



Golden Gospels of Däbrä Sahel

Digit. signum: DSAE-001; 177 fols + IV; 31.5.x 20.5x 9.5 cm; 14th century

The [manuscript](#) belongs to the category of the “Golden Gospels” (*wängälä wäraq*) that is a Gospel Book, usually illuminated, containing notes and documents concerning the church or monastery to which it belongs and the people living around. The notes may be written on empty spaces of the text folios, on the additional folios placed at the beginning and at the end of the manuscript or on separate leaves inserted into it. All these types are to be found in the Däbrä Sahel Gospel.

The documents of the Golden Gospels contain historical records, genealogies, purchase acts, notes on debts and gifts, prayers for the church/monastery benefactors, but most often - and this is the case of our manuscript - land donations (*gwelt*) given to the place at various occasions by kings or nobles. This kind of manuscript is usually supplied with a dated colophon containing the name of the donor and, sometimes, of the scribe. Since it is missing in the Däbrä Sahel Gospel, other historical [documents](#) extant in it have been taken into consideration together with the type of decoration, for its dating.

The decoration - seventeen full-page [miniatures](#) - consists of ten folios of the elaborated Eusebian Canon Tables, introduced by three pages of the Letter of Eusebius to Carpianos, and closed by the depiction of the Fountain of Life and three directly following scenes representing the Crucifixion, the Holy Women at the Tomb and the Ascension combined with the *Maiestas Domini*, that is an abbreviated Passion cycle designed for the Early Christian art objects connected to the Holy Land (ampoullas, bracelets, rings etc.). Moreover, the text of each Gospel is preceded by a portrait of the pertinent Evangelist.

Presently eight other Golden Gospels belonging to the same type and dating to the same time are known: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, eth. 32; Stockholm, Nationalmuseum, NM B 2034; Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W.836; London, Sam Fogg's collection; Paris, a private collection; in Ethiopia: Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 3475a-b; in the churches in the Tigré province: Däbrä Mä'ar, Däbrä Särabi, Ura Qirqos. All of them deserve separate studies.

Selected bibliography:

African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia, R. Grierson (ed.), New Haven-London 1993, nrs 54, 55, 56.

L'Arche Éthiopienne: Art chrétien d'Ethiopie, 27- septembre 2000 - 7 janvier 2001, Paris. Pavillon des Arts, pp. 44-45.

Art of Ethiopia [Sam Fogg's collection], London 2005, pp. 80-81.

E. Balicka-Witakowska, *La Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien: Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive*, Warszawa-Wiesbaden 1997.

Ethiopian Art: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore 2001, pp. 96-97.

M. Heldman, "An Early Gospel Frontispiece in Ethiopia", *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 48 (1979), pp.107-121

C. Lepage, "Reconstruction d'un cycle protobyzantin à partir des miniatures de deux manuscrits éthiopiens du XIVe siècle", *Cahiers archéologiques* 35 (1987), pp. 159-196.

Mäzgäbä Se'elat [database], <http://128.100.218.174:8080/about.html>