

A Fragment of an Ancient Hymnody Manuscript from Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila (Təgray, Ethiopia)*

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I. Script and Text

In the course of several visits, the Ethio-SPaRe project has recently conducted a study of the site of Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila Mikaʿel, an old church in the district of Gulo Mäḳäda (East Təgray).¹ The manuscript collection of the church is remarkable, among other things, thanks to the presence of a small improvised “genizah”: a number of fragments of destroyed parchment manuscripts kept in a simple bag in the inner of the sacristy. Most of the fragments are remains of medieval manuscripts of various content and age, not particularly remarkable; but one small, badly damaged leaf attracted the attention of the research group due to its pronounced archaic features.²

The leaf measures ca. 200 (height) x 160 mm (width).³ The text is laid out in two columns, 25 written lines each. The upper written line is placed under the upper blindly ruled line. The pricks are poorly visible. It seems that the “primary pricks”, intended to support the making of the vertical ruled lines, were set at the top and bottom (?) horizontal ruled lines. The outer edge of the leaf crumbled, and it is impossible to make any observation concerning the pricks for horizontal ruling (“text pricks”).

The measurements of the written area of the leaf are ca. 158 mm (height) x 130 mm (width). The margins are 22 mm (upper), 20 (lower); 15 mm (inner), 10 (intercolumn), 15 mm outer (right). Each text column is 130 mm high x 60 mm wide. Each line accommodates some 11–13 signs. The recto (R) of the

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¹ See NOSNITSIN 2013: 209–219; a short archaeological survey of the site has been carried out in December 2012, see SERNICOLA 2012: 61ff.

² Cp. also NOSNITSIN 2013: 216, fig. 94. Unfortunately, no other fragment of the same manuscript was discovered at the site.

³ Due to the condition of the leaf, is hardly possible to measure it exactly. Also, it is difficult to understand if the folded extension of the leaf (with a thread of animal origin placed in the fold) is a stab or represents the remnant of a counterpart folium.

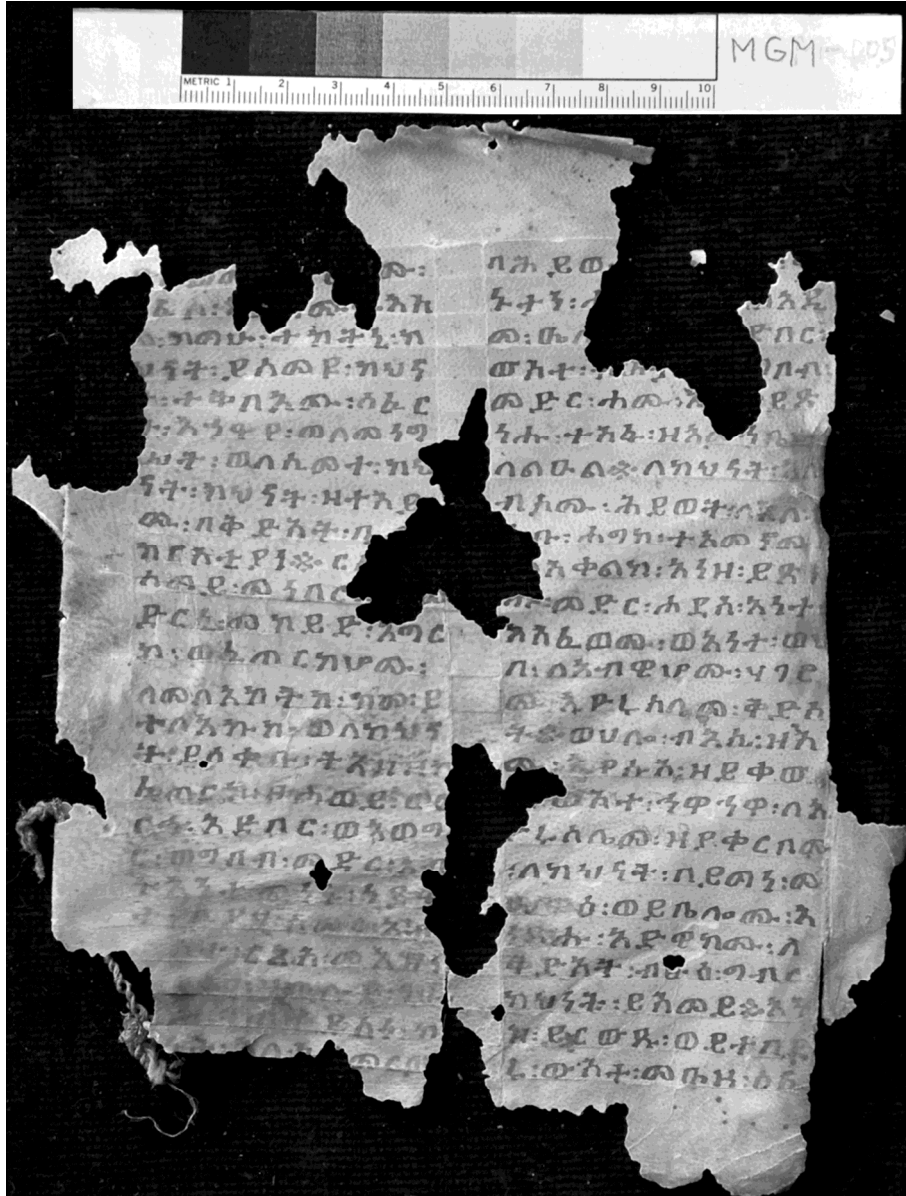


Fig. 1a: Məʿəsar Gʷəhila fragment, recto

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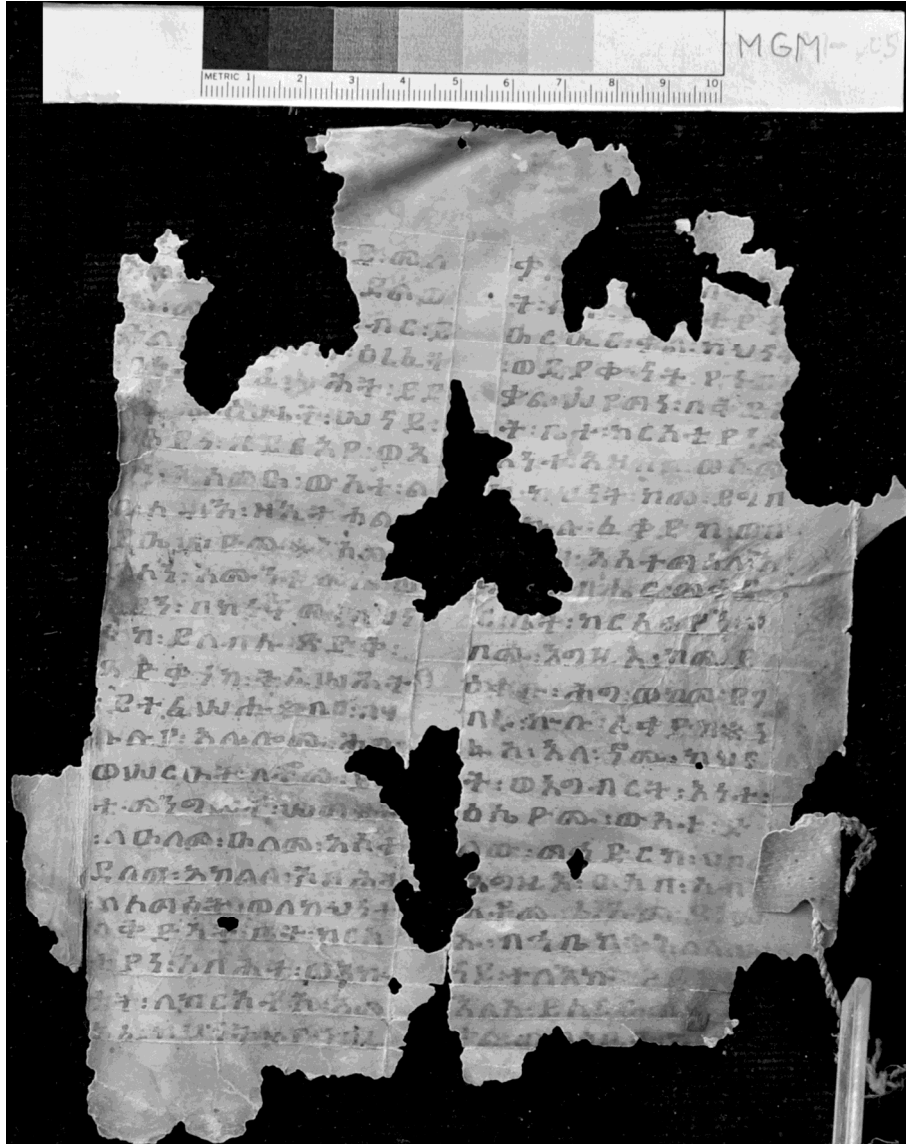


Fig. 1b: Mə'əsar Gʷəḥila fragment, verso

is hair side, crudely processed. The blind ruling was impressed on the flesh side of the leaf (verso, V), in accordance with the widely attested Ethiopian practice.

The handwriting attested on the fragment shows features pointing to the pre-mid-14th century, a period which in Ethiopian palaeography is commonly

leaf referred to as that of “the monumental script”.⁴ Yet, the writing of the fragment does not show fine and elegant shapes, and is marked rather by lack of “monumentality”. It is of mediocre quality; this and some other features (s. below) hint to the modest status of the manuscript which was possibly intended for every-day liturgical use. Nevertheless, the script indeed demonstrates palaeographical traits suggestive of a considerable age. Fig. 94 in Nossnitsin 2013: 216 shows a portion of the text on fol. R, ll. 8–17. Figs. 1a–b show the text in full. The most interesting feature of the fragment is that its text reveals a substantial number of peculiar forms. Below, the text is transcribed without any change, and supplied with a (very tentative) translation:⁵

fol. Ra	fol. Ra
1. [...]ዎ[ሙ.....]ሙ ፡	1. them
2. [ኀ]ፈሶ ፡ [...]ሙ[*] (I) እስ	2. his soul (I) Since
3. [መ] ፡ ከግሁ ፡ ተከትኒ ፡ ከ	3. like this, formerly,
4. ህናት ፡ ይሰመዩ ፡ ከህና	4. priests were appointed priests,
5. [ተ] ፡ ተቅብእሙ ፡ ዕፈር	5. having been anointed with ointment of
6. ተ ፡ አጋዋዩ ፡ ወለመነግ	6. my brothers, and for the reign,
7. ሥት ፡ ወለሲሙተ ፡ ከህ	7. and for the appointment of priests,
8. ናት ፡ ከህናት ፡ ዘተስይ	8. the priests were appointed
9. ሙ ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ቤ[ተ]	9. in the holy
10. ከርሱቲያን* (II) ር[ሰይከ]	10. church. (II) And You made
11. ሰግይ ፡ መነበር[ከ ፡ ወም]	11. the heaven Your throne and
12. ድርኒ ፡ መከይድ ፡ አግር	12. the earth Your footstool,
13. ከ ፡ ወፈጠርከሆሙ ፡	13. and You created
14. ለመለክትከ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይ	14. angels so that
15. ተለክኩከ ፡ ወለከህና	15. they might serve You, and the priests
16. ት ፡ ይዕቀቡ ፡ ትአዘዘከ[፡]	16. so that they might keep Your commandment.
17. ፈጠርከ ፡ ፀሐወይ ፡ ወወ	17. You created the sun and
18. ርኅ ፡ አድበር ፡ ወአውግ	18. the moon, mounts and hills
19. ር ፡ ወግበብ ፡ ምድር ፡ እብ	19. and holes in the ground. A stone
20. ን ፡ እንተ ፡ መነኑ ፡ ነደ[ቅ]	20. that the builders rejected,
21. ተ ፡ ኪያሃ ፡ ሰመ[ረ] ፡ አብ<...>	21. the Father liked it
22. [ውስ]ተ ፡ ርአስ ፡ መእዘነ	22. in the head of the corner. ⁶
23. [ት ፡] (III) [...]ውሉድ [፡ ...]	23. (III) Children
24. [.....] ይሰፉ ፡ ከ	24. ... he hopes
25. [.]ት ፡ [እለ ፡] ት[.]መርዎ ፡	25. who

⁴ UHLIG 1988: 73–176.

⁵ Square brackets with dots in between stand for the materially destroyed text (one dot for one sign, approximately); the text in square brackets is proposed reconstruction; a dot below the letter means that the reading is uncertain. The Roman numbers in parenthesis mark the beginnings of chants (see below).

⁶ Cp. Ps. 117:22.

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fol. Rb	fol. Rb
1. በሕይወ[ት ፣]	1. In life
2. ኑታን ፣ [ሐ...]አዲ	2. leather
3. ም ፣ ዔ[ሰ... ፣ አ]ድብር ፣	3. mounts
4. ውስተ ፣ [ግታ...ገ]ብብ ፣	4. holes
5. ምድር ፣ ሐሙ ፣ እ[...]ይጽ	5. in the ground, they suffered while
6. ነሐ ፣ ተሰፋ ፣ ዘአሙጎቤ[ሆ ፣]	6. waiting for the hope from
7. ለልዑል* (IV) ለከህናት ፣ አላ	7. the Most High. (IV) The priests
8. ብሶሙ ፣ ሕይወት ፣ ለእለ ፣	8. He vested with life, those
9. [ግቀ]ቡ ፣ ሐግከ ፣ ተአመኖሙ ፣	9. who have kept Your law having believed
10. [በመ]ስቀልክ ፣ አነዘ ፣ ይጽነ	10. in Your Cross while waiting
11. ሐ ፣ ምድር ፣ ሐዳስ ፣ አነተ ፣	11. for a new land. You
12. አስፈጸሙ ፣ ወአነተ ፣ ወሀ	12. have given them hope and You
13. በ ፣ ለአብዊሆሙ ፣ ሃገሮ	13. gave to their fathers their land,
14. ሙ ፣ ኢዮሩሰሌም ፣ ቅድስ	14. the holy Jerusalem.
15. ት* (V) ወሀሎ ፣ ብአሲ ፣ ዘስ	15. (V) And there was one man, by name
16. ሙ ፣ ኢየሱስ ፣ ዘይቀው	16. Jesus, who was standing
17. [ም] ፣ ውስተ ፣ ጎዋጎዋ ፣ ለኢ	17. at the thresholds of
18. ዮሩሰሌም ፣ ዘያቀርቦሙ	18. Jerusalem, who was bringing
19. ፣ ⁷ ለከህናት ፣ በይማነ ፣ መ	19. the priests to the right
20. ሥዋዕ ፣ ወይቤሎሙ ፣ አ	20. from the altar, and who said to them,
21. ነጽሐ ፣ አድዊከሙ ፣ ለ	21. “Clean your hands for
22. ቅድስት ፣ ብፁዕ ፣ ግብር ፣	22. the holy and blessed deed
23. ከህነት ፣ ይስመይ* (VI) አን	23. which is called priesthood.” (VI) While
24. ዝ ፣ ይርውጹ ፣ ወይተበደ	24. they run and rush
25. ሩ ፣ ውስተ ፣ መዓዛ ፣ ዕፍ	25. into the fragrance of ointment
fol. Va	fol. Va
1. [ረት ፣ ...ና]ይ ፣ መለ	1.
2. [... ፣ ይ]ይልዎ	2. ... is fitting for them
3. መ[.....]ብር ፣ ይ	3.
4. ድል[ዎ...] ፣ ዕረፈት	4. repose is fitting for them,
5. ፣ ገነ[ት ፣ ት]ፈሥሕት ፣ ይደ	5. paradise, joy are fitting
6. [ልዎሙ ፣] ዕሢት ፣ ሠናይ ፣	6. for them, nice reward
7. ዓይነ ፣ ኢይርአየ ፣ ወአ	7. which eye has not seen, and
8. ዘነ ፣ ኢሰምዓ ፣ ውስተ ፣ ል	8. ear has not heard, ⁸
9. በ ፣ ሰብእ ፣ ዘኢትሐል[የ ፣]	9. which has not been conceived in the heart of man,
10. ይዔሥዮሙ* (VII) እስመ ፣ [ቅ]	10. (and) He will award them. (VII)

⁷ Here the word divider (semicolon) stands, unusually, at the beginning of the line (also see Va, ll. 5, 15, 19, 21, 25, and Vb, l. 4).

⁸ Cp. 1 Cor. 2:9.

<p>11. [ዱ]ሰን፣ አሙንቲ፣ ዒ [.]፣ ወ 12. ደይን፣ በከነኖሙ፣ ከህኖ 13. ትከ፣ ይለብሱ፣ ጽድቅ፣ 14. ጸድቃነከ፣ ትፈሥሕት 15. ፣ ይትፈሥሐ* (VIII) በ፬፣ በሃ 16. ሌሊያ፣ አለ፣ ሎሙ፣ ኦ[ግ]፣ 17. ወሥርዓት፣ ለቶሙ፣ ይ[እ] 18. ቲ፣ መንግሥተ፣ ሠማያት 19. ፣ ለዓለም፣ ዓለም፣ አስተ 20. ዳለው፣ አከልለ፣ ስበሕት 21. ፣ ለሰማዕት፣ ወለከህነተ፣ 22. ለቅድስት፣ ቤት፣ ከርስ 23. ቲያነ፣ ስበሕት፣ ወአኩ 24. ቱት፣ ለከርስቶስ፣ አመ 25. ፣ አፈ፣ ከህኖት* (IX) የጎብሩ</p>	<p>11. Since they are saints, ... and 12. damnation are in their judgment. 13. Your priests clad themselves in righteousness, 14. Your righteous ones are 15. rejoicing in joy. (VIII) In <i>arba'at</i> with 16. halleluiah. Those for whom law 17. and order – for them is 18. the Kingdom of Heaven, 19. for eternity. Prepare 20. crowns of glory 21. for martyrs and priests. 22. For the holy church 23. (should be) glory, and 24. for Christ (should be) hallowing from 25. the mouth of priests. (IX). They unite</p>
<p>fol. Vb</p>	<p>fol. Vb</p>
<p>1. ቃለ[.....]በ[...] 2. ት፣ በ[...]ቲያነ[፣ መ ፣] 3. ዓርዒር ፣ ቃል ፣ ከህኖት[፣] 4. ፣ ወዲያቀኖት ፣ የጎብ[ሩ ፣] 5. ቃል ፣ ሥዩማነ ፣ በቅድስ[ስ] 6. ት ፣ ቤተ ፣ ከርስቲያነ[*] 7. (X) አንተ ፣ አዘገኝ ፣ ወሴም 8. ከ ፣ ከህኖት ፣ ከመ ፣ ይግበ 9. [ሩ ፣] ኩሉ ፣ ፈቃድክ ፣ ወበ 10. [...ዘ] ፣ እስተማሰለ ፣ እ 11. [ግዚእ]ብሔር ፣ መጎደ 12. ር ፣ ቤት ፣ ከርስቲያን ፣ ወ 13. ቦሙ ፣ እግዚእ ፣ ከመ ፣ ይ 14. ዕቀቡ ፣ ሕግ ፣ ወከመ ፣ ይገ 15. ቦሩ ፣ ኩሉ ፣ ፈቃድክ* (XI) ነ 16. ፈስ ፣ አለ ፣ ኖሙ ፣ ከህኖ 17. ት ፣ ወአግብርት ፣ አነተ ፣ 18. ዕሴዮሙ ፣ ውስተ ፣ ድ 19. ልው ፣ ማጎድርክ ፣ ሀቦሙ 20. እግዚእ ፣ ዓስበ ፣ ስብ 21. ሐቶሙ ፣ ፈጹም ፣ ይንሥ 22. ኡ ፣ በጎቤክ* (XII) እለሰ ፣ ሠ 23. ማይ ፣ ተለእኩ[.....] 24. እለሰ ፣ ይሰውዑ[...] 25. ተል ፣ መ[...]ቤ[...]</p>	<p>1. (their) word 2. the church 3. sweet word, priests 4. and deacons. They unite 5. their word, the governors, in the holy 6. church. 7. (X) You gave order and appointed 8. priests so that they might fulfill 9. Your every will, and in 10. likened 11. God the abode (to) 12. the church, and 13. Lord is with them so that they 14. might keep the law and 15. fulfill Your every will. 16. Soul of those priests and 17. servants who passed away You 18. reward them in your 19. established abode. Give them, 20. oh Lord, remuneration of their glory, 21. let them receive (it) from You 22. in full. (XII) Those who for 23. Heaven served 24. those who offer a sacrifice ... 25.</p>

In the fragment, letters are always written very close to or at the lower ruled line (which coincides with the paleographical “base line”), and some vowel markers look like tiny dots. The ancient letter forms attested in the fragment are, in particular: **ᶞ** (in all vowel orders), with the right loop set upon the left one;⁹ **ᶟ** (in all vowel orders), the typically curved line forming the right “half” of the letter is nearly perpendicularly set upon the line of the “left” half (s. also figs. 2a–c¹⁰); for **ᶘ, ᶙ**, etc., even though the body of the letter is not conspicuously triangular, the vocal markers are short and set at its middle, and hardly reach the “base line”;¹¹ **ᶚ** has the sixth order marker constructed of a vertical stroke and a perpendicular horizontal stroke, slightly curved, directed to the left;¹² **ᶛ, ᶜ** have a small body set up on a tall stem.¹³ The ancient way of vocalizing some letters (with the vowel marker still shaped as a “separate element” attached to the letter) is clearly visible in a few cases: **ᶜ** (Rb, l. 8), **ᶛ** (Rb, l. 25), but somewhat less obvious in the case of **ᶛ** (Ra, l. 5).¹⁴ The shape of letter **ᶜ** is unstable. Sometime the vowel marker (ring) is set at a short linking line (fols. Rb, l. 15, Va, l. 16); once the ring is written without the link, very close to the right side of the letter (fol. Rb, l. 20). The placement of the seventh order marker in *lottomu* (fol. Va, l. 17), if not a mistake or scribal idiosyncrasy, is difficult to account for; does one single vowel marker refer to both *l-* and *t-*? Unfortunately, due to the damage, it is impossible to say whether the word **ᶛᶞᶛᶛ[ᶛ]ᶛᶛᶛ** (fol. Vb, ll. 10–11) is written as two words (archaic spelling) or as one word (later spelling).

The way of vocalization of some words in the text may be described as “odd” or “irregular”, or just different compared to the classic medieval Gəʿəz. This feature, having been attested to a different degree in a few ancient manuscripts, has been sporadically mentioned, but no samples of such texts have been presented *per se*.¹⁵ Therefore the aim of the article is rather

⁹ Cp. DAVIS 1987: 289; UHLIG 1988: 207 places the feature in the late 14th–mid-15th century, but cp. SERGEW HABLE-SELASSIE 1987–88: 26.

¹⁰ Cp. DAVIS 1987: 289; SERGEW HABLE-SELASSIE 1987–88: 26.

¹¹ Cp. UHLIG 1987: 98; cp. SERGEW HABLE-SELASSIE 1987–88: 26.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Cp. UHLIG 1988: 99; cp. SERGEW HABLE-SELASSIE 1987–88: 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Apparently, one should separate such cases from a different characteristic attested in a number of ancient manuscripts, mostly with biblical texts, when the vocals of some letters are marked in insufficiently distinctive and clear way (e.g., DAVIES 1987: 290, for **ᶛ/ᶛ** and **ᶜ/ᶜ**). The phenomenon of “unconventional vocalization” has been briefly described, e.g., in ZUURMOND 1989, II, 54 for the Four Gospels of Lalibāla Mādḥane ʿAlām (EMML no. 6907); cp. also pp. 49–50 for Abba Gärīma III, and p. 52 for Abba Gärīma II (“confusion of the first and the sixth order in combination with certain consonants”). Further see BAUSI 2005, esp. p. 154 and n. 16. SERGEW HABLE-SELASSIE

to present the feature as it appears in a (non-Biblical) text and not to discuss it in detail, or try to explain if and to which extent the “defective” orthography reflects linguistic phenomena, and whether there is a relation to the genre of the fragment’s content (liturgical chants, s. below).

It should be stressed that in a number of cases the transcription may appear arbitrary. In some cases the difference between the letter variants is so slight, that today it cannot be easily discerned. The elements of the letters sometimes cross the lower ruled line, but it is not always easy to understand if they are slightly extended extremities of the “basic forms” or poorly visible vowel markers. Still, there are many clear cases of the “odd vocalisation”:

- 1) A frequent case is **h** standing also for **ከ**, **ከ**: **ከሆናት** instead of **ካሆናት** “priests, consecrated church servants” and **ክርስቲያን/ን** instead of **ክርስቲያን/ን** (a number of cases); **መለእከት** instead of **መላእክት** (Ra, l. 14); **አከልል** instead of **አክልል** (Va, l. 20); **ተከትኒ** instead of **ትካትኒ** (Ra, l. 3), **አድዊከሙ** instead of **አደዊከሙ** (Rb, l. 21; the letter **ከ** appears to be here indeed in its unvocalized form, not in the ancient forms, cp. Uhlig 1988: 159); **ክርስቶስ** instead of **ክርስቶስ** (Va, l. 24). Cp. also **h** standing for **ከ** in **ከነኖሙ**, instead of **ኩንኖሙ** (Va, l. 12).
- 2) Another frequent case is **አ** which stands also for **እ**: **ብአሲ** instead of **ብእሲ** (Rb, l. 15); **መለእከት** instead of **መላእክት** (Ra, l. 14); **ርአስ** instead of **ርእስ** (Ra, l. 22); **ትአዘዘከ** instead of **ትእዘዘከ** (Ra, l. 16); **አሰ** instead of **እሰ** (Va, l. 16, Vb, l. 16); **አነዘ** instead of **እነዘ** (Rb, l. 10), **አድዊከሙ** instead of **አደዊከሙ** (Rb, l. 21); **አመ** instead of **እም** (Va, l. 24, cp. Rb, l. 6).
- 3) **ነ** frequently stands also for **ን** (both forms are easily distinguishable, cp. a very clearly written **ን**, in **እንተ**, fol. Ra, l. 20, or in **መንግሥተ**, Va l. 18): **አነዘ** instead of **እነዘ** (Rb, l. 10); **አነተ** instead of **እንተ** (Rb, 11.11, 17, VB, l. 17); **ዓይነ** instead of **ዓይን** (Va, l. 7); **ወአዘነ** instead of **እዘነ** (Va, l. 8); **ከነኖሙ** instead of **ኩንኖሙ** (Va, l. 12); **መንግሥት** instead of **መንግሥት** (Ra, ll. 6-7, but the standard form occurs as well, Va, l. 18).
- 4) In some cases, **ር** stands for **ረ** (there is one very clear example of **ረ** in Va, l. 5, **ዕረፈት**): **ዕረርተ** instead of **ዕፍረተ** (Ra, ll. 5–6); **ር[ሰይከ]** obviously for **ረሰይከ** (Ra, l. 10), **ይርውጽ** for **ይረውጽ** (Rb, l. 24); **ግብር** instead of **ግብረ** (Rb, l. 22).
- 5) **ፈ** stands for **ፍ**: **ዕፈርተ** instead of **ዕፍረተ** (Ra, ll. 5–6); **ዕረፈት** instead of **ዕረፍት** (Va, ll. 4–5); **ነፈስ** for **ነፍስ** (Vb, ll. 15–16); **ፈጽም** instead of **ፍጽም** (Vb, l. 21).
- 7) **በ** stands also for **ባ** and **ብ**: **አድብር** instead of **አድባር** (Ra, l. 18, Rb, l. 3); **[ስ]በሕት** instead of **ሰበሕት** (Va, l. 23); **ይተበደሩ** instead of **ይትባደሩ** (Rb, ll. 24–25, if the verb in question is *täbadärä*).
- 8) **ለ** stands instead of **ላ** in **መለእከት** (cp. above, under 1, 2).

1987–88: 13 reports a case of “odd vocalization” in Ms. EMMML no. 6913 (Pentateuch, Lalibäla Mädhane ‘Aläm), “Any word which is written today with the first order is written in various ways in this text – in the second, fourth, fifth and sixth order. Such variations are observed in all seven orders”, but for the moment, I have not been able to prove this information. However, in the course of the work of the Ethio-SPaRe project, the project team came across a few other ancient fragments. I have recently been working on a few more of them, some possibly not vocalized in the “standard” way.

- 9) ተ stands for ት in a few cases: ተከትኒ instead of ትካትኒ (Ra, l. 3), ይተለእኩከ instead of ይትለእኩከ (Ra, ll. 14–15), ይተበደሩ instead of ይትበደሩ (Rb, ll. 24–25, s. above).
 10) ሐ stands for ሕ: ሐግከ (Rb, l. 9), but also the correct form ሕግ is attested (Vb, l. 14).

Apart from those mentioned above, the few verbal forms which appear with “irregular” vocalization are ተቅበአሙ (reading ተቅቦአሙ might also be possible) instead of ተቀቢአሙ (Ra, l. 5); ዙተሰይሙ (Ra, ll. 8–9) instead of ዙተሰይሙ, cp. also the form ይሠዩሙ below; ይገበሩ instead of ይግበሩ (Vb, ll. 14–15; the correct form appears as well, Vb, l. 8); አለብሶሙ (Rb, ll. 7–8) instead of አልበሶሙ or አልብሶሙ; perhaps ያቀርቦሙ (Rb, l. 18) instead of ያቋርቦሙ (if verb *ʿaqärräbä* was meant); ተለእኩ (Vb, l. 23) instead of ተልእኩ; እሱተግሰለ (Vb, l. 10) instead of አሱተግሰለ (but cp. the correct አሱተግሰለ, Va, ll. 19–20).

There is also a peculiar form ፀሐወይ, apparently for ፀሐይ “sun”; አብዊሆሙ instead of አበዊሆሙ, and አድዊከሙ instead of እደዊከሙ.

The text of the fragment has been identified. A clue is given by a rubric on fol. Va, ll. 15–16: በ፬ ፤, followed by the word በሃሌሉያ ፤, which reveals that the following passage is an antiphon (liturgical chant), probably of the *arbaʿat*-type.¹⁶ The other passages are obviously also antiphons; they are separated by means of the “cross with four rubricated dots” (✠), the only punctuation sign used.¹⁷ Some of these antiphons can be traced in a contemporary edition of *Dəggʷa* (in the following DTG),¹⁸ the main Ethiopic chant book,¹⁹ and in *Dəggʷa*-manuscripts, where they appear in different order and with some variations, in “normalized” orthography according to the standard Gəʿəz and with musical notation signs, in the portion for 24 *Hədar*, the feast of the 24 Heavenly Priests (*Kahəmatä Sämay*).²⁰ The identified antiphons are the following:

- (I) – DTG p. 74b, እስሙ ፣ ከግሁ ፣ ... ተቀቢአሙ ፣ ዕፍረተ ፣ ✠
 (II) – DTG p. 75a–b, ረሰይክ ፣ ሰግዩ ፣ መንበረክ ፣ ... ውሱተ ፣ ርእሰ ፣ ግዕዝንት ፣ ✠
 (IV) – DTG p. 76a (repeated also elsewhere), ለካህናት ፣ አልበሶሙ ፣ ሕይወተ ፣ ...
 ኢየሩሳሌም ፣ ቅድስት ፣ ✠

¹⁶ The antiphons of this type appear to be the oldest chants attested; cp. SHELEMAY – JEFFERY – MONSON 1993: 74; HABTEMICHAEL KIDANE 2003: 317a–b.

¹⁷ On the whole, nine of thirteen antiphons could be distinguished (the first initial one, before (I), and the last one, numbered (XII) are incomplete. Sometimes the separation is arbitrary because parts of the text are lost.

¹⁸ The 1987 A.M. facsimile edition by Täsfa Gäbrä Šällase.

¹⁹ See HABTEMICHAEL KIDANE 2005: 123a–124b.

²⁰ See JEFFEREY 1993: 220; cp. also the respective entry in the editions of Ethiopic Synaxarion.

- (VIII) – DTG p. 74–b, ሎሙ ፡ ሕግ ፡ ወሎሙ ፡ ሥርዓት ፡ ሎቶሙ ፡ ... ለክርስቶስ ፡ በአፈ ፡ ካህናት ።፤
- (X) – DTG p. 77a–b, አንተ ፡ አዘዘክ ፡ ... ኩሉ ፡ ፈቃደክ ።፤

In some cases, only a portion of the antiphon can be identified:

- (VI) – Va, ll. 1–5 – probably DTG p. 76b, ሠናየ ፡ መልእክተ ፡ ክብር ፡ ይደልዎሙ ፡ ምክፅቢተ ፡ ክብር ፡ ይደልዎሙ ።፤
- (VI) – Va, ll. 7–10 – DTG p. 77a, ዘዓይን ፡ ኢርእየ ፡ ወዕዝን ፡ ኢሰምዓ ፡ ...²¹
- (VII) – Va, ll. 12–15 – DTG p. 77a, ካህናትክ ፡ ይለብሱ ፡ ጽድቅ ፡ ...
- (XI) – DTG p. 77b, ነፍስ ፡ እለ ፡ ኖሙ ፡ አግብርቲክ ፡ ወአዕማቲክ ፡ ... ይንሥኡ ፡ ዓስበ ፡ በጎቤክ ።፤

One more antiphon was not found in DTG, but discovered elsewhere in manuscripts, e.g., in a *Dəggwa* and *Zəmmare* manuscript TRM-017 (Taḥtay Ruba, East Təgray), datable to the late 17th/first half of the 18th century:

(IX) - cp. fol. 21ra: ያኃብሩ ፡ ቃለ ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ መዓርዒር ፡ ቃለ ፡ ካህናት ፤ ወዲያቆናት ፡ ያኃብሩ ፡ ቃለ ፡ ሥዩማን ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ።፤²²

The exact dating of the Məʿəsar G^wəḥila fragment is an open question, as it is usually the case with the most ancient Ethiopian manuscript witnesses. Ms. EMMML no. 7078 (Betä Giyorgis, Lalibäla) is sometimes recalled, with the 13th-century dating, as the oldest known Ethiopian chant manuscript.²³ That manuscript has not been catalogued yet; but the estimation of age appears somewhat exaggerated. Evaluating the picture published in Shelemay – Jeffery – Monson 1993: 82, one would rather think of the second half of the 14th or the 15th century. As for the Məʿəsar G^wəḥila fragment, a tentative dating considerably prior to the 14th century appears to be justified. In fact, the fragment might be by far the oldest example of the Ethiopian chant manuscript known today. It should also be seen as a proof for the considerable age of the Ethiopian liturgical chant tradition, which is anterior to the oldest manuscript witnesses.

²¹ Quotation 1 Cor. 2:9 is more complete in the Məʿəsar G^wəḥila fragment than in DTG.
²² In fact, the Ms. contains also antiphon (I), in the form close to that of DTG, cp. TRM-017, fol. 21ra: እስመ ፡ ከማሁ ፡ ትካትኒ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ይሰየሙ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ተቀቢያሙ ፡ ዕፍረ ተ ፡ ዕፍረት ፡ አኃውየ ፡ ለመንግሥት ፡ ወለሲመተ: ካህናት ፡ ካህናት: ይሠየሙ ፡ በቅድስት ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ።፤
²³ HABTEMICHAEL KIDANE 2005: 124a; cp. esp. SHELEMAY – JEFFERY – MONSON 1993: 74; more precisely, it contains a collection of *arbaʿat*-antiphons, a part of the *Dəggwa*.

II. Non-Carbon Ink Attested?

In the case of the Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila fragment, it has been possible to complement the short philological and palaeographical study with an enquiry into the material aspects. The fragment also attracted attention because of its ink which was not black, as it is common in the majority of medieval Ethiopian manuscripts, but of distinctive light brown colour. It was possible to make a number of pictures of the fragment with the portable digital microscope (cp. figs. 2a–c). When compared to images of other books of later age from the same collection, e.g. MGM-003 (s. figs. 3a–c),²⁴ obtained in the same way, we observe a striking difference in the response to the light particularly in the NIR regions. The difference manifests itself in almost complete disappearance of the inks from of the Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila fragment in contrast with the black colour of inks in MGM-003, that is obviously independent of the wavelength of the illuminating light. This is a clear indication of a different type of ink used in these manuscripts since only carbon inks stay opaque throughout the vis-NIR regions of light spectrum.

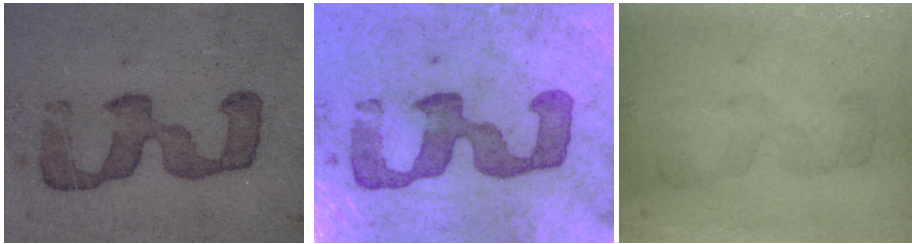


Fig. 2a–c: Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila fragment, images taken with Dino-Lite PRO 2 digital microscope, fol. Va, l. 6 from above (word ሠናይ), vis, UV and NIR light, resp.



Fig. 3a–c: Məʿəsar Gʷəḥila, MGM-003, Collection of homilies, late 15th or 16th century, images taken with Dino-Lite PRO 2 digital microscope, fol. 1ra, l. 14 from above (word ሰብኩ), vis, UV and NIR light, resp.

²⁴ A homiliary datable to the late 15th or rather 16th century (NOSNITSIN 2013: 215f., fig. 95).

To substantiate our observation of the inks, we performed ink analysis with μ -X-ray fluorescence (XRF) spectrometer Artax, Bruker. It was possible to collect XRF spectra from the parchment and inked area at a number of locations. Fig. 4 shows variation of the intensity of the elements Ca, Fe, K, Mn and Zn along the line scan. As can be seen in fig. 4, the intensities of the elements Fe, Ca and K grow considerably when the inked area is reached and stay quite constant within this area. In contrast, the distributions of the elements Mn and Zn display a similar scatter in both areas. Enhanced intensity of iron in the inked area could be indicative of iron-gall inks. However, other metallic components typically found in the iron-gall inks produced from vitriol (i.e. Zn and Mn) do not belong to the ink in our case. Combining these results with the NIR images we conclude that non-carbon inks of the Məʿəsar Gwəhila cannot be unequivocally classified as common iron-gall inks. They could be plant inks with addition of iron, prepared according to a local recipe. It would be tempting to consider this practice as ancient, later substituted by carbon ink recipes, but, of course, more testing is needed to establish whether the ink composition correlates with the region of provenance or the age of the manuscript.

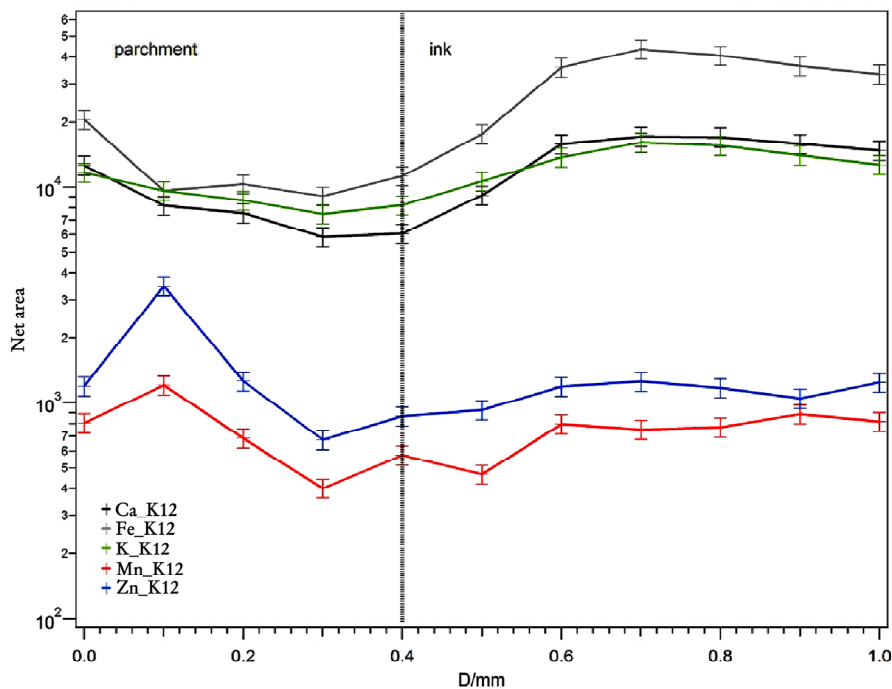


Fig. 4. Element distributions extracted from a μ -XRF line scan. Dotted line indicates the boundary between non-inked and inked areas

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Summary

The article presents a multidisciplinary analysis of an old fragment of a hymnody manuscript recently recorded in one of the ecclesiastic libraries of East Təgray. The handwriting on the fragment demonstrates pre-14th century palaeographic features. A peculiarity of the text is represented by the so-called “odd vocalization”, with many words vocalized in a way different from the standard Gəʿəz. The content of the fragment is a sequence of antiphons, some having been identified. A non-destructive material analysis, aimed at identifying the chemical components of the inks, revealed that the black ink used in the fragment is dissimilar from the common carbon inks attested in more recent manuscripts of the same ecclesiastic library. It does contain a high quantity of iron and a few other metals; however, it cannot be plainly identified as iron-gall-inks.