tenures") and it gives the names of the abbots in the following sequence: Tälawe Krəstos (died on 18 *Miyazya*), Zä-Mänfäs Qəddus (25 *Hamle*), 'Asetä Maryam, Kəflä Maryam (21 *Mäggabit*), Gäbrä Mäsqäl (23 *Nähase*), 'Ewostatəwos (16 *Təqəmt*), Wäldä Kidan (8 *Hədar*), Gäbrä Mədhən (5 *Gənbot*), Täklä Haymanot (18 *Säne*), Säyfä Šəllase, Säyfä Mika'el (14 *Yäkkatit*), Zä-Šəllase (13 *Mäskäräm*), Gäbrä 'lyäsus (16 *Hədar*), Wäldä Mika'el (23 *Miyazya*), Gäbrä Həywät (apparently in tenure for the time the book was written). From a colophon in a different manuscript (the Vita and Miracles of St. George of Lydda) we know that Zä-Šəllase was a contemporary of *däğgəzmač* Wəbe (baptismal name Kidanä Maryam), a ruler of Səmen, who kept under his sway large areas in North Ethiopia in 1826-55 (s. EAE IV, 1133b-36a).

²⁶ S. EAE I, 147b.

²⁷ S. the on-line database *Mazgaba seelat*, EAE II, 387b-88b.



Fig. 18. Rubakusa, *Mäṣṣafä gəbrä həmamāt*



Fig. 19. Rubakusa, *Wəddase Maryam*



Fig. 20. Rubakusa, *Senodos*

The monastic library contains some materials which definitely predate the 18th cent. and hint to the former history of the site. The oldest manuscript of the collection appears to be datable to a pre-15th cent. time, with the script showing some features akin to those of the so-called “monumental script” (fig. 19). The manuscript contains the *Wəddase Maryam* (“Praise of Mary”) and a few other texts, but to define its content is difficult because of its deprecatе condition. Other

old items of the collection are late 15th- or early 16th-cent. manuscripts: a *Senodos*, incomplete at the end but still in good condition (fig. 20), and a collection of the apocryphal *Vitae of the Apostles (Gädlä ḥawaryat)* datable to the same time, unfortunately destroyed, with many leaves missing. One more remarkable manuscript is a 16th- or early 17th-cent. (?) collection of the hagiography of 'abunä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus (fig. 21).



Fig. 21. Rubakusa, Gädlä Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus



Fig. 22ab. Rubakusa, Gädlä Yohannes

The collection of Rubakusa includes a number of other interesting manuscripts. One of them is a calligraphically written codex containing a collection of hagiographic works, some of them hardly known: the Vita and Miracles of Yoḥannəs of (Däbrä) Wifat and his companion Matewos²⁸; the Homily of Yoḥannəs Bishop of 'Aksum on Yəshaq, and the Miracles of Yəshaq/Gärima; *mälkə*-hymns for Tälawe Krəstos on a loose bifolium (written by a crude, recent hand)²⁹. The manuscript can be dated to the second half of the 18th – 19th cent. (if correct, it entered the collection after the time of Tälawe Krəstos). As to the hagiographic traditions of Yoḥannəs and Matewos, the texts claim early composition time. Cp. the extensive and complex colophon of the Vita of Yoḥannəs stating that the text was compiled in the 21st year of the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508-40), during the tenure of Metropolitan Marqos (d. 1529-30), which is 83 years after the repose of Yoḥannəs (s. fig. 22ab), who is said to have died around 1446. Among the manuscripts with commented texts or (Amharic) commentary collections, a large Psalter appears particularly remarkable, with nearly each verse supplied with extensive elaborations written by a careful, well-trained hand (fig. 23). A nice 17th-cent. (?) manuscript (fig. 24) contains the collection of hymns called *Wəddase mədrawəyan wä-sāmayawəyan* ("Praise of the Earthly and the Celestial Ones"), a rearrangement of the *sālam*-hymns otherwise found appended to commemorative notices in the *Sənkəssar*³⁰.



Fig. 23. Rubakusa, Psalter with commentaries

²⁸ Previously, Yoḥannəs of Wifat was known only from mentions in other hagiographic works and one short hymn (cp. Fiaccadori 1988). Now, the major work of his hagiographic tradition has been discovered and recorded. As to Matewos, this saintly monk has been completely unknown. Both are said to have been born in Mäqet (today in North Wällo, s. EAE III, 767b-68a) and ordained by the 15th cent. Metropolitan 'abunä Bärtolomewos. They were active in the historical South Ethiopia. Yoḥannəs founded Däbrä Wifat, while Matewos established Däbrä Šällus Qəddus; the former died on 7 *Gənbot*, the latter on 21 *Mäskäräm*. Reasons for including the manuscript with such works in the collection of Rubakusa are not clear.

²⁹ The only hagiographic composition on him which has been discovered in the manuscripts so far.

³⁰ Cp. EAE II, 248a-49a.

The most interesting is an elegant long rectangular Gospel of John (including also a number of other texts, in a rare constellation), donated to the monastery during the office of Zä-Šəllase, a contemporary of *däggazmač* Wəbe (baptismal name Kidanä Maryam) by a certain Wälättä Kidan (also some other names are mentioned). The main text is written in unusually fine, slender, slightly left-sloping script. The most interesting features are an Arabic heading for the Gospel of John and drawings revealing European influences hinting at connections with Egypt and recalling the role that *däggazmač* Wəbe Ḥaylä Maryam played in obtaining Metropolitan 'abunä Sälama III (figs. 25a-c)³¹.



Fig. 24. Rubakusa, *Wəddase mədrawəyan wä-sāmayawəyan*



Fig. 25a. Rubakusa, Gospel of John

³¹ He arrived in Ethiopia in 1841, s. EAE IV, 489b-90b.



Fig. 25bc. Rubakusa, Gospel of John

Area Səheta – Bahəra – Gwaḥgot

A part of the contemporary Ganta 'Afäšum wäräda, the district (wäräda) Bahəra – Səheta is located to the north from 'Addigrat behind the mountains called Sägren. It encompasses mainly the valley of the river May Saḥsaḥta with adjacent localities, and extends up to the churches of 'Af Məhyaw and Bahəra, as well as Gwaḥgot 'Iyäsus near the Ḥaramat mountain chain and the river Sulloḥa. While the rock-hewn churches of Ḥaramat have been known to the scholars ever since, the valley of May Saḥsaḥta (called Səheta) with some 6-8 churches scattered on a relatively small area of a few square kilometers appears to have escaped the attention³². There, the ecclesiastic libraries and traditional culture in general have been to a lesser extent disturbed than in many other places; and the cultural heritage of the area pre-dates the medieval period of the Ethiopian history. The project team was able to survey four main churches of Səheta along May Saḥsaḥta: Mäläkusäyto Maryam, 'Addimḥara Däbrä Mädhānit 'Abba Yoḥanni, Məngas Maryam and Däbri Qəddus Giyorgis. The area definitely requires more field research and studies that are more detailed.

4. Mäläkusäyto Qəddəst Maryam

Mäläkusäyto (Mäläkwəsäyto) Maryam is a small church located some 15 km westward from 'Addigrat, in the western corner of Ganta 'Afäšum wäräda. Two churches are located in the small valley of Mäläkusäyto. An older church is placed on a hardly accessible rock (fig. 26), hosting two *tabots* (St. Mary and Zä-Mika'el 'Arägawi)³³; another church, also recent and very modest, is

³² In general, the entire area between Gwaḥgot, 'Af Məhyaw and Bahəra is very difficult for driving and travelling, and the rural roads get nearly impassable after even a small rain. The way from 'Addigrat over Sägren pass, though very rough as well, is somewhat better than the way over the main road to Mäqälä and along the Ḥaramat mountain chain.

³³ The church building was recently rebuilt, and a miracle is reported to have taken place during the construction, when a worker fell down from the top of the roof and survived the accident unhurt.



Fig. 26. Mäläkusäyto, view of the church

located on a slope, closer to the main road, some two km away from the church on the peak. It hosts a *tabot* of Gäbrä Mika'el, a local saint (commemorated on 17 Ḥedar).

Local tradition tells about the foundation of the church in 336 “year of mercy” by a ruler whose name is said to be 'Azzay Bä-Kwəllu (?). Later, the church was re-established by

a certain 'aytä Gäbrä Dəngəl. Gäbrä Mika'el, a local holy man, is said to have been a hermit who lived and taught in Mäläkusäyto.



Fig. 27a. Mäläkusäyto, Four Gospels

A history of the church – much different from that told by the people – is recorded also in the written form. It is contained in a document included in the Four Gospel book (“Golden Gospel”) of the church. The document appears to be contemporary with the main text; it recounts that the church was founded by a certain 'Abä Käräzun. From the formula *wä-'əmdəḥrehu fäläst* (“and those monks who were after him”), we can conclude that 'Abä Käräzun might have been a monk

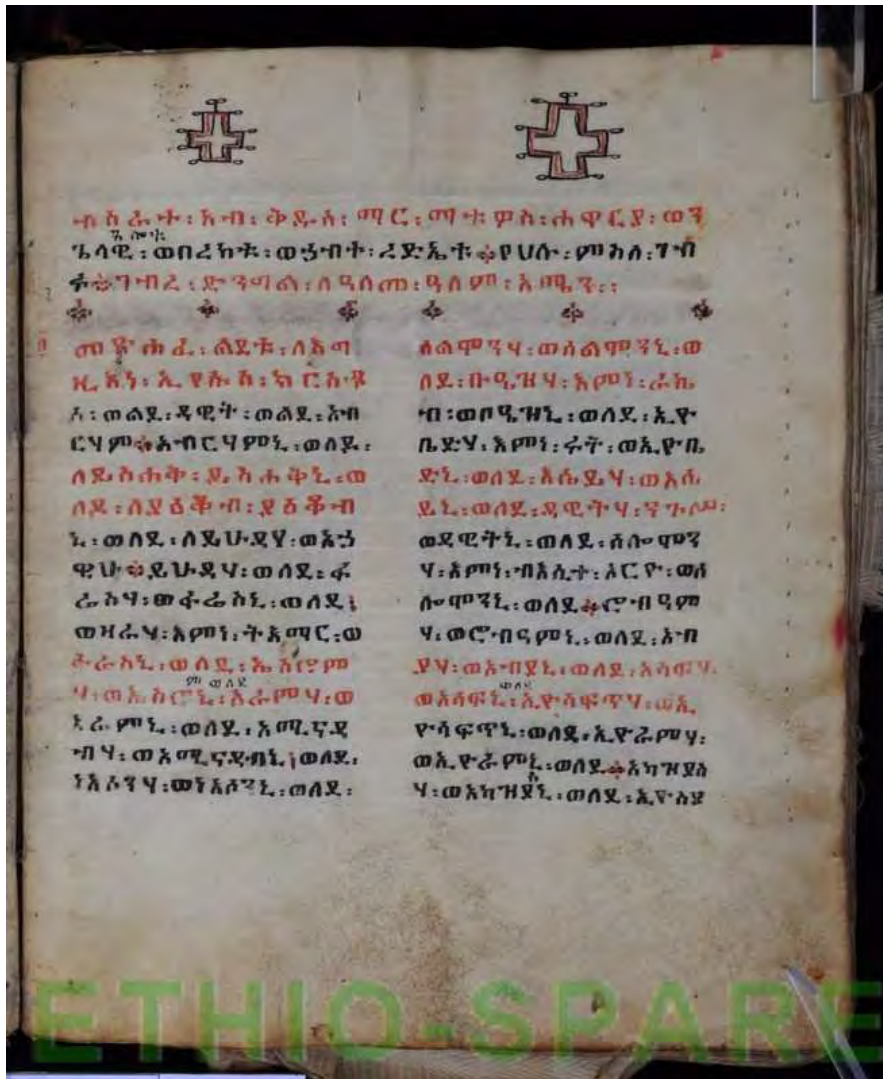


Fig. 27b. Mäläkusäyto, Four Gospels

or ecclesiastic, but the genealogy which follows, contains also a female and is unlikely a spiritual genealogy of monks. The most important information is that 'aytä Gäbrä Dəngəl was the one who rebuilt the church (s. above), and that the document was written in the time of King Täklä Giyorgis (reigned during six different periods in 1779-1800) and Metropolitan 'abunä 'lyosab (d. 1803)³⁴. Furthermore, Gäbrä Dəngəl appears as the commissioner of a manuscript containing the Four Gospels (the scribe's name, Däḥayä Mäläkot, is also mentioned) which – possibly at a later point – was decorated by very mediocre miniatures, painted by an amateur or simply un-experienced or starting artist (s. figs. 27a-b). The Gospel book also contains a register of

Mäläkusäyto's *qwəlt*-lands. Another book donated by Gäbrä Dəngəl is a fine copy of the *Dərsanä Mika'el* ("Homily of St. Michael") (figs. 28a-b) written by the same scribe and richly illustrated by the same artist. In a note on the completion of the book the scribe calls Gäbrä Dəngəl a son of Tälawe Krəstos and Wälättä Šəllase; furthermore, the note is extended by Gäbrä Dəngəl's genealogy from a certain Šəltan Säläwa (?) to Wälättä Šəllase. There is at least one manuscript in the library, a copy of the *Wəddase 'amlak* ("Praise of God") datable at least to the 17th cent. (fig. 29), which predates Gäbrä Dəngəl's time.

Two manuscripts containing hagiographic works about 'abunä Gäbrä Mika'el are of special interest since the hagiographic tradition of this saint appears completely unknown. One of the manuscripts, poorly written and datable to the late 18th or 19th cent., contains a collection of Miracles of 'abunä Gäbrä Mika'el of Səḥeta, "a son of priest 'Əndrəyas" (fig. 30ab). The second manuscript containing the Vita and Miracles is recent, written according to the colophon in 1963 E.C. The historical identity of this holy man venerated exclusively in Mäläkusäyto is still to be identified. Another remarkable hagiographic text of the collection is a 17th- or early 18th-cent. quire containing the Vita of 'abba Yoḥanni of Däbrä 'Asa (Tämben), a work exceedingly rare in East Təgray.

³⁴ S. EAE IV, 826b-27b.



Fig. 28ab. Mäläkusäyto, *Dersanä Mika`el*



Fig. 29. Mäläkusäyto, *Wəddase`amlak*



Fig. 30ab. Mäläkusäyto, *Miracles of Gäbrä Mika`el*

5. 'Addimḥara Däbrä Mädhānit 'Abba Yoḥanni

'Addimḥara Däbrä Mädhānit 'Abba Yoḥanni is another church of Səḥeta. 'Addimḥara, the name of a small locality, is indeed explained by the local people as 'Addi 'Amḥara, "the country of Amhara people", though historical reasons for that are unclear. Local tradition tells that the church was established by šum 'agame Rämḥay (Romḥay). His grave is located in front of the façade of the church (a peculiarity not observed by the team elsewhere), which is a late 19th cent. building recalling some architectural features of the old St. Mary cathedral in 'Aksum (fig. 31ab).



Fig. 31a. 'Addimhara 'Abba Yoḥanni, view of the church



The full name of Rämḥay is Rämḥa Šellase, who was indeed one of the governors of 'Agamä and a late 19th – early 20th cent. descendant of *däḡḡazmač* Säbagadis³⁵. The interior of the church is richly decorated by murals, showing historical personages: Rämḥa Šellase himself and many others, apparently his courtiers or members of his family depicted as warriors or as supplicants (fig. 32ab), as well as ecclesiastics of the church³⁶. The main *tabot* of the church is dedicated to 'abba Yoḥanni of the monastery Däbrä 'Asa (Tämben)³⁷.

The Four Gospel book of the church is a 19th cent. manuscript with numerous miniatures that are not typical for the Gospel books, painted by not a very professional artist (fig. 33; cp. above, on Mäläkusäyto Gospel books). Perhaps by chance, the manuscript was donated to the church by Gäbrä Dəngəl (the same person as mentioned above, s. "Mäläkusäyto Maryam"?) and Šägga Šellase. Beside the main text, it contains some documents (including the list of the fields in possession of the church) and the short Vita of 'abba Tärbu (s. Report V).

Fig. 31b. 'Addimhara 'Abba Yoḥanni, grave of Rämḥay

³⁵ One of the powerful lords of the first half of the "Time of the Princes" (s. EAE IV, 430a-31b).

³⁶ Some of them, like 'abunä Gäbrä Giyorgis, probably the first head of the church, are also mentioned in the manuscripts.

³⁷ Also known simply as "Abba Yoḥanni", s., e.g., Lepage – Mercier 2005:164-67 and EAE V, s.v.



Fig. 32ab. 'Addimhara' Abba Yohanni, murals



Fig. 33. 'Addimhara' Abba Yohanni, Four Gospels



Fig. 34ab. 'Addimhara' Abba Yohanni, *Mälkə'a guba'ē*

Quite a number of manuscripts were donated by šum 'agame Rämḥa Šəllase. The most illustrious item of the library is a 18th- or 19th-cent. (?) collection of poetic compositions (*Mälkə 'a guba 'e*, "Collection of *Mälkə* 'Hymns"). Originally the book was owned by a certain Qalä Krəstos; later it went into possession of Rämḥa Šəllase³⁸. The manuscript is remarkable due to its excellent miniatures. An illuminator painted miniatures on the blank folia and empty spaces after each poetic composition, depicting their protagonists in static postures, or illustrating their deeds on the basis of their respective hagiographies (fig. 34a); some of the miniatures are accompanied by depictions of donor's relatives (fig. 34b).



Fig. 35ab. 'Addimḥara 'Abba Yoḥanni, *Miracles of Jesus*

³⁸ The former possession note mentioning Qalä Krəstos was erased, though not completely, but in the supplication notes with his and his wife's names remained intact. A new possession note mentioning Rämḥa Šəllase, his wife Wälättä Mika'el, his parents and children was inscribed under the old one; the new names were also written elsewhere in the margins.

Another interesting feature of the church is the dedication of its main *tabot* to *'abba* Yoḥanni whose veneration has been attested only in Tämben. An older manuscript with his *Vita*³⁹ and *Mälkä*-hymns commissioned by “Gäbrä Mädhən Bayru of Səheta” is datable to the 19th cent. Another manuscript containing Yoḥanni’s hagiography is very recent, reportedly copied in Tämben. A miracle of *'abba* Yoḥanni is added on a fly-leaf in a manuscript containing the Miracles of Mary, donated by Rämḥa Šəllase. A richly illustrated manuscript of *Tä'amrä 'Iyäsus* (“Miracles of Jesus”) written by scribe 'Askälä Maryam contains several miniatures depicting episodes from the *Vita* of *'abba* Yoḥanni, and also a portrait of Rämḥa Šəllase with his relatives revering the church of the Saint (fig. 35ab). An (older?) manuscript containing the *Vita* of *'abba* Yoḥanni is present also in *Mäläkusäyto* Maryam (s. above), only a few km away from 'Addimḥara; however, it is impossible to say without a detailed study how the veneration of this Saint (unusual for East Təgray) was spreading, whether Rämḥa Šəllase had a direct (family?) link to Tämben and planted the veneration of his patron saint in the area over which he was appointed, or the cult was brought there through other ways. The church possesses a number of art objects, among others those presumably donated by Rämḥa Šəllase: two very well preserved votive crowns stored in the original containers (round baskets), and ceremonial vestments decorated with numerous metal plates, still in relatively good conditions.

6. Məngas Qəddest Maryam

Məngas Maryam is the next church of Səheta, located some 3-4 km from the descent to the valley. The rectangular church stands close to the terraced slope, its basement placed on an elevation suggestive of presence of ancient ruins (fig. 36); a small church dedicated to *'abunä* Täklä Haymanot, affiliated to that of St. Mary, is located in the vicinity. Local tradition claims that a sanctuary at Məngas was established “15 years before the birth of Christ” (?); it also recounts that 86 ancient kings “were crowned in Məngas before they went to 'Aksum to rule”⁴⁰. Indeed, the ancient age of the site appears to be confirmed by the presence of an archaeological site in its vicinity (s. Appendix).



Fig. 36. Məngas Maryam, view of the church

³⁹ Basset 1884; s. also EAE V, forthcoming.

⁴⁰ The tradition takes reference to the name Məngas which it interprets as “the place of crowning”. Obviously, the name is derived from the root NGŠ. The word *məngas* is absent in the dictionaries of Ethiopic but the word did exist since it has been found in at least one Ethiopic text, the *Vita* of *'abunä* Mädhəninä 'Əgzi' (s. Colin 2010:528-29, translated as “le lieu de couronnement”).



Fig. 37. Mengaś Maryam, Miracles of Mary and infixed hymn

The manuscript collection of the church is rather unremarkable but remained largely undisturbed in the 20th cent., with only few books showing signs of modern repairs and rebinding. The Four Gospel manuscript is a very modest book, without traditional introduction and parts preceding each Gospel. The manuscript might be datable to the 18th cent., and in one of the documents added on the flyleaves the 18th-cent. *ras Wäldä Šöllase*⁴¹ is mentioned. The age and typology of the collection of Məngaś are difficult to define without a detailed study, since most of the manuscripts lack colophons or hints in the subscriptions useful for dating, and the paleographic features are not conspicuous enough. At the first estimation, most of the books do not antedate the 18th cent. The oldest items preserved in the collection appear to be a small (late 17th- or early 18th-cent.?) quire with the Marian hymn *ʿIsäggəd läki wä-əweddəsäki* (“I worship and praise you...”), infixed in a more recent manuscript with the Miracles of Mary (fig. 37); and a manuscript, unfortunately badly damaged, containing the *ʿArägawi mänfäsawi* (“Spiritual Elder”) with commentaries and the Vita of

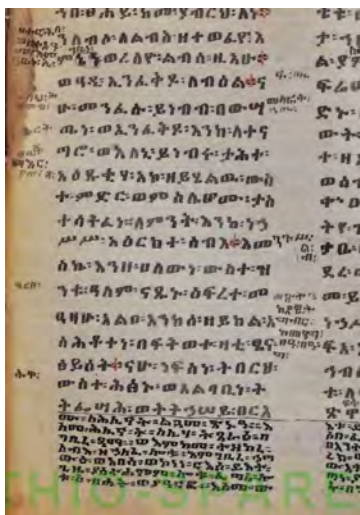


Fig. 38ab. Mengaś Maryam, *ʿArägawi mänfäsawi*

Täklä Maryam / Mäbaʿa Šəyon. Both the commentaries and the Vita are possibly written by the same (later) hand. The Vita is accommodated in the bottom margins of the folia throughout the codex (fig. 38a). The main text is followed by a hymn and a rare apocalyptic composition called *Fəkkare ʿlyäsus* (“The Explanation of Jesus”) (fig. 38b)⁴². The presence of the commented

⁴¹ EAE IV, 1072a-74ra.

⁴² Cp. EAE II, 516b-18a.

ʿArägawi mänfäsawi may be suggestive of the former existence of the monastic community at Məngaś.

A small local scribal tradition has been attested around Məngaś, with at least one scribe who has worked here since many years and produced many dozens of books⁴³.

7. Däbri Däbrä Zakaryas Qəddus Giyorgis

Däbri Qəddus Giyorgis is located a few km away from Məngaś, closer to the end of the valley. Overlooking the valley, the rectangular church of St. George (called also Betä Giyorgis) stands on a high rock and is hardly accessible (fig. 39a). It was renovated some time ago; local tradition relates that it was founded by King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. Another structure is visible between the rocks to the right from the church, which is similar to what the team observed at some other sites: a cave or cavity in the rock is separated from the outside by a masonry wall with windows (fig. 39b).

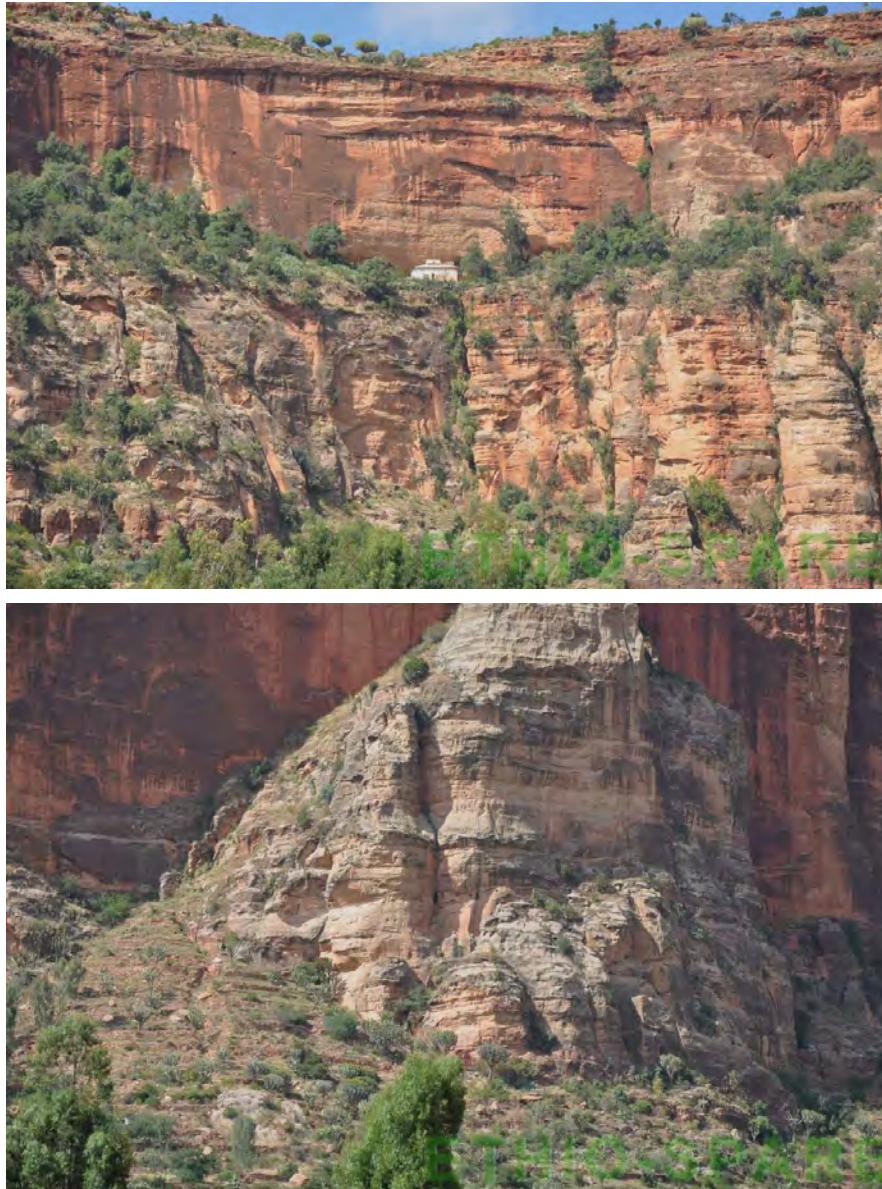


Fig. 39ab. Däbri Giyorgis, church view and the old church

⁴³ Təklay Märässa, ca. 104 years old; now not practicing his profession because of the age; however, he was active for several decades and wrote many dozens of books. There is also a hint that, historically, local scribes were active in the area of Səheta (s. above, *ʿAddimhara Däbrä Mädhanit ʿAbba Yoḥanni*).



Fig. 40ab. Däbri Giyorgis, Four Gospels, (a) Evangelist and talismanic picture, (b) parchment guard.



Fig. 41a. Däbri Giyorgis, *Gädlä Giyorgis*.

Local people said that it is the former church of St. Cyriacus, now deserted, without the *tabot* (reportedly stolen)⁴⁴. The third church Däbri Mädhane 'Aläm is built in a more accessible place of the valley; the current structure is recent, but the church is said to have been founded by *grazmač* Mäšäša, who also donated to the church some books.

Now, the local people cannot find an explanation for the uncommon name of the main church, Däbrä Zakaryas; perhaps it reflects the ancient dedication which is today forgotten. The Four Gospel book of Däbri Giyorgis is datable probably to the 17th or early 18th cent. (a tentative dating of the manuscript is difficult), with crude, peculiar illuminations which include talismanic pictures normally used only in protective scrolls (fig. 40a). More important, parchment guards strengthening the last quires are made out of re-utilized leaf originating from an ancient, pre-14th cent. (?) manuscript (fig. 40b), a hint to the ancient age of the library.

Moreover, in a manuscript containing a collection of St. George's hagiographic works, possibly of the same age as the Gospel Book (fig. 41a), a few other ancient leaves originating from at least two different manuscripts have been found (figs. 41b-c). The names of the scribe and original donor(s) were erased in that book, and in a few passages, a certain Ḥabä Dəngəl was indicated as donor⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ It appears that R. Plant noticed both the Qirqos and Däbri Däbrä Zakaryas Giyorgis churches but did not reach that area; both are only mentioned in her book (Plant 1985:34, with some discrepancy in the names of the localities, but note the interpretation of the name "Məngas").

⁴⁵ The same person is indicated as the donor of the Four Gospel book.

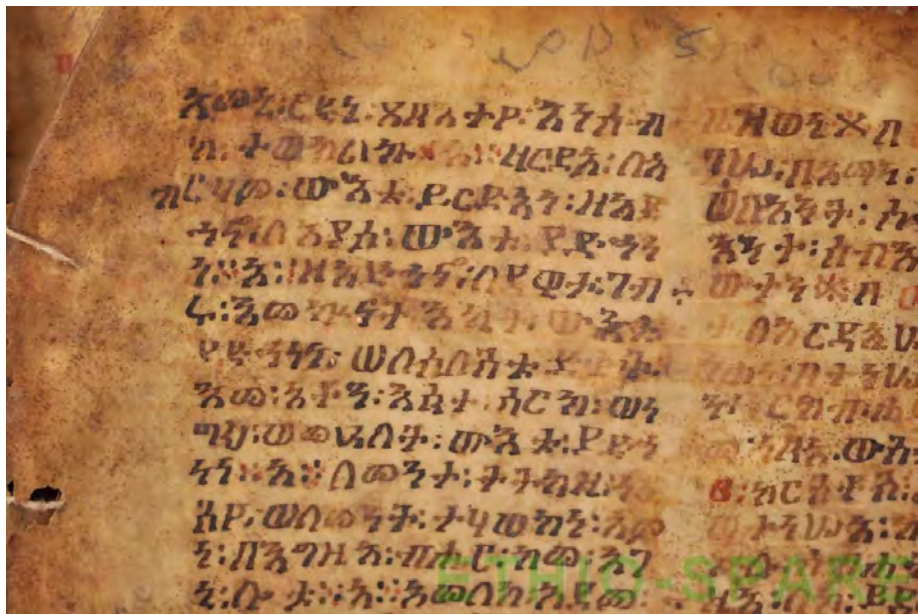


Fig. 41bc. Däbri Giyorgis, Gädlä Giyorgis: (b) infixed ancient leaf; (c) ancient leaf.

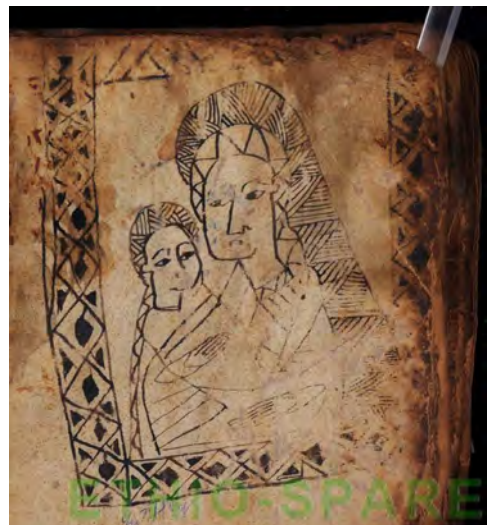


Fig. 42ab. Däbri Giyorgis, Miracles of Mary; text and drawing.



One more manuscript with the hagiographic collection of St. George of Lydda is a small long rectangular codex bound between leather covers, datable probably to the 18th cent., mentioning Şegge Dængəl in supplication formulas. Another old item of the collection is a late 15th- or 16th-cent. manuscript of the Miracles of Mary (*Tä'amrä Maryam*) (fig. 42a), with a peculiarity: a drawing of St. Mary with Her Child in "reversed way", i.e. Mary holding Christ on the right hand (fig. 42b). Among more recent manuscripts, there is a Psalter donated by *fitawrari* Mäšäša (baptismal name Wäldä Rufa'el) in 1919 E.C., with miniatures showing – unusual for Psalter manuscripts – the devastation of Gondär by the "Dervishes" (Mahdists) (fig. 43ab)⁴⁶. At least one more manuscript written by the same careful, well-trained hand, containing the *Gəbrä həməmat* ("The Rite of Passion Week") has been recorded in Mäläkusäyto Maryam (s. above).

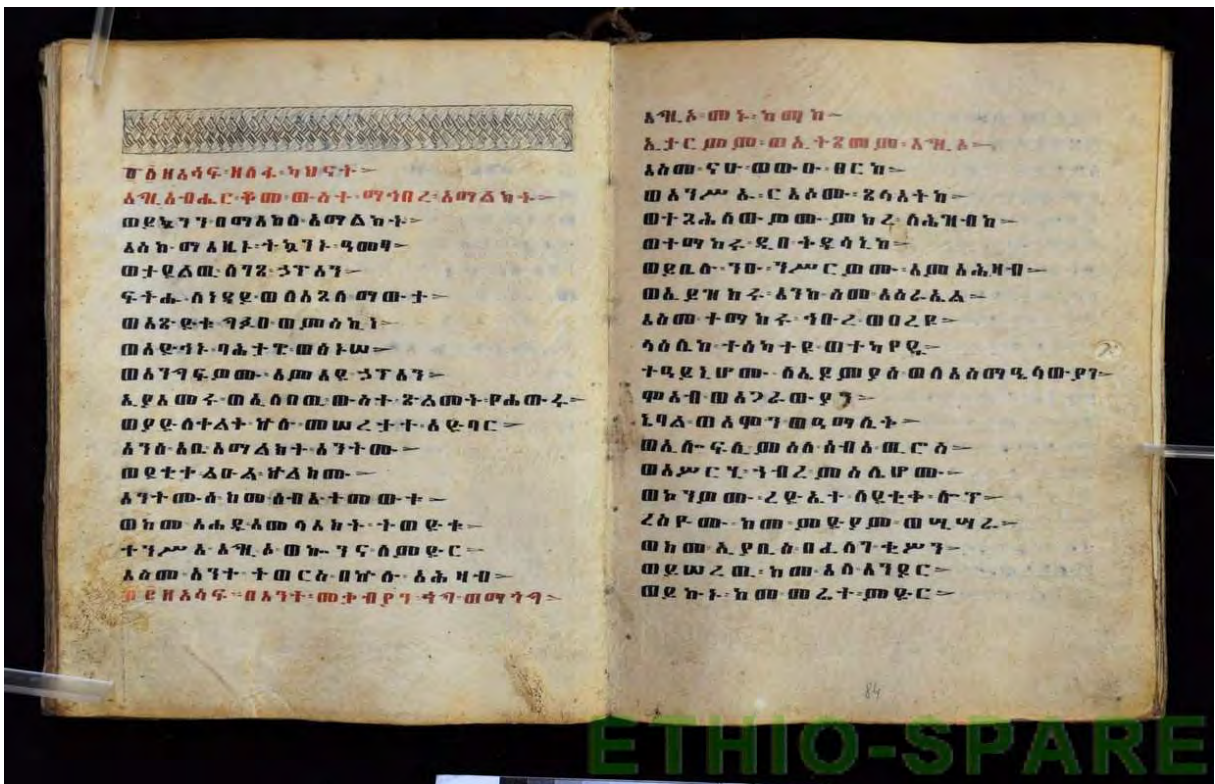


Fig. 43ab. Däbri Giyorgis, Psalter.

⁴⁶ The devastation of Gondär by the Mahdists took place in 1888 and 1889. The picture shows the death of ecclesiastic Wäldä Mika'el (not identified so far) "when he and his disciples were slaughtered by the Dervishes".

8. 'Af Məhyaw Qəddəst Maryam

'Af Məhyaw Maryam is located at the distance of some 40-min-drive from the valley of Məngas and Däbri, in the area of Gwaḥgot, not far from the churches Gwaḥgot 'Iyäsus (s. Report III) and Baḥera Maryam. As some other churches of the area, 'Af Məhyaw Maryam, a rectangular structure built in the traditional Təgrayan style, stands elevated on the slope and is very difficult to reach (fig. 44)⁴⁷.



Fig. 44. 'Af Məhyaw, view of the church.



Fig. 45. 'Af Məhyaw, Four Gospels.

⁴⁷ Before November 2012, the team of the project made several unsuccessful attempts to reach the collection of 'Af Məhyaw.



Fig. 46ab. 'Af Məhyaw, Missal, with the added text.

In the full name of the church, the place name “Yarāfāda” is added: Qəddəst Maryam Yarāfāda 'Af Məhyaw⁴⁸. Local tradition recounts that initially there was a church dedicated to Mary the Magdalene (Maryam Mägdälawit) built on the top of the rock. In 1610 “year of mercy” ras Mika'el Səḥul⁴⁹ saw a dream which was interpreted as a divine order to transfer the church from the top of the rock down onto the slope and re-establish it. Ras Mika'el Səḥul fulfilled the divine order and gave *gwəlt*-land to the church; later, a monastic community was established during the time of King Yoḥannəs IV (r. 1872-89) (but now there are no monks).

The Four Gospel book of the church is a 17th-cent. (?) manuscript illuminated in a rather crude way, possibly, by not a very professional painter, with the handwriting tending to broadly spaced letters with weak shading (fig. 45)⁵⁰. For the rest, the collection is modest, with some books from the 19th – early 20th cent. common for a small church library. One of the more remarkable books is a Missal with the mention of Metropolitan 'abunä Sälama III (in tenure 1841-67)⁵¹. Its main text is neatly written (fig. 46a), the last 10-12 leaves (possibly added later) contain an excerpt from the *Mäṣḥafä fäws mänfäsawi* (“Book of the Spiritual Medicine”, a treatise of canon law)⁵² written by a different hand (fig. 46b).

⁴⁸ 'Erāfāda is the variant appearing in the books of the collection of the church. It was not possible to clarify when the name ' Af Məhyaw was introduced in circulation.

⁴⁹ 1610 A.M. (= 1617/18 A.D.), the year mentioned in the narrative does not comply with the years of life of ras Mika'el Səḥul (b. 1691, d. 1777, s. EAE III, 562b-64b; he consolidated the control over full Təgray in late 1750s).

⁵⁰ Gäbrä Dəngəl is mentioned as the scribe; the orthography of the word for “scribe”, *ṣafe* (the standard is *ṣāḥafi*) is a variant that so far has never been encountered in the manuscripts seen by the project team.

⁵¹ EAE IV, 489b-90b, 1134b-35a. The manuscript was given to the church by 'asallafi Ḥagos, according to the donation note; however, the original donor/commissioner was probably a different person (by name Ḍādälä Maryam) mentioned in the main text.

⁵² EAE II, 508a-10a.

9. Baḥera Qəddəst Maryam gədam

The rock-hewn church of Baḥera Maryam is well-known thanks to its architecture and murals, and has been already visited and studied by a number of scholars⁵³. It is formally a monastic community, but no monks currently live at the church. Baḥera is located only several km away from 'Af Məhyaw Maryam, and it is very difficult to reach. The rectangular structure (the pronaos of the rock-hewn church) stands on a slope under the vertical rock (fig. 47); on the other side of the small valley there is a small, recent church of Baḥera Zä-Mika'el 'Arägawi, associated with Baḥera Maryam. A traditional school run by an old teacher is affiliated to the main church and frequented by a few dozens of disciples.

The church is said to be ancient, but local tradition does not specify the name of the founder or the time of founding. A monastic community is said to have been established in the time of King Yoṣtos (r. 1711-16) and re-established by Yoḥannəs IV, but currently there are no monks.

The Four Gospel book of Baḥera Maryam is a 19th-cent. manuscript, finely written, and



Fig. 47. Baḥera, view of the church.

illustrated apparently by two different painters, one more professional (fig. 48) and another one less experienced or simply an amateur⁵⁴. The oldest item of the collection is a leaf with a beautiful miniature (St. Mary with the Child) painted in ancient style, obviously originating from an old 14th-cent. (?) Four Gospel manuscript (fig. 49). The leaf has been reutilized as frontispiece miniature in 19th-cent. codex which contains a collection of miracles and poetic compositions (33 miracles of St. Mary, furthermore a few miracles of St. George of Lydda and Jesus, etc.). According to the usual practice, the leaf was sewn with vegetal threads unto a blank verso side, opposite to the incipit of the text. Because of this, unfortunately, it was impossible to properly record the writing on the other side. A few more original fine miniatures decorate the book⁵⁵. One manuscript of the modest collection of Baḥera, with the *Dərsanä Mika'el* (Homiliary for the feasts of St. Michael; fig. 50)⁵⁶ was donated by *šum 'agamä Rämḥa Šəllase* (s. above, 'Addimḥara Däbrä Mädhānit 'Abba Yoḥanni).

⁵³ Plant 1985:183-85, no.111; s. also the on-line database *Mazgaba seelat* ("Bahara"), and Lepage – Mercier 2005:140-46.

⁵⁴ In the headings and elsewhere 'Amdä Mäsqäl, 'Amdä 'Iyäsus and Səbḥat Lä-'Ab are mentioned.

⁵⁵ According to the donation note, it was presented to the church by 'Adāra Giyorgis (his father's name being 'Əbäy Lä-'Ab), from Gur(r)a. Unfortunately, the name in only such a form is insufficient for identifying the locality; perhaps it hints to non-Təgrayan origin of the donor.

⁵⁶ The Homiliary for the feasts of St. Michael (*Dərsanä Mika'el*), followed by a less widespread work, the Homily of the 24 Heavenly Priests.



Fig. 48. Bahëra, Four Gospels.



Fig. 49. Bahëra, Miracles of Mary, ancient miniature.



Fig. 50. Bahëra, Dərsanä Mika'el.

10. Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan

The church Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan is located half-way between 'Agula' and Mäqälä (Kələttä Awla'lo *wäräda*), in a gorge, a few km away from the main road. The old church is small and very dark, crudely cut in the rock. In fact, one can enter only the fore-chamber with a burial in the wall, sealed off with bricks, said to be the grave of the "Righteous Ones", the *Şadəqan*. The following rock-hewn part is currently hardly accessible, since a *tabot* is preserved inside. The access to the historical church will soon be even more difficult since a new large church is being built very close to its entrance, distorting the historical appearance of the site. More recent rectangular church of



Fig. 51ab. Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan, Four Gospel book.

of St. Michael, associated with the Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan, stands in the valley closer to the road and the settlement. According to the local priests, neither of the churches has a *tabot* dedicated to the "Righteous Ones"; the site is only the "place of their repose"⁵⁷. Local tradition refers to 346 "year of grace" as the foundation time, and King Gäbrä Mäsqäl as the founder.

A monastic community is said to have existed at Qaḥen; the institution is still considered *gädam*, but there have been no monks since a long time, and the ecclesiastic collection has no books typical for a monastic library.

The church may be ancient but neither of the collection's books predates 18th cent. On the whole, the collection is very modest. The Four Gospel book appears to be the most remarkable item, and, indeed, it is an unusual manuscript of a type the project team has not recorded yet. It is a long rectangular codex containing two Gospels (John and Mark) and three more works: *Fəkkare 'Iyäsus* ("The Explanation of Jesus", the same work as found in Məngäş Qəddəst Maryam, s. above), *Ṭəbäbä Sabela* ("Wisdom of Sybille") and *Dərsanä Rufa'el* ("Homily of St. Raphael") (cp. fig. 51ab). The text is

⁵⁷ Local tradition tells about 6666 "Righteous Ones" and their leaders 'abba 'Asal (?) and 'abba Danə'el who left their country "Roma" during the persecutions of Diocletian, for Ethiopia. They reached the area of Qaḥen, lived and died there.



Fig. 52. Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan, *Mäşafä gəbrä ḥemamat*.



Fig. 53. Qaḥen Däbrä Şadəqan, *Gädlä şadəqan zä- Qaḥen*.

written by a well-trained hand and the leather cover is finely decorated with tooled ornament. The two Gospels are devoid of traditional introductions⁵⁸; the reason for selecting other works to be copied with the Gospels is unclear. The mention of many individuals in the donation note and erased names of the original donors may be suggestive of the recent occasional acquisition, unrelated to the local 19th-cent. historical context. The oldest book of the collection is a copy of the *Mäşafä gəbrä ḥemamat* (“Book of the Rite of Passion Week”), from the time of King Tewoflos (r. 1708-11)⁵⁹, with talismanic pictures painted, unusually, into the blank space after the incipit of one of the subsections (fig. 52). A remarkable feature of the church collection is hagiographic tradition of the local Şadəqan, an interesting text despite its very close link to the hagiography of the Martyrs of Baraknaha⁶⁰; however, the oldest witness – a very modest manuscript containing the Vita of the local Şadəqan – hardly antedates the 19th cent. (fig. 53)⁶¹.

⁵⁸ In fact, there are a few more examples of manuscripts containing two Gospels, but the sequence John – Mark appears to be very rare (cp., e.g., Zuurmond 1989, I, 242-49, with no example of such a manuscript).

⁵⁹ S. EAE IV, 936b-37b.

⁶⁰ Already discussed in Brita 2010:5-6 with the list of the manuscripts (cp. also EAE IV, 447). The tradition, however, has not been documented in full until now.

⁶¹ This manuscript is given signature Qāḥēn 1 (Tegrāy) by A. Brita; this and the other witnesses are described (Brita 2010:5-6). The other witnesses are fairly recent: one was copied in 1948 E.C. (Ms. Qāḥēn 2, *ibid*), another one, appearing even more recent, contains the Vita and the Miracles, and was donated by *fitawrari* Kiros ʿEmbaye (Ms. Qāḥēn 3).

11. 'Addi 'Arba'a Däbrä Səbhat Qəddəst Maryam

A big church on the outskirts of Wuqro (fig. 54ab)⁶², 'Addi 'Arba'a Maryam is said to have been founded in the time of Abreha and Asbəha. The name 'Addi 'Arba'a⁶³ is explained by the local people as the “town of forty big/noble people”, who settled there in the past.



Fig. 54ab. 'Addi 'Arba'a Maryam, view of the church.

⁶² But still difficult to reach because of the very bad road.

⁶³ Pronounced by the local people with the glottal stop at the end, but the form with 'ayn ('Arba'a) appears to be preferred in subscriptions.

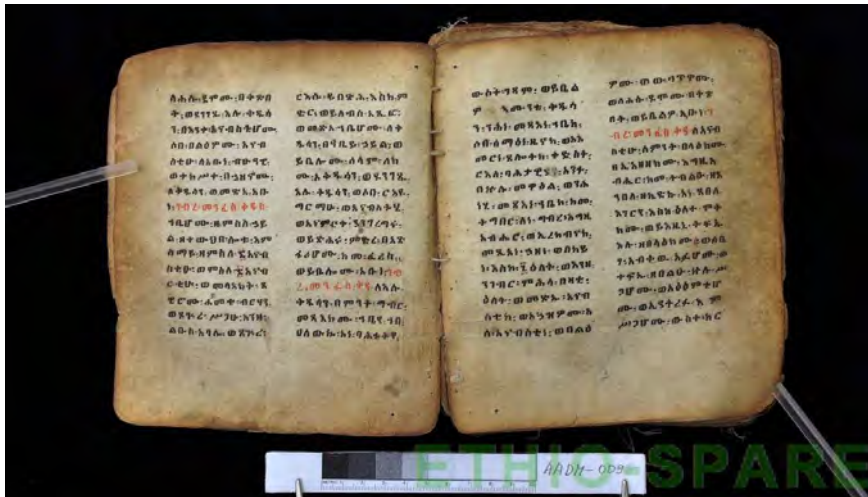


Fig. 55 'Addi 'Arba'a Maryam, Gädlä Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus.



Fig. 56 'Addi 'Arba'a Maryam, Miracles of Mary, miniatures.



Fig. 57 'Addi 'Arba'a Maryam, lectionary.

The oldest manuscript of the small, modest collection is a worn, damaged and incomplete copy of *Gädlä Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus* (“Acts of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus”), possibly datable to the 17th cent. (fig. 55). Among the other manuscripts, a 19th-cent. copy of the *Tä’amrä Maryam* (“Miracles of Mary”) contains a fine (unfinished?) miniature, showing obvious European influences (fig. 56). A few books may have entered the collection in the time of King Yoḥannəs IV (a lectionary, fig. 57).

12. Şahəlo Däbrä Şähay Qəddest Maryam

Şahəlo Maryam is a small church in the neighborhood of the famous Abreha and Asbəha church⁶⁴. Local tradition does not recall anything from the history of the church, with the exception of a claim that the church was established there in the 4th cent. The round church building was probably built in the late 19th or early 20th cent. (fig. 58); the structure of the *mäqdäs* is covered with murals, also depicting numerous historical personages (fig. 59).

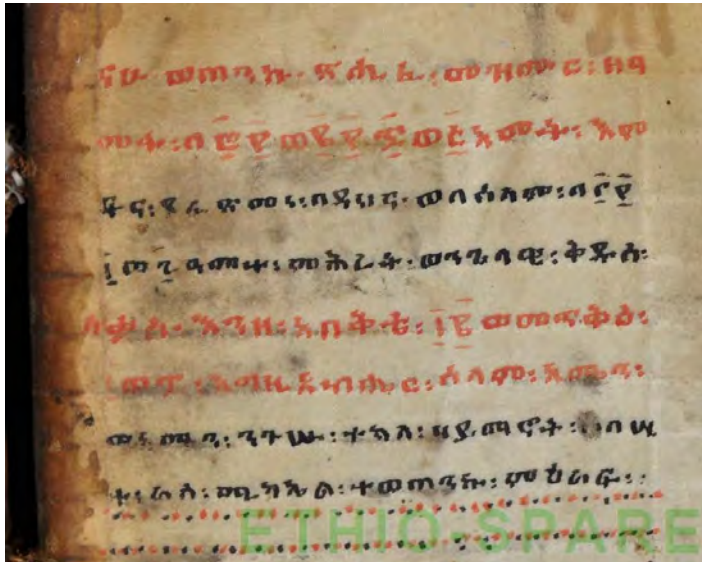


Fig. 58. Şahəlo Maryam, view of the church.



Fig. 59. Şahəlo Maryam, murals.

⁶⁴ *Ṭabiya* (district) Gəmad.



The Four Gospel book of the church is a 20th-cent. manuscript donated by *ras* Gugsa 'Ar'aya Šəllase (1882-1933)⁶⁵. A 19th-cent. copy of the Miracles of Mary was produced, according to the colophon, by a scribe Täsfa Həywät from the church of 'Abrəha and 'Asbəha⁶⁶; a manuscript of the *Mäšhafä 'aslətj* is written by a similar hand. The oldest book of the collection is a copy of the *Mə'raf*, with the colophon preceding the incipit (fig. 60a), mentioning both the dates when the writing was commenced and completed⁶⁷. The writing is of a very mediocre quality, but the text is not devoid of traditional decorative

Fig. 60a-c. Şahəlo Maryam, *Mə'raf*, (a) colophon, (b-c) ornamental bands.



ornamental bands separating subsections (figs. 60b-c).



⁶⁵ EAE II, 905a-06a.

⁶⁶ Remarkably, it appears that the formal name of a *tabot* related to the "brothers-kings" is *tabotä həggomu lä-'Abrəha wä-'Asbəha*, lit. "tabot of the law of 'Abrəha and 'Asbəha" (present in Şahəlo Maryam and in the church of 'Abrəha wä-'Asbəha).

⁶⁷ 7265 "from the creation of the world" (?), i.e. 1773 A.D. (cp. Chaïne 1925:169); the date of the completion 315 "year of mercy" is probably mistaken. The colophon mentions also King Täklä Haymanot II (r. 1769-77) and *ras* Mika'el (obviously, *ras* Mika'el Səhul who put Täklä Haymanot on the throne, cp. EAE IV, 835a-36b).

Another interesting item of the collection is a manuscript containing the second part of the Synaxarion which is linked to *däggazmac* Gwangul Maru. He was a lesser-known son of *däggazmač* Maru who was in turn a brother of King Yoħannəs IV⁶⁸. The exact relation of the manuscript to Gwangul is not known since a donation note mentions a different name⁶⁹; only a flyleaf contains a depiction of Gwangul (fig. 61) near the image of John the Baptist on the opposite side.



Fig. 61. Şahəlo Maryam, *Mə'raf*, colophon.

13. Dārəba Mādħane 'Aläm

Located very close to Şahəlo Maryam, Dārəba Mādħane 'Aläm is a small church (*gäṭär*) founded by *däggazmač* Kasa 'Ar'aya who was a son of ras 'Ar'aya Şəllase Dəmsu⁷⁰. The first head of the church was priest Gäbrä Mäsqał Wäldä Şəllase. The Four Gospel book is a recent manuscript donated by the founder in 1913 E.C.; the oldest manuscript of the collection (a prayer book) can be dated to the time of Metropolitan Sälama III (s. above, Rubaḳusa Qəddus Giyorgis).

⁶⁸ This is the second book donated by this nobleman that was recorded by the project team (for the first, s. Report II, no. 21). On *däggazmač* Maru s., e.g., Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 1975, 24-25; s. Bairu Tafla 1977, genealogical table III.

⁶⁹ Wäldä Giyorgis – a mistake for Gäbrä Giyorgis, the baptismal name of Gwangul from the aforementioned manuscript?

⁷⁰ Died in 1889, s. EAE I, 314.

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Appendix. Archaeological and topographic activities in the area of 'Addigrat

By Luisa Sernicola and Marco Barbarino, Naples

During the period December 2-6, 2012, Dr. Luisa Sernicola and Mr. Marco Barbarino, members of the Italian Archaeological Expedition at Aksum of the University of Naples "L'Orientale", Naples, Italy, joined the team of the Ethio-SPaRE Project of Hamburg University with the aim of producing a digital map and 3D model of the old church and compound at Mə'əsar Gwəḥila Mika'el (s. Report V). On that occasion, non-systematic archaeological observations have been conducted at Mə'əsar Gwəḥila and two different localities (Läqay Kidanä Məḥrät, Report III; Məngas, s. above, Report VI) on the basis of what previously recorded by the members of Ethio-SPaRE. Hereafter, a very preliminary report of what noticed in the field has been provided; more detailed information will follow in further publications.

Mə'əsar Gwəḥila Mika'el

Data for the implementation of a digital map and 3D model of the whole compound and of the ancient, presently abandoned semi-hypogean church (formerly dedicated to Abrəha and Aṣbəha) have been acquired at Mə'əsar Gwəḥila by using the Structure From Motion process, which allows to gain three-dimensional models of selected features from photos. Target points have been acquired by mean of a Trimble M3 5" Total Station.

Post-Aksumite potsherds dating between A.D. 700/800 and A.D. 1200/1300 have been recorded along the eastern side of the 'Ənda Şadəqan river, where the remains of semi-hypogean architectural structures are located. This evidence suggests that the area was in some way inhabited at least since Early Medieval time (9th/10th cent. A.D.?). The occurrence of few, very eroded fragments of Aksumite ceramics and knapped lithics points to an even earlier frequentation of the area.

Läqay Kidanä Məḥrät

One complete ceramic bowl has been showed us as part of the church property of the church Läqay Kidanä Məḥrät. The bowl is characterized by a red fine ware fabric, smoothed internal and burnished external surfaces, continuous, slightly concave profile and rounded rim. It measures 14 cm in diameter and is 8.5 cm high; wall thickness ranges between 0.7 and 0.8 cm. Typological analysis date the item generically to the Aksumite period (ca. 50 B.C. – A.D. 700/800). According to the local priest, the bowl has been collected on one of the cultivated terraces surrounding the church and other similar objects are presently kept in to the church. Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to inspect them. The area deserves further investigations.



Fig. 62. Məngaś. Wall.

Məngaś

The remains of a huge archaeological site have been recorded in the area of Məngaś, in the western sector of the village of May Šum (GPS 14° 10' 32,150" N; 39° 28' 4,970" E). The site, located on presently cultivated terraces, is characterized by the remains of walls protruding from the topsoil (fig. 62) and clearly visible in the exposed profiles of two seasonal river gorges draining down from the mountains to the west of the site. A high quantity of potsherds is scattered on surface. The ceramics, mainly orange fine ware, includes cups, dishes, bowls, jars and globular flasks. Decoration is moulded, incised or painted (fig. 63). Preliminary observations point to date the site to the Late-Aksumite period (ca. A.D. 500 – 700/800). The site is highly disturbed by soil erosion and cultivation and deserves protection and further investigations.

A stone slab about 1.20 m high, with weathered marks on at least two faces, has been recorded by local inhabitants in a pit in the area of the church Məngaś Ḥaylä Täklä Haymanot. Unfortunately the pit was too dark for any possible analysis and interpretation of the incised marks. The slab should be moved for closer examination under the supervision of the Culture and Tourism Agency of Təgray.

Ancient bricks were recorded also in the walls of the structures around the nearby church Məngaś Maryam, on the other side of the valley. Large processed stone slabs lying on the slope above the church hint to the presence of the ancient queries.



Fig. 63. Məngaś. Ceramics.



IMPRESSUM

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