Studies in Ethiopian Languages, Literature, and History

Festschrift for Getatchew Haile
Presented by his Friends and Colleagues

Edited by
Adam Carter McCollum

2017

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Aethiopistische Forschungen

Begründet von

Ernst Hammerschmidt

Fortgeführt von

Siegbert Uhlig

Herausgegeben von

Alessandro Bausi

Band 83

2017

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

The ‘Golden Gospel’ of Ag^wäza and its Historical Documents¹

EWA BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA

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

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

1 The author is indebted to Jan Retsö for the translation of the document no. 5, see below. Thanks are also due to Michael Gervers for taking the excellent photographs of the manuscript.

2 The notion was adopted by the Christian iconography and the representation of luxuriously looking Gospel book appears in the scenes such as *Hetoimasia*—‘Empty Throne’, the ‘Divine Liturgy’ and became the customary attribute of Christ-Pantocrator, cf. Koep 1952; von Bogay 1971, 1189–1202; Wessel 1978, 119–131.

3 The selection of records is quoted in Heldman and Devens 2005, 93. However, it should be remembered that in Ethiopia the application of gold for any kind of decoration was minimal, ‘Gold’, *EAE*, II (2005), 832b–834a (N. Sobania) and the wording used in the sources suggests that ‘gold’ most probably refers to any kind of metal cover, including covers made of light, polished bronze or other yellowish metal.

4 ‘Wängelä Wärq’, *EAE*, IV (2010), 1130b–1032a (A. Bausi).

5 It seems that ‘Golden Gospels’ were seldom decorated with both miniatures and metal covers. In fact, we know of only two examples that match this description: the manuscript from Hayq Ḥayq Ḥayq dating 1290/91, whose metal covers, which have not been preserved, are mentioned in one of its notes, cf. Sergew Hable Sellase 1992, I, 252–255, and the manuscript from Abba Gärima, whose dating and provenance of decoration and covers are still under discussion, recently Bausi 2011, 17–22.

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

Ag^wäza is situated in the mountains of the Təgray province,⁸ and faces the northern cliffs of the Gär^calta region. There are two rock-cut churches at the place: the old one, now abandoned, on the summit of the mountain, and the new church at its foot, hewn in 1992. Both are dedicated to the Four Celestial Creatures (*Arba^cətu Īnsäsa*) and the Trinity (*Šəllase*). According to local tradition the upper church belonged to a monastic community known as Däbrä Šahəl, established by the Metropolitan Bärtälomewos, who is supposedly buried there.⁹ He was sent from Egypt to Ethiopia in 1399 and his long and eventful episcopate extended through the reign of seven kings.¹⁰ The monastery flourished until the nineteenth century, after which it went into gradual decline and eventually fell into disuse with death of the last monk, some 20 years ago.

6 Lindhal 2005–2008; Tewelde Medhin Joseph 1969–1970, I, 96; ‘Ag^wäza’, *E Ae*, V (2014), 224a–225a (E. Balicka-Witakowska). An enigmatic note in Mercier 2000, 44, quoted in Heldman and Devens 2005, 82, perhaps refers to Ag^wäza and its Golden Gospel.

7 Together with 10 other manuscripts. The photographic material was deposited at the Hill Museum & Microfilm Library, Collegeville, Minnesota. Unfortunately, the collection is neither accessible online nor catalogued; on the project, sponsored by the SIDA and directed by the author, see http://www2.lingfil.uu.se/projects/Dabra_SabelQ/.

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

9 According to another tradition the coffin with his body is kept in the *mäqdäs* of the Mädhane ‘Aläm church on Rema island, Lake Tana (Hammerschmidt 1973, 66).

10 Dawit I (1380–1412), Tewodros (1412–1413), Yəshaq (1413–1430), Īndäryas (1430), Täklä Maryam (1430–33), Šərwä Iyäsus (1443), ‘Amdä Iyäsus (1433) and Zär’a Ya^cqob (1434–68). The exact date of Bärtälomewos’s death is not known, but the last recorded reference to him while he was still alive is in a document dated 1438, cf. ‘Ethiopian Prelates’, *CE*, III–IV (1991), 999a–1044a (S. Tedeschi), here 1012–1013; ‘Bärtälomewos’, *E Ae*, I (2003), 485b–486a (G. Lusini). In addition to the documents quoted by the authors Bärtälomewos’s name appears in the manuscript of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Borgianus 26, dating to 1409, Grébaut and Tisserant 1935, 843; in the Gospel Book from Kəbran Gäbrä’el (Kəbran 1) dating around 1425, Hammerschmidt 1973, 87–88; and in a tri-lingual document (Coptic–Gə’əz–Arabic) added to a Gospel book kept in the church of Mädhane ‘Aläm in Lalibäla (the Coptic part is signed by Bärtälomewos and dated 29 May 1410), Schneider 1970, 82–83.

Among about 80 manuscripts owned by the community and presently kept in the lower church, half are fragments of old books.¹¹ The Golden Gospel is guarded in the house of the chef priest, together with an iron staff cross inlaid with brass and a hand cross with figural engravings, both, according to local tradition, once being the property of *abunä* Bärtälomewos.

Description of the Manuscript

The manuscript¹² is in good shape. It measures 315 x 205 x 95 mm and contains 177 folios gathered into 23 quaternion quires, with guard sheets added at the beginning and an additional folio inserted between pages 176 and 177.¹³ The quires, not numbered, are sown with an unidentified thread and when opened reveal two pairs of sewing stations.¹⁴ It is not clear how they are attached to the 15 mm thick wooden boards because the wood is entirely covered with light brown leather. The stamped pattern is very crude: a large, double frame filled with a diamond motif encloses the central panel, which is decorated with a large square outlined by a row of diagonal crosses. On the front and back covers the decoration is similar, but that on the back cover is more carefully executed. The spine was left plain. Very wide turn-ins mitred at the corners and pasted are decorated with double diagonal lines (Figs. 1, 17). The uncovered central part is inlaid with a piece of printed, blooming Indian chintz, differently patterned for the front and back covers but possibly cut from the same piece of cloth. The textiles may be tentatively dated to the mid-eighteenth century,¹⁵ to the same time that the covers were leathered. The thongs of the two slit-braid endbands are visible between the front cover and the first guard sheet (Fig. 1), their stitches being discernible on the spine. The bookblock and the cover are well preserved but the spine has become slightly concave and the fore-edge is bulging.

The layout of the pages was designed by pricking and ruling on the bifolia; the margins are wide.¹⁶ The pages of the main text and the Eusebian

11 Eventually all manuscripts were digitised as part of the SIDA project (see n. 7) before being cleaned and boxed or stored in envelopes.

12 Digitisation signum: DSAE-001.

13 I am not describing the structure of the quires here. This can be seen in the colour photographs accessible online, see n. 7.

14 One of the most typical Ethiopian methods of sewing quires, cf. Bozzacchi 1996, I, 333–339; see also Szirmai 1999, 4647.

15 The comparative material can be found in: Irwin and Brett 1970, esp. catalogue no. 24, pl. 20.

16 Approximately: lower – 40 mm, outer – 30 mm, upper – 20 mm.

Canon tables¹⁷ (ff. 2v–6v) have 29 and 32 lines respectively, divided into two columns separated by a space of about 10 mm. The ruling patterns on the bifolia decorated with painting seem to differ between the pages with the Canon tables and those with the miniatures. The ruled lines are hardly visible, which may explain why the text of the first and last pages of the pre-facing letter¹⁸ runs almost diagonally (Figs. 2, 3). The ruling was not used to shape the text grids for the tables, to straighten the architectural elements or to draw the miniature's frames.

The text of the Four Gospels is complete. The lections are marked in the upper margin¹⁹ in two different hands. One, carefully written with large characters and dark-red ink, begins with the word: *ar'astä mēnbab* or *mēnbab*—‘reading’, the other, in light red ink,²⁰ starts with a number and the word *bä-əntä*—‘on/for’ and is often preceded by a decorative curl. An extra help for finding the required section of text are the white and blue threads attached to the upper right corner of the pages.

The main text is written in a well-trained hand and reveals several characteristics of the fourteenth–fifteenth century script.²¹ Introducing each Gospel is a heading in the form of a simple horizontal band with the rubricated, inscribed title (Figs. 10–13). This band is embellished with horn- and cross-formed ornamentation executed in black and red ink. Moreover, the first six lines of both columns alternate in red and black ink. They are also marked by ornamental signs²² and a system of black and red lines and dots that run vertically in the inner and/or outer margins, occasionally in the inter-columnium. The punctuation marks ending the sentences are usually turned

17 They provide concordances indicating where passages that recur in different Gospels can be found in relation to one another. The main and still very useful work on the subject: Nordenfalk 1938 and Id. 1963, 17–34. On the Ethiopian Canon tables see Leroy 1962, 173–204; ‘Canon tables’, *EAE*, I (2003), 680a–681b (M. Heldman); Bausi 1998–2002, 45–67.

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

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

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

21 For instance, the loops of the letter *am* lie close to each other and the diacritical for the 7th order of *A* is attached directly to the letter. On this subject cf. Uhlig 1988, chapter 3; recently ‘Ethiopic palaeography’, *COMSt*, 287–291 (A. Bausi–D. Nosnitsin).

22 The forms that appear most often are: Latin cross with loop at the top (kind of *ankh*-cross); *XRho*-cross, suspended spiral, right and left turned ‘horn’. For the typical repertory of such the signs in the manuscripts dating to the fourteenth/fifteenth century, cf. Uhlig 1984, 318–328; Id. 1988 (n. 20), 204–205, 329–331.

into the rosettes through the addition of four red dots. Line fillers are composed of two groups of four dots connected by two streaks and written in black ink. Each Gospel ends with the entitled and numerated list of readings (*tituli*). Their numbers are rubricated and the title written within a decorative band. The numbers referring to the Canons are written in black in the inner margin and between the columns and usually are encircled by the decorative signs in red. These colours are also used to mark the endings which comprise aligned streaks and dots. No names in the text are highlighted in red.

Beside the main text, the manuscript contains five additional notes:

1. concerning a commemoration for King Zār'a Ya'qob, written on the second folio of the guarding sheets (IIva) (Fig. 14)
2. an undated donation, on the third folio of the guarding sheets (half size of the page cut vertically, IIIvb) (Fig. 15);
3. a donation of King Yəshāq for Agwāza, on folio inserted between folios 176 and 177 (three-quarters of the size of the page cut horizontally, VIv) (Fig. 16);
4. concerning the death of the Coptic Patriarch Gabriel, on folio 177rb (Fig. 16);
5. a free translation into Arabic of the document at 177ra, on folio 177v (Fig. 17).²³

The Miniatures

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

²³ In the section below on the documents, they are numerated as: 1 = document 3; 2 = document 4; 3 = document 1; 4 = document 2; 5 = document 5.

1. Canon tables²⁴

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

The text is enclosed within the architectural frames created by a decorative tympanum resting on two columns with parted curtains wrapped around their trunks. In the Christian symbolic language widely applied in the liturgy, the curtain that screens the holy of holies, that is the place of God's dwelling, separates the visible, terrestrial space from the invisible and celestial. In that context the open or drawn back curtains may be interpreted as admittance to participation in the divine revelation, here taking the form of the evangelical Good News.²⁵ The birds identified in the accompanying inscriptions²⁶ as *durra* (parrot), flank the tripod-vase at the top, while a long-tailed *ṭawos* (peacock) and *g^{wc}ṛa* (name obscure) pick the flowers in the vases placed close to the columns. The composition as the whole recalls the Garden of Paradise.

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

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

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

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

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

25 We find the Canon tables depicted in the same way as in our miniature in several Gospel Books dating to the fourteenth–sixteenth centuries. A large repertory of examples can be found in the database MS, search word: 'Canon tables'

26 The list of the birds' names appearing in the Ethiopian Canon tables with philological comments is to be found in Bausi, 1998–2001, 56–67. In our manuscript the names generally do not correspond with the species depicted.

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

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

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

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

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

The frame is richly ornamented. The columns support an arched tympanum adorned with interlaces and a large blooming plant. The tympanum is flanked by two thick twigs and surmounted by a huge, crescent-formed plant surrounding a vase filled with flowers picked by the *durra* birds. On either side of the arrangement there is a stylised fruit tree being picked by unnamed birds. The columns are flanked by the floral vases with sitting birds called *Kalā* 'another one'. At the top of the composition there are two caged birds designated as *šoma'atawit*—'anchorite', an allusion to the allegorical interpretation of Psalm 102: 7 recalling the Crucified Christ.²⁷ The addition of this element makes it clear that the decoration of this Canon is a part of a larger composition extending to the facing folio not only physically but also ideologically.

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

The representation, also called *Fons vitae* ('the Fountain of Life') is covered with multifaceted symbolic meanings related to baptism and resurrection, its iconography referring to the Holy Sepulchre and the paradisiacal Source of Life with its four rivers, i.e. the Gospels.²⁸ In our miniature, the edifice, the so-called *tholos*, is composed of four columns, which support a heavy,

²⁷ 'I am like a desert owl, like an owl among the ruins. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a housetop'; cf. Balicka-Witakowska 1990–1991, 140–158.

²⁸ Underwood 1950, 46–53, 104–107.

conical roof resting upon the curved cornice. It is surmounted by a cross and bordered by two large, scrolled plants ending in stylised and oversized blossoms. Between the columns, in the centre, hangs a knotted curtain symbolising the presence of God,²⁹ accompanied by an inscription that summarises the content of the Canons: 'the table of the concordance'.³⁰ A decorative, low lattice-work grill closes the intercolumniation.³¹ On either side of the edifice there is a cypress tree described as 'the tree of Paradise',³² in front of which stand two, long-horned hart or deer called *babula*.³³ Two peacocks with spread tails,³⁴ but labelled *sägon*, ('ostrich'), flank the cross at the top of the structure.

2. Christological cycle

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

The scene shows the early Christian type of the Crucifixion originating in the Holy Land and connected to the cult of the *loca sancta*. It shows the empty cross and Christ pictured symbolically in the guise of a lamb, accompanied by the inscription, 'Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world' (Jn 1:29). The sun and the moon, both anthropomorphised, flank the figure and are described as 'the sun when it darkened' (Lk 23:45) and 'the moon when it turned to blood' (Jo 3:3–4). The cross which is presented in the background on a red, triangular shaped representation of Golgotha, is flanked by two crucified thieves labelled 'the thief of the right side' and 'the thief of the left side', as well as by the lance-bearer and sponge-bearer respectively designated 'the soldier who pierced Him' and 'the soldier who gave Him drink the vinaigrette'.³⁵ The composition is

29 On the knotted curtain as an emblem of sacredness cf. Klauser 1960, 141f.

30 Abbreviation of the formula: *nubare śar'at zākāmā habru 'arba'atu wangell wängelawyan*, 'Tables of the arrangement how the Four Gospels agree'.

31 Most probably a reflection of the *tegurium* of the Holy Grave, represented, for instance, on some Palestinian ampoules, cf. Underwood 1950, 92–93.

32 On the cypress as the paradisiacal tree cf. Flemming 1972, 591–594.

33 They are rendered with their heads turned from the fountain, a misunderstanding of Psalm 42: 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul thirsts for God, for the living God', that is one of the textual sources of the image, cf. Domagalski 1990, 122–150. On the etymology of the *babula* cf. Bausi 1998–2001, 59–63.

34 Here to be understood as the symbol of incorruptibility, immortality and resurrection, Lotter 1929, 25–27; Kramer 1971, 409–411.

35 Balicka-Witakowska 1997.

framed and surmounted by a decorative arch, flanked by two stylised lilies or lotuses, the flowers symbolising the resurrection and eternal life.³⁶

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

In the centre, an angel holding a cross and described as 'the angel who overturned the stone' sits at the edge of the open tomb showing Christ's shroud inside. The short side of the tomb is depicted as a three-coloured square. Flanking the angel are two women carrying censers and perfume bottles and identified as Martha (to the left) and Mary (to the right).³⁷ Below, two soldiers armed with spears, swords and shields are rendered in half-figure. The inscription states: 'the soldiers who were at the tomb' and 'the lances and the swords'. The lamps hanging from the above suggest that the scene is inside the Holy Sepulchre, but the arch with three crosses may depict the cupola of the building from outside.³⁸ In the upper part of the picture the sun and moon are represented,³⁹ and the sky is bordered with intertwined floral bands.

Ascension (ff. 7v–8r) (Fig. 9)

The miniature follows the iconographical scheme combining the image of the *Maiestas Domini* with the illustration of the event described in the Gospels. The blessing Christ, a codex in his hand, sits inside the perfectly round mandorla carried by the Four Celestial Creatures, rendered as winged, half-figures.⁴⁰ They are identified by the customary inscription 'face of man' etc., but in addition their role as the bearers of God's throne is recalled by the text visible uppermost in the middle: 'the image of the throne'. Below the *Maiestas* stands Mary *orans* between two angels (Michael and Gabriel).⁴¹ The accompanying inscription reading 'the image of Mary, shall her prayer be with us forever, amen' makes it clear that she is not only the witness of the Ascension

36 On the symbolism of the lily/lotus flower cf. Desroches Noblecourt 1991, 27–28.

37 The problem of this person's identity is discussed in Lepage 1987, 159–196, esp. 176–179.

38 Heldman 1979, 107–121, esp. 114, makes an attempt to interpret these elements.

39 Their presence, as well as that of three crosses under the arcade, connect this scene with the Crucifixion. Such a composition seems to be characteristic of the whole group of the Gospels that has the Christological cycle depicted in three scenes, see n. 51.

40 This early iconographical tradition is presented in Crozet 1953, 53–63 and Bourguet 1959, 3–25; on the Ethiopian representations cf. Chojnacki 1981, 159–181; Lepage and Gire 1976, 84–88, 96–101.

41 *Ibid.* 75–79.

but is also the symbolic figure for the praying *ecclesia*.⁴² Two rows of young figures pointing towards Christ and described as ‘twelve apostles, how they looked at His Ascension’ connect the scene to the biblical narrative. They are placed on the facing page—an arrangement without a parallel in Ethiopian material.⁴³

3. The Evangelists (ff. 8v, 63v, 93v, 171v) (Figs. 10–13)

Although the four Evangelists resemble each other, all are represented standing frontally and holding the codex with the inscription ‘the Holy Gospel’, the painter gave them some individual features by differentiating their ages and patterns of dress. He used two types of frames to present the figures: either a three-lobed arcade or a fanciful pediment formed of two intertwined, highly stylised floral scrolls⁴⁴ supported by two columns, and, in the case of Luke, by two staff crosses.

The garments of the Evangelists, a tunic and a draped mantel, despite advanced stylisation echo Late Antique models.⁴⁵ It is rare, for all the Evangelists to be rendered as standing persons.⁴⁶ Commonly, some are depicted as sitting at a desk and engaged in writing, a form that dominates from the mid-fifteenth century, with standing Evangelists being, with minor exceptions, eliminated.

* * *

In the painting of the miniatures, all by the same hand,⁴⁷ six basic colours were used: red, yellow, dark green, brown, dark blue and black, the natural

⁴² Wessel 1955, 315–334.

⁴³ As the double-sided miniatures are customarily composed the scenes: the Entry into Jerusalem and the Miracle in Cana, rarely the Massacre of the Innocents.

⁴⁴ A similar arrangement can be observed in the fifteenth-century miniature representing John the Evangelist on a single folio in the Robert McCarthy Collection, London, cf. Mercier 2000, 60 which on stylistic ground is connected with the portraits of the Evangelists in the Gospel Book from the church of Abba Pāntālewōn in Aksum, cf. database MS, MG-2005.168:004-016.

⁴⁵ Friend 1927, 115–147; Id. 1929, 3–29. On the Ethiopian representations ‘Evangelists in Art’, *EAE*, II (2005), 460b–463a (M. Heldman).

⁴⁶ Another example is the early fourteenth-century Gospel Book kept in the church of Dābrā Šəyon in Gär‘alta, cf. database MS, MG-2004.141:026-036.

⁴⁷ Since each portrait of the Evangelist is painted on a single leaf inserted at the beginning of the relevant quire and the Canon tables followed by the Christological cycle occupy the whole quire, we may surmise that the miniatures were executed independently from the text and that the painter and the scribe were most probably different persons.

tone of the parchment serving as white. Applied on the differently tinted backgrounds they produced several hues such as grey-blue and beige, resulting in total in a large colour palette. The miniatures are executed with varying care, and some of the craftsmanship is really sloppy. The striking lack of skills reveals the crooked lines of the Canon's grids. The frames and architectural elements are seldom straight and the colours are in part unevenly distributed. On the other hand, all circular forms are very precisely traced, because the painter used a kind of bow compass.⁴⁸ His human figures are very sketchy, but he was not totally devoid of artistic aptitude as witness the fanciful ornaments and originality of colour compositions. The red dots on the cheeks and forehead of the three first evangelists and the bodies of all figures drawn in red, show a dependence on models that adopted some stylistic features from Islamic art. The intricate ornamentations may originate from the same source.⁴⁹

* * *

The Agwāza manuscript, executed about 1430,⁵⁰ shares several characteristic with two groups of Ethiopian Gospel Books dating between the end of the thirteenth and the end of the fifteenth centuries and generally also serving as Golden Gospels. They applied two types of illustration related to the text's narrative, the life of Christ. The first, presently known from nine examples,⁵¹ always contains three scenes from the Passion cycle, the same as appear in the Agwāza manuscript. It has been established that this illustration concept, as well as the iconography of the miniatures, drew on Early Christian schemes spread by the pilgrim tokens produced in the Holy Land, such

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

49 Balicka-Witakowska 2009–2010, 109–131.

50 See *infra* document 5, p. 175 and Fig. 17, p. 190.

51 To that group belong the manuscripts listed (with selected bibliography) in: Balicka-Witakowska 1997 and Heldman and Devens 2005, 77–99. They are: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, éth. 32; Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, W.836; Däbrä Libanos (Aṣbo), London, Sam Fogg collection; fragments kept in Addis Abāba, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Ms. 2475; fragments divided between Stockholm, National Museum, B 2034 and the collection of Sam Fogg, C. Griffith Mann, *Art of Ethiopia*, Published to accompany an exhibition at Pace Wildenstein, New York, 18–29 October 2005 (London: Sam Fogg Rare Books & Manuscripts, 2005), 80–81. To this list of known manuscripts should be added the following recently discovered: the Gospels in Däbrä Šārabi, cf. database MS, MG-2004:009-036; MG-2004:100:016-019; the fragment in 'Ura Qirqos, cf. database MS, MG-2005:138:093-102.

as ampoules, bracelets, rings and possibly icons.⁵² The second type, identified in some 20 manuscripts,⁵³ followed Byzantine models and multiplied the events from Jesus' life to about 20 scenes. Since several of the manuscripts illustrated in one or the other way may be relatively precise dated, it is possible to observe that the first, or 'Palestinian' type, gradually disappeared during the fourteenth century, while the second, 'Byzantine' type, survived into the first third of the sixteenth century.

Although the *Agwāza Gospels* was composed at a time when the 'Byzantine' type of illustration flourished, the manuscript seems to adopt more stylistic and iconographical features from the declining 'Palestinian' redaction. The similarities are more conspicuous in the narrative scenes than in the highly standardised decoration of the Canon tables. The Crucifixion, although placed within the simple, squared frames characteristic of the multi-scene cycles, added the arch and the floral elements borrowed from an architectural setting of 'Palestinian' type. From the same model derive the shape of the landscape (although reduced to the hill of Golgotha), the naked thieves and the soldier who is just carrying the lance instead of using it, making him resemble the pilgrim figures depicted on souvenirs from the Holy Land.⁵⁴ The Holy Women at the Tomb show the link even more clearly, because the scene appears only in the short cycle, being simply omitted from the long ones.⁵⁵ Finally, the Ascension, although diverging from Palestinian iconography, through the addition of the apostles belonging to the long-cycle

52 The subject is discussed in: Heldman 1979; Lepage 1987; Balicka-Witakowska 1997, 123–133.

53 To the manuscripts listed in Balicka-Witakowska 1997, the following should be added: the fragment from *Ahəya Fäḡḡ*, cf. Spencer 1993, 77–78, Fig. IX and database MS, DS-1973.007:001-004; *Gäbrä Krəstos*, Dagna, cf. MS, MG-2006:076:010-080:010 and Chojnacki 2009, 28–32, Figs. 3a, 3b; Oslo, Schøyen Collection, MS no. 2113, cf. Mercier 2000, 55; manuscript of *Amba Gəṣān*, cf. Spencer 1967, 95–108 and MS, DS-1972.001:001 – 002:001; *Qālaqəl Şəyon Maryam*, cf. database MS, EBW-2005.137:001 – 002:001; *Kəbran*, cf. MG-2006.049:001-032; *Bärbär Maryam*, cf. database MS, EF-2007.017:026-086; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, MS Rogers Found 1998:66, cf. Evans 2004, 441.

54 The detailed discussion of all these elements in Heldman 1979; Lepage 1987; Balicka-Witakowska 1997.

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

redaction,⁵⁶ in the main shows the scene as it derives from the early Christian model. It is also notable that the portraits of the standing Evangelists in classical garment appear more often in the manuscripts relating the short Christological cycle, especially that type enclosed in the tri-lobed frame.⁵⁷

The date of the manuscript's production allows us to suppose that the painter had deliberately chosen to follow the Palestinian prototype of illustration and iconography, most probably because of its highly esteemed antiquity and links to the *loca sancta* of the Holy Land.⁵⁸ Yet, he did not fully turn his back on the trends current in his lifetime, as indicated, for instance, in the wide range of colors, his attempts to give the depicted figures some individuality, the daring stylisation and the element of flexibility in changing the schemes and iconographical rules.

Documents

I am providing here the Ethiopic texts⁵⁹ along with translations, as well as a short summary of the contents to enable the historians and church historians to pursue further investigations.

Document 1 [fol. IVv] (Fig. 16)

በስመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ አምላክ ፡ ዕበይ ፡ ለእግ
ዚአብሔር ፡ እስከ ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ኃይል ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ ተጽሕፈ ፡ መጽሐ
ፈ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ዘወሀበ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ይስሐቅ ፡ ወስመ ፡ መንግሥቱ ፡ ንብ
ረ ፡ መስቀል ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ኢትዮጵያ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ያኑን ፡ መዋዕሊሁ ፡ ወያ
ጽንዕ ፡ መንግሥቶ ፡ ወያግርር ፡ ፀሮ ፡ ወጸላዕቱ ፡ ታሕተ ፡ እገሪሁ ። ወሀበ ፡
ዘንተ ፡ ወንጌል ፡ ወጉለተ ፡ ወወሰከ ፡ ጉልተ ፡ አገዛ ፡ ወዘቀዳሚ ፡ ጉልት ፡
[...] ወግረ ፡ መሐርጽ ፡ መሕጸየ ፡ አዋልድ ፡ [...]: 60 ዐድ ፡ እውዕርት ፡ ጉለተ ፡
ከመ ፡ ይኩኖ ፡ ለተዝካሩ ፡ ሎቱ ፡ ወሀበ ፡ ለመካነ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ሣህል ። ወኢለኣ

56 In these representations, two angels are not depicted.

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

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

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

60 Erased words; further instances of erasure are marked in the same way in both text and translation.

ሐዱ፡ ስልጣን፡ ከመ፡ ያውጽእ፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌል፡ እም[ው]እተ፡ ደብረ፡ ሣህል፡ ወእመቦ፡ ዘሂደ፡ ወአውፅአ፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌል፡ ወዘነየለ፡ ወዘሂደ፡ ውእቶን፡ ጉልተ፡ ይኩን፡ ርጉመ፡ ወውጉዘ፡ ወይኩን፡ መክፈልቱ፡ ምስለ፡ ቃያል፡ ቀታሊ፡ ወምስለ፡ ይሁዳ፡ ዕልው፡ አግባኤ፡ እግዚኡ፡ ወይኩን፡ ውጉዘ፡ በአፈ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አምላክነ፡ ወእምአፈ፡ አጋእዝቲነ፡ ፲ወ፪፡ ሐዋርያት፡ ወእምአፈ፡ አበዊነ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፰፡ እለ፡ ተጋብሑ፡ በሀገረ፡ ንቅያ፡ ወእምአፋሆሙ፡ ለክልኤ፡ ምእት፡ እለ፡ በኤፌሶን፡ ወእምአፈ፡ ሊቀ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ አባ፡ ገብርኤል፡ ወጳጳስነ፡ አባ፡ በርተሎሜዎስ፡ ወእምአፋየ፡ እነ፡ ነዳይ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶስ፡ ዘሀገረ፡ ስንድፋ፡ ጸሐፍኩ፡ በትእዛዘ፡ ንጉሥ፡ [...] ይስሐቅ፡ ተጽሕፈ፡ አመ፡ ፴፡ ለወርጎ፡ ጥር፡ በዓመት፡ ፲፻፡ ወ፪፻ወ፵፡ ለሰማዕታት፡ ንጹሓን፡ ይጸግወነ፡ በረከቶሙ፡ አሜን፡ [...] ላህመ፡ ወሀብኩ፡ ለተዝካርየ፡⁶¹

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, one God. Glory to God forever. Power to God. (This) Gospel book was written and given (to Däbrä Šahəl) by Lord King Yəshaq⁶² (whose) royal name (is) Gäbrä Mäsqäl, king of Ethiopia. May God prolong his days and strengthen his kingdom, and throw his adversary and enemy under his feet. He gave this Gospel and granted and enlarged the *g^wəlt*⁶³ of Ag^wäza, (in addition to?) that which was the primary *g^wəlt*, [...] Wägrä Mäharəṣ, Mähšäyā Awälədd [...] (whereas?) ‘Ad Aw^cort he allotted (it) that it should be for the commemoration of him (and) gave (it) to the place of Däbrä Šahəl.⁶⁴ Nobody (has) the authority to take out this Gospel book from Däbrä Šahəl. If anybody steals this Gospel book and takes (it) out, and (thereby) violates (against this command) and thieves these *g^wəlt*, may he be cursed and excommunicated. May his lot be with Cain the murderer and with Judas the wicked, the betrayer of his Lord, and may he be excommunicated by the mouth of the Holy Trinity, our God, and by the mouths of our lords the 12 Apostles, and by the mouths of our 318 Fathers who assembled in the city of Nicaea, and by the mouths of the two hundred who (assembled) in Ephesus, and by the mouth of

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

62 Reigned 1414–1429.

63 The term refers to land tenure or granted fief, ‘G^wəlt’, *EAE*, II (2005), 941b–943b (D. Crummey).

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

our *pappas abba* Gäbräʾel,⁶⁵ and our *pappas abba* Bärtälomewos, and by my mouth, me, the poor Mikaʾel, bishop of the city of Šandäfa.⁶⁶ I have written (this) by the order of King [...] Yəšhaq. It was written on the 30th of the month of *Tərr* in the year 1440 of (the Era of) the Pure Martyrs. May their blessing be our grace. Amen. [...] I have given a cow for my commemoration.

The text, which closely follows the pattern characteristic for the early Ethiopian charters,⁶⁷ was written by a trained scribe. He states that the Gospel book was executed during the time of King Yəšhaq and given by the latter to the monastery of Däbrä Šahəl. The gift was accompanied by land donations and in reward the king expected the monks to offer the commemorative prayers or services on his behalf.⁶⁸ The document is precisely dated but the statement about the year is mistaken. Firstly, calculated according to the 'Era of the Martyrs',⁶⁹ the event would have occurred in the year 1723/1724 CE. Secondly, even if the scribe had in mind the 'Year of the Incarnation', the calculation still gives us a wrong year, 1447/48 CE, which is 17 years after Yəšhaq's death, although he seems to have been alive when the document was written. The problem can be solved with help of the date appearing in the Arabic synopsis of the document which has the year 1140.⁷⁰ Consequently we can presume that the scribe put number 4 (ḏ) instead of 1 (ā) or that his 1 does not differ from 4. In any case the year of the document must be 1424 CE.

Another problem concerns the names of the scribe. He presents himself as Mikaʾel, the bishop of Šandafa who, as we learn from the texts of the *Miracles of Mary*, was sent in 1437 to Ethiopia with three Coptic Church dignitaries

65 Gabriel V, the 88th Alexandrian patriarch (1409–1428), cf. 'Gabriel V', *CE*, IV (1991), 1130a–1133a (K. Samir).

66 Šandafa in Egypt is situated in the northern part of the Delta close to the famous monastery of Məṭmaq (al-Maḡṭas), cf. Maspero and Wiet 1919, 164. I am indebted to Denis Nösnitsin for identification of this place; on Mikaʾel, cf. 'Dayr al-Maḡṭis', *CE*, III (1991), 819 (R.-G. Coquin).

67 Huntingford 1965, 4–27, with many examples.

68 It would be interesting to compare that document with the still unpublished note on the land donations made by king Yəšhaq to the monastery of Däbrä Mäʿar that is written in its Golden Gospel.

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

70 See *infra* document 5, p. 175 and Fig. 17, p. 190.

by the successor of the Patriarch Gabriel, John XI (1428–1453).⁷¹ The legates spent one year in the country and apparently passed Däbrä Šahəl. We may surmise that on this occasion Mika'el, who obviously knew Gə'əz, was asked to write, or rather rewrite, the act of donation which was inserted into the Golden Gospel and that he also composed its synopsis in Arabic found on the last page of the book. In the Ethiopic document he added his name in the place of the anonymous scribe of the original text at the end of the sanction clauses, but not in the Arabic version.⁷² Consequently the sentence which follows the sanction clauses: 'I have written (this) by the order of King [...] Yəshaq' does not refer to Mika'el, but to the first scribe.

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

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

አመ : ፲ : ለወርኅ : ጥር : ተዝካረ : ዕረፍቱ : ለቅዱስ : ወብፁዕ : አባ : ገብር
ኤል : ሊቀ : ጳጳሳት : ዘእስክንድርያ : እምኢየሩሳሌም : ዘፈነወ : ሎቱ : ርእ
ሰ : ማርቆስ : ሐዋርያ : ወንጌላዊ : ለንጉሠ : ኢትዮጵያ : ይስሐቅ : ዘተሰም
የ : ገብረ : መስቀል : ወልደ : ዳዊት : ውእቱኒ : አዘዘ : ከመ : ይገብሩ : ተዝ
ካሩ : ወይሥርዑ : አርብዓሁ ።

On the 10th of the month of *Tərr* the commemoration (took place) of the dormition of the holy and blessed *abba* Gäbrä'el, the Patriarch of Alexandria, from Jerusalem, who sent the 'head' of Mark the Apostle (and) Evangelist, to the King of Ethiopia, Yəshaq, who was (also) called Gäbrä Mäsqäl, the son of Dawit. He then gave orders to make his commemoration and they arranged the *arbə'a*⁷³ for him.

The document concerns the commemorative services for the Coptic Patriarch Gabriel, most probably performed 40 days after his death (in 1428) by the monks of Däbrä Šahəl. It is not clear who gave the order for the commemoration, King Yəshaq or the Metropolitan Bärtälomewos. In this text the latter is

71 Cerulli 1943, 200–201.

72 See *infra* document 5, p. 175 and Fig. 17, p. 190.

73 Lit. 'forty'; here the funeral rites 40 days after the death of the deceased.

not simply called *pappas* but solemnly referred to as 'the head of Mark the Apostle'.⁷⁴ The document seems to be written by the same scribe as the document 1, which means that most probably it was added in 1437 or 1438.

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

አመ : ፲ : ወ፬ : ለሐምሌ : እንዘ : ሀሎ : ንጉሥነ : ዘርአ : ያዕቆብ : በደብረ : ብርሃን : ተጽሕፈ : ዘከመ : ይገብሩ : ተዝካሩ : መምህራን : ዘትግራይ : ለንጉሥነ : ዘረአ : ያዕቆብ : ዘተሰምየ : ቈስጠንጢኖስ ። ዜና : ገብርኤል : ዘደብረ : ሣህል : አመ : ፳ወ፬ : ለየካቲት : ፯ : እታላም ። ከመዝ : ይግበር : ተዝካርየ : ዜና : ገብርኤል : ንቡረ : እድ : ዘደብረ : ሣህል : በከመ : ተጽሕፈ : ውስተ : ዝንቱ : መጽሐፍ : እንበለ : አጽርዖ ። ወለእመ : አጽርዑ : ንቡራነ : እድ : ዘደብረ : ሣህል : እምዜና : ገብርኤል : ወእለሂ : ይመጽኡ : እምድኅ ፊሁ : ንቡራነ : እድ : ዘደብረ : ሣህል : ውጉዛነ : ለይኩኑ : በአፈ : አብ : ወወልድ : ወመንፈስ : ቅዱስ : ወይኩኑ : ውፁአነ : እምኩሉ : ጸጋ : ዘይሁብ : እግዚአብሔር : ለእንለ : እመሕያው : በቃለ : እግዚአብሔር : ለዓለመ : ዓለም : አሜን ።

On the 14th of *Ḥamle*, when Zār'a Ya'qob⁷⁵ was our king, it was written in Däbrä Bərhan⁷⁶ that the teachers of Təgray should make a commemoration for our king Zār'a Ya'qob, who was called Qwästäntinos. Zena Gäbrä'el of Däbrä Šahəl on the 24th of *Yäkkatit* (received) 7 *atalam*.⁷⁷ Thus may Zena Gäbrä'el, *nəburä 'əd*⁷⁸ of Däbrä Šahəl, make commemoration for me [Zār'a Ya'qob], as has been written in this book, unless he [Zār'a Ya'qob] revokes it. If *nəburanä 'əd* of Däbrä Šahəl, (starting) with Zena Gäbrä'el, (and including) those who come after him (as) *nəburanä 'əd* of Däbrä Šahəl annul it, may they be excommunicated by the mouth of the Father and of the Son and the

74 That is an Ethiopian metropolitan who was sent from Alexandria, in this case *abba* Bärtälomewos. The expression cannot be understood literally because the well-known legend of St Mark's relics makes no mention of Mark's head being sent to Ethiopia. Regarding the representation of St. Mark's head in the Gospel book of abbot Iyäsus Mo'a, cf. Heldman 1983, 554–568.

75 Reigned 1434–1468.

76 Monastery and town founded by Zār'a Ya'qob, Perruchon 1899, 53, 56–57, 69–73.

77 Measurement unit mostly used for grain, Pankhurst 1969, 117; 'Ēntälam', *EAE*, II (2005), 318b (R. Pankhurst).

78 Title of high ranking ecclesiastic administrator connected to a major church or monastery. Under Zār'a Ya'qob's time they were members of ecclesiastic administration promoted by the king, cf. 'Nəburä 'əd', *EAE*, III (2007), 1161a–1162a (D. Nosnitisin).

Holy Spirit. And may they be deprived of any grace that God would give to people by the Word of God, for ever and ever. Amen.

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

Document 4 (fol. IIIvb) (Fig. 15)

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

I am Pāwlos son of Abrəham. I have had a splendid thought and ascended⁷⁹ to this Däbrä Šahəl, and was admitted by the monks. I say: 'Remember me and take the contribution (payment?) for the Four (Celestial) Creatures and for the Apostles,⁸⁰ and make commemoration for them that they may remember me in their prayers for ever and ever, amen. Let them make the commemoration, together with⁸¹ our father Ḑstifanos'.

The document records an offering of unknown character and value to the monastic church of Däbrä Šahəl, made by a certain Pāwlos. Seemingly, he climbed to the monastery in order to hand over the gift personally. It is interesting to note that the church was already primarily dedicated to the

79 Read **ዐረጉ < ዐረግኩ**.

80 Both names refer to the dedication of the church and its *tabotat*, that is the altar slabs dedicated to the patron/patrons of the church, cf. 'Tabot', *EAE*, IV (2010), 802a–804a (M. Heldman).

81 Written twice.

Four Celestial Creatures⁸² as it is today, while the second dedication, to the Apostles, was changed to a dedication to the Trinity. The last sentence of the document can be understood in two ways: either the grantor has added the saint, *abba* Ḥṣṭifanos,⁸³ to his intercessors, or Ḥṣṭifanos was the name of the abbot of the monastery at the time, and the grantor wishes him to join the monks in commemorative prayer.

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

Document 5 (fol. 177v) (Fig. 17)

Translated by Jan Retsö

بسم الاب والابن والروح القدس الاله الواحد
العظمة لله العزة القوة للرب
هذا ما اوقف وحبس وابد وخلد السيد
الملك اسحق جبر مصقل ملك ملوك الحبشه
ادام الرب حياته وخلد مملكته ويجمع اعداه
تحت اقدامه امين تذكارا له ولولد ولده [...]
على دير دبر سهل وما لاحد سلطان من قبل
انجيل سيدنا يسوع المسيح ان يخرج هذا ال
المقدس عن الدير المذكور لوجه من الوجوه ولاسبب
من الاسباب ومن حرّ واخرجه يكون محروم
ملعون ويكون نصيبه مع قايين القاتول ويأهوذا
مسلم سيده +
[...] فم الثالث المقدس ومن فم سادتنا التلاميذ

82 The cult of the Four Celestial Creatures flourished in the fifteenth century and was supported by King Zār'a Ya'qob. Readings about them were added to the Ethiopian Synaxary (8 *Ḥadar*). It was probably for these reasons that several churches at the time dedicated their altar slabs to the Four Celestial Creatures, our church among them.

83 'Ḥṣṭifanos', *E Ae*, II (2005), 390a–391b (S. Kaplan and D. Nosnitsin).

ومن فم الآبا الثلثماه وثمانيه عشر
 المجتمعين بمدينة نقيه ومن فم المائتي المجتمعين بافسس ومن فم الاب
 البطريك ابا غبريال ومن فم الاب الطاهر[المطران ابا برتلوماوس ومن فم دفتره
 المسكين سطرها +
 وعلى بني الطاعه تحل البركه والسيح لله دائما ابدا
 كتبه الحقير ميخائيل خادم [...] صندفا
 كان سلخ شهر طوبه سنة α,ρ̄m̄

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, the only one God. The might belongs to God and the strength and the power to the Lord. This is what the Lord Ishāq Gabra Maṣqal, the king of kings of Ethiopia, entrusted, bequeathed, made lasting and perpetuated—may the Lord make his life long and his kingdom eternal, laying his enemies under his feet, amen, as a memory for himself and the son of his son [...] to the monastery of Dabra Sāhil.⁸⁴ No one has authority (through) our Lord Jesus Christ to bring this Holy Gospel out from the mentioned monastery in any way or by any reason. The one who ventures and brings it out, may he be condemned and cursed; may his lot be together with Cain, the murderer, and Judas, the deliverer of his Lord +⁸⁵ [and may he be cursed from] the mouth of the Holy Trinity and from the mouth of our Lords the Apostles and from the mouth of the three hundred and eighteen fathers gathered in the city of Nicaea, and from the mouth of the two hundred gathered in Ephesus and from the mouth of the father the Patriarch Abā Ghabriāl and from the mouth of the virtuous father the Metropolitan Abā Bārtulūmāwus and from the mouth of the humble *daftara* who wrote this +.⁸⁶ And may the blessing dwell over the children of obedience. Praise be to God always, ever. The humble Mikhāʾīl,

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

85 The cross put above the last words marks the place where the text written in the inner margin should be inserted. It ends with the words: 'the humble *daftara* who wrote this' and corresponds to the lines 16–21 in the Gəʿəz version.

86 *Daftara* should be understood here as *dābtāra*, i.e. an educated cleric but not ordained (cf. 'Dābtāra', *EAE*, II (2005), 53b–54b (S. Kaplan)) and relates to the anonymous scribe who wrote the document during the time of king Yəshaq.

the servant of [?] Šandafā the Lord in truth, wrote this.⁸⁷ It was in the end of the month of *Tūbah* in the year 1140.⁸⁸

Abbreviations

- CE* Aziz Atiya, ed., *Coptic Encyclopedia*, I–IV (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1991).
COMSt A. Bausi et al., eds, *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies: An Introduction* (Hamburg: Tredition, 2015)
E Ae S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; S. Uhlig in collaboration with A. Bausi, eds, IV: O–X; A. Bausi in collaboration with S. Uhlig, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2014).
LChI K. Wessel, ed., *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, I–VII (Rom–Freiburg: Herder, 1968–74).
MS database *Māzgäbä Se'elat*: <http://128.100.218.174:8080/doCmd.jsp>; Id & password: student
RBK K. Wessel and M. Restle, eds, *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966–).

Bibliography

- Balicka-Witakowska, E. 1990–1991. 'L'Oiseau dans la cage: un exemple éthiopien', *Orientalia Suecana*, 40–41 (1990–1991), 140–158.
 – 1997. *Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien: Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive* (Wiesbaden–Warszawa: ZAS-PAN, 1997).
 – 2009–2010. 'Influence of Islamic Art on Ethiopian Artistic Tradition', in A. Gori and B. Scarcia Amoretti, eds, *L'Islam in Etiopia: Bilanci e Prospettive*, *Civiltà del Mediterraneo*, 16–17, Numero monografico (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2009–2010), 109–131.
 Bausi, A. 1998–2001. 'Some Short Remarks on the Canon Tables in Ethiopic Manuscripts', *Studi Magrebini*, 26 (1998–2002), 45–67.

⁸⁷ A small word is written over the junction between *khādim* 'servant' and Šandafā, which however, is not legible. The Gə'əz version has *Mika'el epis qopos zä 'āhgurā* (sic!) *Šandafa*, but the word 'bishop' does not seem to occur in the Arabic which instead has *al-ḥaqīr*, 'humble', 'miserable', a title of priests. The Arabic version further mentions the names Dābrā Sahil, Ephesos and Nicaea corresponding to the Gə'əz version but no other names.

⁸⁸ The date should be understood as 30 *Tūbah* 1140 of the Era of the Martyrs, that is 26 January 1426 CE. 30 *Tūbah* corresponds with 30 *Tərr* in the Ethiopian document. The author's thanks are due to Father Ugo Zanetti for clarification of that matter.

- 2011. 'The 'True Story' of the Abba Gärima Gospels', *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter*, 1 (2011), 17–22.
- Bourguet, P. 1959. 'Les 'symboles des quatre évangélistes' ou l'énigme des quatre 'êtres vivants' de l'Apocalypse dans l'iconographie chrétienne', *La Revue réformée*, 10/37 (1959), 3–25.
- Bozzacchi, G. 1996. 'La legatura etiopica', in M. Regini and P.G. Tordella, eds, *Conservazione dei materiali librari, archivistici e grafici*, I (Torino: Umberto Allemandi & Co, 1996), 333–339.
- Cerulli, E. 1943. *Il Libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del medio evo latino*, Studi orientali pubblicati a cura della scuola orientale, 1 (Roma: Dott. Giovanni Bardi Editore, 1943).
- Chojnacki, S. 1981. 'The Four Living Creatures of the Apocalypse and the Imagery of the Ascension in Ethiopia', *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte*, 23 (1981), 159–181.
- 2009. *Christ Resurrection in Ethiopian Painting*, Orientalia Christiana Analecta, 282 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2009).
- Crozet, R. 1953. 'Les representations anthropo-zoomorphique des évangélistes (VI^e–IX^e siècles)', in *Études mérovingiennes. Actes des Journées de Poitiers, 1^{er}–3 mai 1952* (Paris: A. et J. Picard, 1953), 53–63.
- Desroches Noblecourt, C. 1991. 'Le langage symbolique des lys, papyrus et lotus, dans l'Égypte ancienne', *Bulletin mensuel de l'Académie des sciences et lettres de Montpellier*, 22 (1991), 27–28.
- Domagalski, B. 1990. *Der Hirsch in spätantiker Literatur und Kunst: unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der frühchristlichen Zeugnisse*, Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband, 15 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1990), 122–150.
- Evans, H.C. 2004. *Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Museum of Art–New Haven, CO–London: Yale University Press, 2004).
- Flemming, J. 1972. 'Zypress', *LChI*, 5 (1972), 591–594.
- Friend, A.M. jr. 1927. 'The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts', *Art Studies: Medieval, Renaissance and Modern*, 5 (1927), 115–147.
- 1929. 'The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts', *Art Studies: Medieval, Renaissance and Modern*, 7 (1929), 3–29.
- Grébaut, S. and E. Tisserant 1935. *Codices Æthiopici Vaticani et Borgiani, Barberinianus Orientalis 2, Rossianus 865*, I–II (In Bybliothea Vaticana, 1935–1936).
- Hammerschmidt, E. 1973. *Äthiopische Handschriften vom Tānāsee, I: Reisebericht und Beschreibung der Handschriften in dem Kloster des heiligen Gabriel auf der Insel Kebran*, Katalogisierung der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland, 20/1 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1973).
- Heldman, M.E. 1983. 'An Ethiopian Miniature of the Head of St. Mark: Egyptian Influence at the Monastery of St. Stephen, Ḥayq', in S. Segert and A. Bogrolieti, eds, *Ethiopian Studies Dedicated to Wolf Leslau* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1983), 554–568.
- and M. Devens 2005. 'The Four Gospels of Dabra Mā'ar: Colophon and Note of Donation', in D. Nonsnitsin et al., eds, *Varia Aethiopica in Memory of Sevir B. Chernetsov*

- (1943–2005), *Scrinium: Revue de patrologie, d'hagiographie critique et d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 1 (St. Pétersbourg: Byzantinorossica, 2005), 77–99.
- Huntingford, G.B.W. 1965. *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1965), 4–27.
- Irwin, J. and K.B. Brett 1970. *Origins of Chintz: With a Catalogue of Indo-European Cotton-paintings in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), 1970).
- Klauser, T. 1960. 'Der Vorhang vor dem Thron Gottes', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, 3 (1960), 141–142.
- Kramer, J. 1971, 'Pfau', *LChI*, 3 (1971), 409–411.
- Koep, L. 1952. *Das himmlische Buch in Antike und Christentum*, Theophaneia, 8 (Bonn: Hanstein, 1952).
- Lepage, C. and J. Gire 1976. 'Dieu et les Quatres Animaux Célestes dans l'ancienne peinture éthiopienne', *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de la civilisation éthiopienne*, 7 (1976), 84–88, 96–101.
- 1987. 'Reconstitution d'un cycle protobyzantin à partir des miniatures de deux manuscrits éthiopiens du XIV^e siècle', *Cahiers archéologiques*, 35 (1987), 159–196.
- Leroy, J. 1962. 'Recherches sur la tradition iconographique des Canons d'Eusèbe en Ethiopie', *Cahiers archéologiques*, 12 (1962), 173–204.
- Lindhal, B. 2005–2008. *Local History of Ethiopia* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2005–2008) (online publication: http://www.nai.uu.se/library/resources/dossiers/local_history_of_ethiopia/; last access: 2 February 2016).
- Lothar, H. 1929. *Der Pfau in der altchristlichen Kunst: Eine Studie über das Verhältnis von Ornament und Symbol* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1929).
- Maspero, J. and G. Wiet 1919. *Matériaux pour servir à la géographie de l'Égypte*, Mémoires publiés par les membres de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 36 (Le Caire: l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1919).
- Mercier, J. 2000. *L'Arche éthiopienne. Art chrétien d'Éthiopie (Catalogue d'exposition, Paris, Pavillon des Arts, 27 septembre 2000–7 janvier 2001)* (Paris: Musées, 2000).
- Nordenfalk, C. 1938. *Die spätantiken Kanontafeln: Kunstgeschichtliche Studien über die eusebianische Evangelien-Konkordanz in den vier ersten Jahrhunderten ihrer Geschichte*, I–II (Göteborg: Isacson, 1938).
- 1963. 'The Apostolic Canon Tables', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 62 (1963), 17–34.
- Pankhurst, R. 1969. 'A Preliminary History of Ethiopian Measures, Weights and Values', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 7/2 (1969), 99–164.
- Perruchon, J. 1899. *Les chroniques de Zar'a Ya'eqob et de Ba'eda Maryam rois d'Éthiopie de 1434 à 1478 (texte éthiopien et traduction)*, Bibliothèque de l'École pratique des hautes études, Sciences philologiques et historiques, 93 (Paris: Bouillon, 1899).
- Schneider, M. 1970. 'Deux actes de donation en arabe', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 8 (1970), 79–87.
- Sergew Hable Sellase 1992. 'The Monastic Library of Däbrä Hayq', in P.O. Scholz cum collaboratione R. Pankhurst et W. Witakowski, eds, *Orbis Aethiopicus: Studia in ho-*

- norem Stanislaus Chojnacki natali septuagesimo quinto dicata, septuagesimo septimo oblata*, I, Bibliotheca Nubica, 3 (Albstadt: Karl Schuler, 1992), 243–258.
- Spencer, D. 1967. 'Trip to Wag and Northern Wallo', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 5/1 (1967), 95–108.
- 1993. 'The Monastery of Aheya Fägg Qusquām in Wallo: Its Illuminated Manuscripts and Other Treasures', in P. Henze, ed., *Aspects of Ethiopian Art from Ancient Axum to the 20th Century* (London: Jed Press, 1993), 73–82.
- Szirmai, J.A. 1999. *The Archaeology of Medieval Bookbinding* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999).
- Tewelde Medhin Joseph, *abba* 1969. 'Introduction générale aux églises monolithiques du Tigray', in R. Pankhurst and S. Chojnacki, eds, *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa 1966*, I (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1969), 83–98.
- Uhlig, S. 1984. 'Ornamente und Marginalzeichen in den äthiopischen Handschriften. Ein Vergleich mit anderen semitischen und mit koptischen Codices', *Bibliotheca Orientalis*, 61/3–4 (1984), 318–328.
- 1988. *Äthiopische Paläographie*, Äthiopistische Forschungen, 22 (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1988).
- Underwood, P. 1950. 'The Fountain of Life in Manuscripts of the Gospels', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 5 (1950), 43–138.
- von Bogay, T. 1971. 'Hetoimasia', in *RBK*, II: *Durchzug durch das Rote Meer–Himmelfahrt* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1971), 1189–1202.
- Wessel, K. 1955. 'Ecclesia Orans', *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, 70 (1955), 315–334.
- 1978, 'Himmliche Liturgie', in *RBK*, III: *Himmelsleiter–Kastoria* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1978), 119–131.

Fig. 1: Front cover and fol. 1r

Fig. 2: ff. Vv–1r: last page of the Introduction to the Gospels and first page of the Eusebian letter

Fig. 3: ff. 1v-2r: Second and third page of the Eusebian letter

Fig. 4: ff. 2v-3r: Canons

Fig. 5: ff. 3v-4r: Canons

Fig. 6: ff. 4v-5r: Canons

Fig. 7: ff. 5v–6r: Canons; *Tempietto*

Fig. 8: ff. 6v–7r: Crucifixion; Holy Women at the Tomb

Fig. 9: ff. 7v–8r: Ascension

Fig. 10: ff. 8v–9r: Evangelist Matthew; first page of Matthew's Gospel

Fig. 11: ff. 63v–64r: Evangelist Mark; first page of Mark's Gospel

Fig. 12: ff. 93v–94r: Evangelist Luke; first page of Luke's Gospel

Fig. 13: ff. 141v–142r: Evangelist John; first page of John's Gospel

Fig. 14: fol. IIv: document 3

Fig. 15: ff. IIIvb–IVr: document 4; first page of the Introduction to the Gospels

Fig. 16: ff. VIv–177r: document 1; last page of the Gospels and document 2

Fig. 17: fol. 177v: document 5 and back cover