European Union Seventh Framework Programme IDEAS ERC Starting Grant



Ethio-SPaRe



Cultural Heritage of Christian Ethiopia:

Salvation, Preservation and Research

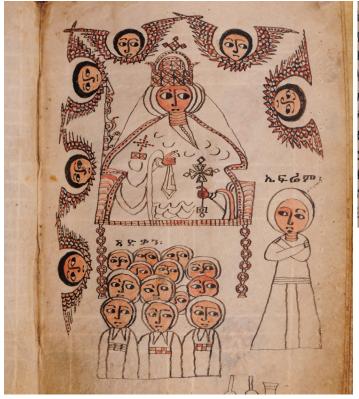


Ninth Mission

March 2015

Report

(by Denis Nosnitsin, PI)



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Hamburg University 2015

Ethio-SPaRe Ninth Field Mission (March 2015)

Public Report

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Introduction

The final field mission of the Ethio-Spare project took place on 13.-29.03.2015. This time, the trip was undertaken in cooperation with the University of Mekele, Department of History and Cultural Studies, which had enquired, earlier in the year, for collaboration in the task of urgent study of Mäzäga. This is a *wäräda* of West Tigray (previously out of the project's research scope) where many areas will be submerged or affected in various ways, after a while, by the unfolding development projects¹. The first studies of the area were conducted as early as 2008 and resulted in some discoveries; on 22 June - 1 July 2012, the specialists from Mekele University conducted further archaeological survey of the area², identifying more historical sites of importance. In the course of the discussions about current a future research opportunities which took place on the final conference of Ethio-SPaRe (July 2014), an idea was raised to make a survey of manuscripts in the ecclesiastic libraries of at least some of the main churches of the area, and it was realized in March 2015. The participants of the field mission (16.-25.03.2015) were the PI Dr Denis Nosnitsin and Magdalena Krzyzanowska from the side of Ethio-SPaRe project, and Yohannes Gebreselassie and Yohannes Aytenew from the side of Mekele University³.

The areas which today are embraced by the West Tigray zone – *wärädas* Kafta Humära, Şägäde, Wälqayt – are distant from the core of Tigray; they are climatically harsh, especially the lowland part, the lowland part of Wälqayt, also known as Mäzäga, which was to become the object of the joint research⁴. Even though, specifically the area Wälqayt – Mäzäga is known to play a role in the history of Ethiopia⁵. Formerly it was more heterogeneous then it is now in terms of languages

² See the press-release of Mekele University "Rescue Project in Mezega and Surroundings, Western Tigray – Discoveries in Heritage and Culture, Improving the Livelihood" (accessed on 05.08.2015, http://213.55.94.36/Old%20site%20backup/index.php/announcements/312-press-release-rescue-project-in-mezega-and-surroundings-western-tigray--discoveries-in-heritage-and-culture-improving-the-livelihood"); a report was submitted to the French Center for Ethiopian Studies in Addis Abeba, which supported the research. Among the most important findings of

¹ The so-called Welqayt Irrigation Project aimed at the large-scale sugar production.

the project was the systematic documentation of the Bet Mulu Castle site. ³ I express my sincere thanks to Prof. Dr. Wolber Smidt (Mekele University) whose help was decisive during the preparation

of the trip.

⁴ The area of Lowland Wälqayt – Mäzäga (sometimes called also Mäzäga Wälqayt) seems to have been mostly uncovered by the studies of G. Ellero, who dealt predominantly with the "Highland Wälqayt" (its administrative center in ^sAddi Rämäş, cp. Ellero 1948, Dore – Mantel-Niecko – Taddia 2005). Moreover, in his excellent anthropological studies, he paid only small attention to the manuscript materials preserved in the churches, concentrating on the oral traditions.

⁵ The information from historical sources is summarized in EAE III, 891a-b-892b (it seems however that the historical Mäzäga does not fully coincide with today's Lowland Wälqayt-Mäzäga); EAE IV, 1122a-1123a.

and religions. In the 17th century it was, obviously, in the orbit of the Gondärine Kingdom; by the same period, the monastic culture of Waldabba became an influential factor in the life of region and the entire country. In the course of history, a number of churches and monasteries were established in both Highland Wälqayt and in Wälqayt-Mäzäga; to study and document their manuscript culture of the latter was set as the primary aim of the field research described below.

The research team made its base in May Gaba, the center of the *tabiya*-district called by the same name. In the next days, it made attempts to reach several churches in the surrounding area, which turned out to be very difficult due to the poor roads and the climate. A few church institutions refused access. Two of them, however, could be studied profoundly, May Hargäs Giyorgis and May Gaba Mika'el.

May Hargäs Giyorgis

May Hargäş ('Inda) Giyorgis⁶ is located in *tabiya* May Çä'a, *qušät* called by the name of the church. May Hargäş Giyorgis is a monastic community and considered *gädam*. The round church hosts four *tabots*: St. George, St. Michael, '*abunä* 'Arägawi and St. Mary⁷. May Hargäş Giyorgis is located in the middle of climatically harsh, very hot area. The church of St. George is round, looking like plastered with concrete from the outside (figs. 1, 2), but it was unfortunately not possible to see the inner part and check the presence of the murals on the sanctuary walls. The compound of the church and monastic settlement are hardly visible from the road since they stand below the level of the ground (fig. 3), but close to a gorge with a small river (May Çä'a). The gorge is covered with thick vegetation (fig. 4); the local people say that it covers caves which were formerly used by hermits. The monastic compound is divided hosts dwelling for monks and nuns and there is a communal house (figs. 5, 6).

The priests and monks could not refer to a foundation time of the monastery, but said that it was founded by "*abunä* Minas hundred years ago", which should be understood in such a way that May Hargäs Giyorgis is affiliated with the so-called Betä Minas⁸, and was founded by its representatives.

The manuscript collection of the monastery turned out to be interesting⁹. Some books (both older and very recent) bear the short notice "Minas" or "zä-Minas", or "zä-betä Minas", indicating that they were indeed sent to May Hargäs Giyorgis from the Betä Minas – the Minas congregation of Waldəbba. Apparently, there were no books older than late $16^{th}/17^{th}$ cent. The "Golden Gospel" is an interesting, heterogeneous book possibly dating to the 17^{th} century: the first two Gospels (Matthew, Luke) are written by a very skilled scribe (fig. 7); a portion of John is written by a less skilled, but still very careful scribe (fig. 8); the rest is written by the first hand. The rubrication is carried out by those two hands respectively¹⁰. The numbers referring to the Canon Tables, punctuations signs, and meticulous text corrections¹¹ are carried out by a third hand, throughout the volume. The same hand

⁶ Hargäs means "crocodile" in Təgrəňňa (Kane 2000:198); the reason for such a name is not known.

⁷ The main feasts are: 12 Hədar and 12 Säne for St. Michael, *Tərr* 18, Hədar 23 and Miyazya 23 for St. George, 14 *Təqəmt* for 'Arägawi and 21 *Tərr* and 21 Säne for St. Mary.

⁸ One of the two rivaling congregations of Waldəbba (called after the 16th-century abbot Minas), the second one being Betä Tama (s. Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie 2014).

⁹ Containing at least 20 varios older books, and at least 10-15 more recent.

¹⁰ Including, for instance, the names Jesus and Christ.

¹¹ However, the division of the text to be used for the Canon Tables is carried out only for half of the book.

inscribed also a short supplication of the person (donor or commissioner?) called Gäbrä Lə^cul (fig. 9). The blank pages are covered with additional notes, mostly inventories (fig. 10).

Among the hagiographic manuscripts, the most interesting was a 17th century (?) codex containing the Vita of Kiros, Miracles of Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus and (added later) *mälkə*²-hymn for Kiros. The manuscript, of small size, is written in a peculiar broad and big script by the scribe called Zä-Mika²el, and commissioned by someone called ²Afä Krəstos (fig. 11).

A 19th century manuscript of Horologium (*Mäṣḥafä sāʿatat*) contains interesting images: the church building ('Aksum Ṣəyon or another one?), a variation on the topic "Ephrem the Syrian meeting St. Mary" and four pictures of saints, among them such rare personages as Lätşun and Pälamon¹² (figs. 12-14).

The *Mäṣḥäfä gəbrä ḥemamat* "Book of the Rite of the Holy Week", written in the nice Gondärine (*gwəlḥ*) script was produced, according to the colophon, in the 13th year of King Yoḥannəs (most probably possibly Yoḥannəs I, r. 1667-1682, then 1680?), commissioned by Zä-Giyorgis, and written by the scribe Matyas (though the colophon, with name of the commissioner, was added by a different scribe) (figs. 15-16). Underscoring the complexity of the library, from other additional notes in the book it follows that it was in the possession of another church, Kidanä Məḥrät of May Läbäṭa, another church in Waldəbba.

May Gaba Mika'el

May Gaba Mika'el¹³ is a big church located at the outskirts of the town of May Gaba. It is a monastic community with ca. 20 monks and 5 nuns. A traditional school is run at the monastery, offering teaching up to the level of liturgy (*qaddase*). The church has only one *tabot*, that of St. Michael.

The history of this institution is peculiar since it was formerly located in another place, at the Bet Mulu Castle, which was the foundation of 'Ayanä '∃gzi', the local governor in the first half of the 18th century. The church was moved from the hill of the castle down in 1953 by *fitawrari* Yəlma; in ca. 1971, the town of May Gaba was founded. Currently the town is quickly expanding; soon the monastery will stand in the urban area, the circumstance which will endanger the local ecclesiastic collection.

The current church is a recent building (fig. 17). However, the monks could not tell the name of the founder and an approximate foundation time. The head of May Gaba Mika²el only stated that the local community is closely connected with the Betä Minas of Waldəbba.

The collection of May Gaba Mika'el has scores of interesting books, and shows a few typical for the monastic library¹⁴. As in the case before, there are some books marked with the sing of the "House of Minas" (Betä Minas). A sizable (25 quires) 17th century (?) manuscript of *Tä'amrä Maryam* "Miracles of Mary", written in several hands, was donated, according to a note, by "communities of 'Abräntant to Kəsad 'Aga Maryam"; but the original commissioners were 'Aśratä Şəyon, Mälkə'a Krəstos and Märqorewos (fig. 18-20). Däbrä 'Abräntant is one of the biggest Waldəbba monasteries¹⁵. The library possesses a late 16th or 17th century *Tərg^wame mäl'əktä Pawlos*, Commentary of John Chrysostom on the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews (with added glosses in commentaries in Gə'əz) (fig. 19) which occurs in monastic libraries of the upper level rather than in

¹² Cp. Hummel 2015.

¹³ Gaba means in a kind of thorny tree in Təgrəñña (Kane 2000:2289, Zizyphus spina christi).

¹⁴ The library encompasses up to 15 historical books, and some 15 recent books.

¹⁵ S. EAE II, 8a-9b.

modest church libraries; a 17th-century (?) copy of ²*Arägawi mänfäsawi* "Spiritual Elder" and not very common *Zena* ²*Abäw*, probably of the same age. A manuscript of *Mäṣḥafä gənzät*, Book of the funeral ritual, donated by ^cAśratä Ṣəyon (the same as above?) and Wäldä Haymanot, datable to the 17th century at least, appears to be an exceptionally well preserved example of the service book (figs. 20-21)¹⁶ which is intensively used for the funeral service and do not survive over a long time.

Conclusion

The monastic libraries of the Waldəbba churches and monasteries are reportedly extremely rich but have never been explored, and this area has been hardly accessible to the scholars. The field research produced clear indications that the manuscript culture of the area of study, adjacent to Waldəbba, is richer than it was assumed. A lot of books which entered the collections of the churches, also of those recently founded, appears to have come from Waldəbba or through the intermediation of Waldəbba. It is important to start the systematic exploration and reconnaissance at least in the neighboring districts, which were also under the strong influence of Waldəbba, to approach the latter in the future. It is equally important that the authorized institutions and scholars will start elaborating the strategy as to how this very specific cultural area can be recorded and protected, in view of the ongoing development projects and the overall deep changes taking place in the local physical and cultural landscape.

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¹⁶ Noticeable are a rare ligature for the word *halle luyya* \mathcal{A} : \mathcal{A} :, contracted into two signs (fig. 21, col. Va, Ra), and the elegant frame for the readings' indications in the upper margin (fig. 21).

Plates



Fig. 1. May Hargäs 'Inda Giyorgis, the main church

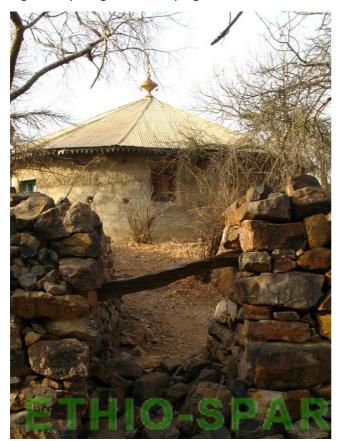


Fig. 2. May Ḥargäṣ '∃nda Giyorgis, the main church



Fig. 3. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, seen from afar



Fig. 4. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis , the gorge of the river May Çäsa



Fig. 5. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, monks' dwellings



Fig. 6. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, communal house



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Figg. 7, 8, 9, 10. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, the Four Gospels book.

ም።አንዝድስብ ቶስወለዘአጽሐ በስመ፡አብ፡ወወ 12:00 72.0.9 ትምምስለመሳ**አ** ልድ፡መመግፊስ: <u>ችስቱመንበ2: δ</u> んのスフナチキ ከት ንጹ ሐንቋ 45.0.4.7.0. ት፡ለአቡን፡አባ፡ 10 7 10 h 17 h ለግዋው መበረክ ከቀግጽሕፍ:ግ ንጥ አ:ወይገበ ኪሮ ስ ይጽሐፍ ስ F00-18-18:1. FA:15:+770 4. 30:39° 8:00 C:-11+3:PL ወይባር ኮ-ካቡረ: 20-9-9-9-9-0 ርቅ፡ዝኢይደመለ ያተ፡መጣየታተ፡ ምስለ: ሥለ ከ: ለቅዱስ:አቡን: ወአማልክተ፡ወ ስውስአሐም 1112:00 42.71: ቅዱስ:ለግብር AH-S-HOP-1 2: ዘሚካኤልአ n-KL:nCh+h: ቅዓ-ስ.መ'አምም አኮ:ስ በአ:ባሕቲ ትርስኡጊ:በ'አግ ጎሬ:ኅር 7:ሰማ 1ª100.01190. +: \$ 1.5 0 1 1 ተ-ስሙ-ለአበ-ነ፡ 2023:00202 የተ-ንፍሉ ወሥ **ቢሮስ** ፈአቡካ: አካልግተመለ "ABN-3AB ንሁ:ቅድስት:ወ ዘበስማዎት፡አስመ አመ፡አ.2.ካበ፡አ n-30H-1:00% ዝንቱ፡፬ተአም አካ አካይ መታጥ ካልብተ፡ያወስ 20-:120-7:7 ሐፍ-ዘአራክርስ 1.90 8:2.78 4: አ ለዓለሙ ዓለም።

Fig. 11. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, Vita of Kiros



Figg. 12, 13, 14. May Hargäs 'Enda Giyorgis, Horologium



Fig. 15. May Hargäs 'Inda Giyorgis, Book of the Rite of the Holy Week

<u>ኦአበው።ቅዱሳን፡ወንጸ-ሐን፡ኢትርስ</u> <u>አኒ፡በጻለተትክሙ፡ቅድስት፡አነ፡ነጻይ፡</u> ግንሞት፡ጽሐፈሆ፡ማትያከ**፡** Hov 8- A 4: HOY U NZ: PA & J: HA 8 A G: H 2 P C 2 A: W + 8 A &: 1 Houf: 00 39 Mut: A 77 My. P. M? h: אים אסס ואין נט : א סט: ו ט ן :: אמטאייי NEKC % F 5: & C + : O 3 h-C : D. 7 : 3 8 m 7 9 2. F. 3 & 0 8 7 : 3 7 05 A: 3 7 12 & 1 m. C: > 90 % 4 6 0.94: 34

Fig. 16. May Hargäs 'Inda Giyorgis, Book of the Rite of the Holy Week



Fig. 17. May Gaba Mika'el, the main church

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Figg. 18.-20 May Gaba Mika'el, Miracles of Mary



Fig. 21. May Gaba Mika'el, Commentary of John Chrysostom on the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews



Fig. 22. May Gaba Mika'el, Book of the funeral ritual



Fig. 23. May Gaba Mika'el, Book of the funeral ritual



IMPRESSUM

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