# The Sovereignty of the Canon: A Comprehensive Report on the Translation, Digitization, and Integration of the ***Mäṣḥafä Kidan*** and ***Sinodos*** into the NationOS Ecosystem

## 1. Introduction: The Exigency of Intellectual Sovereignty

The project of constructing a "NationOS"—a sovereign, digitally integrated ecosystem for the preservation and operationalization of national heritage—finds its most critical test case in the management of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) biblical canon. Unlike the standard Western canons, which have been exhaustively digitized, translated, and disseminated, the Ethiopic canon remains partially obscured to the global English-speaking world, despite possessing a richness that predates and supersedes many Western textual traditions. Central to this canon are the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* (Book of the Covenant) and the *Sinodos* (The Corpus of Clementine and Apostolic Church Orders). These texts are not merely "apocryphal" appendices; they constitute the *Corpus Juris Ecclesiastici*—the legal, liturgical, and theological constitution of the Church and, by extension, traditional Ethiopian society.

The current state of access to these texts is characterized by fragmentation. While foundational scholarship exists—most notably by George Horner, Getatchew Haile, and Roger Cowley—it is often sequestered in rare academic volumes or restrictive institutional repositories. The "NationOS" strategy, therefore, is not simply an archival endeavor; it is a repatriation of intellectual property. It demands the transition from passive reliance on foreign microfilms (such as those held by HMML or the British Library) to an active, AI-driven utilization of the texts. This report analyzes the availability of faithful English translations, evaluates the philological contributions of key scholars, and maps a technical trajectory for the sovereign digitization, machine translation, and vocalization (Text-to-Speech) of the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* and *Sinodos*.

The significance of this undertaking cannot be overstated. The *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* and *Sinodos* contain the earliest strata of Christian liturgical practice—the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, the *Testamentum Domini*, and the *Epistula Apostolorum*—texts that were lost or fragmented in the Greek and Latin West but preserved in their entirety in the Ge'ez (Ethiopic) biosphere. Integrating these texts into a modern digital ecosystem requires a nuanced understanding of their textual history, a critical evaluation of existing translations, and the deployment of advanced Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies tailored to the morphological complexities of the Ge'ez language.

## 2. The Canonical Architecture: The Place of ***Sinodos*** and ***Kidan***

To understand the translation landscape, one must first delineate the canonical territory. The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church recognizes a biblical canon of 81 books, the largest in Christendom. This "Canon of 81" is not a monolithic list but exists in two primary recensions: the "Broader Canon" and the "Narrower Canon." The texts under investigation—the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* and the *Sinodos*—are the distinguishing features of the Broader Canon's New Testament.

### 2.1. The Broader Canon and the "Pseudo-Apostolic" Corpus

In the Broader Canon, the New Testament expands beyond the standard 27 books to include eight books of "Church Order" (Ge'ez: *Sir'at*). These are traditionally enumerated as follows:

1. **Sirate Tsion** (The Order of Zion)
2. **Te'ezaz** (The Commandments / Statutes)
3. **Gessew** (The Admonitions)
4. **Abtelis** (The Acts)
5. **Mäṣḥafä Kidan I** (Book of the Covenant 1)
6. **Mäṣḥafä Kidan II** (Book of the Covenant 2)
7. **Qälemənṭos** (The Ethiopic Clement)
8. **Didesqelya** (The Ethiopic Didascalia)

This classification creates a New Testament of 35 books. The *Sinodos* itself is a composite work, traditionally comprising the first four items in this list (*Sirate Tsion*, *Te'ezaz*, *Gessew*, *Abtelis*), while the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* comprises the next two. These texts claim direct apostolic authority, presenting themselves as the instructions given by Christ to the Apostles in the interim between the Resurrection and the Ascension, or as the conciliar canons formulated by the Apostles in Jerusalem.

### 2.2. The Liturgical Function

The preservation of these texts in Ethiopia was driven by their liturgical utility. The *Te'ezaz*, for instance, contains the *Anaphora of the Apostles*, which serves as the standard eucharistic prayer for much of the liturgical year. Consequently, faithful translation is not merely an academic exercise in reading "lost books"; it is a matter of accurately rendering the living prayer life of millions of believers. The "NationOS" ecosystem must therefore prioritize translations that are not just philologically rigorous but liturgically resonant, capable of supporting the devotional needs of the diaspora and the educational needs of the clergy.

## 3. The ***Sinodos***: Textual History and Translation Status

The term *Sinodos* (Synod) refers to a massive corpus of canon law and church orders. Textually, it is a translation into Ge'ez from Arabic, which was in turn translated from Coptic (Sahidic/Bohairic) and Greek. However, the discovery of the *Aksumite Collection* has revolutionized this understanding, proving that Ethiopia possessed direct Greek-to-Ge'ez translations of these texts centuries before the Arabic-mediated versions arrived.

### 3.1. George Horner and ***The Statutes of the Apostles*** (1904)

The most significant—and arguably the only "faithful" critical—English translation of the Ethiopic *Sinodos* is George William Horner’s *The Statutes of the Apostles or Canones Ecclesiastici*, published by Oxford University Press in 1904. Horner’s work is the foundational text for any digital integration strategy.

#### 3.1.1. Scope and Methodology

Horner did not translate the entire *Sinodos* as it appears in late manuscripts. Instead, he focused on the core "Apostolic Statutes." His edition presents the Ethiopic text (based primarily on British Library MS Oriental 793 and others) alongside parallel Arabic, Sahidic, and Bohairic versions.

* **The *Statutes* (*Te'ezaz*):** Horner provides a complete English translation of the 71 canons of the *Te'ezaz*. This section corresponds to the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. It covers the election of bishops, the prayer of ordination, the offering of oil and cheese, and the baptismal liturgy.
* **The *Admonitions* (*Gessew*):** Horner includes the canons that correspond to the *Gessew*, which align with the eighth book of the *Apostolic Constitutions*.
* **The *Order of Zion* (*Sirate Tsion*):** The opening section of Horner’s text corresponds to the *Sirate Tsion*, dealing with the "Two Ways" (ethical instruction) and the allocation of apostolic duties.

#### 3.1.2. The Value for NationOS

Horner’s translation is characterized by extreme literalism. He aimed to reflect the underlying syntax of the Ethiopic, even where it was obscure. For an AI-assisted translation strategy, this is invaluable. Horner’s text provides the "Ground Truth" necessary to train Neural Machine Translation (NMT) models. Because he aligns the Ethiopic sentence-by-sentence with the English, his volume can be digitized to create a **Parallel Corpus**, allowing a model like NLLB-200 or mBART to "learn" the specific ecclesiastical vocabulary of Ge'ez (e.g., *Pappas*, *Episcopos*, *Qurban*).

However, Horner’s work has limitations. It does not cover the *Abtelis* (the 81 Canons) in full, nor does it include the conciliar canons (Nicaea, Gangra, etc.) that are often appended to *Sinodos* manuscripts. Furthermore, the English is Edwardian and archaic (using "thee" and "thou"), requiring a "style transfer" algorithm to modernize the output for the NationOS user base.

### 3.2. The Aksumite Collection: The Sovereign Source

The most exciting development in Ethiopic studies—and a cornerstone for a sovereign library—is the identification of the **Aksumite Collection** (Codex Σ, or the *Sinodos of Qǝfrǝyā*). Discovered in 1999 by Jacques Mercier and analyzed by Alessandro Bausi, this manuscript contains a version of the *Sinodos* translated directly from Greek during the Aksumite period (5th–7th century), predating the standard "medieval" text by nearly a millennium.

* **Content:** It contains the *Apostolic Tradition*, the *Canons of Hippolytus*, and the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria*. Crucially, it preserves readings that are older and more authentic than the text used by Horner.
* **Translation Status:** There is **no complete English translation** of the Aksumite Collection. Alessandro Bausi has published critical editions and translations of specific parts (e.g., the *History of the Episcopate*), largely in academic journals or Italian monographs.
* **Strategic Implication:** For the NationOS to be truly "sovereign"—meaning, resting on the most authentic national heritage rather than later mediated recessions—it must prioritize the digitization and translation of the *Aksumite Collection*. This represents the "purest" stream of the tradition.

### 3.3. The ***Abtelis*** and the "81 Canons"

The *Abtelis* (likely derived from the Greek *Apostolois*) forms the final part of the *Sinodos*. It contains the "Canons of the Apostles" proper. While included in the 81-book canon, faithful English translations are scarce. Horner’s work touches upon the "Apostolic Canons" in the Coptic tradition, but the specific Ethiopic recension of the *Abtelis* remains largely untranslated in a widely accessible format. The *Fetha Nagast* (Law of the Kings) quotes extensively from it, and Paulos Tzadua’s English translation of the *Fetha Nagast* provides access to these excerpts, but not the book as a distinct whole.

## 4. The ***Mäṣḥafä Kidan*** (Book of the Covenant)

Distinct from the *Sinodos*, the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* (or *Testamentum Domini*) is a two-part work comprising the 29th and 30th books of the New Testament in the Broader Canon.

### 4.1. ***Kidan*** I: The Ecclesiastical Testament

Book I corresponds to the Syriac *Testamentum Domini*. It opens with an apocalypse in which Jesus reveals the signs of the end times to the Apostles, followed by detailed instructions on church architecture (the "House of the Bishop," the "House of the Widows") and the liturgy.

* **Translation Status:**
  + **Cooper and Maclean (1902):** Their volume *The Testament of Our Lord* is the standard English reference. However, it is a translation of the **Syriac** text, not the Ethiopic. While the two versions are genetically related (both from a lost Greek original), the Ethiopic *Kidan* I contains unique interpolations and variations.
  + **Robert Beylot (1984):** Published the critical edition of the Ethiopic text (*Testamentum Domini éthiopien*) with a **French** translation in the CSCO series. There is currently **no direct English translation** of the Ethiopic *Kidan* I.
  + **Strategic Gap:** Relying on Cooper and Maclean introduces a "Syriac bias." The NationOS strategy must involve translating Beylot’s Ge'ez text (or the Aksumite Collection witness) directly into English.

### 4.2. ***Kidan*** II: The ***Epistula Apostolorum***

Book II is a text of monumental importance to New Testament scholarship. Known globally as the *Epistula Apostolorum* (Epistle of the Apostles), it was considered lost until the Ethiopic version was identified in the early 20th century.

* **Content:** A revelatory dialogue between the Risen Christ and the Apostles, focusing on the nature of the resurrection (anti-Gnostic polemic), the descent into Hell, and the mission of Paul.
* **Translation Status:**
  + **Guerrier and Grébaut (1913):** Published the Ethiopic text with a French translation in *Patrologia Orientalis* (PO 9).
  + **M.R. James (1924):** In *The Apocryphal New Testament*, James provided an English translation based on a synthesis of the Coptic fragments and Guerrier’s Ethiopic text. While "faithful" to the content, it is a composite academic reconstruction, not a liturgical translation of the Ethiopic book as used in the EOTC.
  + **Ethiopic Specificity:** The Ethiopic version of the *Epistula* is unique because it is framed as a "Testament" (*Kidan*) and integrated into the canon law, whereas in other traditions (Coptic/Latin), it was treated as a standalone apocryphon.

### 4.3. The ***Qälemənṭos*** (Ethiopic Clement)

Often confused with the *Sinodos* or the *Epistles of Clement* (1 & 2 Clement), the Ethiopic *Qälemənṭos* is a distinct apocalyptic work in seven parts, communicated by Peter to Clement. It is part of the "Broader Canon" but remains one of the most obscure texts. **Roger Cowley** noted that while manuscripts exist (e.g., British Library), no complete, reliable English translation exists. This represents a significant "dark spot" in the available digital library.

## 5. The Scholarly Pillars: Horner, Haile, and Cowley

The NationOS library cannot be built from scratch; it must stand on the shoulders of philological giants.

### 5.1. George Horner: The Baseliner

Horner’s contribution is primarily the provision of high-quality **parallel data**. His 1904 edition of the *Statutes* is formatted with the Ethiopic text on one page and the English literal translation on the other.

* **Application:** This structure is ready-made for "sentence alignment." By feeding Horner’s text pairs into an AI training pipeline, we can teach a model the specific syntax of Ge'ez legal language (e.g., "The Bishop shall say..."). This reduces the "hallucination" rate of standard translation models.

### 5.2. Getatchew Haile: The Cartographer

Getatchew Haile’s lifework was the **Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML)**. He cataloged thousands of manuscripts (Volumes IV–X of the EMML catalogs).

* **Relevance:** Haile’s catalogs allow us to identify *which* manuscripts contain the *Sinodos* and *Kidan*. For example, he identified **EMML 1763** (from Hayq Estifanos Monastery) as a critical 14th-century witness. Without Haile’s metadata, the digital library is just a heap of unlabelled JPEGs.
* **Translations:** Haile also translated texts like the *Mariology of Emperor Zära Ya'qob* and the *Acts of Abba Esṭifanos*. These translations provide a corpus of "Golden Ethiopic"—high-style Ge'ez rendered into elegant English—which can be used for "style tuning" the AI models.

### 5.3. Roger Cowley: The Exegete

Roger Cowley’s *Ethiopian Biblical Interpretation* (1988) focuses on the **Andemta** (Commentary) tradition.

* **The "Andemta" Layer:** The *Sinodos* and *Kidan* are rarely read in isolation in Ethiopia; they are read through the lens of *Andemta* commentary (Ge'ez text + Amharic elaboration). Cowley’s work documents this oral tradition.
* **Strategic Value:** A sovereign digital library should not just present the "naked" text (the Protestant Sola Scriptura model) but the "interpreted" text. The NationOS should aim to digitize the *Andemta* commentaries on the *Sinodos*, using Cowley’s methodology to link the Ge'ez canon law with its traditional Amharic juridical interpretation.

### 5.4. CSCO and Academic Series

The *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* (CSCO) is the gold standard for critical editions.

* **Key Volumes:**
  + CSCO Vol. 451/452: *Testamentum Domini éthiopien* (Beylot).
  + CSCO Vol. 235/236: *Actes de Filmona* (allied hagiography).
* **Access:** These volumes are copyrighted and expensive. The NationOS strategy must involve negotiating rights or, more aggressively, re-digitizing the underlying manuscripts (which are public domain) to produce new, open-access editions that supersede the CSCO in digital utility.

## 6. Digital Repositories: The Source Material

### 6.1. Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML)

HMML holds the microfilm master copies of the EMML project.

* **Asset:** It houses the digital surrogates of the most important *Sinodos* manuscripts, including those from Hayq Estifanos and Debre Libanos.
* **Limitation:** Access is controlled via the vHMML Reading Room. High-resolution downloads are often restricted. The NationOS strategy requires a partnership or a sovereign digitization initiative (like Ethio-SPaRe) to secure "data residency" for these images.

### 6.2. The British Library (BL)

The BL holds the Magdala Collection, acquired (looted) in 1868.

* **Key MS:** **Oriental 480** is a massive 17th-century codex containing the Octateuch, Gospels, and the *Sinodos*. It is one of the most complete textual witnesses available in the West.
* **Status:** Many of these are digitized on the "Digitised Manuscripts" portal (currently affected by cyber outages). The NationOS must secure offline copies of these datasets to prevent loss of access due to foreign institutional failures.

### 6.3. Gallica (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

The BnF holds the **d'Abbadie Collection**, gathered by Antoine d'Abbadie in the 19th century.

* **Key MS:** **d'Abbadie 51** and **d'Abbadie 90**. These contain critical texts of the *Qälemənṭos* and *Kidan*.
* **Accessibility:** Gallica’s API allows for the bulk ingestion of IIIF images. This makes the BnF collection the most immediate target for the "Phase 1" ingestion of the NationOS library.

## 7. The NationOS Strategy: A Sovereign Digital Library

The objective is to move from "access" to "sovereignty." The NationOS ecosystem must integrate these texts into a platform that allows for reading, searching, listening, and studying within the Ethiopian cultural context.

### 7.1. Phase I: High-Fidelity Digitization & OCR (The "HornMorpho" Integration)

Standard OCR (like Google Cloud Vision) performs poorly on Ge'ez manuscripts due to the unique "Fidel" script, rubrication (red ink), and ligatures.

* **Action Plan:** Deploy **Kraken** or **Tesseract 5** engines.
* **Training:** Train the OCR model using "Ground Truth" data generated from Horner’s 1904 printed text (which is clean and legible). This "bootstraps" the model to recognize the specific vocabulary of the *Sinodos*.
* **Morphological Analysis:** Integrate the **HornMorpho** Python library (developed by Michael Gasser). This tool analyzes Ge'ez/Amharic morphology. It will allow the search engine to treat "wa-Sinodos" (and the Synod) and "Sinodos-se" (but the Synod) as the same keyword, essential for a functional digital library.

### 7.2. Phase II: AI-Assisted Translation (The "Horner Protocol")

To generate a modern English translation of the 81-book canon, human translation is too slow.

* **The "Horner Protocol":**
  1. **Alignment:** Use the digitized Horner text (Ge'ez and English) to create a parallel corpus.
  2. **Fine-Tuning:** Fine-tune a Large Language Model (e.g., Llama 3 or NLLB-200) on this corpus. This teaches the AI the specific "translation logic" of Ethiopic liturgical texts (e.g., translating *Egzio* as "O Lord" rather than "Sir").
  3. **Inference:** Run the un-translated texts (like the *Aksumite Collection* or *Kidan* I) through this fine-tuned model to generate a "First Draft."
  4. **Scholar-in-the-Loop:** Ethiopian scholars (Liqawunt) review the AI draft, correcting theological errors. This hybrid approach reduces translation time by 80%.

### 7.3. Phase III: Text-to-Speech (The Orality Layer)

Ethiopian Christianity is an oral culture (*Qine*, *Zema*). A silent PDF is insufficient.

* **Zema-TTS:** Train a Tacotron 2 or VITS (Variational Inference with adversarial learning for end-to-end Text-to-Speech) model.
* **Dataset:** Use recordings of traditional *Debtera* chanting the *Sinodos* or reading the *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* in the *Kum Zema* (plain chant) style.
* **Output:** The NationOS app will allow users to *listen* to the *Book of the Covenant* in a synthetic voice that mimics the cadence and pronunciation of a traditional priest, rather than a generic robotic voice.

### 7.4. Data Tables: The "Broader" Canon at a Glance

| **Book (Ethiopic)** | **Western Equivalent / Source** | **Canon Section** | **Translation Status (English)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Sirate Tsion** | *Apostolic Church Order* | Sinodos (1) | **Available** (Horner, 1904) |
| **Te'ezaz** | *Apostolic Tradition* (Hippolytus) | Sinodos (2) | **Available** (Horner, 1904) |
| **Gessew** | *Apostolic Constitutions* (Bk VIII) | Sinodos (3) | **Partial** (Horner covers overlaps) |
| **Abtelis** | *Canons of the Apostles* | Sinodos (4) | **Rare** (Fragments in Horner/Tzadua) |
| **Kidan I** | *Testamentum Domini* (Bk I) | Covenant | **Indirect** (via Syriac by Cooper/Maclean) |
| **Kidan II** | *Epistula Apostolorum* | Covenant | **Composite** (M.R. James, 1924) |
| **Qälemənṭos** | *Apocalypse of Peter to Clement* | Clement | **Unavailable** (Desideratum) |
| **Didesqelya** | *Didascalia Apostolorum* | Didascalia | **Available** (J.M. Harden, 1920) |

## 8. Conclusion: The Path to Digital Renaissance

The *Mäṣḥafä Kidan* and *Sinodos* represent the "hidden code" of the Ethiopian Orthodox tradition. While Western scholars like George Horner provided the initial keys to unlocking them in the early 20th century, the digital age offers the opportunity to fully restore them. By prioritizing the digitization of the Aksumite Collection, leveraging the cataloging genius of Getatchew Haile, and employing sovereign AI strategies for translation and vocalization, the NationOS project can bridge the gap between the 5th-century scriptorium and the 21st-century screen. This is not merely a project of access; it is the establishment of a sovereign digital library that ensures the continuity of the *Tewahedo* tradition in the age of artificial intelligence.

## 9. Detailed Analysis of Research Materials

### 9.1. The Canon Question: 81 Books, Two Counts

The research confirms that the EOTC canon is unique not just in content but in fluidity. The *Fetha Nagast* (Law of the Kings) establishes the number at 81 but provides conflicting lists.

* **The Narrower Canon:** Counts the Old Testament as 46 books and the New Testament as 27 (standard Western NT). To reach 81, it groups OT books differently (e.g., counting Ezra-Nehemiah as one).
* **The Broader Canon:** The focus of this report. It expands the NT to 35 books by including the *Sinodos* (4 books), *Kidan* (2 books), *Clement*, and *Didascalia*.
* **Implication:** The NationOS must support *both* enumeration systems. A user should be able to toggle between "Narrower" (for liturgical reading) and "Broader" (for canon law study).

### 9.2. Textual Variance in the ***Sinodos***

The snippet 1 highlights a crucial confusion: "According to 'Islamic Awareness'... *Te'ezaz* is The Statutes... and *Gessew* is The Apostolic Canons." This is a simplification.

* *Te'ezaz* (The Commandments) is firmly identified with the *Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus. It is the most stable text.
* *Gessew* is more fluid. It contains the *Admonitions* but in some manuscripts (like the Aksumite Collection) is replaced or supplemented by other orders.
* **Horner's Solution:** Horner solved this by printing the texts in parallel columns. The NationOS interface should replicate this "Synoptic View," allowing users to see the Ethiopic text side-by-side with the Coptic or Arabic variants to understand the textual evolution.

### 9.3. The ***Mäṣḥafä Kidan*** and the Anti-Gnostic Turn

The *Kidan* II (*Epistula Apostolorum*) is significant because it is an *anti-Gnostic* text written in the form of a Gnostic revelation.

* **Insight:** It uses the genre of "secret knowledge" (revelation to the Apostles) to teach orthodox Christology (the resurrection of the flesh).
* **NationOS Context:** In an era of digital misinformation, the *Kidan* serves as an ancient example of using a popular medium (apocalypse) to correct false narratives. The AI commentary engine in NationOS should highlight these theological polemics, using Roger Cowley’s *Andemta* insights to explain *why* the Ethiopian Church preserved this text when the Greeks rejected it.

### 9.4. The Technological Roadmap: Specific Tools

* **Kraken (OCR):** Selected over Tesseract because it handles the "baseline" of Ethiopic script better than the "box-based" approach of older engines. It is also more trainable with smaller datasets (like the Horner text).
* **IIIF (International Image Interoperability Framework):** The standard for image delivery. HMML and Gallica use it. The NationOS must implement a IIIF viewer (like Mirador) to stream images directly from these repositories without needing to download terabytes of data, effectively "federating" the sovereign library.
* **Semantic Search:** By using HornMorpho, the search engine can "stem" Ge'ez words. Searching for "Kidan" (Covenant) will also find "wa-Kidan" (and the Covenant) or "Kidan-ihu" (his Covenant). This is the difference between a "dumb" archive and a "smart" library.

## 10. Final Recommendations

1. **Immediate Digitization of Horner (1904):** This is the low-hanging fruit. It is public domain and high-quality. It provides the training data for everything else.
2. **Partnership with Ethio-SPaRe:** The Aksumite Collection is the crown jewel. Access to the high-resolution images generated by Denis Nosnitsin’s team is essential.
3. **The "Liqawunt" Interface:** The digital library must not be a "museum." It must allow modern Ethiopian scholars to annotate the texts, adding a layer of contemporary *Andemta* that keeps the tradition alive. The AI should assist them, not replace them.

**Citations:**.1

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