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Report

(by Denis Nosnitsin, PI)



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Public Report

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Editorial note

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



Fig. 1a, May ʾAnbäsa (left), Koholo (center), view from the valley of Gəwa

During the period 31.10.-11.12.2011 the team of the Ethio-SPaRe project carried out its fourth field research mission. Based in ʿAddigrat and Wəgro, the team greatly widened the geographic scope, working in Gulo Mākāda and the area around the city of ʿAddigrat, and also vast Ganta Afāšum, Saʿsi Šāʿada ʾƏmba and ʾƏndārta *wārādas*.

The team included project members from Hamburg University¹, representatives of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (TCTA)², and members of the administration of the respective church administration offices³. Within six weeks of intensive work, the team visited 21 sites and worked on the collections of 19 sites⁴, some of them completely unknown or less known, or difficult to access. The excellent cooperation of the TCTA and the local church administration enabled the team to score good results: it recorded a few hundreds of manuscripts and collected plenty of historical information about the sites.

Besides, in the framework of the Ethio- SPaRe project, a team of manuscript restorers composed of N. Sarris (Greece) and M. Di Bella (Italy)⁵ worked during two weeks in ʿAddigrat (14.-27.11.2011), partly in rough field conditions, and repaired a number of old manuscripts recorded by the project team during the previous trips⁶.

Below follow some brief observations on the 17 churches and monasteries visited, as well as photos of the sites and the most remarkable manuscripts and objects. The full-scale evaluation of the results is being underway at the Hiob Ludolf Center for Ethiopian Studies in Hamburg. The digital copies of the collected materials may be consulted in the main office of the Təgray Culture and Tourism Agency (Mägāla) and in the Eastern Təgray Diocese (ʿAddigrat). In the report below, all datings and conclusions are to be considered preliminary.

1. May ʾAnbäsa Kidanä Məḥrät and ʾƏnda Mähşun

The site of May ʾAnbäsa can be reached through the same road that leads to Koholo Yoḥannēs (s. Report III). On passing by Koholo, one continues on the road above the river Gəwa; after some 25-30 min drive, one has to leave the main road and descend the slanted slope on foot. The monastery of May ʾAnbäsa Däbrä Gännät Qəddəst Kidanä Məḥrät stands above the river (which in the dry season reduces to a small stream), nearly hidden for the outside observer (fig. 1a). Under the monastic compound, there are small terraced fields and a picturesque waterfall interrupting the course of the river. Below the drop of the waterfall, there is a cave which is said to have formerly been a church dedicated to ʾabunä Zärʾa Buruk, and a small monastic community lived inside. Several interconnected caves, very wet and chilly, indeed show traces of rough construction work and use as dwellings⁷.

¹ Dr. Denis Nosnitsin (PI), Dr. Stephane Ancel, Vitagrazia Pisani M.A., Susanne Hummel M.A. (research associates), Magdalena Krzyzanowska (PhD candidate); for some time the team was joined also by doctoral students Sophia Dege (Hamburg) as well as Verena Krebs (Konstanz).

² Mäsärät Haylä Səllase acted as field coordinator, Boggalä Täsämma and Haylay Tāklay as field assistants; the head of the Agency Kābbädä ʾAmarä Bälay acted as project coordinator.

³ Fəşşum Gäbru, the representative of the Eastern Təgray Diocese; *liqā māzämməran* Kasa, *mälakä ḥəywāt* ʿƏzra from the church offices of Wuqro and Ganta ʾAfāšum, resp., and mārīgeta Harägäwäyni from the church administration of ʾƏndārta. The field work was opened and concluded by the coordinating meetings in the TCTA and the in the East Təgray Diocese with His Grace ʾabunä Maqaryos.

⁴ The collections of ʿAddigrat Zä-Mikaʾel ʾArägawi and ʿAddi Çəwa Mikaʾel have not yet been studied.

⁵ Assisted by Mākʾännən Ḥagos (TCTA) and a representative of the East Təgray Diocese.

⁶ A separate report on restoration activity will be made available online.

⁷ One of the *tabots* of May ʾAnbäsa is dedicated to Zärʾa Buruk (commemorated on *Tərr* 13); possibly, it is the *tabot* from the cave church.

Inside the compound of the monastery, there is one recent rectangular church, built in the traditional Təgrayan style, standing in front of the entrance gate. It stands on the place of an earlier, also rectangular, church that had been dismantled sometime in the mid-2000s. Another church, small and round, stands on the slope deep inside the monastic settlement, partly hidden by trees and thick vegetation. Today, it is used as sacristy (*ṣəqa bet*).

The monastery of May ʾAnbäsa has a long history. According to the head (*māmhər*) of the community, ʾabba Ṣəge Dəngəl Kidanä Maryam⁸, it was founded under King “Ṣamdä Ṣen” (i.e., Ṣamdä Ṣeyon I, r. 1318-48), by ʾabunä ʾAbərəham “of Qata”, the same ʾabunä ʾAbərəham who is also venerated in Koholo⁹. Called here “ʾAbərəham of May ʾAnbäsa”, he is considered the founder and the first head of the community¹⁰. ʾAbunä Wäldä Tənśaʾe was ʾAbərəham’s successor and the second head. He is said to have come from Waldebba riding a lion (ʾanbäsa), bringing *tabots* of Kidanä Məḥrat and Holy Trinity¹¹. Other prominent heads were Maḥşāntä Maryam¹² and ʾabunä Täklä Haymanot who also rode a lion and lived during the “Time of the Princes” (*Zāmānā mäsafənt*). Local tradition preserves an account about an early 18th-century (?) raid by Guttu-



Fig. 1b, ʾƏnda Mähşun, church

Oromo, during the time of *māmhər* Kidanä Maryam, when scores of monks were killed. The monastery suffered during the “Time of the Princes”, and was re-established by King Yoḥannəs IV. The kings and local rulers are told to have revered May ʾAnbäsa. Vestments of King Yoḥannəs IV are reportedly preserved in the monastery’s sacristy. Other rulers such as *ras* ʾAlula ʾƏngəda¹³, *ras* Mängäša¹⁴ are said to have visited the place. Local tradition refers to May

ʾAnbäsa as a community of very high status and one of the biggest in the area over many centuries¹⁵.

⁸ Also known as ʾabba Ḥəsan.

⁹ S. Report III n. 9.

¹⁰ The monastic manuscript collection contains his Vita, but the manuscript is quite recent. According to the monks, there was an older copy in the collection, but it was badly damaged, and the present copy was produced to replace it.

¹¹ It is to Wäldä Tənśaʾe that the origin of the monastery’s name May ʾAnbäsa (‘Lion’s Water’) is traced. Once the abbot fell ill and asked for water from the place where a lioness and her three cubs lived in a den.

¹² A *tabot* dedicated to him is kept in May ʾAnbäsa; he is commemorated on *Mäggabit* 16.

¹³ A famous Təgrayan lord, 1847-97 (s. Haggai Erlich, in: EAE I, 211b-213b).

¹⁴ *Ras* Mängäša Yoḥannəs, a son of King Yoḥannəs IV, a governor of Təgray 1868-1906 (Tsegay Berhe, in: EAE III, 728a-729b).

¹⁵ The records of Giovanni Ellero who visited the monastery sometime in late 1930 give a rare opportunity to follow development and changes in the local monastic tradition and context over the span of 80 years (cp. Ellero 1995:80). Remarkably, the role of *ras* Wäldä Šəllase has been

A small nunnery called ʾḤnda Mähṣun, with 5-7 nuns, is located some 5 km away from May ʾAnbäsa, down along the valley of Gəwa, in the hot and deserted lowland. The nunnery is under the administration of May ʾAnbäsa. Mähṣun was explained to us as contracted form for Maḥṣäntä Maryam, the prominent monk mentioned above. The nunnery is said to have been large in the past; ruined dwellings on the slope some 300m away from the current settlement¹⁶ are allegedly the former houses of the nuns. It was impossible to get information about the history of the community or find out in what way Maḥṣäntä Maryam was related to the place. There is a *ṣäbäl*-source in the vicinity of the community; the church of the monastery, small and round, resembles the old church of May ʾAnbäsa (fig. 1b). On the way back, an old, deserted cave-church dedicated reportedly to ʾabunä Yasay was spotted below the road¹⁷. Local people repeatedly said that until recently the entire area between Koholo and ʾḤnda Mähṣun had been the abode of many *baḥṭawi*-hermits.

Indeed, in contrast to more “transparent” parts of ʾḤndäṛta, the area along the river Gəwa between Koholo and ʾḤnda Mähṣun appears to have been a place of monastic retreat for both coenobitic communities and hermits, pursuing different ways of monastic life. Its northern part (ʾḤnda Mähṣun) is directly linked to Tämben, the most traditional and conservative region with the developed monastic tradition.

In late 1930s the community of May ʾAnbäsa encompassed 40 monks¹⁸; in the post-war time of Ḥaylä Šellase I, up to 80 monks. It declined after 1974, under the military government (*Därg*), and only recently started reviving. Currently, there are ca. 15 monks and novices living in the monastery. The community follows strict *ʾandännät*-rule, and, though poor, seeks to achieve complete self-subsistence. The burden of running and administering two communities, taking care of the elderly monks and providing the church service for the local people is to the biggest part carried by the head of the community, strong and energetic ʾabba Ḥəsan who entered May ʾAnbäsa some 5 years ago.

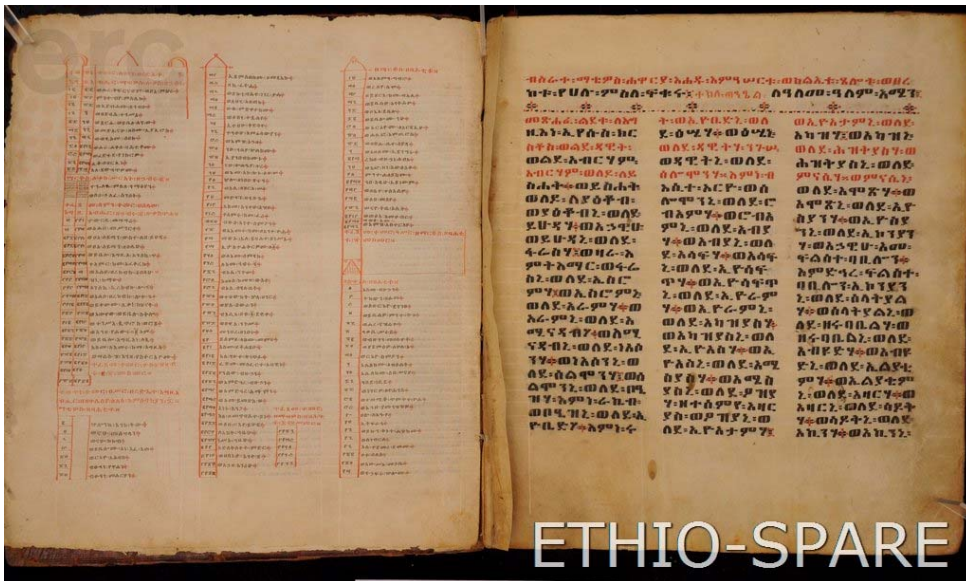
The manuscript collection of May ʾAnbäsa is very extensive and complex. It possesses, however, no manuscripts dating into the period around its purported foundation time (14th century). At the same time, the range of works included into the collection definitely points to a strong, long-existing monastic community and tradition of monastic learning. Below, there are some brief preliminary observations and examples of selected books.

suppressed, and the link between him and *mamḥər* Täklä Haymanot is not remembered. A new element is the story of the massacre by the Oromo-Guttu, which was not reported by Ellero. Today, the important information about the former *gwəlt*-land and privileges of the community (including recent grants by *däggazmač* Säbagadis and King Yoḥannəs IV), as well as the role of May ʾAnbäsa in the ecclesiastic administration, is not relevant and therefore is not remembered. From the description left by Ellero it becomes clear that the monastery has lost a substantial part of its assets: the current number of manuscripts in the monastic collection is far less than “more than 200 codices” reported by Ellero; there are also no traces of the old “*tucul*” (round church) with a completely painted *mäqdäs*.

¹⁶ Close to the stone bridge over Gəwa, said to have been constructed by *ras* Mängäša and inaugurated in 1963 E.C. Here, the river separates ʾḤndäṛta from Tämben.

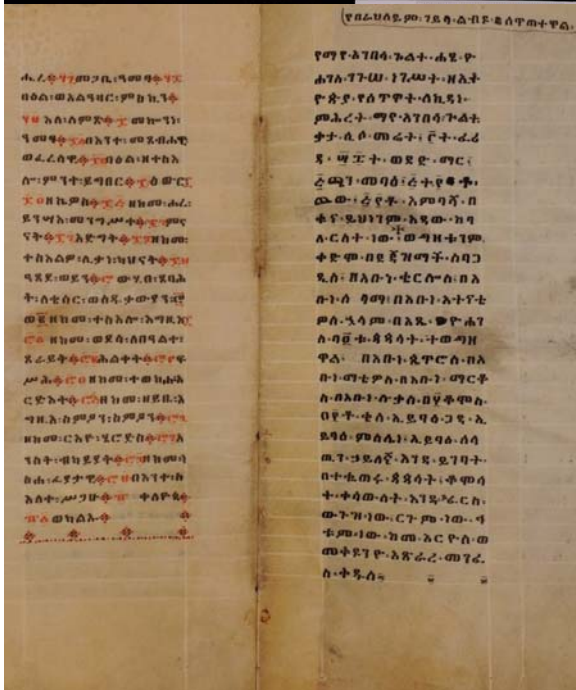
¹⁷ As in the case of Zärʾa Buruk, the *tabot* of Yasay is said to have been brought to May ʾAnbäsa.

¹⁸ Ellero 1995:80.



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Fig. 2a, 2b, May ʿAnbäsa, Four Gospels



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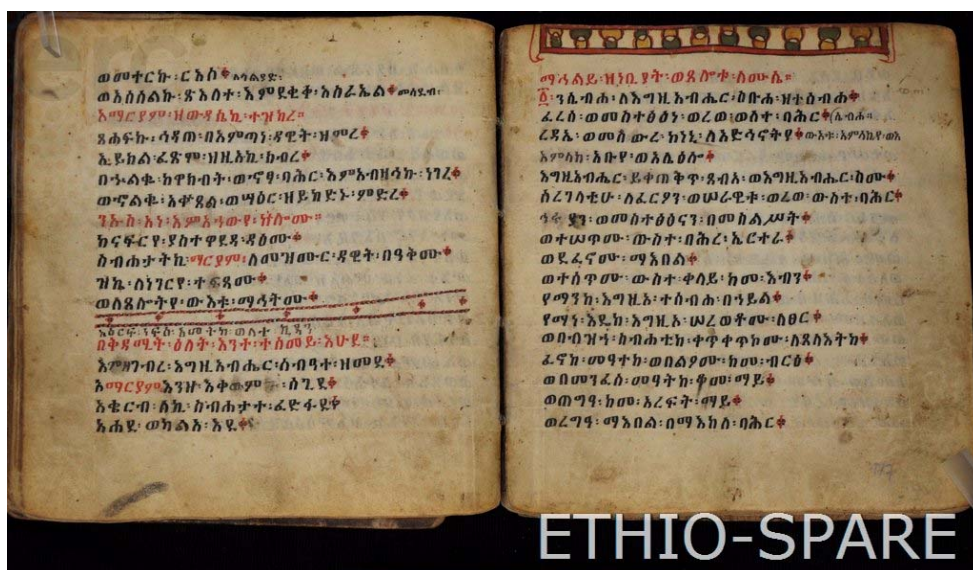


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Fig. 3, May ʿAnbäsa, Gädlä Kiros, Gädlä Nob



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Fig. 4a, 4b, May
?Anbäsa, Psalter

The collection possesses several Gospel books (three Four Gospels, and ten manuscripts containing the Gospel of John). One of the Four Gospel books seems to be the “Golden Gospel”, written by a well-trained hand (fig. 2a)¹⁹ and containing the land charter of May ?Anbäsa, issued by King Yoḥannēs IV (fig. 2b)²⁰.

It was possible to identify two oldest books of the collection, both are high quality manuscripts and in good condition. One is the manuscript containing two hagiographic works: the Vita of Kiros (*Gädlä Kiros*)²¹ and the Vita of Nob (*Gädlä Nob*) (fig. 3). Dating to late 16th/early 17th century, it was in the possession of a certain Täklä Haymanot; it is possible that this was indeed

¹⁹ Though with minimum of decorative elements, and a remarkable fluctuation in the size of the script: the letters are 10-11mm tall in the initial fols. of Matthew, 11-12 mm in the initial fols. of Mark, 12-13 mm for Luke, 11-12 mm for John, as if the scribe have had some problems with assessment of space or with the availability of parchment for writing.

²⁰ Cp. Ellero 1995:80; since the document mentions all four bishops of King Yoḥannēs, probably it was issued when all four bishops were still alive. It is known that the King received the Metropolitan Pētros in 1881, while one of the bishops accompanying him, Marqos, died already in 1882 (S. Tedeschi, in: *Coptic Encyclopaedia* IV, 1038); thus the charter might have been written around 1881. An interesting feature of the book is that its pricks do not “mirror” each other; in each quire, they were apparently pierced through four leaves at once, separately for each side, from the upper bifolio of the quire.

²¹ Reportedly, a *tobot* dedicated to Kiros is preserved in May ?Anbäsa; this would be a rare case of dedication.

the very Täklä Haymanot who was the head of the community during the time of Säbagadis²². The second is a fine (late 16th-century?) Psalter manuscript²³, with numerous commentaries in Gəʿəz and Amharic. The codex has somewhat untypical ornamental dividers for separating groups of ten Psalms from each other and no traditional Ethiopic “titles of Psalms” (figs. 4a, b).



Fig. 5, May ʾAnbäsa, collection of texts

One of the manuscripts of the collection has been known since 1974, due to a publication of R. Cowley²⁴. This is a thick, nearly square, elegant codex with miscellaneous content, including an old-Amharic text published by R. Cowley (fig. 5); but a closer look does not support the dating of the manuscript he had proposed²⁵. More reasonable dating could be the second half of the 19th century. Moreover, a few more manuscripts of the collection, attributable to the second half of the 19th century, are written in similar type of script, hinting for a possible provenance from one and the same “workshop” – a group of scribes working in same place who learned within the same tradition and possessed similar, though not identical handwriting; cp. the Gospel book mentioned before (fig. 2a); a manuscript of the ʾArganonä wəddase (“Organ of Praise”; fig. 6), a copy of the Wəddase ʾamlak (“Praise to God”; fig. 7); and the second Four Gospel book (fig. 8)²⁶. The picture will become clearer after the entire collection has been carefully studied.

Despite the substantial size of the collection, there is a remarkable lack of illuminated manuscripts; of those few with images, nearly all are very recent (20th century). Perhaps this can be explained by the “stern”, “sober” character of the collection, intended for a large coenobitic community, living according to strict rules, where miniatures were thought to be “entertaining” and therefore inappropriate for the monks²⁷. Among the lesser known or unknown works discovered

²² According to the ownership notes, a few more manuscripts were in possession of Täklä Haymanot.

²³ One of some 25 Psalter manuscripts of the collection.

²⁴ Cowley 1974.

²⁵ “Large, very square hand, probably not later than the seventeenth century” (Cowley 1974:597).

²⁶ With the handwriting very close to that of the first one, s. fig. 2a.

²⁷ In this respect, the presence of only one manuscript of the Miracles of Mary, otherwise very widespread and popular, is also unusual.

in the collection there are the Vita of ʾAbreham of Qata/May ʾAnbäsa; the *mälkə*²⁸-hymn in honour of Wäldä Tənśaʿe and the Vita of Maḥşāntä Maryam²⁸.



Fig. 6, May ʾAnbäsa, ʾArganonä Wəddase

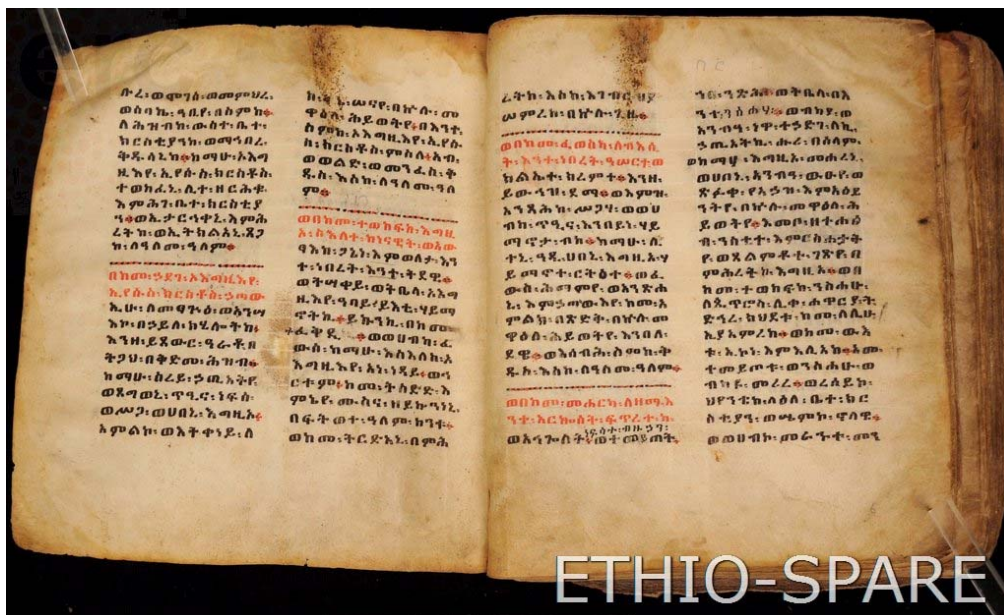


Fig. 7, May ʾAnbäsa, Wəddase ʾAmlak

During the work of the project team, three bindings were repaired by the local scribe and binder *mārigeta* Ḥarägäwäyṇi²⁹.

²⁸ All of them are quite recent; the most recent is the codex with the Vita of Maḥşāntä Maryam, the hagiographic work so far unknown. The manuscript is kept, in fact, not in May ʾAnbäsa, but in ʾEnda Mähşun; it is said to have been a copy of an older manuscripts which was badly damaged by fire and now is gone.

²⁹ The threads of the sewing have broken in a few codices. Usually the breakage occurs along the joints at the sewing stations where the text block is attached to the boards (especially the upper board). This typical damage initially looks unsubstantial; however, if no measures are undertaken, the text block will disintegrate. Rebinding of one simple codex without leather covering took *mārigeta* Ḥarägäwäyṇi some three hours. The example was followed by a novice living in the monastery and

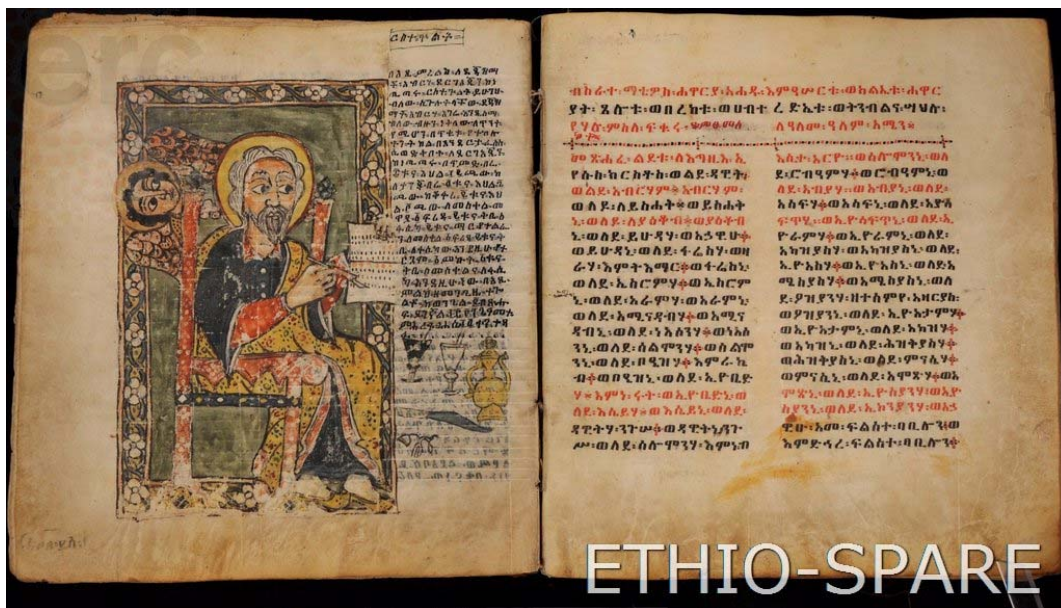


Fig. 8, May ʿAnbäsa, Four Gospels

2. Səddäyto Mikaʿel

The church Səddäyto Däbrä Gännät Qəddus Mikaʿel is located in the interior of the Gulo Mäḵäda *wäräda*, in a part which is difficult to access. The large rectangular church of Səddäyto, built recently to replace the old, dismantled, building, stands at the foot of a cliff (fig. 9). On the slope above the church, there is a small chapel of Kidanä Məḥrät. Above the chapel, a crude stone wall is visible at the cliff, hiding a cavity apparently with an old burial inside.

The church possesses a complete late 15th–early 16th–century Four Gospel manuscript, the “Golden Gospel” of Səddäyto. A few notes are found between the Gospels, which obviously contain important information, but are not easy to understand and interpret. A note on fol. 146vb (fig. 10a) refers to a certain Ḥaylä Krəstos as the donor of the book and founder of the church³⁰. Another note, written by a more recent (?) hand, concerns the “the beginning of the lineage” of Ḥaylä Krəstos and probably relates an event from the life of one of his descendants (fig. 10b)³¹. The handwriting of both notes is posterior to the first half of the 16th century, but looks older than 19th century. Local tradition does not recall Ḥaylä Krəstos, nor does it preserve any other information on the history of the church. The people claim that the church was founded in 468 E.C., but they could not explain from which source they took the date.

preparing to take his monastic vow. He mastered the techniques of the chain-stitch sewing while assisting the *mārigeta* and within a few days repaired the sewing of ca. 15 codices.

³⁰ Only half of the note is relatively clear: “This (is) the book of Ḥaylä Krəstos, the censer of its cross (?) and the order of the Mass of (the church of) St. Michael which Ḥaylä Krəstos established.” The second part of the note is difficult to understand; it seems to be a liberal interpretation of the 16th–century notes from the same codex (s. n. 32 below).

³¹ The tentative translation of the note, composed in a somewhat confused way and with corrections, is as follows: “This is the beginning of the lineage of Ḥaylä Krəstos. Zär’a Yoḥannēs generated Wäldä Tənša’e, Habtä Giyorgis; Habtä Giyorgis generated Wäldä Gäbrəʾel. Seven years after she was captured, Habtä Glyorgis brought her back, and the priest was ʾAbalä Krəstos, her, Wälättä Haymanot, who donated the daily bread so that it might serve them as the guide to the Heavenly Kingdom. Do not forget (to recite) the Pater Noster for her, each of you.”



Fig. 9, Səddäyto church

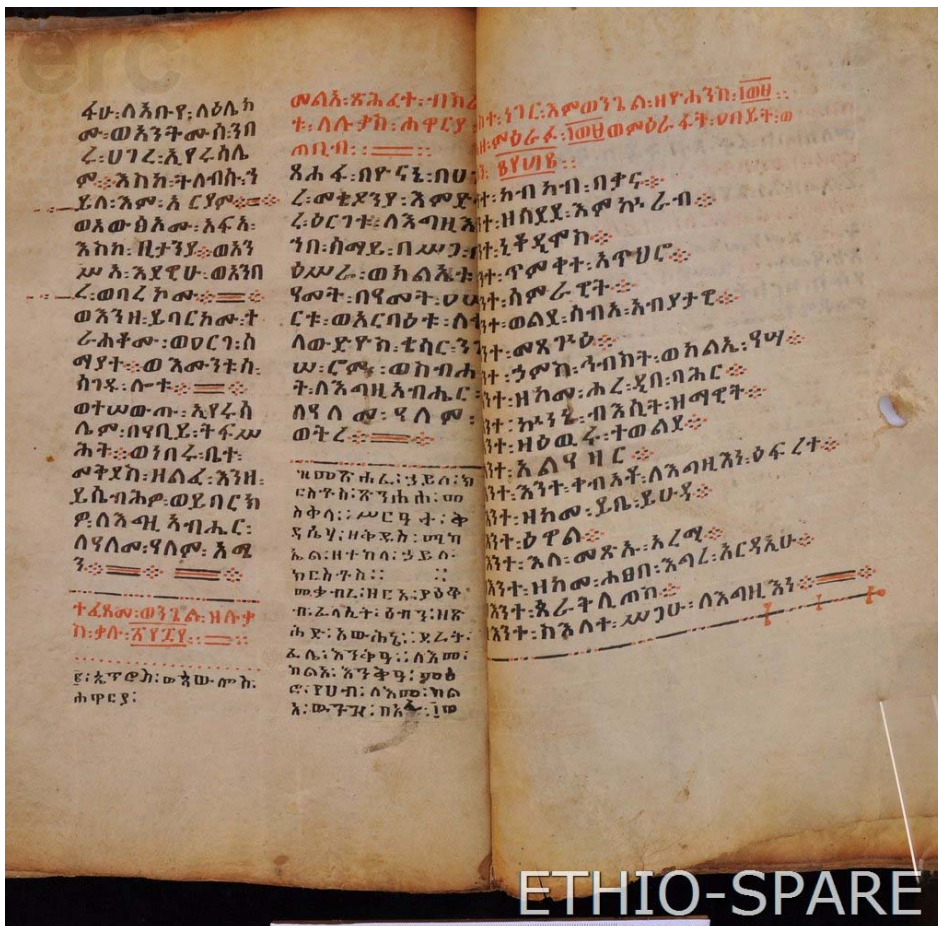


Fig. 10a. Səddäyto, note in the Four Gospel manuscript



Fig. 10b, Səddäyto, note in the Four Gospel manuscript

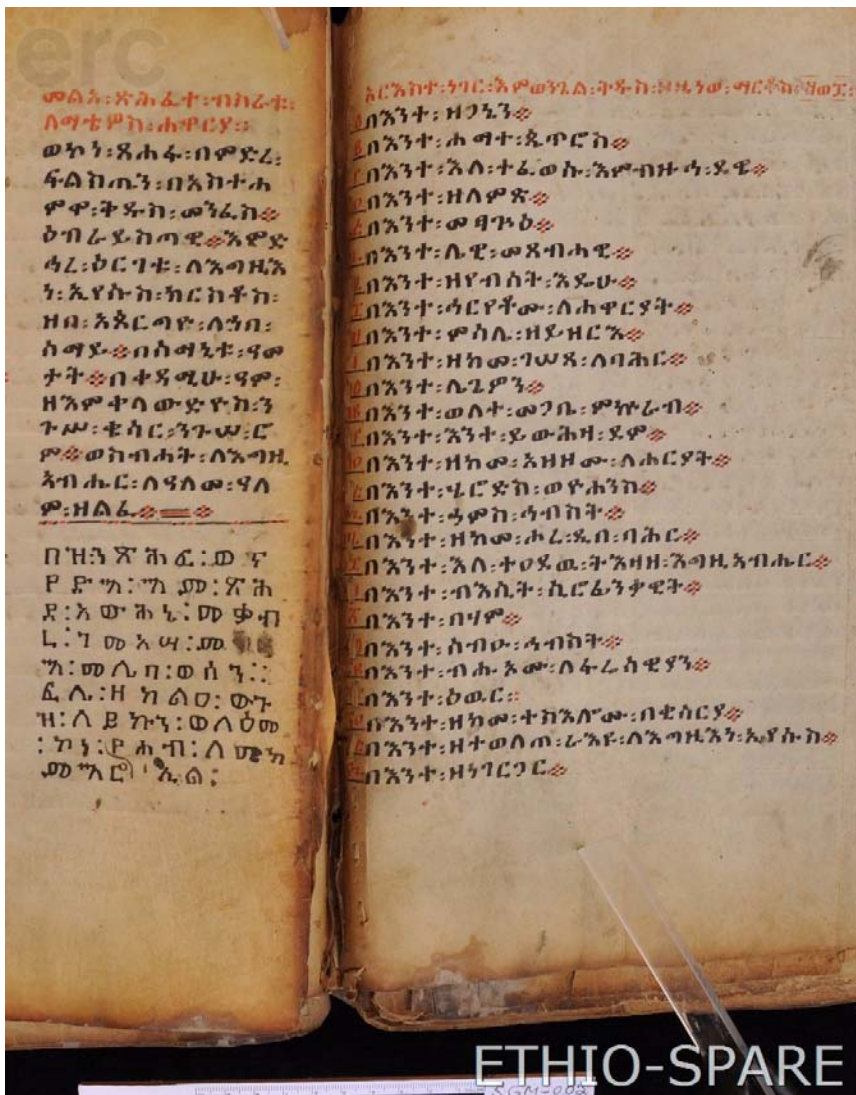


Fig. 10c. Səddäyto, note in the Four Gospel manuscript

Two other notes contained in the Four Gospel book are possibly contemporary to the manuscript, i.e. date back to the first half of the 16th century. These notes, a shorter one and a longer one, are interrelated and were probably conceived as documents complementing each other. Unfortunately, the longer note is very difficult to decipher because of the faded ink. The shorter one is well legible and probably refers to the land occupied by the church building and compound (fig. 10c)³².



Fig. 11, Səddäyto, *Gəbrä Həmamāt*

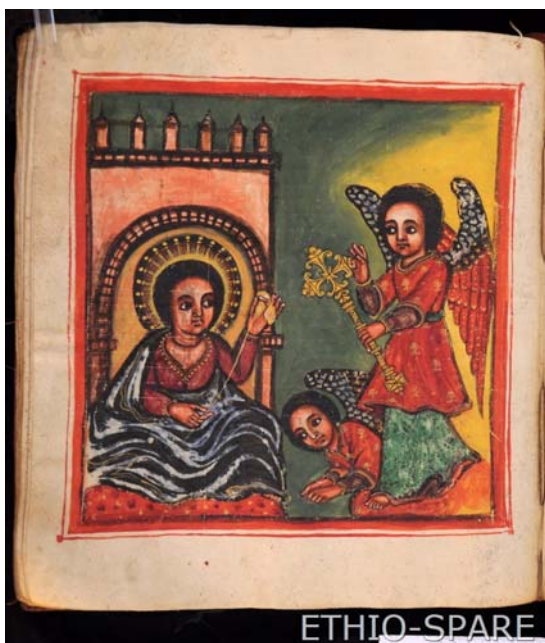


Fig. 12, Səddäyto, collection of Marian texts

³² The charter can be provisionally translated as follows: “Through what we are writing we announce: from the juniper of Awḥəne, the burial of Gāmāʾaśa, (till) Məḥbəʾ [or literally: “hiding place”?] Mäleba is the border. Whoever changes (the border defining it) in a different way, will be excommunicated; and if it happens, he will give a measure of cereals to (the church) of Michael”. The word *fäle* is missing in the Gəʿəz dictionaries, but the meaning can be assumed from the semantics of the root *fälayä* “separate, divide, distinguish”, Leslau 1987:161.

Among other books, the church collection possesses a badly damaged manuscript of the *Gəbrä Həməmat* (fig. 11) from the first half of the 16th century³³; a large, richly illuminated collection of Marian texts (*Nägärä Maryam* etc.), dating probably to the first half of the 19th century (fig. 12). A recent manuscript of the Vita of Mäzgäbä Šəllase proves the influence of the monastery Gundä Gunde. The church has recently acquired a *tabot* of the Righteous Ones of ʿAddiqäharsi Paraqlitos (s. Report I). As in some other churches, the presence of a *tabot* of Libanos hints to the old veneration tradition spread in Gulo Mäkäda.

3. Taḥtay Ruba Maryam

The church of (Däbrä Bərhan) Taḥtay Ruba (Qəddəst) Maryam is only 3-4 km away from Səddäyto. Three churches are located at the site: a picturesque chapel of St. Mary on a hardly accessible rock (visible from Səddäyto, s. fig. 13); and two rectangular churches below: a smaller and older one, and a large recently built one (fig. 14). The gatehouse is a remarkable, huge structure (fig. 15), similar to those found in some other places of the area (Qärsäbär, s. Report I; or in Aḥzära, s. Report II).



Fig. 13, Taḥtay Ruba, chapel, view from Səddäyto



Fig. 14, Taḥtay Ruba, main church

³³ Dating back to the same time as the Gospel book?



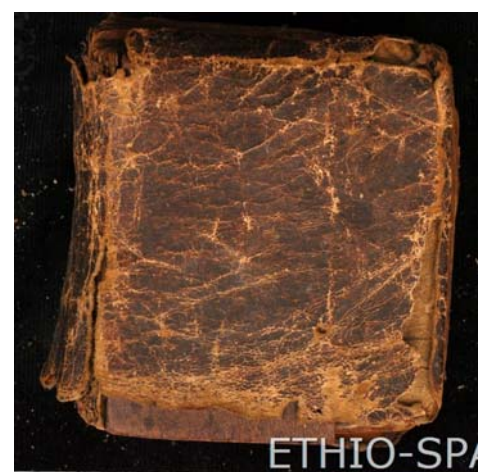
Fig. 15, Tahtay Ruba, gate house



Fig. 16, Tahtay Ruba, Four Gospel manuscript



Fig. 17ab, Tahtay Ruba, *ʾEgziʾabəḥer Nəgśä*



The Four Gospel book of the church dates back to the 18th century, and it seems to be a crude copy of an older Gospel manuscript, which did not survive (fig. 16). The church possesses a valuable manuscript of the hymn collection *ʾEgziʾabəḥer Nəgśä* ("The Lord Reigns") which is ascribed to King Zärʾa Yaʿqob (1434-68). The manuscript, possibly dating back to the second half



Fig. 17cdef, Taḥtay Ruba, ʿƏgziʿabəḥer Nəgśä, binding

of the 16th century³⁴, is in relatively good condition and, as a rare case, still preserves the original binding (figs. 17a-e)³⁵. An evidence of the link to Gundä Gunde is found in an 18th-century hagiographic dossier of Mäzɡäbä Šəllase (Vita, Miracles and *mālkəʿ*-hymn), which was written by a poorly trained scribe who had difficulties in following the ruling³⁶. The manuscript is remarkable due to the peculiar style of the miniatures (figs. 18a, 18b). A 17th-century (?) fine hymnody manuscript³⁷, written in one column, contains (figs. 19a, 19b) a reference to Gundä Gunde in a “protective prayer” added on the protection folia preceding the text; a donation note mentions Mäzɡäbä Šəllase among other individuals.



Fig. 18a, Taḥtay Ruba, Vita of Mäzɡäbä Šəllase

Local people could not give any information on the founders of the church, except the commonly repeated statement that it was founded in the time of King Säʿaldoba. The names of Mäzɡäbä Šəllase and ʿƏzra, another head of Gundä Gunde, are only vaguely remembered. Though quite extensive, the manuscript collection of Taḥtay Ruba covers only a small portion of the history of the area, which reaches back into a pre-historical period. A proof for that are the

³⁴ Cp. another early witness of the work, in EMMML no. 3128 (the content of the manuscript of Taḥtay Ruba corresponds thus to fols. 2r-94r).

³⁵ Thick, nearly square manuscript of small size with text written in relatively big letters is a peculiar codex type (and, in fact, a masterpiece of the Ethiopian manuscript making!) which has not been sufficiently attended to yet.

³⁶ By the scribe (priest) ʿAmdä Mikaʿel.

³⁷ Parts of the *Məʿraf*, *Dəggʷa*; *Zəmmare*; *Mäwasəʿt*.



Fig. 18b, Tahtay Ruba, Vita of Mäzgäbä Šellase

rock pictures found in a shallow niche under the rock, depicting human beings and animals (figs. 20, 21ab)³⁸.

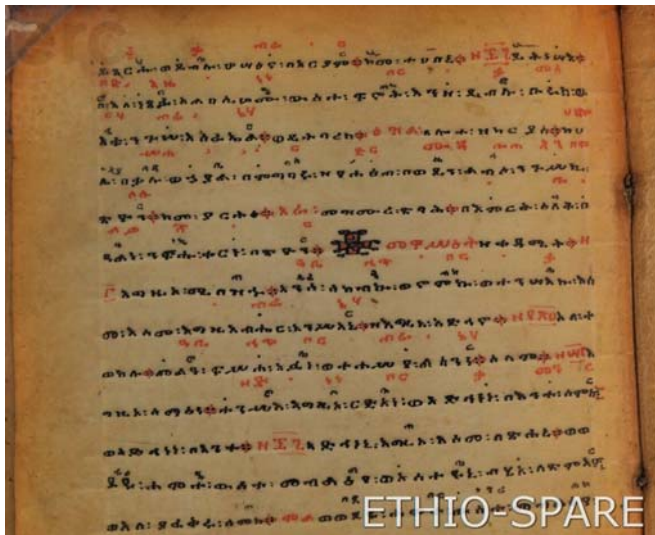


Fig. 19a-b, Tahtay Ruba, hymnody manuscript



Fig. 20, Tahtay Ruba, niche with rock-painting



Fig. 21a, Tahtay Ruba, rock-painting

³⁸ Gulo Mākāda is known for its rock art sites (cp. "Fäqada Maryam", Report I; among the recent finds, s. Gigar Tesfay 2000). However, it seems that the rock art of Tahtay Ruba has not been studied (the place was outside the area covered by the Gulo-Makeda Archaeological Project, s. D'Andrea et alii 2008).

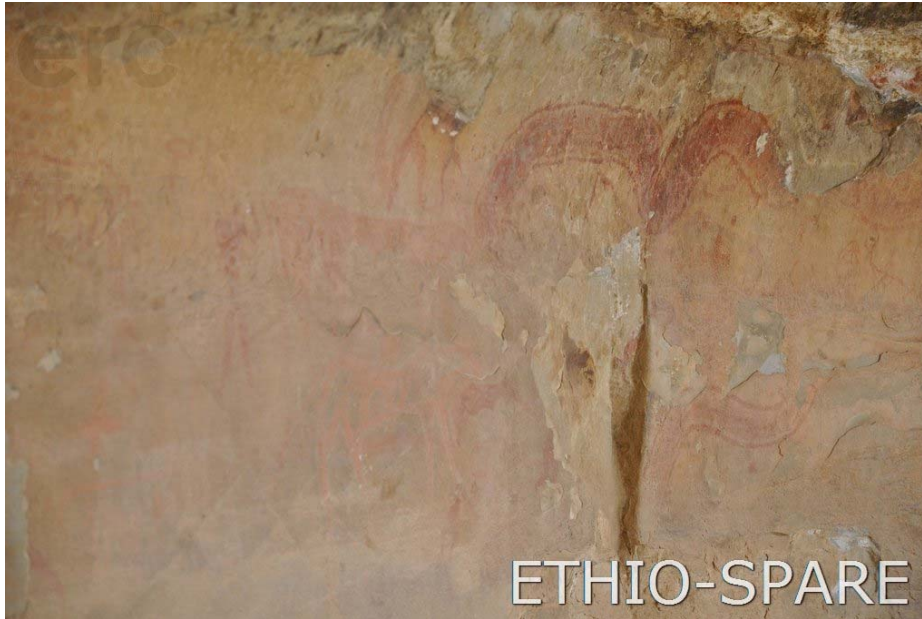


Fig. 21b, Tahtay Ruba, rock-painting

4. Mäkaʾəlo Kidanä Məhrät *gädam*

Mäkaʾəlo Mäkanä Ləʿul Kidanä Məhrät is located not far from the church of ʾƏmbäyto Täklä Haymanot (s. Report I), on the same side of the road, but one has to leave the road, pass between the rocks and climb up the steep slope (fig. 22). One can see the site from the road. Mäkaʾəlo Kidanä Məhrät is still considered a monastery (*gädam*), but the monastic community disappeared long ago. Local tradition claims, with a reference to an undefined written source (“a book”), that the first sanctuary was founded there in 720 E.C., and was then destroyed by Queen Judith/Gudit in 920, and in the 16th century again by ʾAḥmäd Grañ. King Gäbrä Mäskäl donated



Fig. 22, Mäkaʾəlo Kidanä Məhrät, church

gʷəlt-land to Mäkaʾəlo along with other “44 monasteries” of the area. It was also reported that, over the time, the books of the monastic community got dispersed: some went to Gundä Gunde, some went to Däbrä Maʿšo³⁹; a Gospel book of Mäkaʾəlo was taken to ʾAksum⁴⁰. As to the time of the local monastic community’s decline, it reportedly happened after the

wars of Aḥmäd Grañ. The inhabitants of the hamlet near Mäkaʾəlo stress that all of them are

³⁹ The huge rock of Däbrä Maʿšo with the church atop is visible from Mäkaʾəlo.

⁴⁰ This information may possibly indicate that a document related to Mäkaʾəlo is included in one of the Gospel books of ʾAksum Şayon.

consecrated priests or deacons and that their ancestors served in the church for centuries. Anyone who does not want, by whatever reason, to be a consecrated servant should leave the settlement.



Fig. 23-24, Mäka'elo Kidanä Məhrät, Miracles of Mary

The collection of Mäka'elo is quite moderate; there was, though, a valuable, voluminous manuscript of the *Tä'amrä Maryam* ("Miracles of Mary") dating back to the second half of the 16th century (fig. 23), with miniatures probably inserted later (fig. 24). A finely written Missal mentions John as the Patriarch of Alexandria⁴¹ and Sinoda as the Metropolitan of Ethiopia⁴², though the handwriting hints rather to a later period, at least mid-18th century (fig. 25).

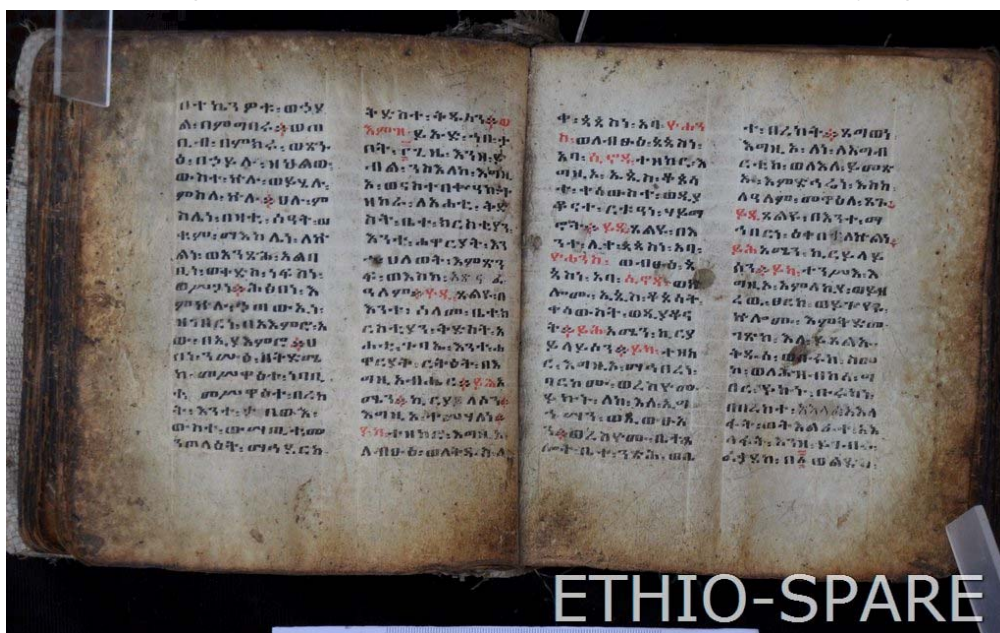


Fig. 25, Mäka'elo Kidanä Məhrät, Missal

⁴¹ Possibly John XVI (1676-1718).

⁴² Contemporary of King Yohannēs I (1667-82), he arrived to Ethiopia in 1678 and died in 1699.

5. May Šäʿada Šəllase, May Šäʿada ʿArbaʾtu ʾƏnsəsa

The complex of May Šäʿada is located in the part of Gulo Mäkäda where the concentration of the churches is quite impressive. It includes three churches, of them two in use: at the foot of the hill, there is an active church dedicated to Holy Trinity (Šəllase; fig. 26a); on the top, there is a church dedicated to the Four Heavenly Creatures (ʿArbaʾtu ʾƏnsəsa, still in use), and another one, of the same dedication (now out of use, fig. 26b). All churches are rectangular, built in the traditional Təgrayan style. Local tradition relates that the Trinity church was established by *ras* Səbḥat ʾArägawi, the governor of Təgray (d. 1914); the upper church is said to have been established by King Säyfä Arʿad (r. 1344-71)⁴³. There has never been a monastic community at May Šäʿada.



Fig. 26a, May Šäʿada, church of Trinity



Fig. 26b, May Šäʿada, church of the Four Heavenly Creatures

⁴³ As in a few other cases, a foundational charter is said to be included in a “Golden Gospel” manuscript in ʾAksum. No such document is recorded in the published collection commonly referred to as the *Liber Axumae*; a place called May Ƨaʿda is mentioned in a charter issued for the church of ʾAmba Šännayt by King Ləbnä Dəngəl (Conti Rossini 1909:31, no. 30) but the identification is uncertain.

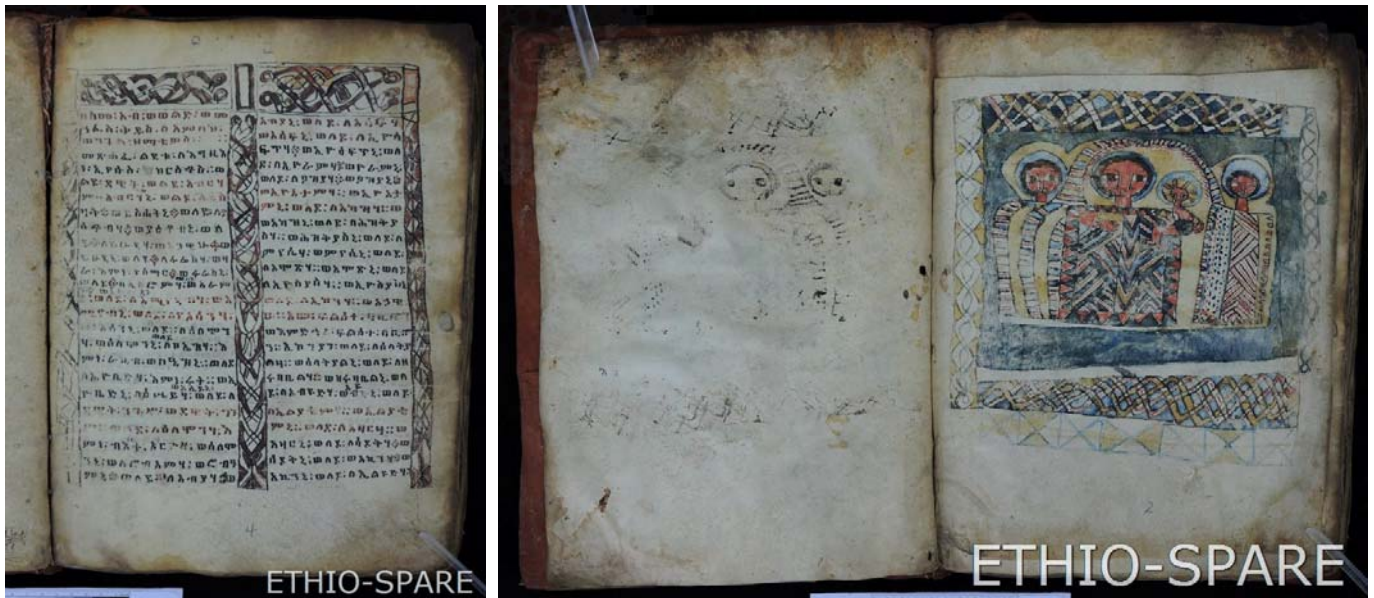


Fig. 27, 28, May Šāfada, Four Gospels

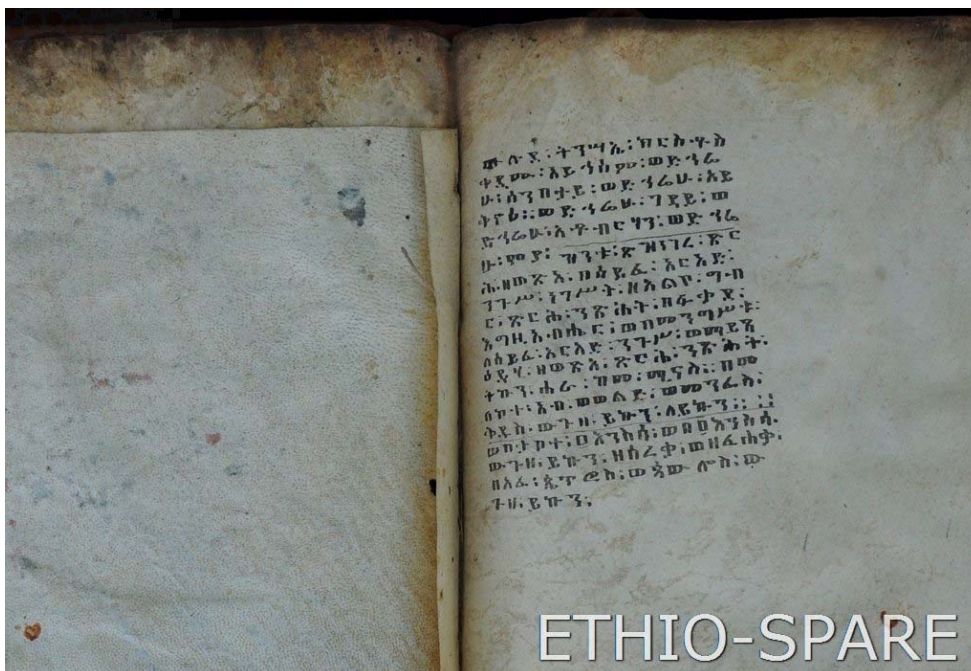


Fig. 29, May Šāfada, note in the Four Gospels

Today, the May Šāfada manuscript collection unites the books from all three churches. It is extensive but modest in terms of quality and age of the manuscripts. The Four Gospel book is possibly a copy of an older manuscript which did not survive. Dating probably to the 19th century, the codex is crudely manufactured and written (fig. 27), with one miniature in a peculiar, “rough” style (fig. 28). The Gospel book contains a note which is composed of a genealogy of an individual and a short record concerning the foundation of the church by the 14th-century King Sāyfā Arʿad (fig. 29). The note was probably copied from an old manuscript⁴⁴ and gave ground for the church foundation story. Among other manuscripts, a small-size book containing magic *ʿasmat*-prayers and the Prayer of St. Mary on Golgotha is interesting due to the drawings (figs.

⁴⁴ It is, in fact, written in the manuscript twice, similar to the marginal notes of the Səddäyto Gospel book.



Fig. 30a-b, May Šāʿada, collection of prayers, drawings, exhortation

30ab)⁴⁵. Indeed, the collection possesses a few manuscripts donated by ras Səbḥat, among them a Psalter with a beautiful frontispiece decoration, the picture of the Lion (of Judah), and fine ornamental bands for separating the usual parts of the Psalter, elaborate with otherwise not very common anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs (figs. 31ab).



Fig. 31a-b, May Šāʿada, Psalter

6. Säglat Qəddəst Maryam, Säglat Qəddus Mikaʿel

⁴⁵ Executed by a certain Gäbrä Mikaʿel who also wrote (in crude, angular script) a short text exhortation on the *recto* side.

The site of Säglat has been known since quite a long time⁴⁶. It is located in the same valley as ʿAddi Qiyahto Maryam (with the flattop mount Däbrä Maʿšo in the background). To reach Säglat,



Fig. 32, Säglat Mikaʿel, church



Fig. 33, Säglat Mikaʿel, ancient remains

one has to pass near ʿAddi Qiyahto and the small white church of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus ʿAddi Addikwaʿ (?ʿənda Gabər). The site accommodates two churches: the more recent Säglat Qəddus Mikaʿel on the rock and the older Säglat Qəddəst Maryam, with ancient columns and burial in the compound, located on the plain (figs. 32, 33). Local tradition has it that the churches, today with one *tabot* each, were founded in the 5th and 15th “year of mercy” respectively (?) under King Gäbrä Məsqäl; there was a monastic community whose prominent head ʾabba Kəflä Maryam lived “before the reign of Ḥaylā Šəllase”⁴⁷.

Despite the ancient age of the site, the collection of Säglat has no old books. The earliest seems to be an early 17th-century (?) hymnody bound with two leather covers, containing the *Dəgg^wa* and the appended penance text *Mäṣḥafä Qedär* (fig. 34)⁴⁸. There are some samples of a local (?) handwriting style, with letters tending to square, angular shapes: a late 18th/19th-century

⁴⁶ The locality is described in Leclant - Miquel 1959:110 (s. also Godet 1977:55). Recently, the area was surveyed by the international Gulo-Makeda Archaeological Project (G-MAP), s. D’Andrea et al 2008.

⁴⁷ It is not the first time that the priests of the church with particularly old history did not know any historical tradition and could not tell anything but very common *topoi*.

⁴⁸ S. Daniel Assefa, in: EAE III, 270a-271a. The version of the text in the manuscript from Säglat is much shorter than the edited text, e.g., *Mäṣḥafä qedär wä-qännona...*, 1962 E.C.

(?) *Dərsanä Mikaʾel* and *Mäṣḥafä ʾTəmqaʾt* (figs. 35, 36). Some manuscripts show interesting scribal and manuscript making practices, such as the Missal dating to 1777-79⁴⁹ with infixed quire containing a passage from The Lord's Prayer: "The hosts of the angels of the Savior of the World stand before the Savior of the World ... the Apostles followed his faith", executed by a more recent hand (figs. 37a, 37b)⁵⁰.

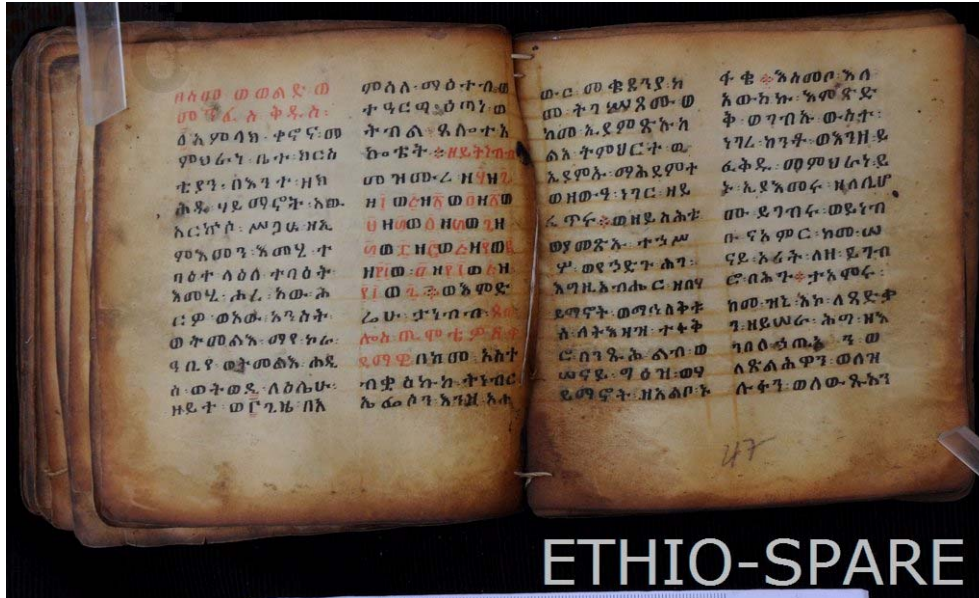


Fig. 34, Säglat
Mikaʾel,
Mäṣḥafä Qedär

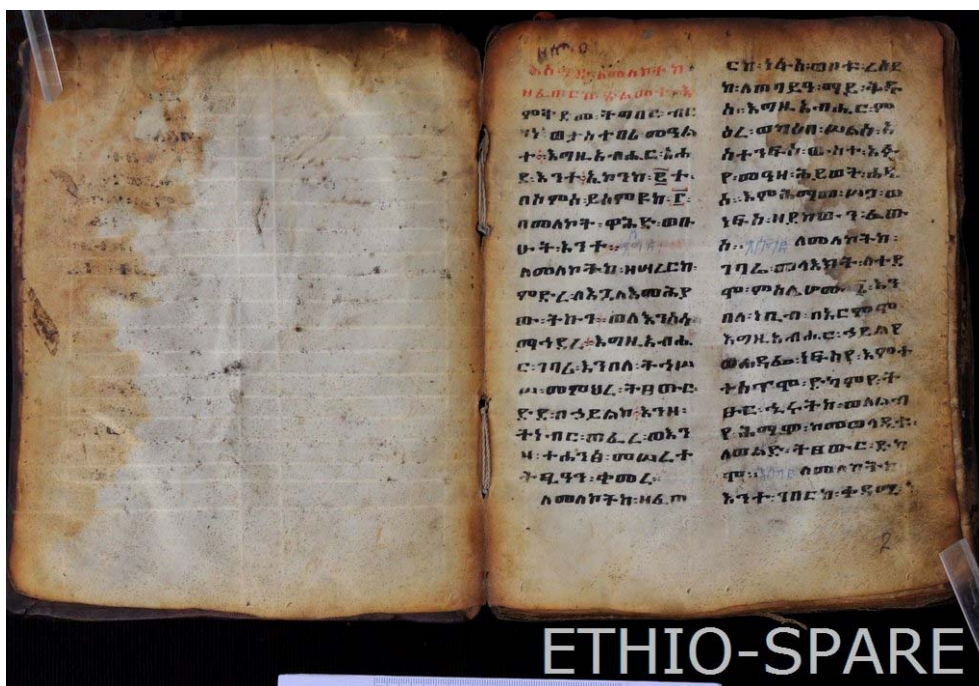


Fig. 35, Säglat
Mikaʾel,
Dərsanä Mikaʾel

⁴⁹ Based on the mentions of King Sälonon II (r. 1777-79) in the litanies (fol. 23r) and Metropolitan ʾabunä Yosab elsewhere, fol. 37v (Yosab II; he arrived in Ethiopia in 1770, d. 1803, S. Tedeschi, in: *Coptic Encyclopaedia* IV, 1030).

⁵⁰ *Mäṣḥafä qəddase*, Qəddase ʾHawaryat, "Anaphora of the Apostles", §§63-65, repeated also in other Anaphoras, (Qəddase ʾƏgziʾ, "Anaphora of Our Lord", §§ 72-74; Qəddase Yoḥannēs Wäldä Nägʾädgʾad, "Anaphora of John Son of Thunder", §§ 113-15, etc.). The exact purpose of this addition is not clear so far; in the same form, the passage is also found in the Anaphoras.



Fig. 36, Sāglat
Mika'el, Māṣṣhafā
Ṭəmqaṭ

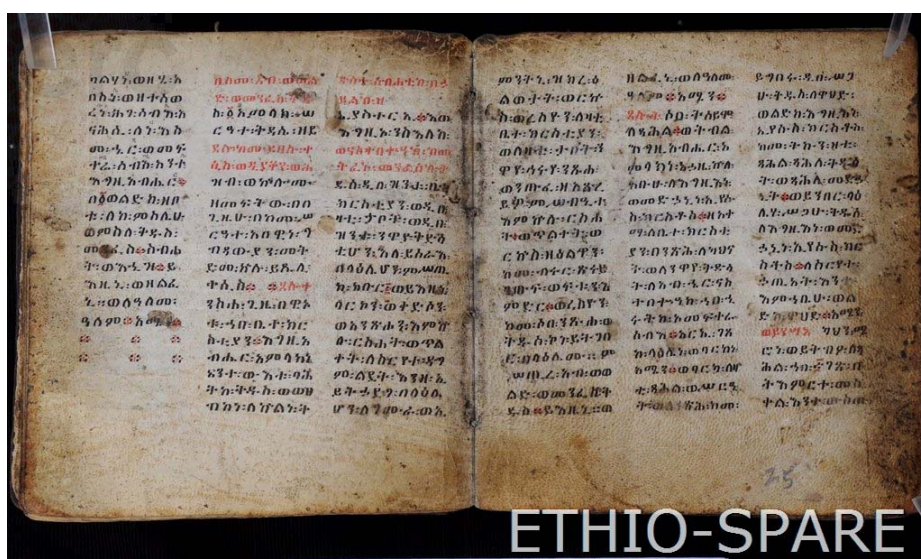


Fig. 37a, Sāglat
Mika'el, Missal

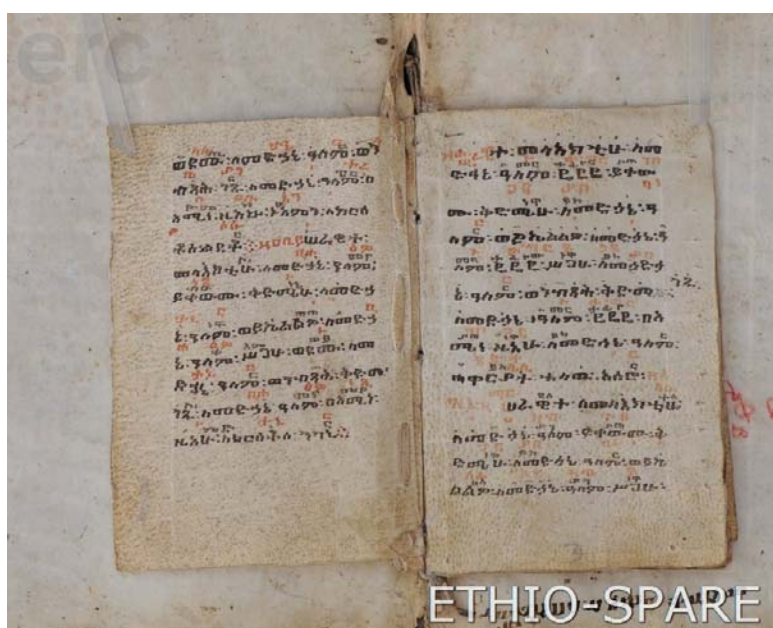


Fig. 37b, Sāglat Mika'el,
Missal

7. ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat Pētros wā-Ḥawlos

The church ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat Pētros wā-Ḥawlos is located behind May Šāʿada Šēllase. The path to the church is difficult; one enters between the hills, passes a small white church of Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus, and descends into a valley in which the large church of Apostles Peter and Paul stands (figs. 38, 39; the locality, though, is called ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat, i.e. “House/ church of the Apostles”). According to local tradition, the church was founded in the time of King Sāʿaldobba; there was a monastic community that declined and disappeared after the war of Aḥmād Grañ⁵¹.



Fig. 38, ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat Pētros wā-Ḥawlos, view



Fig. 39, ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat Pētros wā-Ḥawlos, church

The church collection possesses a fine, voluminous late 15th-century manuscript with the collection *Gādlä Ḥawaryat* (the apocryphal Vitae of the Apostles) (fig. 40); it is unclear for the moment whether the book could be a foundational donation to the church or was acquired in the course of time. Among other manuscripts, there is a 18th-century collection of hagiographic texts devoted to Mäzgäbä Šēllase whose veneration is very popular in Gulo Mäḳäda⁵². The

⁵¹ Initially, the person interviewed tried to recall another name, and started with his title, *ras*. After a few minutes of thinking, he asked other people from ʾĒnda Ḥawaryat and received a hint from them.

⁵² And nearly superseding the cult of such saint as Mäṭaʿ /Libanos.

manuscript, worn, written by not very well trained hand and somewhat crudely manufactured, is illuminated, and the iconographic program and the style of the miniatures resemble the Vita of Mäzɡäbä Šəllase of Tahtay Ruba Maryam (figs. 41a, 41b; cp. figs. 18a, 18b above). The Four Gospel book of ʿƏnda Ҳawaryat is written by a mid-19th-century scribe whose hand⁵³ was already spotted in the *Dərsanä Mikaʿel* manuscripts of May ʿAbʿa Maryam and Golʿa Yohannes (s. Report III).

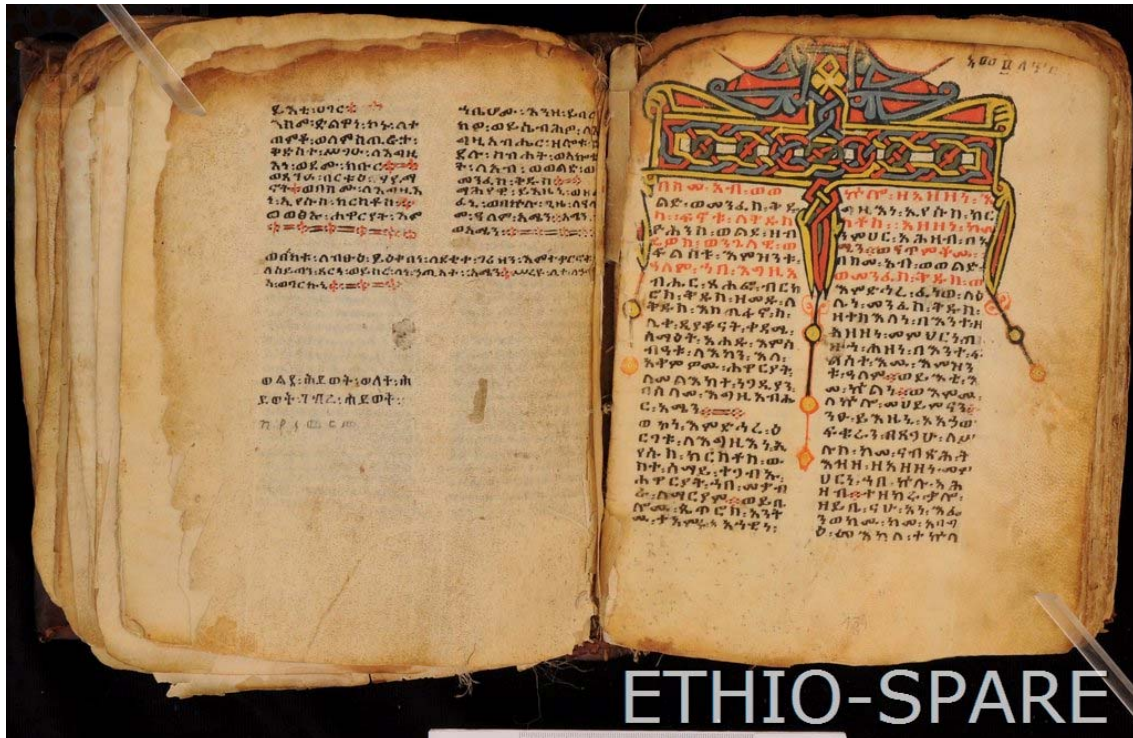


Fig. 40, ʿƏnda Ҳawaryat Pətroṣ wä-Pawloṣ, *Gädlä Ҳawaryat*

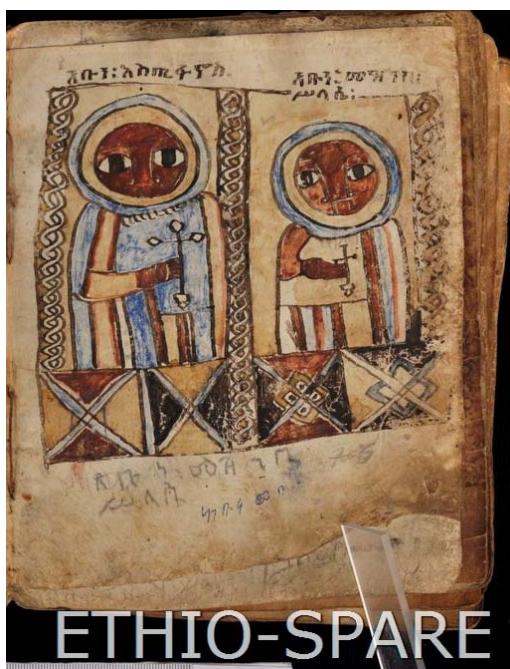


Fig. 41ab, ʿƏnda Ҳawaryat Pətroṣ wä-Pawloṣ, Vita of Mäzɡäbä Šəllase

⁵³ Remarkable for the small, broadly spaced letters and the tendency to lesser contrast between thick and thin elements of the signs.

8. Qāndaʿro Qəddus Qirqos

The church Qāndaʿro Däbrä Ḥayl Qəddus Qirqos is located north-east from the ʿAddigrat, on one of the hills overlooking the town. A large rectangular church in the broad compound is half-hidden by high trees (fig. 42)⁵⁴. It has under its administration another one, dedicated to St. George (Qāndaʿro Qəddus Giyorgis)⁵⁵ which has been recently built in a more accessible locality on the brink of the urban area. Local tradition stresses the ancient age of the sanctuary, which existed already in the “Old Testament time” (Yä-ʾOrit). Local people say that some old remains were found during the construction works at the church. A monastic community is said to have existed but disappeared when the last monks died.



Fig. 42, Qāndaʿro Qirqos, view

The manuscript collection of the church possesses a valuable 16th-century Four Gospel book written in a fine 16th-century hand (fig. 43) with a single, unusual miniature showing a symbolical depiction of the nine main feasts “of our Lord” as seven saints (fig. 44). Among other books, there is a manuscript of *Gädlä Zä-Mikaʾel Arägawi* (“Vita of Zä-Mikaʾel Arägawi”) dating to the second third of the 17th century, which appears to be the oldest copy of the text recorded so far by the project team⁵⁶. The manuscript is remarkable also due to a monastic genealogy following the Vita (fig. 45)⁵⁷ and a royal (?) genealogy in Amharic, which occupies one and a half of the codex’s endleaves⁵⁸. The collection possesses an interesting Synaxarion manuscript (the

⁵⁴ The Təgrəñña name Qāndaʿro was apparently derived from the words *qāndi daʿro* “the chief sycamore” (Kane 2000:1000, 2148).

⁵⁵ According to the priests, a *tabot* consecrated for the 15th-century female saint Krəstos Šämra (cp. D. Nosnitsin, in: EAE IV, 443b-445a) has been recently introduced into the church, and a copy of her Vita has been obtained.

⁵⁶ Despite the proximity of Däbrä Dammo there have been only relatively recent indications of Zä-Mikaʾel’s veneration in the area around ʿAddigrat including the manuscripts with his Vita (frequently copied together with the Vita of Gäbrä Krəstos / St. Alexis).

⁵⁷ The spiritual genealogy gives a hint to the dating, since it stops shortly after the return of the “(Orthodox) faith” after a 20-years break caused by the “hand of the Franks” (in fact, Catholicism was proclaimed official religion by King Susenyos in 1621, but the Orthodoxy was restituted already after 11, not 20, years).

⁵⁸ The handwriting is difficult to date but it does not seem much posterior to the main text. The genealogy starts with the Biblical King Solomon and Mənilək but then springs to Dənsağan (= Dəgnağan, s. S. Munro-Hay, in: EAE II, 125) who is followed by Mäsobä Wäraq (known also from the

first half of the year) written, unusually, in two columns. The age of the manuscript is difficult to define⁵⁹ but it seems to be one of the oldest Synaxarions among those recorded by the project (fig. 46)⁶⁰.

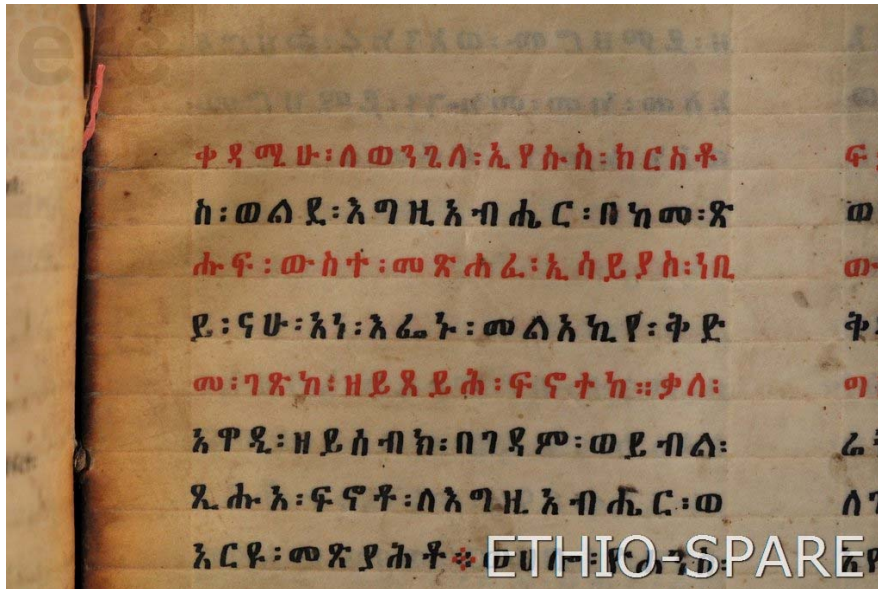


Fig. 43, Qāndaʿro
Qirqos, Four Gospels



Fig. 44, Qāndaʿro
Qirqos, Four Gospels

treatise *Bäʿlā nāgāst*). Among her sons is Ġan Šəyyum whose son is ʿArbe (e.g., Ĥarbay, s. G. Fiaccadori, in: EAE II, 1031a-32a), He is followed by a few names of the Zagʷe kings. In other words, here, the Zagʷe line is not separated from the Solomonic line.

⁵⁹ Second half or late 16th century? The Ethiopic signs for 6 and 7 are written in the typical archaic manner and are difficult to distinguish.

⁶⁰ The text contained in the manuscript is highly different from the published/edited versions (Guidi – Colin, Budge, s. also the recent Ethiopian church edition) in terms of the content (though there are apparently many common commemorations), language and rendering of personal and place-names. Cp. the commemoration note for the *translatio* feast of ʿAqlimos “and the martyrs like him” on the 12th of *Mäskäräm* which has no parallel in the edited text (Colin 1986).

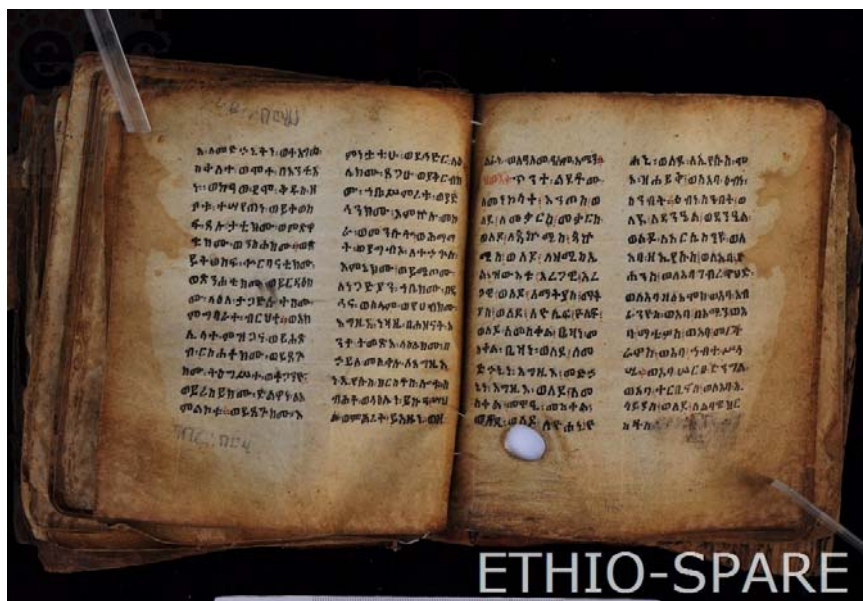


Fig.45, Qāndaʿro
Qirqos, *Gädlä Zä-
Mikaʿel Arägawi*

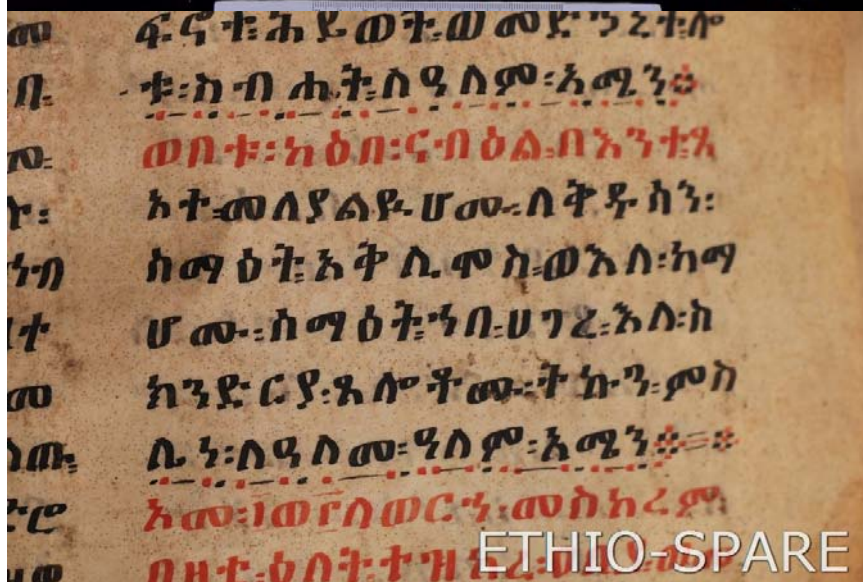


Fig. 46, Qāndaʿro
Qirqos, *Gädlä Zä-
Mikaʿel Arägawi*,
aenealoav

9. Mänāwät Qəddus Giyorgis

Mänāwät Giyorgis ʿƏnda Maryam, a modest *gäṭär*-church, can be reached from the town of

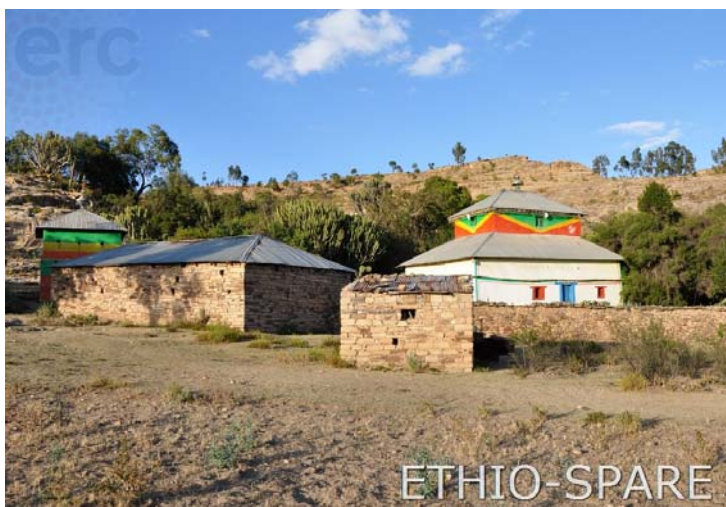


Fig. 47, Mänāwät Giyorgis, view

ʿƏdaga Ḥamus via ʿAddi Qälābās. The church stands in a green picturesque valley partly surrounded by trees (fig. 47). Local tradition recounts that it was founded by *däggäč* Säbagadis who set up the *tabot* of St. George⁶¹. Indeed, a few codices of the church collection were donated by Säbagadis (mentioned by his baptismal name Za-Mänfäs Qəddus): a Gospel book with crude miniatures (figs. 48a, 48b) and a richly illuminated *Gädlä Giyorgis*

⁶¹ Local priests indicated that a written document concerning the foundation (a land charter or a historiographic narrative?) is inscribed in one of the books of Golʿa Yoḥānnəs (s. Report III).

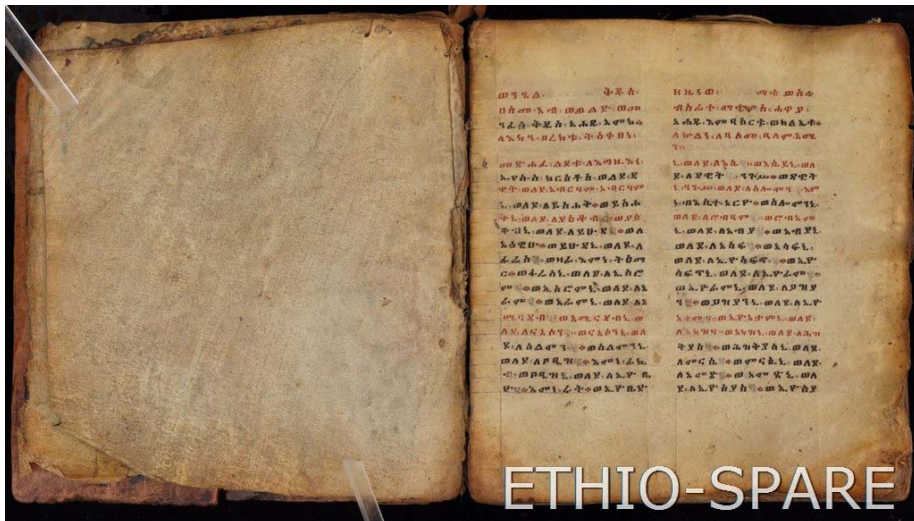


Fig. 48a, Mänawät
Giyorgis, Four Gospels

ETHIO-SPARE

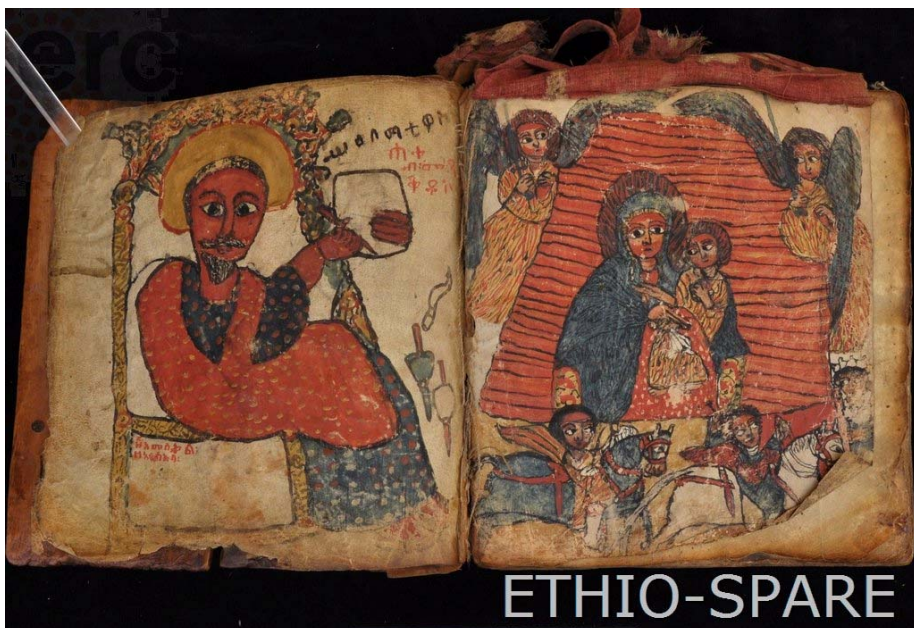


Fig. 48b, Mänawät
Giyorgis, Four Gospels

ETHIO-SPARE



Fig. 49, Mänawät
Giyorgis, Gädlä Giyorgis

ETHIO-SPARE

(“Vita of St. George”) (fig. 49). However, the church might have existed also before the time of Säbagadis who thus only re-established it sometime in the beginning of the 19th century. A hint to this is a 16th-century fragment that has been found included in one of the manuscripts as an endleaf.



Fig. 50a, Mänawät Giyorgis, *mäsob*



Fig. 50b, Mänawät Giyorgis, *mäsob*, inscription

A few interesting historical items have been recorded at the site, all in good condition: an umbrella (*ḡanṭəla*) manufactured in the “pre-modern” way, not on the base of an industrially made umbrella; two old-*nägarit* drums said to be drums of Säbagadis; a *mäsob*-basket covered by textile decorated with metal pendants and plaques, with a votive inscription incised on a metal tablet (figs. 50a, 50b)⁶².

10. May Raza Täklä Haymanot Maryam

The church of May Raza Täklä Haymanot is a remote *gäṭär*-church which can be reached



Fig. 51, May Raza, church

through ʿEdaga Ḥamus, via the road to Gäblen; at one point, one has to leave the road and descend into a gorge. The rectangular church dedicated to Täklä Haymanot stands at the place where the gorge ends and opens into a plain (fig. 51). The church is difficult to reach; it has not apparently been properly investigated before⁶³.

⁶² According to the votive inscription, the basket was donated in 1930/31 E.C.

⁶³ Some images of the manuscripts of May Raza can be found in the database *Mäzgäbä Seelat* (<http://128.100.218.174:8080>). According to E. Balicka-Witakowska, she visited the church around 2004 and inspected the manuscripts but it was not possible to view the church inside. So far, no references to the church have come up in any historical sources. There is a slight possibility that May Raza may be identical to ʿAd Raza of the *Liber Axumae* (cp. Bausi 2006:134).

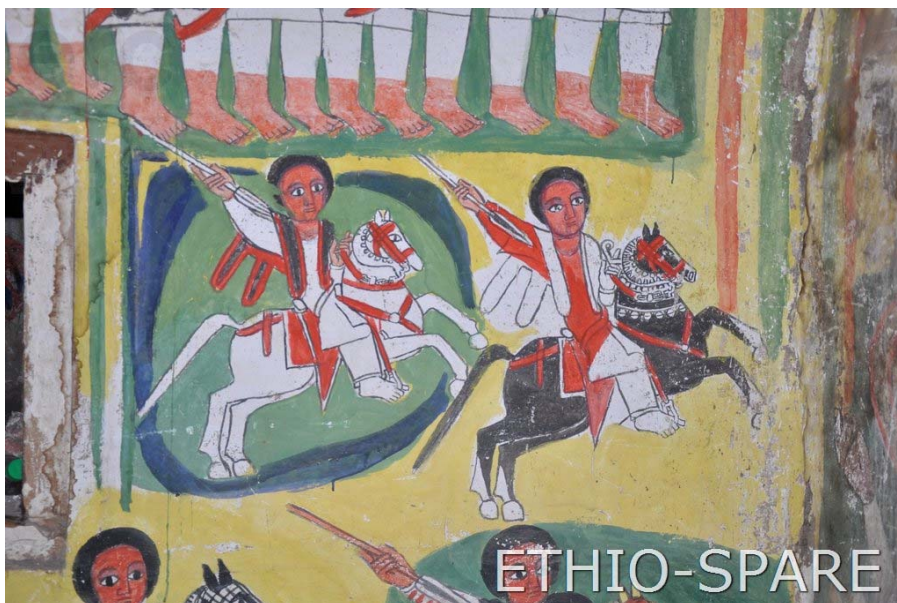


Fig. 52-54, May Raza, murals



According to a local tradition, the church was founded by *däggäč* Säbagadis who established the *tabot* of St. Mary.

Ca. 30-35% of the painted surface of the walls of *mäqdäs* and narthex has perished or is in very poor condition. Those more or less preserved depict besides the iconographic program usual for that type of church numerous “laic” scenes such as hunting, processions, war events (figs. 52, 53), and mention and show different personalities, starting from Säbagadis (figs. 54, 55). There is also a votive picture of the person who commissioned the paintings, *ras* Səbhat ʾArägawi, together with the members of his family, accompanied by an extensive votive



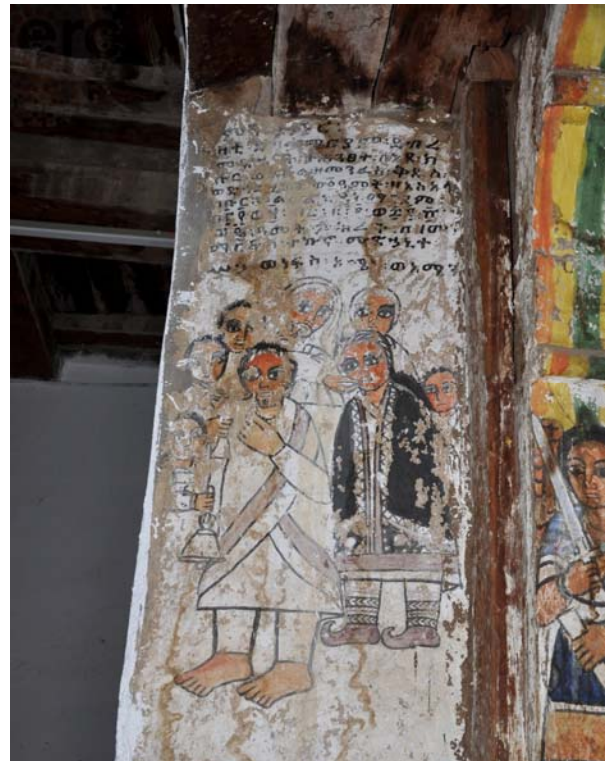
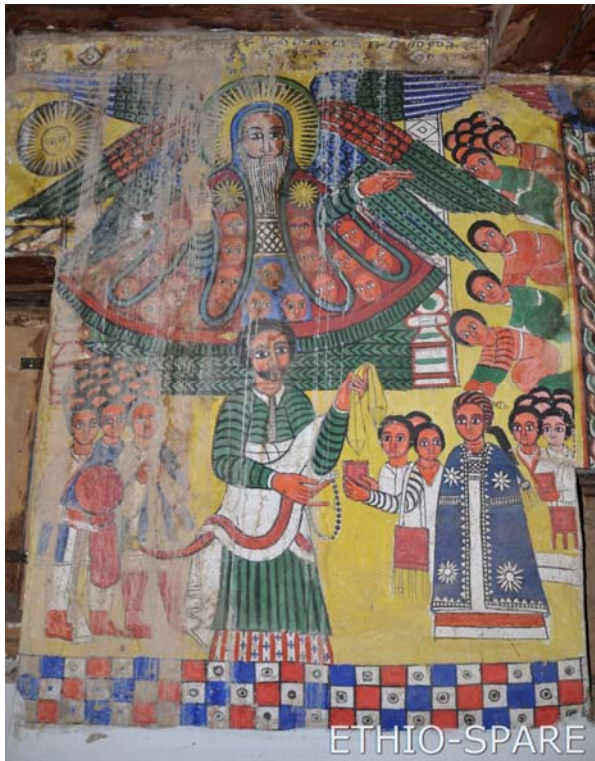


Fig. 55-56, May Raza, murals; inscription

inscription (fig. 56). According to this text, the paintings (or at least a part of them) were executed in 1890 A.D.⁶⁴ whereas the church was founded 61 years before, i.e. in 1829⁶⁵. The paintings are not ancient but still of significant value and should be properly studied by art historians as May Raza is one of a few rectangular churches of East Tegray which were not reconstructed in the course of the 20th century and whose original murals escaped destruction and repainting.

⁶⁴ The provisional transcription and translation of the inscription read as follows: ምር...ምር* ዛቲ፡ ደብረ፡ ማርያም፡ ደብረ፡* መድኅኒት፡ ተሐንፀት፡ በእደ፡ ከ*ቡር፡ ወልዑል፡ ዘመን፡ ፍቅሩ፡* ወድኅረሂ፡ በ፳፡ ወ፳፱መት፡ ዘእስክላ*፡ ከቡር ወልዑል፡ ኪዳነ፡ ማርያም* በ፲፱፡ ወ፳፡ ብር፡ በ፲፱፡ ወ፳፱፡ ገዢ*ወ፪፡ ዓመተ፡ ምሕረት፡ በዘመነ*፡ ማርያም፡ ትኩሮ፡ መድኅኒተ፡ ሥጋ፡ ወነፍስ፡ አሜን፡ ወአሜን “...(?) This church of Mary, Däbrä Mädhānit, was built through the hand of the honorable and exalted Zä-Mänfäs Qəddus, and after 61 years the one who caused it be painted (is) the honorable and exalted Kidanä Maryam, for 350 Bərr, in 1882 “Year of Mercy”, in the year of Mark, so that it might be for him the salvation of his flesh and soul. Amen and Amen”. Kidanä Maryam is the baptismal name of *ras* Səbḥat ʾArägawi.

⁶⁵ One of the manuscripts at May Raza (on paper) contains a unique Amharic letter from the painter, ʾaläqqa Šahlu, to the commissioner of the murals, *ras* Səbḥat ʾArägawi. Here is the provisional translation of the letter: “May this (writing) reach the honourable and exalted head of the governors who was chosen from his mother’s womb, beloved in his deeds, *däḡḡazmač* Səbḥat Läʾab. May the Saviour of the World give you health and protect you and may the Mother of God not separate from you. May the Angel of Mercy protect you. May Tāklä Haymanot be for you the helper and the refuge. I have spent time buying grain for myself with the money that you gave me, in your wealth. I have not obtained the grain which you ordered (be given) for me. The people of Däbrä Mädhānit became sad, together with me, since there is no one that would give me (grain). And now may you accomplish the work of your generosity to me. As it is (commonly) said, a priest who did not have a dinner cannot celebrate Mass with his heart. Having said this, ʾaläqqa Sahlu, the painter of Däbrä Mädhānit, your church, is bowing (in front of you).”

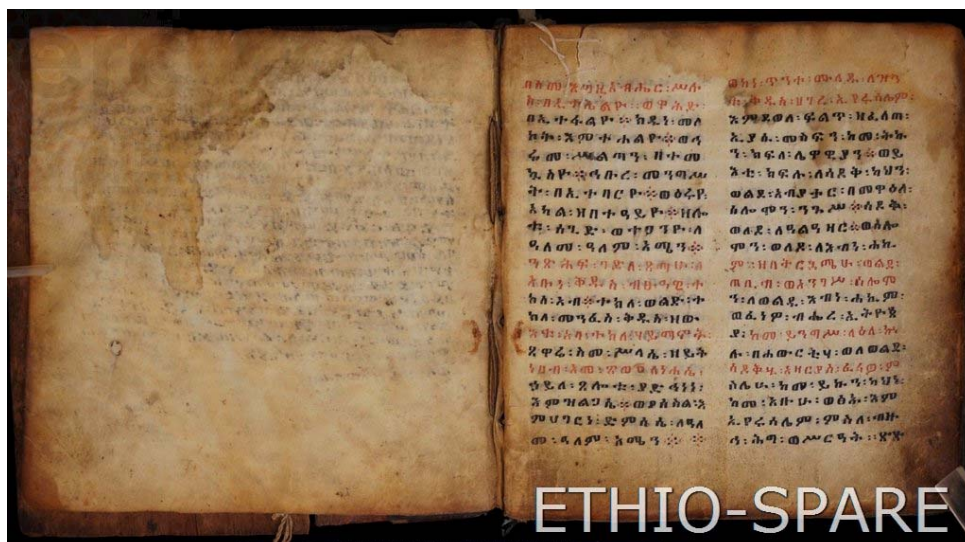
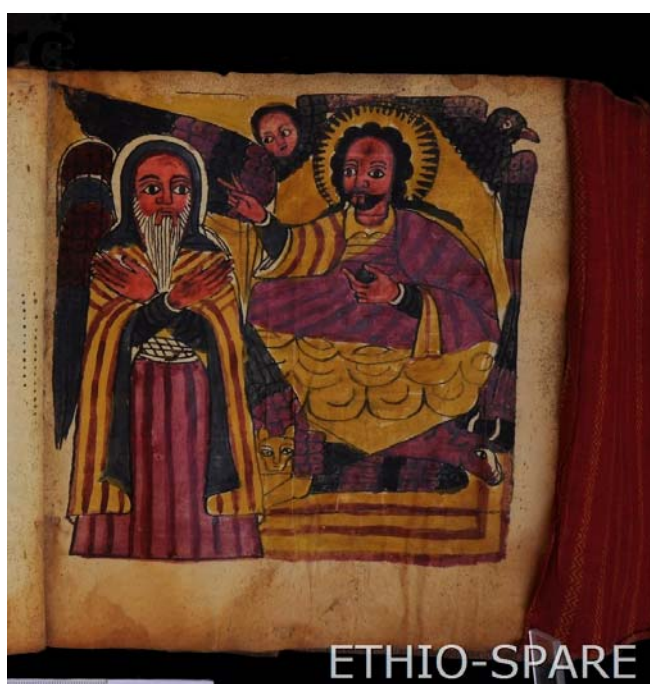


Fig. 57a (left), 57b (left below), May Raza, *Gädlä Tāklä Haymanot*

Fig. 58 (right below), May Raza, Missal



The oldest codex of the church collection is the magnificent 15th-century manuscript of *Gəbrä ḥəmamāt*, already reported. The Four Gospel book of the church was donated by *ras* Səbhāt ʾArägawi. Among other interesting books, the church collection possesses a fine, illuminated manuscript with the *Gädlä Tāklä Haymanot* (“Vita of Tāklä Haymanot”; figs. 57a, 57b), with a colophon referring to 1887⁶⁶, and a few more manuscripts dating back to Yoḥannēs IV’s time, like a Missal (fig. 58) and a copy of the *Gädlä Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus* (“Vita of Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus”) (fig. 59); a manuscript of the treatise ʾAmməstu ʾaʿmadä məšṭir (“Five Pillars of Mystery”) with early 18th-century (?) small-size folia containing the hymn ʾAkkonu bəʾəsi (praising St. Mary) infixed between the endleaves (fig. 60). Among the other recent manuscripts, of particular interest is a mid-20th century manuscript of the Vita of Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus, with a peculiar example of personal devotion: a small photo of the commissioner is pasted below the frontispiece miniature of Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus (fig. 61).

⁶⁶ The church acquired the manuscript possibly along with the *tabot* of Tāklä Haymanot.

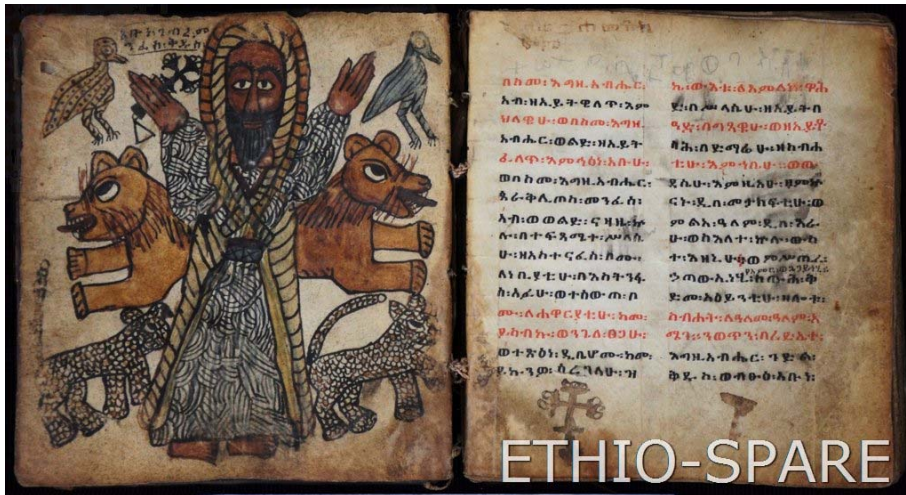


Fig. 59, May Raza,
Gädlä Gäbrä
Mänfäs Qəddus



Fig. 60, May Raza,
ʾAmməstu
ʾaʿmadä məštir

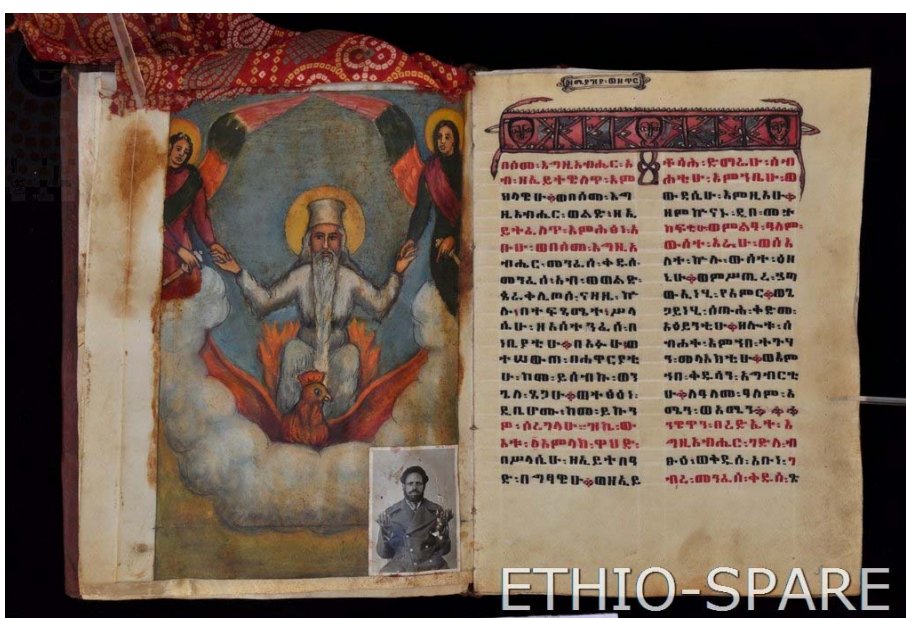


Fig. 61, May Raza,
Gädlä Gäbrä
Mänfäs Qəddus,
donor

11. Säwnä Maryam

The remote site of Säwnä (Säwne) Däbrä Sina Däbrä Gännät Maryam is located close to the border between the Təgray and ʿAfar regions, but is accessible thanks to a good road from the town of ʿƏdaga Ḥamus. Säwnä became known thanks to Gigar Tesfaye who visited the site some time in 1972-74⁶⁷. This site comprises two churches in a spacious compound, a very recent one (built 1997 A.M.; fig. 62) and an older one whose age, however, does not exceed a few dozens of years. Both churches are neatly painted inside and outside⁶⁸.

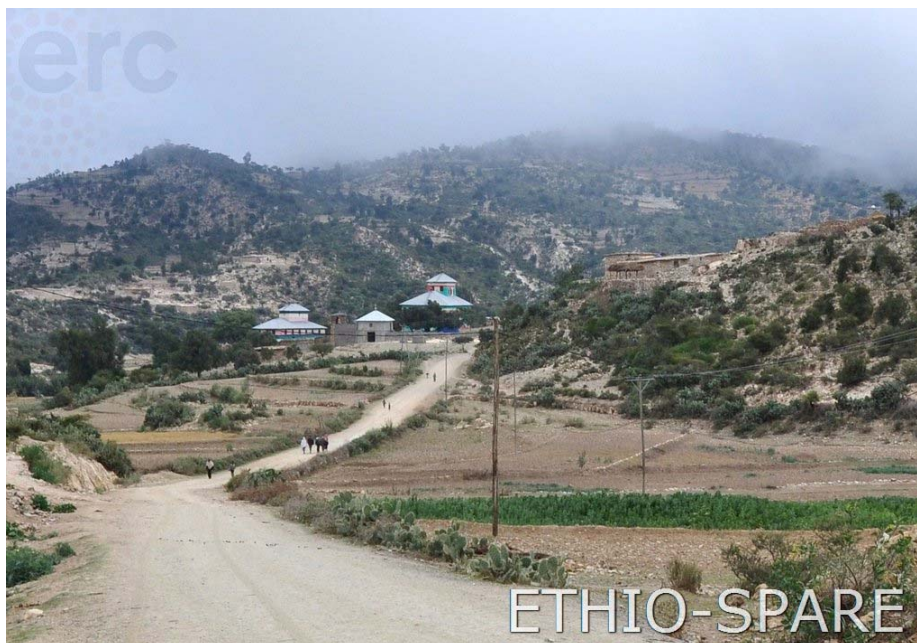


Fig. 62, Säwnä Maryam, view

A small manuscript containing the history of the church in Amharic, reported by Gigar Tesfaye⁶⁹, did not come up and the priest interviewed by the team most probably never consulted it. According to him, the church of Säwnä was founded “13 years after Aksum was raised” (?), by a certain Bərhan ʿOda⁷⁰. Further on, the “history of the church” reports of a certain *ras* ʿƏšet, who caused the document be written in Gondär, on the 12th year of the reign of King Fasilädäs⁷¹. The old (14th-century?) cross of the church, also reported by Gigar Tesfay, was in place, as well as the oldest and most remarkable manuscript of the collection, the richly illuminated Four Gospel

⁶⁷ S. Gigar Tesfaye 1974:57-76. In his publication he provided a photograph of an old church of Säwne which stands at some distance from the site where the books and paraphernalia are currently kept. The site was also visited by E. Balicka-Witakowska and M. Gervers in 2004, and a number of photographs can be found in their database *Mazgaba Seelat* (under “Säwne”).

⁶⁸ A small church school (for *nəbab*, or reading) is run by young teacher Dawit, a native of Goğgam.

⁶⁹ Fortunately, the document (not an integral codex but a few small-size parchment double leaves) was photographed by Gigar Tesfaye and printed in his article. Containing “the statutes” of the church (including the reference to the holders of *rim*-land) in Amharic with passages in Gəʿəz, the document is a valuable witness since only a few pieces of the genre are known so far. The source provides interesting data but it should be considered with some caution: despite the reference to King Fasilädäs (Gigar Tesfaye 1974:59) who reigned in 1632-67 neither the features of the handwriting nor the language and style of the document can be supportive of dating it back to the 17th century. Rather, it is likely that a 19th/20th-century ecclesiastic *mārigeta* Gəday (who mentioned himself explicitly in the document) elaborated on an older tradition.

⁷⁰ Reminiscent of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase in Gondär mentioned in the document (Gigar Tesfaye 1974:59)?

⁷¹ Gigar Tesfaye 1976:59, 67 (fol. 1r).

book⁷², probably dating to the first half of the 16th century. The site is located some 20 km away from Gundä Gunde but today there are no visible traces referring to possible historical links between Säwnē and Gundä Gunde, except the style of the miniatures of the Gospel book⁷³. Other manuscripts of the collection, though numerous, were of recent date, with the exception of a nicely written 18th-century (?) Psalter containing two documents written on infixed leaves. One of them (fig. 63) appears to be a record concerning the acquisition of parcels by different individuals, written by the same hand as the main text.

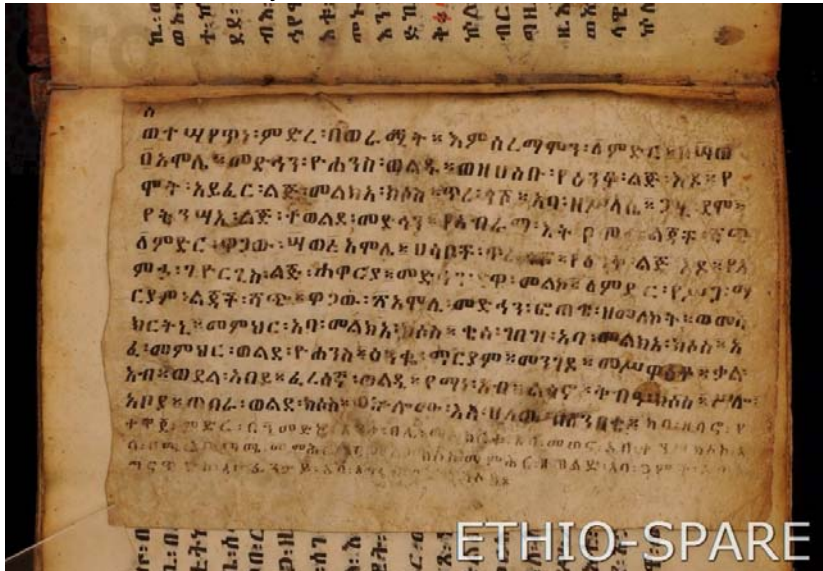


Fig. 63, Säwnä Maryam, Psalter, pasted document

12. Wälwalo Qirqos

The church of Wälwalo Däbrä Bərhan Qirqos can be reached by the same road as Säwnē and is located half-way to the latter. One has to turn left at the small town of Walwälo and proceed several minutes along a side-road. The church became known chiefly thanks to Gigar Tesfaye⁷⁴.

The contemporary church building (fig. 64) was built in the early 1970s. Being definitely an old foundation, Wälwalo Qirqos has an exceptionally large number of *tabots* (more than 20). Local tradition claims that the church was established by King ʿAlameda, and re-established by King Gäbrä Mäsqäl. The third time the church was renovated by someone whom the interviewed priest referred to as “*ṭərar* [*ḡanṭərar*?] Bāzabbəh” (?). A few remains of the older church building(s), such as four decorated stone columns standing inside the church, have been documented⁷⁵. Interesting features not reported before are structures in the compound of the church: in front of the entrance gate, there is a large and apparently old *hədmo*-house. The people were uncertain as to the purpose of the house and the time of its construction. Finally, they described it as a house for community meetings, but its unusual position and internal structure (s. figs. 65a, b, c) may be suggestive of other former use⁷⁶.

⁷² Photographs of both items can be found in the database *Mazgaba Seelat* (s. above).

⁷³ Gigar Tesfaye was more positive about the influence of Gundä Gunde in the area; the name of Subuḥa appears, indeed, in the variant of the Solomonic legend about the Queen of Sheba and her son Mənilək elaborated in Gundä Gunde hagiographic works, but refers rather to the ancient connection of the area to the ʾIrob people.

⁷⁴ Gigar Tesfaye 1974, same source as for Säwnä Maryam. The site was also documented by M. Gervers and E. Balicka-Witakowska (s. *Mazgaba Seelat*).

⁷⁵ S. note 74 above.

⁷⁶ As a residence of a ruler or as a church building (the presence of another small stone house nearby is reminiscent of the function of the *betleḥem*, the house where Eucharistic bread is prepared). In front



Fig. 64, Wälwalo Qirqos, church

Fig. 65a, Wälwalo Qirqos, structure in the church compound



The 19th-century (?) Gospel book of the church has an unusual feature: the miniature of St. John the Evangelist is placed not at the frontispiece of the Gospel of John, but at the end of the manuscript, on an endleaf. It is preceded by a picture of the donor painted on the verso-side of the last folio of the regular text quire (fig. 66). The place usually reserved for the miniature of St. John is occupied by a “laic” scene of elephant hunting, probably depicting the donor as the main character. A donation note mentions a

certain Wäldä Yoḥannēs and the name of the church as Qirqos zä-Laḥlen. Today, the name Laḥlen does not seem very common or is perhaps even out of use⁷⁷.

Among other books, the modest collection of Wälwalo Qirqos possesses a fine late-17th-century Missal (fig. 67)⁷⁸; an elegant 18th-century (?) manuscript of *Dərsanä Sānbāt* (“Homily of the Sabbath”) which was donated by a certain Wäldä Šəllase⁷⁹ and carefully copied by the scribe

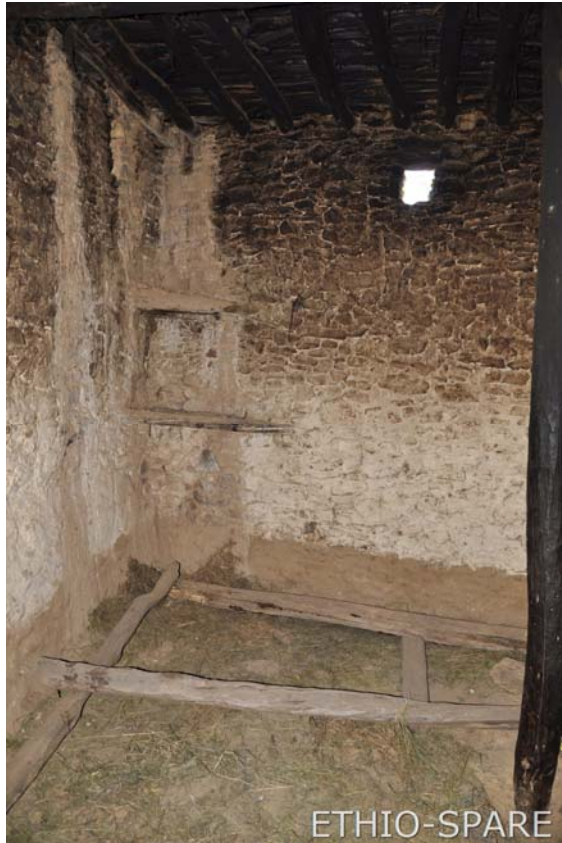
of the southern wall of the church there is an old grave looking like a shaft tomb, still partly covered from above.

⁷⁷ However, only by means of this indirect reference it is possible to connect the site with earlier (preliminary) studies: Anfray 1973:14-15, map and fig. (the reference repeated without any additional information under “Laḥlen” in Godet 1977:49; another references provided there, Lepage 1973:44, could not be retrieved and confirmed). The publications contain practically no information (a description of the way to the site, the administrative district in which it is located; photos with general views) which would help identifying and finding the site in the local landscape.

⁷⁸ Mentioning Patriarch of Alexandria John XVI (1676-1718), Metropolitan Sinoda (arrived to Ethiopia in 1678, died in 1699), King Yoḥannēs I (r. 1667-82).

⁷⁹ “The souls” of his parents, father Wäldä Maryam Gäbrä Mäsqäl and mother Wälättä Muse, are mentioned elsewhere in the supplication formulas.

Məşlalä İyäsus, who is styled as “a beloved one of *blatta Kasa*”⁸⁰ (figs. 68a, b). The manuscript contains an extensive, complex and hardly understandable note in Amharic (figs. 68b, c) about the ancestors and relatives of the donor. A carefully written collection of hagiographic works of Qirqos/ St. Cyriacus (Vita, Miracles, *mälkə*²-hymn) which can be dated probably to the first half of the 19th century (fig. 69), was donated by a certain Habtä Šellase, according to the supplication at the end of the text, and written by priest Həylä İyäsus, the head of the church (*rəʔəsä däbr*) and “head of the priests” (*liqä kahənat*).



Figs. 65bc, Wälwalo Qirqos, structure in the church compound

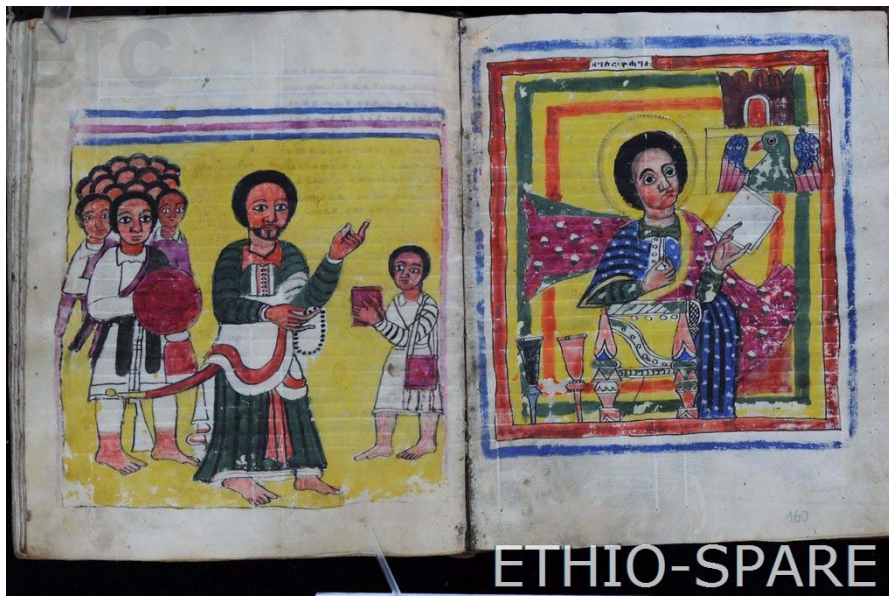


Fig. 66, Wälwalo Qirqos, Four Gospels

⁸⁰ Could Wäldä Šellase be the baptismal (or Christian) name of *blatta Kasa*?

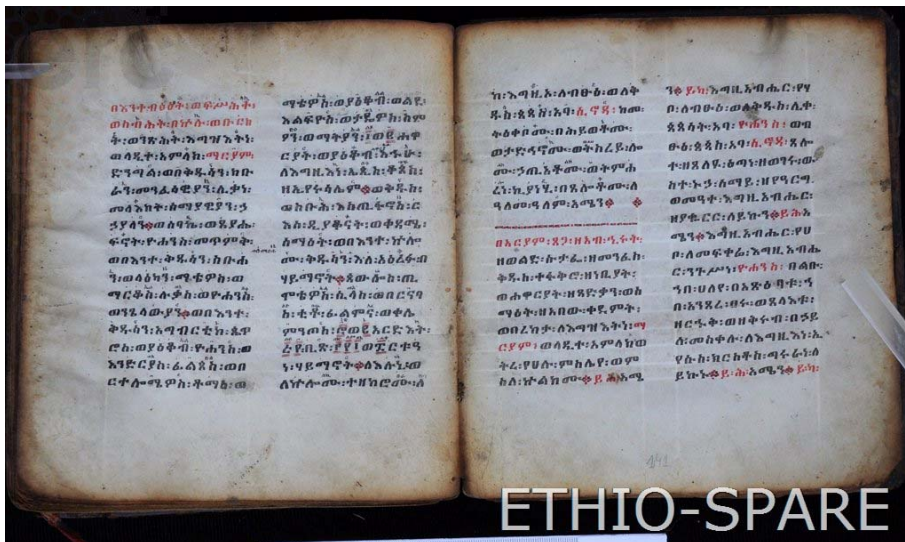


Fig. 67, Wälwalo Qirqos, Missal



Fig. 68a (left), Wälwalo Qirqos, Dersanä Sänbät

Fig. 68bc (below), Wälwalo Qirqos, Dersanä Sänbät, note

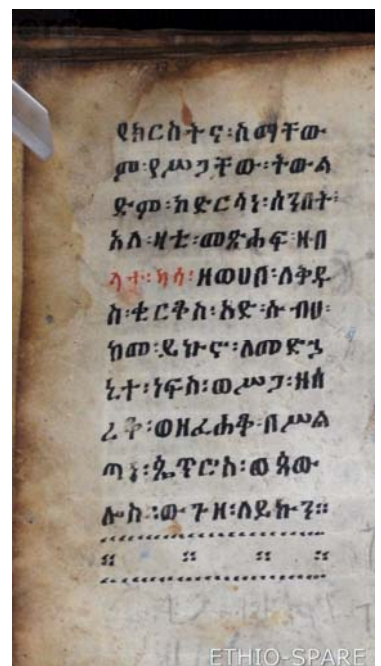




Fig. 69, Wälwalo Qirqos, Gädlä Qirqos

13. Qālaqəl Šəyon Maryam

The rock-hewn church Qālaqəl Šəyon Maryam is located two or three kilometers away from Wälwalo Qirqos, on a rock (fig. 70)⁸¹. A magnificent view over a large area opens from its top. A few houses stand at the foot of the rock. A path leads to the church at the accessible side of the rock. The original rock-hewn structure is hidden by the rectangular narthex looking like a church of the common Təgrayan type, and it serves today as sanctuary (figs. 71a, b)⁸². An open burial place is located in a cavern on the western side of the rock slope, containing a small pile of bones (said by the locals to originate from the Old Testament time, “yā-ʾOrif”). Local tradition claims that the church was founded by the Aksumite Kings Abrəha and Ašbəha and that many books were donated by *däggazmač* Säbagadis.

The manuscript collection contains a number of fine manuscripts. Many of them are afflicted by humidity and water since the place where they are stored – inside the church, not in a separate *ʿəqa bet* sacristy – is very humid and cold. The precious one-quire 14th-century manuscript (locally referred to as *Säʿatat*, Horologium), reported by Gigar Tesfaye, has been found safe and in good condition (fig. 72)⁸³. Besides, the church collection possesses a Four Gospel manuscript dating probably to the mid 18th century⁸⁴. The sumptuous manuscript is not illuminated but, thanks to its unusually large size (307 *folia*), fine handwriting (with very large, carefully written letters), fine white parchment and very carefully produced tooled ornaments on the covers (figs. 73a, b), it can be considered one of the most remarkable manuscripts of the area. Unfortunately, nearly all additional notes contained in the manuscript have been washed out. One of them, in the first folio of the Canon tables, has survived; it refers to the commemoration (*täzkar*) of *ras* ʿƏšet⁸⁵. Most probably, he is the same person as the one who is mentioned in the “history” of Säwnä Maryam (s. above), a 17th-

⁸¹ *Qālaqəl* is pl. from Təgrāñña *qālqāl*, meaning, among others, “peak of a mountain affording a good view” (Kane 2000:889b).

⁸² As it happened to some other rock-hewn churches. This circumstance makes the access to the historical structures and their study particularly difficult.

⁸³ As Säwnä and Wälwalo, the church of Qālaqəl was visited by E. Balicka-Witakowska and M. Gervers in 2004, and a number of photographs of this item were included in the database *Mazgaba Seelat* (s. under “Qelaqel”).

⁸⁴ King ʾIyasu mentioned in the headings of the Gospels might be, then, ʾIyasu II (r. 1730-55).

⁸⁵ Moreover, it mentions seven other “brothers” (his brothers or sons?): ʾAli, Nagəś, Gädʾališ, Yohānnəs, Səbhat, Hafani, Baylul.

century (?) representative of the local elite whose identity remains to be clarified. As in the other churches, a few books were indeed donated by *däggazmač* Säbagadis (Za-Mämfäs Qəddus). Among them, there is a Synaxarion for the second half of the year with the name of the original commissioner/donor deleted and the name Za-Mämfäs Qəddus crudely written by a secondary hand. The handwriting looks somewhat anterior to the time of Säbagadis (fig. 74) and resembles, or maybe is even identical to, the hand attested in the Synaxarion of Däbrä Gännät Kidanä Məhrät Mäkodʿä (s. Report II, fig. 50)⁸⁶.

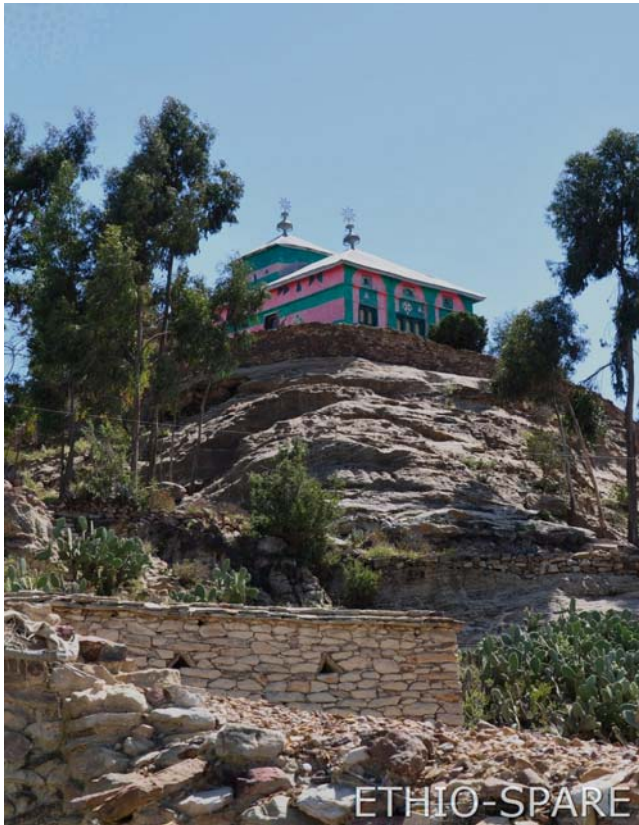


Fig. 70, Qälaqəl Maryam, view



Fig. 71a, Qälaqəl Maryam, church interior



Fig. 71b, Qälaqəl Maryam, church interior

⁸⁶ This pointing to Gondär as the provenance for the second year Synaxarion part of Qälaqəl (the first part is written by a completely different hand). In the course of the describing work of the project, it was clarified that the Synaxarion of Däbrä Gännät Kidanä Məhrät Mäkodʿä was written in the time of King Yoştos (1711-16).



Fig. 72, Qälaqel Maryam, Sāʿatat



Fig. 73a, Qälaqel Maryam, Four Gospels

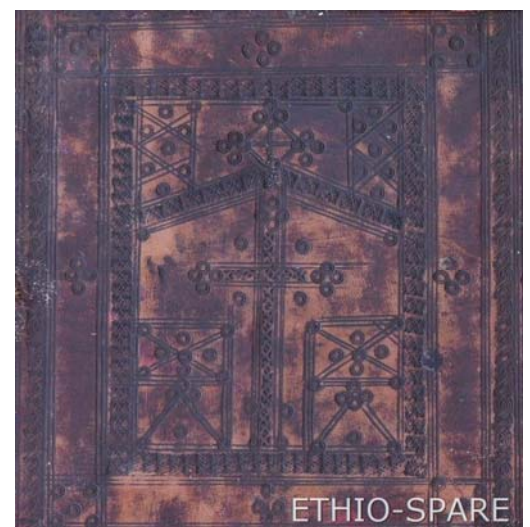


Fig. 73b, Qälaqel Maryam, Four Gospel manuscript, leather covering

One of the collection's hymnody books, an early 19th-century *Daggʷa*, had a fine depiction of the hagiographic scene known from the Vita of St. Yared: King Gäbrä Mäsqäl delighted by St. Yared's singing is unintentionally piercing the foot of the latter with his stock (fig. 75).

Apart from the manuscripts, the church possesses an old-type wooden *mānbärä tabot* with carved decoration.

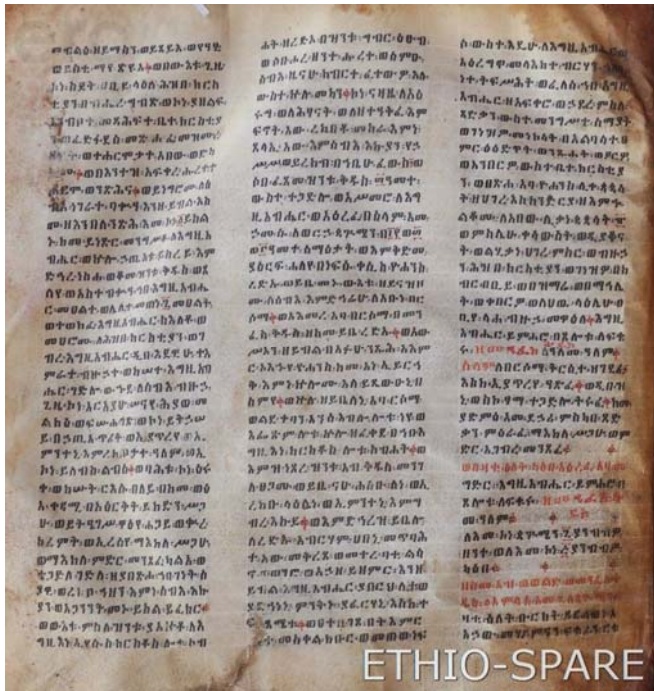


Fig. 74, Qālaqel Maryam, Synaxarion



Fig. 75, Qālaqel Maryam, *Dagg'wa*

14. Ḥangoda Mika'el

Ḥangoda Mika'el or Ḥangoda (Ḥang^wāda) Dābrā Məḥrāt Qəddus Mika'el is a church located in a remote, hardly accessible corner of Sa'ṣi Šā'fada ʔEmba. The area is situated not far from the Ḥawzen plain, which lies further to the south. The church has been known to scholars since the



Fig. 76, Ḥangoda, church

1970s⁸⁷. There is no direct road to Ḥangoda. The best way to reach the place is to leave the main road approximately half-way between ʿEdaga Ḥamus and Sənqata, descend to the right (west), and have a difficult 2-3 hour walk across a ragged plain. The site is located on a narrow, prolonged cliff at the place where Ḥangoda merges with another smaller river.

⁸⁷ The only, very brief description was printed in Plant 1970:232 (no. 40, with the name transcribed erroneously as “Hankorda”; the same on the map in Plant 1985), cp. Sauter 1976:163, nos. 1018-19. Some years ago the site was visited by M. Gervers and E. Balicka-Witakowska, and a number of photos were placed on the web-site *Mazgaba Seelat* (“Hangoda”). Today, the access to the old rock-hewn structure church has become quite difficult since the newly built structure (that substituted for the old “narthex” mentioned by R. Plant) effectively transformed the old church into the sanctuary (*māqdās*), the area strictly reserved only for the consecrated priests and deacons (cp. note 82).

The church and the gatehouse stand on a kind of terrace in the rock and are accessible through a solid modern staircase (figs. 76, 77). One structure (sacristy?) is located on the top of the cliff. One more (house for communal meeting or dwelling of the nuns?) is located below the church. Both rivers are nearly dry during the dry season (fig. 78) but probably are very difficult or impossible to

Fig. 77, Ḥangoda, view

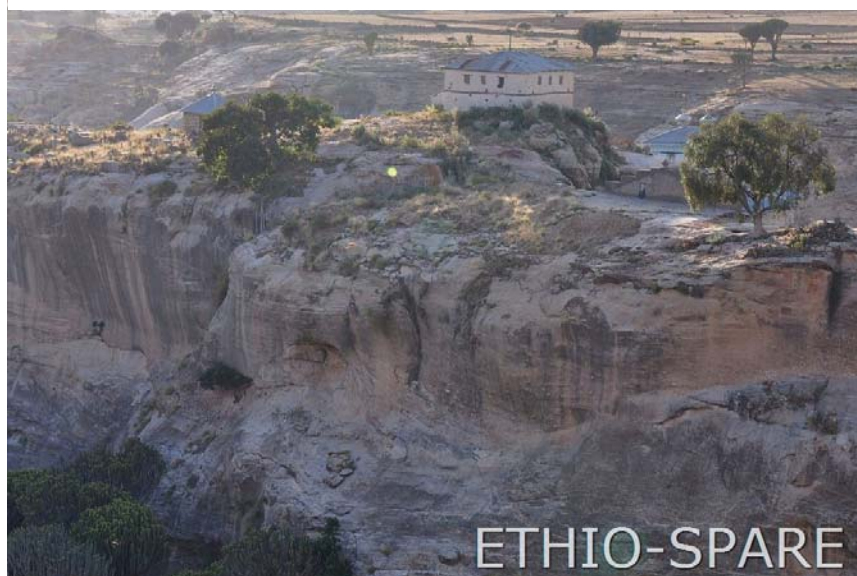


Fig. 78, Ḥangoda, gorge



cross during the rainy season when the church is encircled by water from three sides. The magnificent gorge below the church is said to have been an abode of the hermits. Indeed, the slopes of the gorge show some features that could be interpreted as traces of construction activities (fig. 79). Farther in the gorge there is a cave with the entrance closed by a half-ruined wall. The local people were somewhat inconclusive about its origin⁸⁸.

Local tradition claims that the church was founded in the time of King ʿAlṣameda,

Fig. 78, Ḥangoda, cave

and re-established by ʾəḳḳāge (sic!) Tāklä Haymanot, the famous saint from Šäwa, under King Yəkunno ʾAmlak (1270-85). Afterwards the church declined and “disappeared”



⁸⁸ They referred to it as a possible former abode of the monks. It could have been the remains of the cave-church dedicated to ʾabba Sälama, mentioned by Plant (1970:232) and deserted since many years already by that time.

and was re-established by *däggazmač* ʔAʔədawä Krəstos under King Bäkaffa (r. 1721-30)⁸⁹.

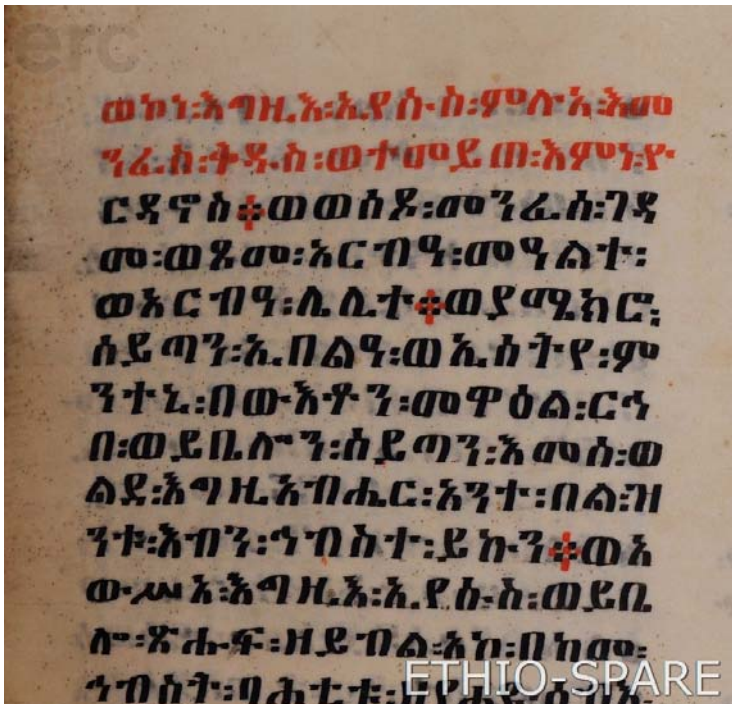


Fig. 80, Ҳangoda, Four Gospels

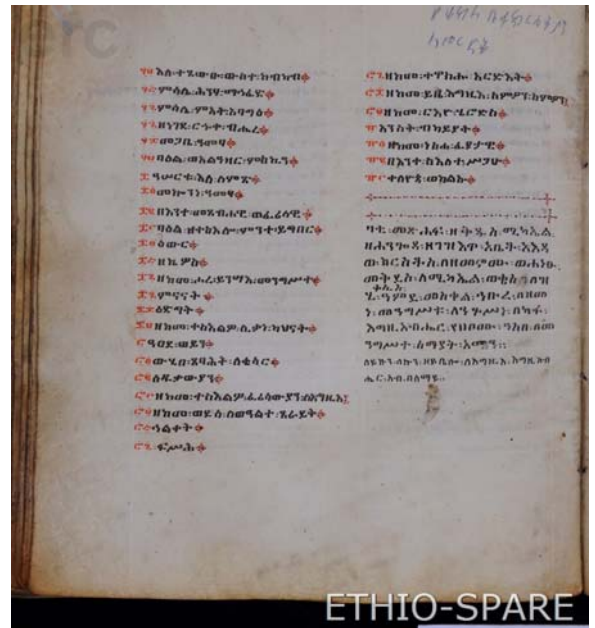


Fig. 81, Hangoda, note in the Four Gospel manuscript



Fig. 82, Ҳangoda, Dəggʷa

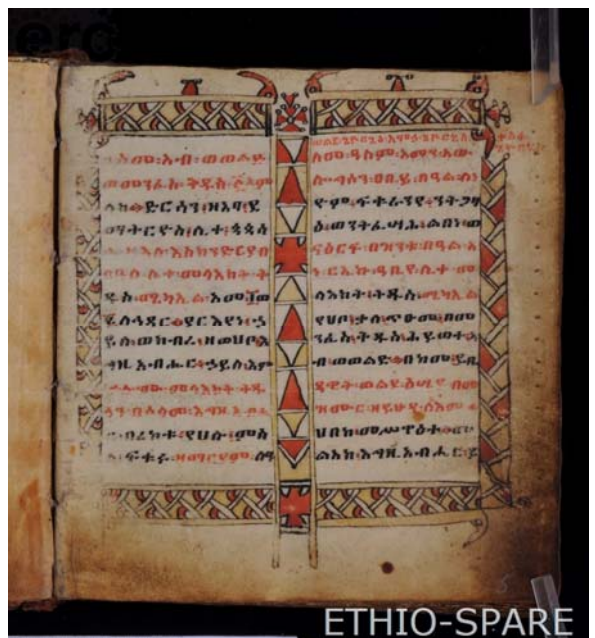
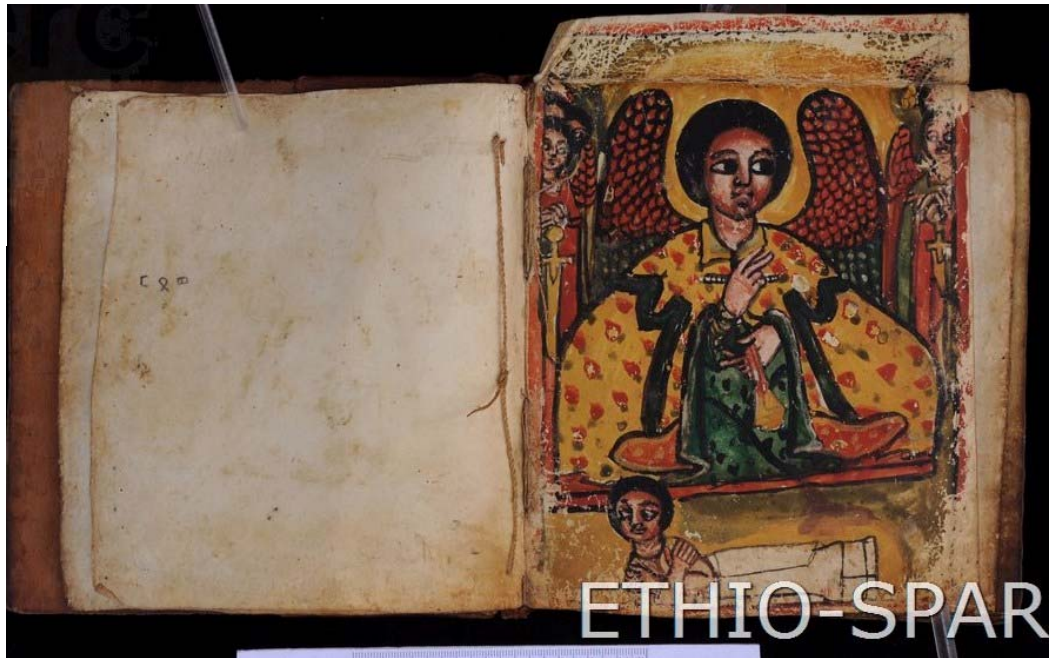


Fig. 83, Ҳangoda, Dərsanä Mikaʿel

⁸⁹ There is a traditional church school at Ҳangoda, with different subjects taught by *mamher* ʔIsayyeyyas and the exegesis of the Old Testament taught by *mälakä mēhrät* Ҳagos Abraha, the head of the church.

Fig. 84,
Ḥangoda,
Dərsanä
Mikaʾel



Only a portion of the historical part of the collection (profoundly renovated in the 20th century) has survived, but the older codices are still in relatively good condition, with historical bindings disturbed less than usual. The Four Gospel manuscript of Ḥangoda, written by a careful well-trained hand (fig. 80) contains a valuable note (fig. 81). Obviously linked to the oral tradition, it tells that the manuscript was bought (and donated?) by ʾabeto ʾAʾədawä Krəstos and that the construction of the church of St. Michael at Ḥangoda took place at the same time, under King Bäkaffa. Both manuscripts containing two parts of the Synaxarion apparently date back to the same time and might be related to ʾabeto ʾAʾədawä Krəstos⁹⁰. The two codices partly retain original binding including parts made of untooled leather. In the manuscript containing the first part of the Synaxarion a certain ʿḤnqʷä Šəllase is mentioned as the scribe. In the manuscript with the second part, the Synaxarion is followed by a rare apocryphal apocalyptic text commonly known as the “Wisdom of Sibyl” (*Ṭəbābä Sabela*)⁹¹ written on added leaves and by a different but not recent hand. Besides, the collection contains a fine hymnody manuscript, with an indication in the prologue to the *Dəggʷa* that the manuscript was started in the 18th year of the reign of King ʾIyasu (fig. 82)⁹². A fine illuminated copy of the *Dərsanä Mikaʾel* (“Homily of St. Michael”), probably dating to the 18th century (fig. 83), shows an interesting practice of Ethiopian manuscript-making. A bigger-size folio with a miniature is folded at the edges (fig. 84) and normally remains in that condition (unfolded only when it is necessary, to see the entire picture). The *Dərsanä Mikaʾel* of Ḥangoda, an example of the “average quality” miniature painting and scribal art, again proves that starting from the 18th century the work enjoyed increasing popularity in North Ethiopia.

⁹⁰ Names of further individuals are mentioned in this and other manuscripts. Their identification will require some time but can yield additional information on the history of the church and its collection.

⁹¹ W. Witakowski, in: EAE IV, 652b-653b.

⁹² Most probably ʾIyasu II (r. 1730-55) is meant and the year is 1748 A.D.

15. Šäbäla Maryam

Šäbäla Däbrä Gännät Maryam is one of the two ecclesiastic institutions of Saʿsi Šäʿada ʿƏmba which are today regarded as *gädam*⁹³. The church stands some 10 km to the south from Sänqaṭa and can be reached by a rugged side-road. It is not easy to reach, despite its relative proximity to the main road. The church is rather new, built in the traditional Təgrayan style (fig. 85). The huge flat mountain of Šäʿada ʿƏmba is visible in the distance, it is said to have originally been the place of the Sänqaṭa town.



Fig. 85, Šäbäla Maryam, church

Local tradition claims that the monastic community was founded by King Zärʿa Yaʿqob at Šäbäla “in the year 30”⁹⁴. It was destroyed during the invasion of ʿAḥmäd Grañ. The monastic community was not re-established. Today, the books are kept far from the church in one of the private houses.

Despite its modest size and age, the collection contains a few interesting and valuable items. Unfortunately, the old Gospel Book of the church was substituted, some 50-70 years ago, for a new manuscript. The church collection possesses a late 18th-early 19th century *Dərsanä Mikaʿel* with crude miniatures painted in a peculiar style (figs. 86a, b). A truly remarkable manuscript of the collection is the one with the *Täʿamrä Maryam* (“Miracles of Mary”). The codex is composite. Its main part dates probably to the 17th century (fig. 87a) but a fine infixed miniature can be possibly attributed to an earlier period (fig. 87b). A few quires were included in the manuscript in the late 19th or 20th century (cp. fig. 87c). There is at least one colophon in the manuscript referring to the 250th year of grace (1674/75 A.D.), a dating which may be assumed for the main hand.

⁹³ Ca. 100 churches are registered by the *wäräda* ecclesiastic administration (*bet көһnät*).

⁹⁴ Indeed, according to the era of the martyrs, year 30 falls upon 1453-54, i.e. within the reign of King Zärʿa Yaʿqob (1434-68).

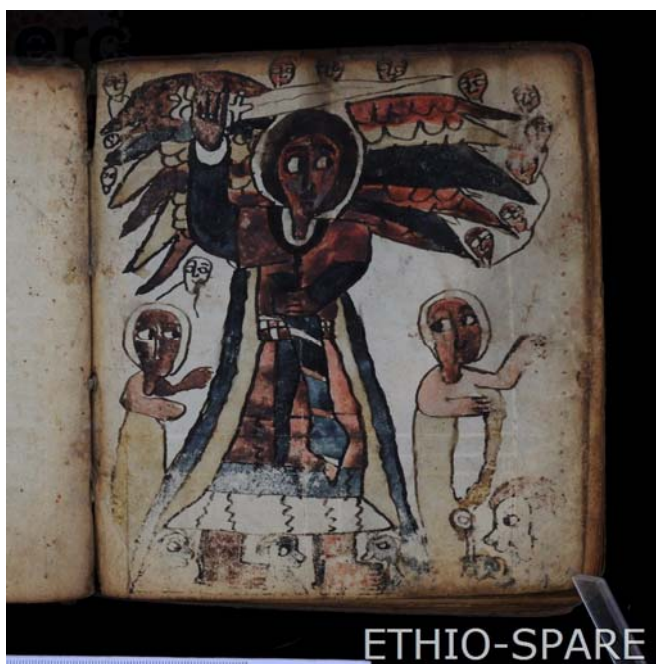


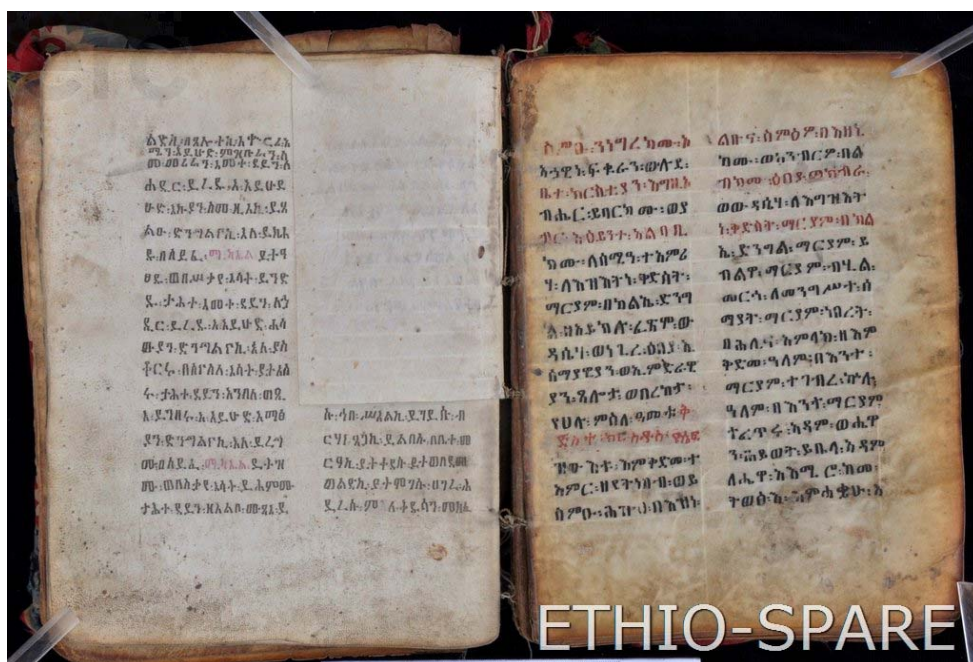
Fig. 86a (left), 86b (down), Šābāla Maryam, *Dərsanā Mikaʿel*



Fig. 87a, Šābāla Maryam, *Miracles of Mary*



Fig. 87b, 87c, Šābāla Maryam, Miracles of Mary



16. Sənqəṭa Fərewäyṇi Maryam

Sənqəṭa Fərewäyṇi (Däbrä Şəge Qəddəst) Maryam, a rectangular, brightly painted church standing in a spacious compound, is the main church of the small town of Sənqəṭa⁹⁵ (fig. 88).



Fig. 88, Sənqəṭa Maryam, church

Local tradition claims that its foundation took place in the time of King ʾIyasu⁹⁶. The small collection of the church includes, among other books, includes a 18th-century manuscript with the theological treatise *Haymanotä ʾAbāw* ("Faith of the Fathers", fig. 89). A number of small-size manuscripts is in private possession, such as the 18th-century manuscript containing the Prayer of St. Mary on the mount of Golgotha (*Sənä Golgota*, fig. 90).



Fig. 89, Sənqəṭa Maryam, *Haymanotä ʾAbāw*



Fig. 90, Sənqəṭa Maryam, collection of prayers

17. Bet Muḵaṣ Mikaʾel

The rock-hewn church of Bet Muḵaṣ (Qəddus) Mikaʾel⁹⁷ is located farther to the south along the road to Mäḡälä, a few kilometers away from the side-road leading to Şäbäla, and not far from the

⁹⁵ The folklore etymology of the name explains it as an Amharic expression *sənq aṭṭa*, "there was no supply", said when a royal army passed the area and had food shortage.

⁹⁶ ʾIyasu I (r. 1682-1706) or ʾIyasu II (r. 1730-55)?

⁹⁷ Also Bet Muḥa.

well-known rock-hewn church of the Apostles Peter and Paul (ʾĒnda Pēṭros wä-Ṣawlos). The Bet Muḵaṣ church is located at the foot of an overhanging cliff. A more recent narthex built on a high podium was added to the original church (fig. 91). Behind the church there is a *ṣābāl*-source hidden by the trees. Those seeking cure sit and sleep under the cliff at the entrance gate of the church. As in some other

Fig. 91, Bet Muḵaṣ Mikaʾel, church



places, at some distance from the church a cave or a niche is seen partly hidden behind a ruined stone wall (fig. 92). Though less known than ʾĒnda Pēṭros wä-Ṣawlos, Bet Muḵaṣ Mikaʾel was also visited by scholars⁹⁸; however, its manuscript collection has never been attended.

The church possesses a fine Gospel book dating probably to the 18th century (fig. 93a). Among its marginal notes, there is a genealogy of a certain female, called ʾAsgäddu. It is written in Amharic by crude hand but looks not much posterior to the main text. At the end of the note, Bet Muḥa Dəngəlāt is stated to be “her *rəst*” (fig. 93b). Another shorter note refers to the foundation date, saying, “This *tabot* (i.e. church) was set up on the 6th year after our King ʾIyoas reigned [=1761 A.D.]; the person who set it up was...” Unfortunately, the name following the last



Fig. 92, Bet Muḵaṣ Mikaʾel, cave

words has been carefully washed out. Local tradition relates, vaguely, of Kings Fasil and Gäbrä Maryam (?). The foundation of the church in the period after them but still in the 17th century, by a certain “*šəm Bägunäy*”, is also mentioned in the document. A recent (20th-century) copy of the *Dərsanä Mikaʾel* contains a single leaf with a fine (18th-century?) miniature of St. Michael attached to

one of the leaves with stitches and protected by textile curtains (fig. 94). Besides, the collection possesses a fine late 17th/early 18th-century manuscript containing the *Gädlä Täklä Haymanot*

⁹⁸ Plant 1973:226, no. 35 (“Mikaʾel, Biet Mekai”); cp. Sauter 1976:164, no. 1108; s. *Mazgaba Seelat*, under “Mukwae”.

(“Vita of Täklä Haymanot”), written by the scribe Wäldä Giyorgis, commissioned by a certain Dämä Krəstos. The handwriting has a peculiar feature that has been observed elsewhere: the elements of letters commonly slanted to the right appear perpendicular to the ruled lines or even have a slight left slant (fig. 95). The oldest manuscript of the collection appears to be the Psalter, which can be probably dated to the late 16th or early 17th century, distinguished by the thin, small broadly spaced script (fig. 96).

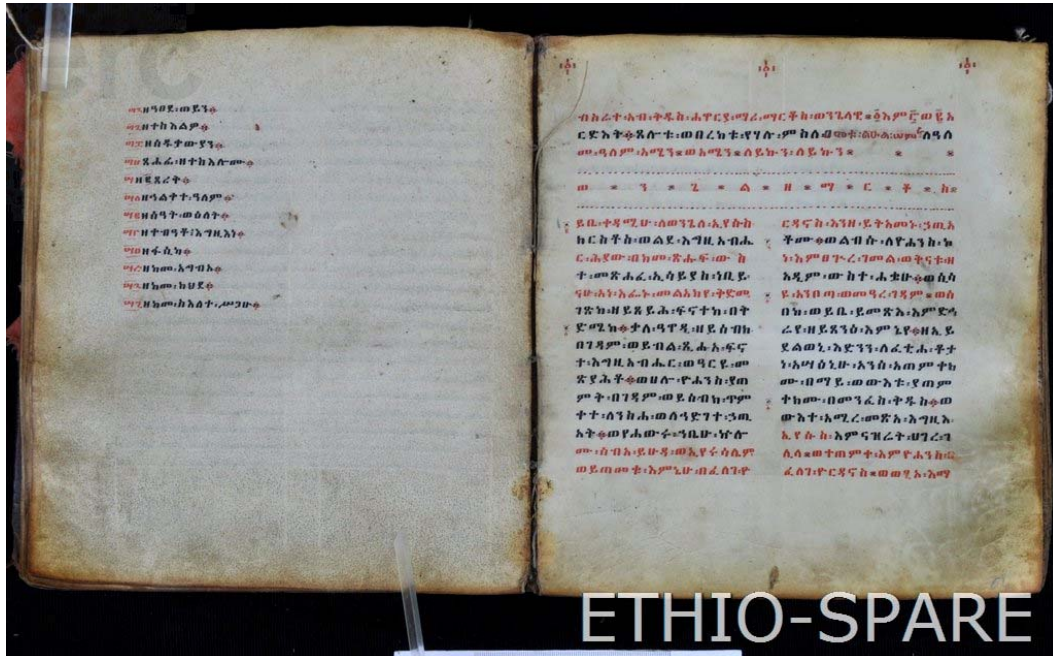


Fig. 93a, Bet Mukāṣ Mikaʿel, Four Gospels

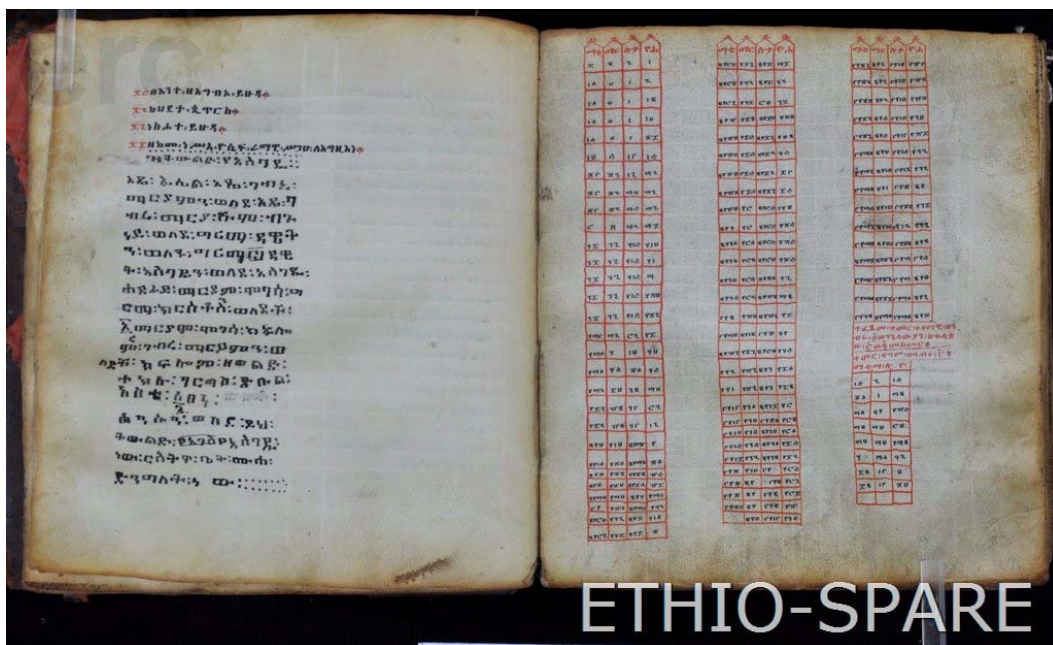
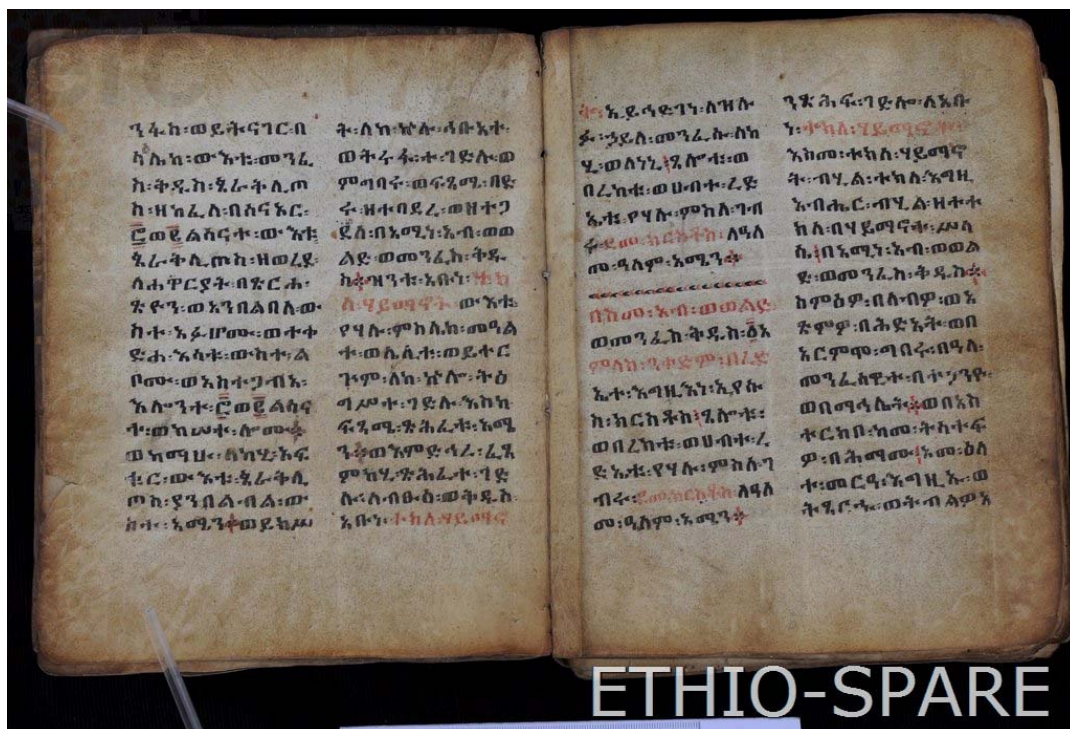


Fig. 93b, Bet Mukāṣ Mikaʿel, Four Gospels, note



Fig. 94 (left), Bet Muka^s
Mika^{el}, Dərsanā
Mika^{el}

Fig. 95 (below), Bet
Muka^s Mika^{el}, Gädlä
Täklä Haymanot



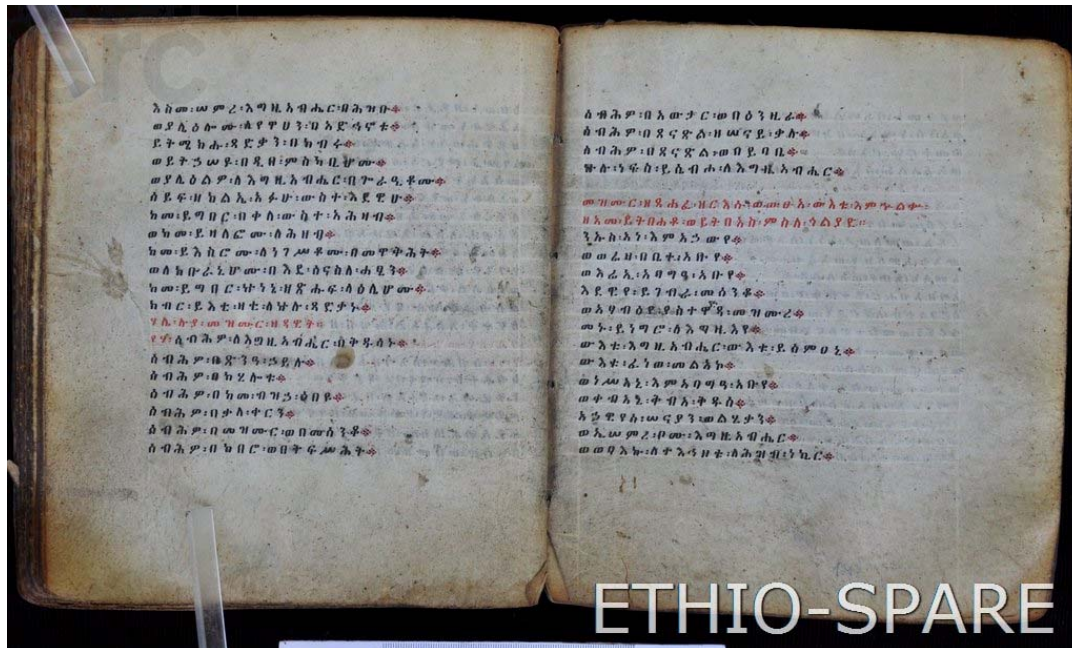


Fig. 96, Bet Muka^c Mika^cel, Psalter

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IMPRESSUM

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Denis Nosnitsin (nosnitsin@yahoo.com)



Researchers:

Dr. Stéphane Ancel
 Susanne Hummel, M.A.
 Magdalena Krzyżanowska, M.A.
 Vitagrazia Pisani, M.A.

Project seat:

Ethio-SPARE
 Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies
 Universität Hamburg
 Alsterterrasse 1
 20354 Hamburg

Web:

www1.uni-hamburg.de/ethiostudies/ETHIOSPARE



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