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THE “GOLDEN GOSPEL” OF AGWÄZA AND ITS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS¹

It is not uncommon in Ethiopia for important churches or monasteries to possess manuscripts called Golden Gospels (*wängelä wärq*). In Mediaeval Christian culture that name was applied to the sumptuous Gospel Books that were illuminated and supplied with gilded covers, often embellished with precious stones. Symbolising God’s word and His presence they were used for the solemn altar liturgy and displayed on a throne at Church councils.²

¹ The author is indebted to Jan Retsö for the translation of an Arabic document. Thanks are also due to Michael Gervers for taking the excellent photographs of the manuscript.

² The notion was adopted by the Christian iconography and the representation of luxuriously looking Gospel book appears in the scenes such as *Hetoimasia* – “Empty Throne,” the Divine Liturgy and became the customary attribute of Christ-Pantocrator, cf. Leo Koep, *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum*, Bonn 1952; Thomas von Bogay, “Hetoimasia”, *RBK*, Bd. II (1971), 1189-1202; Klaus Wessel, “Himmliche Liturgie,” *RBK*, Bd. III (1978), 119-31.

Although several written sources suggest that similarly decorated manuscripts might have existed in Ethiopia as well, until now no example has been found.³ Instead, there are many Gospel books named *wängelä wärq* but for another reason: they are “golden,” that is, precious, because they contain historical and economic notes and documents important for the local community and often the whole region.⁴ Usually they are old, dating to the 14th and 15th centuries and although they are not necessarily supplied with particularly fine bindings they used to be decorated with miniatures.⁵

³ The selection of records is quoted in Marylin Heldman, Monica Devens, “The Four Gospels of Dabra Mäyar: Colophon and Note of Donation”, *Scrinium 1 = Varia Aethiopica in Memory of Sevir B. Chernetsov (1943-2005)*, ed. Denis Nosenitsin et al., St. Pétersbourg 2005, 93. However, it should be remember that in Ethiopia the application of gold for any kind of decoration was minimal, Neal Sobania, “Gold”, *EAE* II, 832-34 and the wording used in the sources suggests that ‘gold’ most probably refers to any kind of metal cover, including covers made of light, polished bronze or other yellowish metal.

⁴ Alessandro Bausi, “Wängelä Wärq”, *EAE* IV, 1130-32.

⁵ It seems that “Golden Gospels” were seldom decorated with both miniatures and metal covers. In fact, we know of only two examples that match this description: the manuscript from Ḥayq ʿƏstifanos dating 1290/1, whose metal covers, which have not been preserved, are mentioned in one of its notes, cf. Sergew Hable Sellase, “The Monastic Library of Däbrä Hayq”, in: *Orbis Aethiopicus. Studia in honorem Stanislaus Chojnacki*, ed. Piotr Scholtz et al., Albstadt 1922, vol. 1, 252-55, and the manuscript from Abba Gärima whose dating and provenience of decoration are still under discussion, recently Alessandro Bausi, “The ‘True Story’ of the Abba Gärima Gospels”, *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter* 1 (2011), 17-22.

The manuscript that is the subject of this paper belongs to this category of *wängelä wäraq*. It was discovered in 2006 in Ag^wäza, a place virtually unknown to scholars.⁶ In 2008, the book was digitised as part of a project supported by SIDA.⁷

Ag^wäza is situated in the mountains of Tigray province,⁸ and faces the northern cliffs of the Gär‘alta region. There are two rock-cut churches at the place: the old one, now abandoned, on the summit of the mountain, and the new church at its foot, hewn in 1992. Both are dedicated to the Four Celestial Creatures (*Arba’ätu Ənsəsa*) and the Trinity (*Šəllase*). According to local tradition the upper church belonged to a monastic

⁶ Bernhard Lindhal, *Local History of Ethiopia*, Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala 2005–08 [online ms.]; Tewelde Medhin Joseph, “Introduction générale aux églises monolithiques du Tigray”, in: *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Etiopici (Roma 2-4 aprile 1959)*, Roma 1960, 96; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, “Ag^wäza”, *EAE V* (forthcoming). An enigmatic note in Jacques Mercier, *L’Arche éthiopienne. Art chrétien d’Éthiopie. Paris Pavillon des Arts 27 septembre 2000 - 7 janvier 2001*, Paris 2000, 44, quoted in Heldman, Devens, “The Four Gospels” (n. 4) 82, perhaps refers to Ag^wäza and its Golden Gospel.

⁷ Together with 10 other manuscripts. The photographic material was deposited in St. John’s Microfilm Library, Collegeville Minnesota. Unfortunately, the collection is neither accessible online nor catalogued. On the project sponsored by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) directed by the author see

http://www2.lingfil.uu.se/projects/Dabra_SahelQ/.

⁸ Also Agoza; *woräda*: Hawzen, *qušät*: Agoza.

community known as Däbrä Šahəl, established by the Metropolitan Bärtälomewos who is supposedly buried there. He was sent from Egypt to Ethiopia in 1399 and his long and eventful episcopate extended through the reign of seven kings.⁹ The monastery flourished until the 19th century, after which it went into gradual decline and eventually fell into disuse with death of the last monk, some 20 years ago.

Among about 80 manuscripts owned by the community and presently kept in the lower church, half are fragments of old books.¹⁰ The Golden Gospel is guarded in the house of the chef priest, together with an iron staff cross

⁹ Dawid I (1380-1412), Tewodros (1412-1413), Yəshaq (1413-1430), Əndəryas (1430), Täklä Maryam (1430-33), Šərwä Iyäsus (1443), ‘Amdä Iyäsus (1433) and Zär’a Ya‘əqob (1434-68). The exact date of Bärtälomewos’s death is not known, but the last recorded reference to him while he was still alive is in a document dated 1438, cf., Salvatore Tedeschi, “Ethiopian Prelates” in: *CE*, 1012f; Gianfranco Lusini, “Bärtälomewos”, *EAE* I, 485f. In addition to the documents quoted by the authors Bärtälomewos’s name appears in the manuscript of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Borgianus 26, dating to 1409, Sylvian Grébaut, Eugène Tisserant, *Codices aethiopici Vaticani et Borgiani*, Città del Vaticano 1935, 843; in the Gospel Book from Kəbran Gabriel (Kəbran 1) dating around 1425, Ernst Hammerschmidt, *Äthiopische Handschriften vom Tānāsee I*, Wiesbaden 1973, 87-88; and in a tri-lingual document (Coptic-Gə‘əz-Arabic) added to a Gospel book kept in the church of Mādhane Alām in Lalibāla (the Coptic part is signed by Bärtälomewos and dated 29 May 1410), Madelaine Schneider, « Deux actes de donation en arabe », *Annales d’Ethiopie* 8 (1970), 82f.

¹⁰ All manuscripts were digitised as part of the SIDA project before being cleaned and boxed or stored in envelopes.

inlaid with brass and a hand cross with figural engravings, both, according to local tradition once being the property of *abunä Bärtälomewos*.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

The manuscript¹¹ is in good shape. It measures 315x205x95 mm and contains 177 folios gathered into 23 quaternion quires, with guard sheets added at the beginning and an additional folio inserted between pages 176 and 177.¹² The quires, not numbered, are sown with an unidentified thread and when opened reveal two pairs of sewing stations.¹³ It is not clear how they are attached to the 15 mm thick wooden boards because the wood is entirely covered with light brown leather. The stamped

¹¹ Digitisation signum: DSAE-001.

¹² I am not describing the structure of the quires here. This can be seen in the photographs accessible online at http://www2.lingfil.uu.se/projects/Dabra_SahelQ/.

¹³ One of the most typical Ethiopian methods of sewing quires, cf., Giampiero Bozzacchi, “La legatura etiopica”, in: *Conservazione dei materiali librari, archivistici e geografici*, ed. M. Regini, P.G. Tordella, Torino 1996, vol. 1, 333-39; see also John Szirmai, *The Archeology of Medieval Bookbinding*, Aldershot 1999, 46f.

pattern is very crude: a large, double frame filled with a diamond motif encloses the central panel, which is decorated with a large square outlined by a row of diagonal crosses. On the front and back covers the decoration is similar, but that on the back cover is more carefully executed. The spine was left plain. Very wide turn-ins mitred at the corners and pasted are decorated with double diagonal lines (FIGS 1, 17). The uncovered central part is inlaid with a piece of printed, blooming Indian chintz, differently patterned for the front and back covers but possibly cut from the same piece of cloth. The textiles may be tentatively dated to the mid-18th century,¹⁴ to the same time that the covers were leathered. The thongs of the two slit-braid endbands are visible between the front cover and the first guard sheet, (FIG. 1) their stitches being discernible on the spine. The bookblock

¹⁴ The comparative material can be found in: John Irwin, Katherine Brett, *Origins of Chintz. With a Catalogue of Indo-European Cotton-Paintings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto*, London 1970, part. catalogue nr. 24, pl. 20.

and the cover are well preserved but the spine has become slightly concave and the fore-edge is bulging.

The layout of the pages was designed by pricking and ruling on the bifolia; the margins are wide.¹⁵ The pages of the main text and the Eusebian Canon tables¹⁶ (ff. 2v-6v) have 29 and 32 lines respectively divided into two columns separated by a space of about 10 mm. The ruling patterns on the bifolia decorated with painting seem to differ between the pages with the Canon tables and those with the miniatures. The ruled lines are hardly visible, which may explain why the text of the first and last pages of the prefacing letter¹⁷ runs almost diagonally (FIG. 3). The ruling was not used to shape the text grids for the

¹⁵ Approximately: lower - 40mm, outer - 30mm, upper - 20 mm.

¹⁶ They provide concordances indicating where passages that recur in different Gospels can be found in relation to one another. The main and still very useful work on the subject: Carl Nordenfalk, *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln: Kunstgeschichtliche Studien über die eusebianische Evangelien-Koncordanz in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten ihrer Geschichte*, I-II, Göteborg 1938 and *Id.*, "The Apostolic Canon Tables", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 62 (1963), 17-34. On the Ethiopian Canon tables see Jules Leroy, "Recherches sur la tradition iconographique des Canons d'Eusèbe en Ethiopie", *Cahiers archéologiques* 12 (1962), 173-204; Marilyn Heldman, "Canon tables", *EAE* I, 680f; Alessandro Bausi, "Some Short Remarks on the Canon Tables in Ethiopic Manuscripts", *Studi Magrebini* 26 (1998-2002), 45-67.

¹⁷ The letter authored by Eusebius to his colleague Carpianus explains the system of Gospel Canons and their purpose.

tables, to straighten the architectural elements or to draw the miniature's frames.

The text of the Four Gospels is complete. The lections are marked in the upper margin¹⁸ in two different hands. One, carefully written with large characters and dark-red ink, begins with the word: *arəstā mänbab* or *mänbab* - "reading," the other, in light red ink,¹⁹ starts with a number and the word *bä-əntä* - "on/for" and is often preceded by a decorative curl. An extra help for finding the required section of text are the white and blue threads attached to the upper right corner of the pages.

The main text is written in a well-trained hand and reveals several characteristics of the 14th-15th century script.²⁰ Introducing each Gospel is a heading in the form of a simple horizontal band with the rubricated, inscribed title (FIGS 10-13). This band is embellished with horn-

¹⁸ Found only once on the bottom margin: f. 162r.

¹⁹ The same colour of ink is used for all other rubrications and text ornamentations.

²⁰ For instance, the loops of the letter *፬* lie close to each others and the diacritical for the 7th order of *፩* is attached directly to the letter. On this subject cf. Sigbert Uhlig, *Äthiopische Paläographie*, Stuttgart 1988, chapter 3.

and cross-formed ornamentation executed in black and red ink. Moreover, the first six lines of both columns alternate in red and black ink. They are also marked by ornamental signs²¹ and a system of black and red lines and dots that run vertically in the inner and/or outer margins, occasionally in the intercolumnium. The punctuation marks ending the sentences are usually turned into the rosettes through the addition of four red dots. Line fillers are composed of two groups of four dots connected by two streaks and written in black ink. Each Gospel ends with the entitled and numerated list of readings (*tituli*). Their numbers are rubricated and the title written within a decorative band. The numbers referring to the Canons are written in black in the inner margin and between the columns and usually are encircled by the

²¹ The forms that appear most often are: Latin cross with loop at the top (kind of ankh-cross); *XRho*-cross, suspended spiral, right and left turned “horn”. For the typical repertory of such the signs in the manuscripts dating to the 14th/15th century, cf. Sigbert Uhlig, “Ornamente und Marginalzeichen in den äthiopischen Handschriften. Ein Vergleich mit anderen semitischen und mit koptischen Codices”, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 61:3-4, (1984), 318-28; *Id.*, *Äthiopische Paläographie*, (n. 20), 204f, 329-31.

decorative signs in red. These colours are also used to mark the endings which comprise aligned streaks and dots. No names in the text are highlighted in red.

Beside the main text, the manuscript contains five additional notes: **1.** concerning a commemoration for King Zär'a Ya'əqob, written on the second folio of the guarding sheets (IIva) (FIG. 14) **2.** an undated donation, on the second folio of the guarding sheets (half size of the page cut vertically, IIIvb) (FIG. 15); **3.** a donation of King Yəṣḥaq for Ag^wäza, on folio inserted between folios 176 and 177 (three-quarters of the size of the page cut horizontally, VIv) (FIG. 16); **4.** concerning the death of Coptic Patriarch Gabriel, on folio 177rb (FIG. 16); **5.** a free translation into Arabic of the document at 177ra, on folio 177v (FIG. 17).²²

THE MINIATURES

²² In the section below on the documents, they are numerated as: 1 = document 3; 2 = document 4; 3 = document 1; 4 = document 2; 5 = document 5.

The manuscript is decorated with 19 full-page miniatures and includes a complete set of the adorned Eusebian Canon tables ending with the representation called *tempietto*, the Christological cycle composed of three scenes placed directly after the Canons and four Evangelist portraits that precede each Gospel.

1. Canon tables²³

First page of *the Letter of Eusebius* (f.1r) (FIG. 2)

The text is enclosed within the architectural frames created by a decorative tympanum resting on two columns with parted curtains wrapped around their trunks. In the Christian symbolic language widely applied in the liturgy, the curtain that screens the holy of holies, that is the place of God's dwelling, separates the visible, terrestrial space from the invisible and celestial. In that context the open or

²³ Distributed as follows: f. 2v – C. I. (Mt Mk Lk Jn; Mt Mk Lk Jn); f. 3r – C. II (Mt Mk Lk; Mt Mk Lk; Mt Mk Lk); f. 3v – C. III (Mt Lk Jn) and C. IV (Mt Lk Jn); fol. 4r – C. V (Mt Lk; Mt Lk; Mt Lk); f. 4v – C. VI (Mt Mk; Mt Mk) and C. VII (Mt Jn: wrongly noted as Mt Mk); 5r – C. VIII (Lk Mk) and C. IX (Lk Jn) and C. X (Mt Mt only) and (Mk Mk only); f. 5v – C. X (Lk Lk Lk only) and C. X (Jn Jn Jn only).

drawn back curtains may be interpreted as admittance to participation in the divine revelation, here taking the form of the evangelical Good News.²⁴ The birds identified in the accompanying inscriptions²⁵ as *durra* (parrot), flank the tripod-vase at the top, while a long-tailed *tawos* (peacock) and *g^w‘əra* (name obscure) pick the flowers in the vases placed close to the columns. The composition as the whole recalls the Garden of Paradise.

Second and third page of *the Letter of Eusebius* (ff. 1v-2r) (FIG. 3)

Both pages display the same decoration. The text has the same type of frame as the previous page, but the birds visible on the tympanum and on top of the stylised vases flanking the columns are exclusively *durra*.

First and second page of the tables (ff. 2v-3r) (FIG. 4)

²⁴ We find the Canon tables depicted in the same way as in our miniature in several Gospel Books dating to the 14th -16th centuries. A large repertory of examples can be found in MS, search word: “Canon tables.”

²⁵ The list of the bird’s names appearing in the Ethiopian Canon tables with philological comments is to be found in Bausi, “Short Remarks” (n.16), 56-67. In our manuscript the names generally do not correspond with the species depicted.

The decoration on both pages does not differ. The birds gathered around the tympanum are called *tīr* (probably from the Arabic *tayr*, “bird”) and those on top of the vases flanking the columns (now without curtains), *kayrat* (name obscure).

Third and fourth page of the tables (ff. 3v-4r) (FIG. 5)

On both miniatures, the frame is composed of the tympanum surmounted by a vase and resting on the columns. They are carelessly executed and drawn askew. The ornamentation is crude and the distribution of the colour (particularly brown) uneven. The birds on the tympanum are designated as *tayrat* while the two sitting on the vases are not named.

Fifth and sixth page of the tables (ff. 4v-5r) (FIG. 6)

The pages are identically decorated and display the arch of the tympanum filled with stylised plants flanked by two twigs and surmounted by a blooming plant. The birds sitting there are called *g^w‘əra*. The others, sitting on the fanciful twigs flanking the columns are not named.

Seventh page of the tables (f. 5v) (FIG. 7)

The frame is richly ornamented. The columns support an arched tympanum adorned with interlaces and a large blooming plant. The tympanum is flanked by two thick twigs and surmounted by a huge, crescent-formed plant surrounding a vase filled with flowers picked by the *durra* birds. On either side of the arrangement there is a stylised fruit tree being picked by unnamed birds. The columns are flanked by the floral vases with sitting birds called *kal'ə* “another one”? At the top of the composition there are two caged birds designated as

ṣoma 'əṭawit - “anchorite”, an allusion to the allegorical interpretation of Psalm 102: 7 recalling the Crucified Christ.²⁶ The addition of this element makes it clear that the decoration of this Canon is a part of a larger

²⁶ “*I am like a desert owl. Like an owl among the ruins. I lie am awake; I have become like a bird alone on a housetop,*” cf., Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, « L'Oiseau dans la cage: un exemple éthiopien », *Orientalia Suecana*, 40-41 (1990/91), 140-158.

composition extending to the facing folio not only physically but also ideologically.

Tempietto (f. 6r) (FIG. 7)

The representation, also called *Fons vitae* – “the Fountain of Life” is covered with multifaceted symbolic meanings related to baptism and resurrection, its iconography referring to the Holy Sepulchre and the paradisian Source of Life with its four rivers, i.e., the Gospels.²⁷ In our miniature, the edifice, the so-called *tholos*, is composed of four columns, which support a heavy, conical roof resting upon the curved cornice. It is surmounted by a cross and bordered by two large, scrolled plants ending in stylised and oversized blossoms. Between the columns, in the centre, hangs a knotted curtain symbolising the presence of God,²⁸ accompanied by an inscription that summarises the content of the Canons: “the table of the

²⁷ Paul Underwood, “The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), 43-138, part. 46-53, 104-107.

²⁸ On the knotted curtain as an emblem of sacredness cf. Theodor Klauser, “Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes”, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 3 (1960), 141f.

concordance”.²⁹ A decorative, low lattice-work grill closes the intercolumniation.³⁰ On either side of the edifice there is a cypress tree described as “the tree of Paradise”,³¹ in front of which stand two, long-horned hart or deer called *babula*.³² Two peacocks with spread tails,³³ but labelled *sägon*, (“ostrich”), flank the cross at the top of the structure.

2. Christological cycle

Crucifixion (f. 6v) (FIG. 8)

The scene shows the early Christian type of the Crucifixion originating in the Holy Land and connected to

²⁹ Abbreviation of the formula: *nubare šar‘at zükämä ḥabaru ‘arba‘atu wangel/wängelawyan* “Tables of the canons which are common for the Four Gospels.”

³⁰ Most probably a reflection of the *tegurium* of the Holy Grave, represented for instance, on some Palestinian ampoules, cf. Underwood, “Fountain” (n. 27), 92f.

³¹ On the cypress as the paradisian tree cf. Johanna Flemming, “Zypress” *LChI* 5, 591-594.

³² They are rendered with their heads turned from the fountain, a misunderstanding of Psalm 42: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul thirsts for God, for the living God”, that is one of the textual sources of the image, cf. Bernhard Domagalski, *Der Hirsch in spätantiker Literatur und Kunst. Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der frühchristlichen Zeugnisse*, Münster 1990, 122-150. On the ethymology of the *babula* cf. Bausi, “Short Remarks” (n. 16) 59-63.

³³ Here to be understood as the symbol of incorruptibility, immortality and resurrection Helmut Lothar, *Der Pfau in der altchristlichen Kunst. Eine Studie über Verhältnis von Ornament und Symbol*, Leipzig 1929, 25ff; Johannes Kramer, “Pfau”, *LCI* 3, 409-11.

the cult of the *loca sancta*. It shows the empty cross and Christ pictured symbolically in the guise of a lamb, accompanied by the inscription, “Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29). The sun and the moon, both anthropomorphised, flank the figure and are described as “the sun when it darkened” (Lk 23:49) and “the moon when it turned to blood” (Jn 3:3-4). The cross which is presented in the background on a red, triangular shaped representation of Golgotha, is flanked by two crucified thieves labelled “the thief of the right side” and “the thief of the left side”, as well as by the lance-bearer and sponge-bearer respectively designated “the soldier who pierced Him” and “the soldier who gave Him drink the vinaigrette”.³⁴ The composition is framed and surmounted by a decorative arch, flanked

³⁴ Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion sans le Crucifié dans l’art éthiopien: Recherches sur la survie de l’iconographie chrétienne de l’Antiquité tardive*, Wiesbaden-Warszawa 1997.

by two stylised lilies or lotuses, the flowers symbolising the resurrection and eternal life.³⁵

Holy Women at the Tomb (f. 7r) (FIG. 8)

In the centre, an angel holding a cross and described as “the angel who overturned the stone” sits at the edge of the open tomb showing inside Christ’s shroud. The short side of the tomb is depicted as a three-coloured square.

Flanking the angel are two women carrying censers and perfume bottles and identified as Martha (to the left) and Mary (to the right).³⁶ Below, two soldiers armed with spears, swords and shields are rendered in half-figure. The inscription states: “the soldiers who were at the tomb” and “the lances and the swords”. The lamps hanging from the above suggest that the scene is inside the Holy Sepulchre, but the arch with three crosses may depict the cupola of

³⁵ On the symbolism of the lily/lotus flower cf. Christiane Desroches Noblecourt, “Le langage symbolique des lys, papyrus et lotus, dans l’Égypte ancienne”, *Bulletin mensuel de l’Académie des sciences et lettres de Montpellier*, 22 (1991), 27-28.

³⁶ The problem of this person’s identity is discussed in Claude Lepage, «Reconstruction d’un cycle protobyzantin à partir des miniatures de deux manuscrits éthiopiens du XIV^e siècle», *Cahiers archéologiques* 35 (1987), 159-196 part. 176-79.

the building from outside.³⁷ In the upper part of the picture the sun and moon are represented,³⁸ and the sky is bordered with intertwined floral bands.

Ascension (f. 7v-8r) (FIG. 9)

The miniature follows the iconographical scheme combining the image of the *Maiestas Domini* with the illustration of the event described in the Gospels. The blessing Christ, a codex in his hand, sits inside the perfectly round mandorla carried by the Four Celestial Creatures, rendered as winged, half-figures.³⁹ They are identified by the customary inscription “face of man” etc., but in addition their role as the bearers of God’s throne is

³⁷ Marilyn Heldman, “An Early Gospel Frontispiece in Ethiopia”, *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 48 (1979), 107-21, part. 114, makes an attempt to interpret these elements.

³⁸ Their presence, as well as that of three crosses under the arcade, connect this scene with the Crucifixion. Such a composition seems to be characteristic of the whole group of the Gospels that has the Christological cycle depicted in three scenes, see note 50.

³⁹ This early iconographical tradition is presented in René Crozet, «Les représentations anthropo-zoomorphique des évangélistes (VIe-IXe siècles)» in: *Etudes mérovingiennes. Actes des Journées de Poitiers. 1^{er}-3 mai* Paris 1952, 53-63 and Paul Bourguet, «Les ‘symboles des quatre évangélistes’ ou l’énigme des quatre ‘êtres vivants’ de l’Apocalypse dans l’iconographie chrétienne », *La Revue réformée* 10:37 (1959), 3-25. On the Ethiopian representations cf. Stanisław Chojnacki, “The Four Living Creatures of the Apocalypse and the Imagery of the Ascension in Ethiopia”, *Bulletin de la Société d’archéologie copte* 23 (1981), 159-81; Claude Lepage, Jean Gire, «Dieu et les Quatre Animaux Célestes dans l’ancienne peinture éthiopienne», *Documents pour servir à l’histoire de la civilisation éthiopienne* 7 (1976) 84-88, 96-101.

recalled by the text visible uppermost in the middle: “the image of the throne”. Below the *Maiestas* stands Mary-*orans* between two angels (Michael and Gabriel).⁴⁰ The accompanying inscription reading “the image of Mary, shall her prayer be with us forever, amen” makes it clear that she is not only the witness of the Ascension but is also the symbolic figure for the praying *ecclesia*.⁴¹ Two rows of young figures pointing towards Christ and described as “twelve apostles, how they looked at His Ascension” connect the scene to the biblical narrative. They are placed on the facing page - an arrangement without a parallel in Ethiopian material.⁴²

3. The Evangelists (ff. 8v, 63v, 93v, 171v) (FIGS 10-14)

Although the four evangelists resemble each other, all are represented standing frontally and holding the codex with the inscription “the Holy Gospel”, the painter gave them

⁴⁰ Lepage, Gire, «Dieu et les Quatres Animaux » (n. 39), 75-79.

⁴¹ Klaus Wessel, "Ecclesia Orans", *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 70 (1955), 315-34.

⁴² As double-sided are customarily composed the scenes: the Entry into Jerusalem and the Miracle in Cana, rarely the Massacre of the Innocents.

some individual features by differentiating their ages and patterns of dress. He used two types of frames to present the figures: either a three-lobed arcade or a fanciful pediment formed of two intertwined, highly stylised floral scrolls⁴³ supported by two columns, and, in the case of Luke, by two staff crosses.

The garments of the evangelists, a tunic and a draped mantel, despite advanced stylisation echo Late Antique models.⁴⁴ It is rare, for all the evangelists to be rendered as standing persons.⁴⁵ Commonly, some are depicted as sitting at a desk and engaged in writing, a form that dominates from the mid-15th century, with standing evangelists being, with minor exceptions, eliminated.



⁴³ A similar arrangement can be observed in the 15th-century miniature representing John the Evangelist on a single folio in the Robert McCarthy Collection, London, cf. Jacques Mercier, *L'Arche éthiopienne* (n. 6), 60 which on stylistic ground is connected with the portraits of the Evangelists in the Gospel Book from in the church of Abba Pântälewön in Aksum, cf. MS, MG-2005.168:004-016.

⁴⁴ Albert M. Friend jr., "The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts", *Art Studies: Medieval, Renaissance and Modern* 5 (1927), 115-147, 7 (1929), 3-29. On the Ethiopian representations Marilyn Heldman, "Evangelist in Art" in: *EAE* II, 460-66.

⁴⁵ Another example is the early 14th-century Gospel Book kept in the church of Däbrä Şəyon in Gärr'alta, cf. MS, MG-2004.141:026-036.

In the painting of the miniatures, all by the same hand⁴⁶, six basic colours were used: red, yellow, dark green, brown, dark blue and black, the natural tone of the parchment serving as white. Applied on the differently tinted backgrounds they produced several hues such as grey-blue and beige, resulting in total in a large colour palette. The miniatures are executed with varying care, and some of the craftsmanship is really sloppy. The striking lack of skills reveals the crooked lines of the Canon's grids. The frames and architectural elements are seldom straight and the colours are in part unevenly distributed. On the other hand, all circular forms are very precisely traced, because the painter used a kind of bow compass.⁴⁷ His human figures are very sketchy but he was not totally devoid of artistic aptitude as witness the

⁴⁶ Since each portrait of the Evangelist is painted on a single leaf inserted at the beginning of the relevant quire and the Canon tables followed by the Christological cycle occupy the whole quire, we may surmise that the miniatures were executed independently from the text and that the painter and the scribe were most probably different persons.

⁴⁷ For instance perfectly regular semi-circular lines are discernible on the roof of the *tempietto* or in the three-lobed arcades of the evangelists. In addition all the nimbi were drawn with aid of this instrument.

fanciful ornaments and originality of colour compositions. The red dots on the cheeks and forehead of the three first evangelists and the bodies of all figures drawn in red, show a dependence on models that adopted some stylistic features from Islamic art. The intricate ornamentations may originate from the same source.⁴⁸



The Ag^wäza manuscript, executed about 1430,⁴⁹ shares several characteristic with two groups of Ethiopian Gospel Books dating between the end of the 13th and the end of the 15th centuries and generally also serving as Golden Gospels. They applied two types of illustration related to the text's narrative, the life of Christ. The first, presently known from nine examples,⁵⁰ always contains

⁴⁸ Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Influence of Islamic Art on Ethiopian Artistic Tradition", in: *L'Islam in Etiopia. Bilanci e Perspettive*, ed. Alessandro Gori, Bianca Scarcia Amoretti = *Civiltà del Mediterraneo* 16-17, Numero monografico, Roma 2009-2010, 109-131.

⁴⁹ See *infra* p.

⁵⁰ To that group belong the manuscripts listed (with selected bibliography) in: Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 34) and Heldman, Devens, "Gospels of Däbrä Mäyar" (n. 3), 77-99. They are: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, éth. 32; Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W.836; Däbrä Libanos (Aşbo), London, Sam Fogg collection; fragments kept in Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Ms. 2475; fragments divided between Stockholm, National Museum, B 2034

three scenes from the Passion cycle, the same as appear in the Ag^wäza manuscript. It has been established that this illustration concept, as well as the iconography of the miniatures, drew on Early Christian schemes spread by the pilgrim tokens produced in the Holy Land, such as ampoules, bracelets, rings and possibly icons.⁵¹ The second type, identified in some 20 manuscripts,⁵² followed Byzantine models and multiplied the events from Jesus' life to about 20 scenes. Since several of the manuscripts illustrated in one or the other way may be

and the collection of Sam Fogg, C. Griffith Mann, *Art of Ethiopia*, New York 2005, 80f. To this list of relatively long known manuscripts should be added the following recently discovered: the Gospels in Däbrä Šäraḅi, cf. MS, MG-2004:009-036; MG- 2004:100:016-019; the fragment in Ura Qirqos cf. MS, MG-2005:138:093-102.

⁵¹ The subject is discussed in: Heldman, "Gospel Frontispiece" (n. 37); Lepage, "Reconstruction" (n. 36); Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 34), 123-133.

⁵² To the manuscripts listed in Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion* (n. 34), the following should be added: the fragment from Ahəya Fäḡḡ, cf. Diana Spencer, "The Monastery of Ahəya Fäḡḡ Qusquam un Wallo - its Illuminated Manuscripts and Other Treasures," in: *Aspects of Ethiopian Art from Ancient Axum to the 20th Century*, ed. Paul Henze, London 1993, 73-82, part.77f, fig. IX and MS, DS-1973.007:001-004; Gäbrä Krəstos, Dagna, cf. MS, MG-2006:076:010-080:010 and Stanisław Chojnacki, *Christ Resurrection in Ethiopian Painting*, Roma 2009, 28-32, figs 3a, 3b; Oslo, Schøyen Collection, ms. nr. 2113, cf. Jacques Mercier, *L'Arche éthiopienne*, (n. 6), 55; Ms. of Amba Gəšan, cf. Diana Spencer, "Trip to Wag and Northern Wällo", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 5:1 (1967), 95-108 and MS, DS-1972.001:001 - 002 :001; Qālaqəl Şəyon Maryam; cf. MS, EBW-2005.137:001 - 002:001; Kəbran, cf., MG-2006.049:001-032; Bərbär Maryam, cf. MS, EF-2007.017:026-086; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Ms. Rogers Found 1998:66, cf. *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261 – 1557)*, ed., Helen Evans, New York 2004, 441.

relatively precise dated, it is possible to observe that the first, or “Palestinian” type, gradually disappeared during the 14th century, while the second, “Byzantine” type, survived into the first third of the 16th century.

Although the Ag^wäza Gospels was composed at a time when the “Byzantine” type of illustration flourished, the manuscript seems to adopt more stylistic and iconographical features from the declining “Palestinian” redaction. The similarities are more conspicuous in the narrative scenes than in the highly standardised decoration of the Canon tables. The Crucifixion, although placed within the simple, squared frames characteristic of the multi-scene cycles, added the arch and the floral elements borrowed from an architectural setting of “Palestinian” type. From the same model derive the shape of the landscape (although reduced to the hill of Golgotha), the naked thieves and the soldier who is just carrying the lance instead to using it, making him resemble the pilgrim figures depicted on souvenirs from

the Holy Land.⁵³ The Holy Women at the Tomb show the link even more clearly, because the scene appears only in the short cycle, being simply omitted from the long ones.⁵⁴ Finally, the Ascension, although diverging from Palestinian iconography, through the addition of the apostles belonging to the long-cycle redaction,⁵⁵ in the main shows the scene as it derives from the early Christian model. It is also notable that the portraits of the standing evangelists wearing classical dress appear more often in the manuscripts relating the short Christological cycle, especially that type enclosed in the tri-lobed frame.⁵⁶

⁵³ The detailed discussion of all these elements in Heldman, “Gospel Frontispiece” (n. 37); Lepage, “Reconstruction” (n. 36); Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 34).

⁵⁴ Replaced by another Resurrection event - the apparition of Christ to John, Peter and Mary Magdalene. The only exception seems to be the Amba Gəšän Gospels, cf. MS, DS-1972.001:029. It should be noted that the scene also appears in the Passion cycle depicted in the church of Yəmrəhannā Krəstos and dating to the end of the 12th century, cf. MS, MG-2007.217:078.

⁵⁵ In these representations, two angels are not depicted.

⁵⁶ In the Gospels of Däbrä Mä‘ar and the Stockholm fragment cf. MS, EBW 2006.002:001 and 004; MG-200.087:016; Also in the early, 14th century Gospels illustrated only with the portrait of the Evangelists, for instance the Gospels of Gära‘alta, Däbrä Şəyon or the fragments from Ahəya Fägg , cf. MS, MG-2004.141:029 and 035; DS-1973.008:002 and 004.

The date of the manuscript's production allows us to suppose that the painter had deliberately chosen to follow the Palestinian prototype of illustration and iconography, most probably because of its highly esteemed antiquity and links to the *loca sancta* of the Holy Land.⁵⁷ Yet, he did not fully turn his back on the trends current in his lifetime, as indicated, for instance, in the wide range of colours, his attempts to give the depicted figures some individuality, the daring stylisation and the element of flexibility in changing the schemes and iconographical rules.

DOCUMENTS

I am providing here the Ethiopic texts⁵⁸ along with translations as well as a short summary of the contents to enable the historians and church historians to pursue further investigations.

⁵⁷ A similar phenomenon was observed in the case of the Gospel Book of Däbrä Mä'ar, which is some 100 years older, Heldman, "Däbrä Mä'ar" (n. 3), 79-80.

⁵⁸ The grammatical errors made by the scribe have not been corrected.

Document 1 [fol. IV_v] (FIG. 16)

በስመ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አሐዱ፡አምላክ፡ ዕባይ፡
ለእግዚአብሔር፡ እስከ፡ ለዓለም፡ ኃይል፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ ተጽሕፈ፡
መጽሐፈ፡ ወንጌል ፡ዘወሀበ፡ እግዚእ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ይስሐቅ፡ ወስመ፡
መንግሥቱ፡ ገብረ፡ መስቀል፡ ንጉሠ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ያኑን፡
መዋዕሊሁ፡ ወያጽንዕ፡መንግሥቶ፡ ወያግርር፡ ፀሮ፡ ወጸላዕቱ፡ ታሕተ፡
እገሪሁ። ወሀበ፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌል፡ ወጐለተ፡ ወወሰከ፡ ጉልተ፡ አጐዛ፡
ወዘቀዳሚ፡ ጉልት፡ [...] ወግረ፡ መሐርጽ፡ መሕጸየ፡ አዋልድ፡ [...]:⁵⁹
ዐድ፡ እውዕርት፡ ጐለተ፡ ከመ፡ ይኩኖ፡ ለተዝካሩ፡ ሎቱ፡ ወሀበ፡ ለመካነ፡
ደብረ፡ ሣህል። ወኢለአሐዱ፡ ስልጣን፡ ከመ፡ ያውጽእ፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌል፡
እም[ው]እተ፡ ደብረ፡ ሣህል። ወእመቦ፡ ዘሄደ፡ ወአውፅአ፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌል።
ወዘኅየለ፡ ወዘሄደ፡ውእቶን፡ ጉልተ፡ ይኩን፡ ርጉመ፡ ወውጉዘ። ወይኩን፡
መክፈልቱ፡ ምስለ፡ ቃያል፡ ቀታሊ፡ ወምስለ፡ ይሁዳ፡ ዕልው፡ አግባኤ፡
እግዚአ። ወይኩን፡ ወጉዘ፡ በአፈ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አምላክነ። ወእምአፈ፡
አበዊነ፡ አጋእዝቲነ ፡፲ወ፪፡ ሐዋርያት። ወእምአፈ፡ አበዊነ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፰፡ እለ፡
ተጋብኡ፡ በሀገረ፡ ንቅያ፡ ወእምአፋሆሙ፡ ለክልኤ፡ ምእት፡ እለ፡
በኤፌሶን። ወእምአፈ፡ ሊቀ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ አባ፡ ገብርኤል። ወጳጳስነ፡ አባ፡
በርተሎሜዎስ። ወእምአፋየ፡ አነ፡ ነዳይ፡ሚካኤል፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶስ፡ ዘሀገረ፡
ስንድፋ፡ ጸሐፍኩ፡ በትእዛዘ፡ ንጉሥ፡ [...] ይስሐቅ። ተጽሕፈ፡ አመ፡ ፴፡
ለወርኅ፡ ጥር፡ በዓመት፡ ፲፻፡ ወ፬፻፲ወ፱፡ ለሰማዕታት፡ ንጹሐን፡ ይጸግወነ፡
በረከቶሙ፡ አሜን። [...] ላህመ፡ ወሀብኩ፡ አበሶ/ሎ፡ ለተዝካርየ።⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Erased words. Further instances of erasure are marked in the same way in both text and translation.

⁶⁰ The last sentence although written as a direct continuation of the text, is an addition. It is difficult to say whether the scribe is the author or someone else.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Glory to God forever. Power to God. (This) Gospel book was written and given (to Däbrä Šahəl) by Lord King Yəshaq⁶¹ (whose) royal name (is) Gäbrä Mäsqäl, king of Ethiopia. May God prolong his days and strengthen his kingdom, and throw his adversary and enemy under his feet. He gave this Gospel and granted and enlarged the *g^wəlt*⁶² of Ag^wäza, (in addition to?) that which was the primary *g^wəlt*, Wägrä Mäharəṣ, Mähşäyä ‘Awalədd [...] (whereas?) ‘Ad Aw‘ərt he allotted (it) that it should be for the commemoration of him (and) gave (it) to the place of Däbrä Šahəl.⁶³

Nobody (has) the authority to take out this Gospel book from Däbrä Šahəl. If anybody steals this Gospel book and takes (it) out, and (thereby) violates (against this command) and thieves these *g^wəlt*, may he be cursed and excommunicated. May his lot be with Cain the murderer and with Judas the wicked, the betrayer of his Lord, and may he be excommunicated by the mouth of the Holy Trinity, our God, and by the mouths of our lords the 12 Apostles, and by the mouths of our 318 Fathers who assembled in the city of Nicaea, and by the mouths of the two hundred who (assembled) in Ephesus, and by the mouth of our *papas abba* Gäbrə’el,⁶⁴ and our *papas*

⁶¹ Reigned: 1414-1429.

⁶² The term referring to land tenure or granted fief, Donald Crummey, “G^wəlt”, *EAE* II, 941-43.

⁶³ The text is corrupted and the character of *g^wəlt* and its distribution are not entirely clear.

⁶⁴ Gabriel V, the 88th Alexandrian patriarch (1409-28), cf. Khalil Samir, “Gabriel V,” in: *CE*, 1130-33.

abba Bärtälomewos, and by my mouth, me, the poor Mika’el, bishop of the city of Səndəfa.⁶⁵ I have written (this) by the order of King [...] Yəshaq. It was written on the 30th of the month of *Ṭərr* in the year 1440 of (the Era of) the Pure Martyrs. May their blessing be our grace. Amen. [....] I have given a cow for my commemoration.

The text, which closely follows the pattern characteristic for the early Ethiopian charters⁶⁶ was written by a trained scribe. He states that the Gospel book was executed during the time of King Yəshaq and given by the latter to the monastery of Däbrä Šahəl. The gift was accompanied by land donations and in reward the king expected the monks to offer the commemorative prayers or services on his behalf.⁶⁷ The document is precisely dated but the statement about the year is mistaken. Firstly calculated according to the “Era of the Martyrs”,⁶⁸ the event would have occurred in the year 1723/4 AD. Secondly, even if the scribe had in mind the “Year of the Incarnation”, the calculation still gives us a wrong year, 1447/8 AD, which

⁶⁵ Sandaf% - the place in Egypt situated in the northern part of the Delta close to the famous monastery of Məṭmaq (al-Maḩṭas), cf. Jean Maspero, Gaston Wiet, *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l’Égypte*, Le Caire 1919, 164. I am indebted to Denis Nosnitsin for identification of this place. On Mika’el, cf. Salvatore Tedeschi, “Mikael of Sandafa” in: *CE*, 819.

⁶⁶ George B.W. Huntingford, *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia. Translated with an Introduction and Notes*, Addis Ababa 1965, 4-27, where also many examples.

⁶⁷ It would be interesting to compare that document with the still unpublished note on the land donations made by king Yəshaq to the monastery of Däbrä Mä’ar that is written in its Golden Gospel.

⁶⁸ Quite apart from this error, it is noteworthy that the scribe chose to calculate according to the Era of Martyrs, a practice common in Coptic Egypt but rare in Ethiopia.

is 17 years after Yəṣḥaq's death, although he seems to have been alive when the document was written. The problem can be solved with help of the date appearing in the Arabic synopsis of the document which has the year 1140.⁶⁹ Consequently we can presume that the scribe put number 4 (ḫ) instead of 1 (ḏ) or that his 1 does not differ from 4. In any case the year of the document must be 1424 AD.

Another problem concerns the names of the scribe. He presents himself as Mika'el, the bishop of Sandaf% who, as we learn from the texts of the *Miracles of Mary*, was sent in 1437 to Ethiopia with three Coptic Church dignitaries, by the successor of the Patriarch Gabriel, John XI (1428-53).⁷⁰ The legates spent one year in the country and apparently passed Däbrä Šahəl. We may surmise that on this occasion Mika'el who obviously knew Gə'əz was asked to write, or rather rewrite the act of donation which was inserted into the Golden Gospel and that he also composed its synopsis in Arabic found on the last page of the book. In the Ethiopic document he added his name in the place of the anonymous scribe of the original text at the end of the sanction clauses, but left him in the Arabic version.⁷¹ Consequently the sentence which follows the sanction clauses: "I have written (this) by the order of

⁶⁹ See *infra* document 5.

⁷⁰ Enrico Cerulli, *Il Libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del medio evo latino*, Roma 1943, 200f.

⁷¹ See *infra* p.

King [...] Yəṣḥaq” does not refer to Mika’el, but to the first scribe.

As to the manuscript itself, even though the exact circumstances and the date of its execution are difficult to currently establish, it cannot be ruled out that it happened in connection to the foundation of Däbrä Šahəl. It is also interesting to note that the donation document as a whole confirms the oral tradition preserved in Ag^wäza about Däbrä Šahəl, although it does not explicitly state that the monastery was founded by *abba* Bärtälomewos, who is only mentioned alongside the Coptic patriarch Gabriel.

Document 2 [fol. 177rb] (FIG. 16)

አመ፡ ፲፡ ለወርኅ፡ ጥር፡ ተዝካረ፡ ዕረፍቱ፡ ለቅዱስ፡ ወብፁዕ፡ አባ፡
ገብርኤል፡ ሊቀ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ ዘእስክንድርያ፡ እማኢየሩሳሌም፡ ዘፈነወ፡ ሎቱ፡
ርእሰ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ሐዋርያ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ለንጉሠ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ይስሐቅ፡
ዘተሰምየ፡ ገብረ፡ መስቀል፡ ወልደ፡ ዳዊት፡ ውኣቱኒ፡ አዘዘ፡ ከመ፡ ይገብሩ፡
ተዝካሩ፡ ወይሥርዑ፡ አርብዓሁ፡።

On the 10th of the month of *Ṭərr* the commemoration (took place) of the dormition of the holy and blessed *abba* GäbrÇÜel, the patriarch of Alexandria, from Jerusalem, who sent the “head” of Mark the Apostle (and) Evangelist, to the King of Ethiopia, Yəṣḥaq, who was (also) called Gäbrä Mäsqäl, the son of Dawit. He then

gave orders to make his commemoration and they arranged the *arbə ‘a*⁷² for him.

The document, concerns the commemorative services for Coptic Patriarch Gabriel, most probably performed 40 days after his death (in 1428) by the monks of Däbrä Šahəl. It is not clear who gave the order for the commemoration, King Yəshaq or the Metropolitan Bärtälomewos, who in this text is not simply called *papas* but solemnly referred to as “the head of Mark the Apostle”.⁷³ The document seems to be written by the same scribe as the document 1, which means that most probably it was added in 1437 or 1438.

Document 3 [fol. IIv] (FIG. 14)

አመ፡ ፲፡ወ፬፡ ለሐምሌ፡ እንዘ፡ ሀሎ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ዘርእ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ በደብረ፡
ብርቆሃን፡ ተጽሕፈ፡ ዘከመ፡ ይገብሩ፡ ተዝካሩ፡ መምህራን፡ ዘትግራይ፡
ለንጉሥነ፡ ዘረኣ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ዘተሰምየ፡ ቈስጠንጢኖስ፡ ዜና፡ ገብርኤል፡
ዘደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ አመ፡ ፳፡ወ፬፡ ለየካቲት፡ ፯፡ እታላም፡ ከመዝ፡ ይግበር፡
ተዝካርየ፡ ዜና፡ ገብርኤል፡ ንቡረ፡ እድ፡ ዘደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ በከመ፡ ተጽሕፈ፡
ውስተ፡ ዝንቱ፡ መጽሐፍ፡ እንበለ፡ አጽርዖ፡ ወለእመ፡ አጽርዑ፡ ንቡራነ፡

⁷² Lit. ‘forty’; here the funeral rites 40 days after the death of the deceased.

⁷³ That is an Ethiopian metropolitan who was sent from Alexandria, in this case *abba* Bärtälomewos. The expression cannot be understood literally because the well known legend about St. Mark’s relics makes no mention of Mark’s head being sent to Ethiopia. Regarding the representation of St. Mark’s head in the Gospel book of abbot Iyäsus Mo’a, cf. Marilyn Heldman, “An Ethiopian Miniature of the Head of St. Mark: Egyptian Influence at the Monastery of St. Stephen, Ḥayq” in: *Ethiopian Studies Dedicated to Wolf Leslau*, ed. Stanislav Segert, András Bogrolieti, Wiesbaden 1983, 554-68.

እድ፡ ዘደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ እምዜና፡ ገብርኤል፡ ወእለሂ፡ ይመጽኡ፡
 እምድግሬሁ፡ ንቡራነ፡ እድ፡ ዘደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ ውጉዛነ፡ ለይኩኑ፡ በአፈ፡
 አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወይኩኑ፡ ውፁአነ፡ እምኩሉ፡ ጸጋ፡
 ዘይሁብ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ለእጓለ፡ እመሕያው፡ በቃለ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡
 ለዓለመ፡ ዓለም፡ አማኝ፡።

On the 14th of *Hamle*, when Zär’a Ya‘əqob⁷⁴ was our king, it was written in Däbrä BÇrhan⁷⁵ that the teachers of TÇgray should make a commemoration for our king Zär’a Ya‘əqob, who was called Qwästäntinos. Zena Gäbrə’el of Däbrä Šahəl on the 24th of *Yäkkatit* (received) 7’ətalām.⁷⁶ Thus may Zena GäbrÇÜel, nÇburä ÜÇd⁷⁷ of Däbrä ±ahÇl, make commemoration for me [Zär’a Ya‘əqob], as has been written in this book, unless he [Zär’a Ya‘əqob] revokes it. If *nəburanä ’əd* of Däbrä Šahəl, (starting) with Zena Gäbrə’el, (and including) those who come after him (as) *nəburanä ’əd* of Däbrä Šahəl annuls it, may they be excommunicated by the mouth of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit. And may they be deprived of any grace that God would

⁷⁴ Reigned: 1434-68.

⁷⁵ Monastery and town founded by Zär’a Ya‘əqob, Jules Perruchon, *Les chroniques de Zar’a Ya’eqob et de Ba’eda Maryam*, Paris 1899, 53, 56-57, 69-73.

⁷⁶ Measurement unit mostly used for grain, Richard Pankhurst, “A Preliminary History of Ethiopian Measures, Weights and Values,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 2:7 (1969), 117; *Id.*, “‘Əntälām,” *EAE* II, 318.

⁷⁷ Title of high ranking ecclesiastic administrator connected to a major church or monastery. Under Zär’a Ya‘əqob’s time they were members of ecclesiastic administration promoted by the king, cf. Denis Nosnitisin, “Nəburä ’əd”, *EAE* III, 1161f.

give to people by the Word of God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

The document is anonymous but written in a skilled hand. It gives us at least two important pieces of information. Primarily we learn that the ecclesiastics of the whole of Tigray province were ordered by King Zär'a Ya'əqob to perform for him commemoration services until these were revoked, so in practice forever. The order was recorded and the document kept in the king's main residence of Däbrä Bərhan. Judging from the situation of the Däbrä Šahəl monastery, they were rewarded with a single gift, probably in the form of a certain amount of grain. Secondly the document gives us the name of the first, or one of the first, abbots of the monastery and his ecclesiastical title, which shows that Däbrä Šahəl counted at that time among the most important monasteries.

Document 4 [fol. IIIvb] (FIG. 15)

አነ፡ ጳውሎስ፡ ወልደ፡ አብርሃም፡ ወመጽአኒ፡ ሕሊና፡ ሠናይ፡ ወዐርገ፡
ወስተ፡ ይእቲ፡ ደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ ወተአማንኩ፡ ምስለ፡ [መ]ነኮሳት፡ ወእቤ፡
[ዝ]ክሩኒ፡ ወንሥኡ፡ [ን]ዋየ፡ ለአርባዕቱ፡ እንስሳ፡ ወለሐዋርያት፡ ወግበሩ፡
ተዝካሮሙ፡ ከመ፡ ይዘክሩኒ፡ በጸሎቶሙ፡ ለዓለመ፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን፡
[ወይ]ግበሩ፡ ተዝካሩ፡ ምስለ፡ አቡነ፡ አስጢፋኖስ፡

I am Pawlos son of Abṛəham. I have had a splendid thought and ascended⁷⁸ to this Däbrä Šahəl, and was admitted by the monks. I say: “remember me and take the contribution (payment?) for the Four Celestial Creatures and for the Apostles,⁷⁹ and make commemoration for them that they may remember me in their prayers for ever and ever, amen. Make the commemoration, together with⁸⁰ our father Əstifanos”.

The document records an offering of unknown character and value to the monastic church of Däbrä Šahəl, made by a certain Pawlos. Seemingly, he climbed to the monastery in order to hand over the gift personally. It is interesting to note that the church was already primarily dedicated to the Four Celestial Creatures⁸¹ as it is today, while the second dedication, to the Apostles, was changed to a dedication to the Trinity. The last sentence of the document can be understood in two ways: either the grantor has added the saint, *abba* Əstifanos⁸² to his intercessors, or Əstifanos was the name of the abbot of the

⁷⁸ Read ፀርጉ, < ፀረግኩ:

⁷⁹ Both names refer to the dedication of the church and its *tabotat*, that is the altar slabs dedicated to the patron/patrons of the church, cf. Marilyn Heldman, “Tabot”, *EAE* IV, 802-804.

⁸⁰ Written twice.

⁸¹ The cult of the Four Celestial Creatures flourished in the 15th century and was supported by King Zär’a Ya’əqob. Readings about them were added to the Ethiopian Synaxary (8 *Hədar*). It was probably for these reasons that several churches at the time dedicated their altar slabs to the Four Celestial Creatures, our church among them.

⁸² Steven Kaplan, Denis Nosnitsin, “Əstifanos”, *EAE* II, 390f.

monastery at the time, and the grantor wishes him to join the monks in commemorative prayer.

The document is written in the same hand as the facing and three next pages with the synopsis of the Gospels.

Document 5 (FIG. 18)

Translated by Jan Retsö

بسم الاب والابن والروح القدس الاله الواحد
العظمة لله العزة القوة للرب
هذا ما وقف وحبس وابد وخلد السيد
الملك اسحق جبر مصقل ملك ملوك الحبشه
ادام الرب حياته وخلد مملكته ويجمع اعداه
تحت اقدامه امين تذكارا له ولولد ولده [...]
على دير سهل وما لاحد سلطان من قبل
سيدنا يسوع المسيح ان يخرج هذا الانجيل
المقدس عن الدير المذكور لوجه من الوجوه والاسباب
من الاسباب ومن حرّ واخرجه يكون محروم
وملعون يكون نصيبه مع قاين القاتول وياهوذا
مسلم سيده⁺ وعلى بني الطاعة تحل البركة والسبح لله دائما ابدا
كتبه الخير ميخائيل خادم صيدنا كان سلخ شهر طور سنة

+ [...] فم الثالث المقدس ومن فم سادتنا التلاميذ ومن فم الآبا الثلثاه وثمانية عشر
المجتمعين بمدينة نقيه ومن فم المائتي المجتمعين بافسس ومن فم الاب البطريرك ابا
غبريال ومن فم الاب الطا[هر] المطران ابا برتلوماوس ومن فم دفتره المسكين سطر

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the only one God. The might belongs to God and the strength and the power to the Lord. This is what the Lord Isāq Gabra Masqal, the king of kings of Ethiopia, entrusted, bequeathed, made lasting and perpetuated - may the Lord make his life long and his kingdom eternal, laying his enemies under his feet, amen, as a memory for himself and the son of his son [...] to the monastery of Dabra Sāhil.⁸³ No one has authority (through) our Lord Jesus Christ to bring this Holy Gospel out from the mentioned monastery in any way or by any reason. The one who ventures and brings it out, may he be condemned and cursed; may his lot be together with Cain, the murderer, and Judas, the deliverer of our Lord.⁸⁴ [...] the mouth of the Holy Trinity and from the mouth of our Lords the Apostles and from the mouth of the three hundred and eighteen fathers gathered in the city of Nicaea, and from the mouth of the two hundred gathered in Ephesus and from the mouth of the father the Patriarch Abā Ghabriāl and from the mouth of the virtuous father the Metropolitan Ab% Bartulūmāwus and from the mouth of

⁸³ The character of the donation specified in the Ethiopic document is omitted here.

⁸⁴ The cross put above the last words marks the place where the text written in the inner margin should be inserted. It ends with the words: “the humble *daṭṭara* who wrote (this)”.

the humble *daṭṭara* who wrote (this).⁸⁵ And may the blessing dwell over the children of obedience. Praise be to God always, ever. The humble Mikhā‘īl, the servant of the Lord in truth, wrote this.⁸⁶ It was in the end of the month of *Tūbah* in the year 1140.⁸⁷

ABBREVIATIONS:

CE - *Coptic Encyclopedia*, ed. Aziz Atiya, vols. 4, New York, 1991.

EAE - *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Sigbert Uhlig et al., vols. 5, Wiesbaden 2003-14.

LChI – *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. Klaus Wessel, vols. 7, Rom-Freiburg (Herder) 1968-74.

MS – database *Mäzgäbä*

Se’elat: <http://128.100.218.174:8080/doCmd.jsp>; Id & password: student

⁸⁵ *Daṭṭara* should be understood here as *däbtära*, i.e. an educated cleric but not ordained, cf. Steven Kaplan, “Däbtära” in: *EAE* II, 53f and relates to the anonymous scribe who wrote the document during the time of king Yəshaq.

⁸⁶ In this document the rank of the scribe and the place of his office are omitted.

⁸⁷ The date should be understood as 30 *Tūbah* 1140 of the Era of the Martyrs, that is 26 January 1426 AD. 30 *Təbah* corresponds with 30 *Tərr* in the Ethiopian document. My thanks are due to Father Ugo Zanetti for clarification of that matter.

RBK - Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst, ed.
Klaus Wessel, Marcell Restle, Stuttgart 1966--

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Att. The captions needed when layout separates the text and the illustrations; otherwise only number of figure and folio/s



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

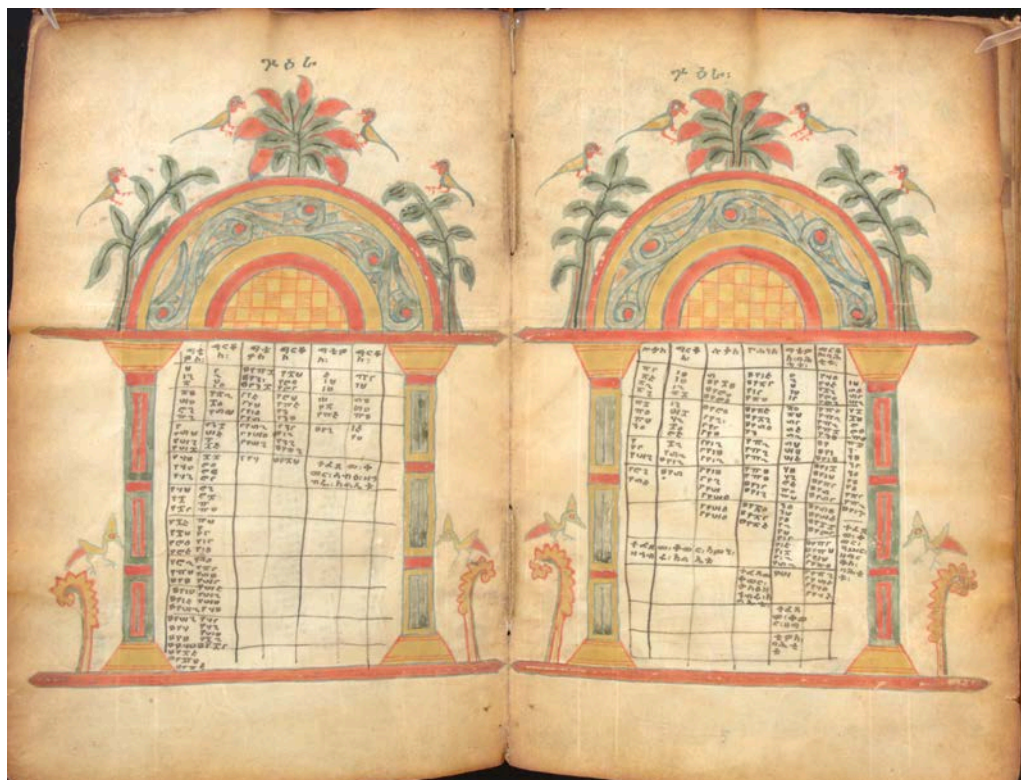


Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

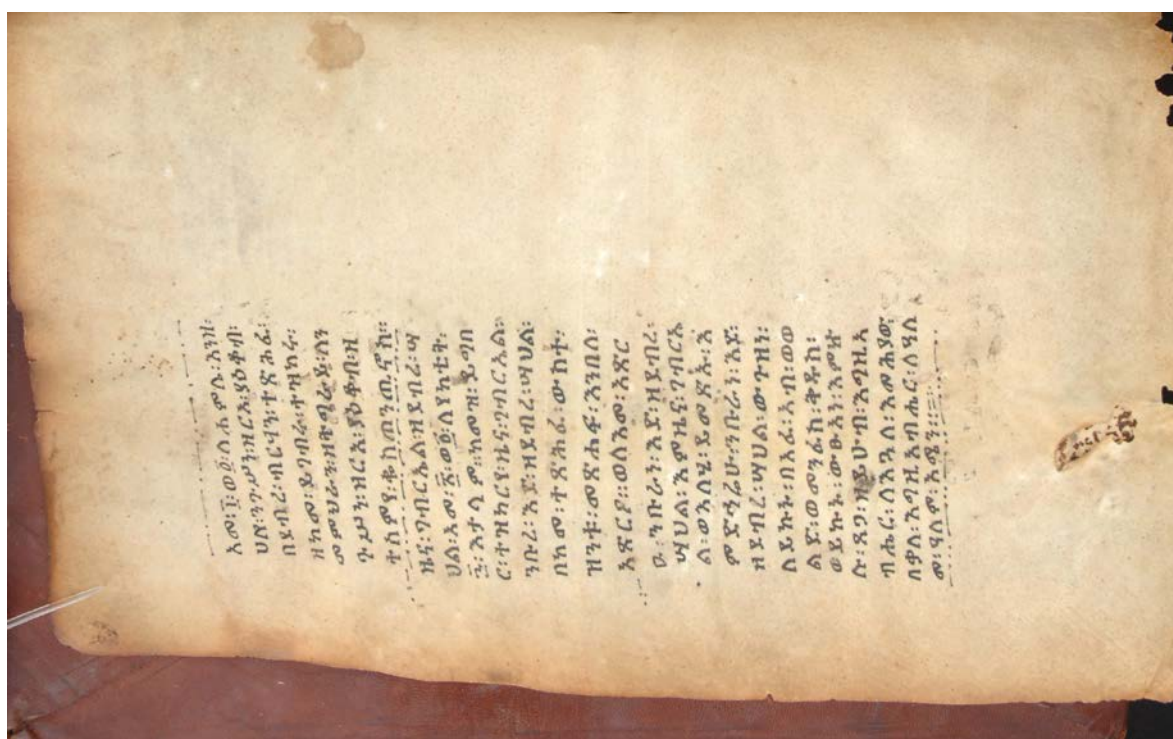


Fig. 14

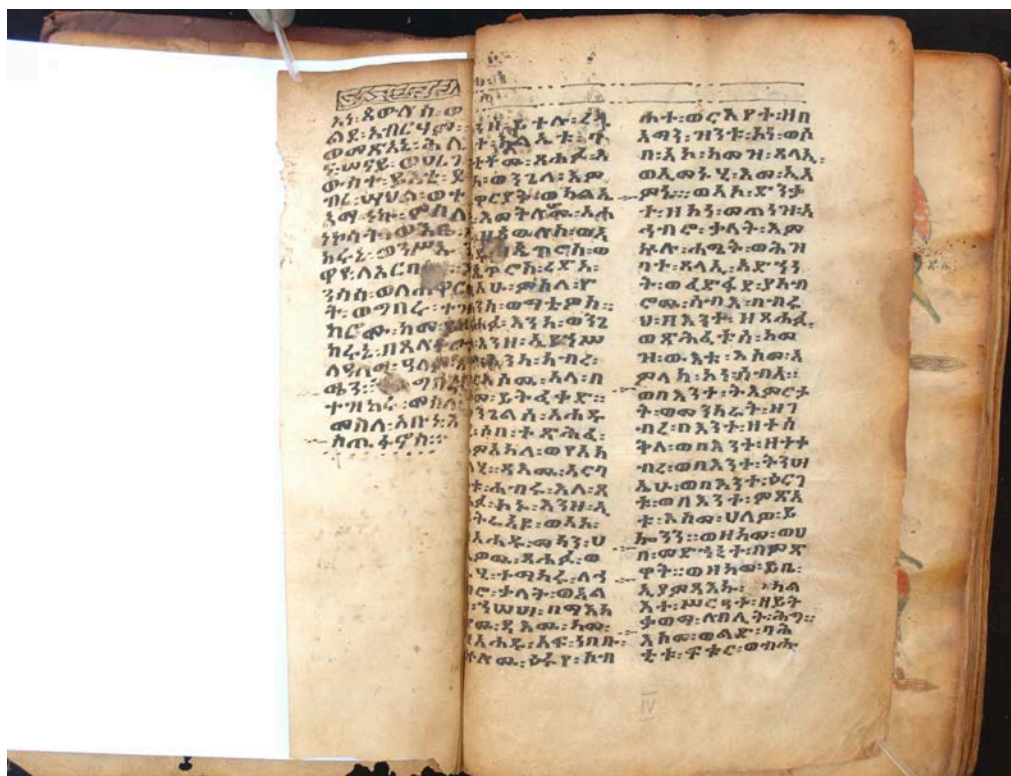


Fig. 15

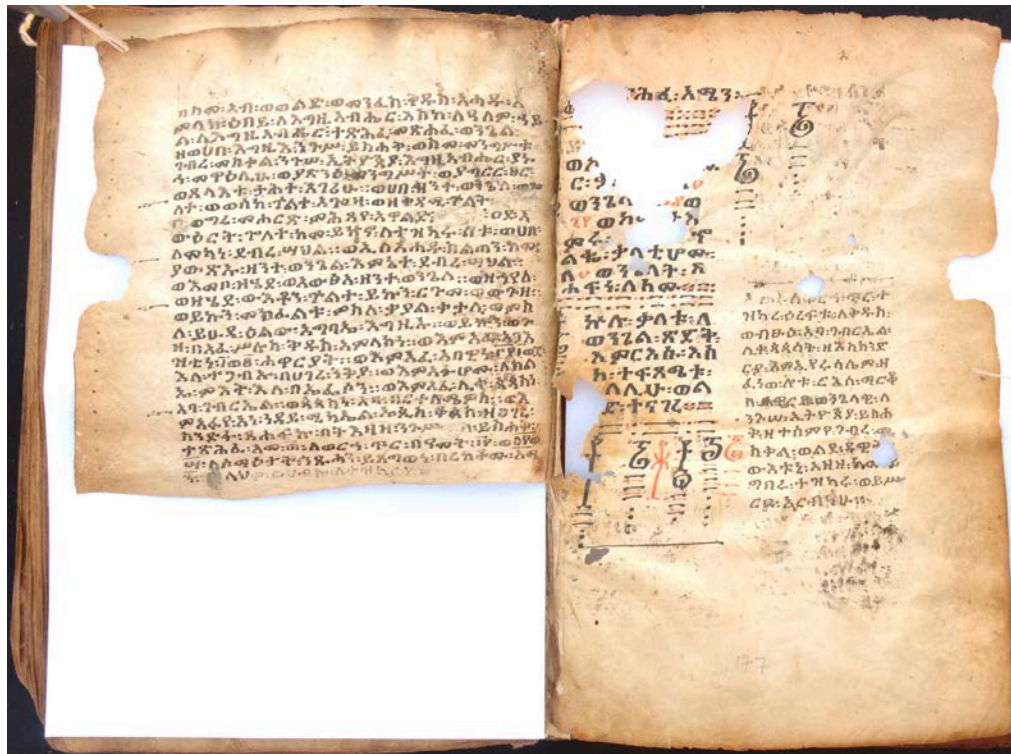


Fig. 16

