

The Disputed *Life* of the Saintly Ethiopian Kings 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa

Susanne Hummel
Universität Hamburg
susanne.hummel@uni-hamburg.de

Summary

The discovery of an Amharic document written by a church scholar from the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis in Eastern Goḡgām (Ethiopia) throws fresh light on the circumstances and disputes behind the composition of the *Life* of the Ethiopian twin brother kings 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa, as well as on the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* ('Homily of Uriel'). The legendary characters of the *Life* and the events it narrates, along with its manuscript tradition, are analysed in detail. The Amharic 'Dimā Document' together with a royal letter concerning the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* is edited with an annotated English translation.

Keywords

Ethiopic hagiography – philology – Aksum – Dimā Giyorgis – Marṭula Maryam – Uriel

'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa reigned on Aksum before all other kings without succeeding one to the other; without any division, on one throne and in one sovereignty, with one command and with one sceptre. Their primacy is not through birth or through kingship but through receiving Baptism and Holy Communion.

መቅድመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ዘነግሡ ፡ አክሱም ፡
በኢተባርዮ ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ ፍልጠት ፡ በአሐቲ ፡ መንበር ፡ ወበአሐቲ ፡ ሥልጣን ፡
ወበአሐቲ ፡ እዘዝ ወበአሐቲ ፡ ምልክና ፡ ወቅድምናሆሙሰ ፡ አኮ ፡ በልደት ፡
ወበመንግሥት ፡ አላ ፡ በነሢኦ ፡ ጥምቀት ፡ ወቅርባን ፡ ውእቲ ፡

(excerpt from the prologue of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbēḥa*)



Ms A (C3-IV-330), Təgrāy, Šərāʿ ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAšbəḥa, GadlaʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAšbəḥa, f. iv, photographed by Michael Gervers.

During my research on the early history of the monastery of Dabra Warq located in Eastern Goḡgām (Ethiopia), every once in a while I came across references that pointed to a historically recent rivalry over primacy between some of the monasteries in that region. It was a late-19th-century document originating in the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis (hereafter Dimā Document)¹ that allowed the reasons behind these hostilities to be fully understood. Moreover, this document is of general relevance to Ethiopic philology as it sheds new light on the origin and purpose of the hagiography of two saintly kings venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church – namely the text known as *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAšbəḥa* (*ʾLife of ʾAbrəhā and ʾAšbəḥa*).

Inspired by the Dimā Document, the article aims at providing a fresh and critical view of the *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAšbəḥa* (written in Gəʿəz, Old-Ethiopic). After a brief introduction into the historicity of the two protagonists, I will shift

¹ I briefly presented the Dimā Document on an extremely fruitful workshop organized by Éloi Ficquet and held on 29 March 2016 at EHESS, Paris: “Comparaisons ecclésiologiques à ras de terre: pratiques de gestion des dons et du foncier dans les Eglises éthiopiennes et orientales.”

to the text itself, present the currently available text witnesses and evaluate the summarized content of the work. Hereafter, I will touch upon the monastic rivalries in Eastern Goḡgām grown or revived after the writing of the *Life* in the mid-19th century and give some introductory remarks to the Dimā Document. The transcription of the Dimā Document and the annotated translation, followed by the presentation of a letter of Emperor Mənilək II form the last part of my article. The article ends with a conclusion.

'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa – Historical Figures?

As triumphantly announced in the prologue of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa* ('*Life* of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa'), the Ethiopian tradition refers to 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa as the first Christian kings of Ethiopia who jointly ruled on Aksum.² In contrast to post-Aksumite literary sources, it is firmly attested by numismatic and inscriptional evidence that the introduction of Christianity into the Aksumite Kingdom is linked to the well documented historical figure of King 'Ezānā (c. 320–360).

There is no doubt that it was King 'Ezānā who was converted to Christianity by Frumentius³ in c. 340 and who initiated the subsequent adoption of the Christian faith as the official religion of the empire.⁴ 'Ezānā's monumental inscriptions and coins dating from the time before and after his conversion to

2 Aksum was once the great capital of the powerful homonymous empire flourishing from c. 150 BCE to 700 CE. Aksum – though it is now only a small town – is until today regarded as a holy city by Christian Ethiopians. For a brief overview of its history see "Aksum. History of the town and Empire," in: *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 173b–179b (S. C. Munro-Hay).

3 Revered as a founder of the faith in Ethiopia, Frumentius (named 'Abbā Salāmā Kāsāte Bərḥān after having become the first Metropolitan of Ethiopia) is commemorated on 26 Ḥamle. For his commemorative notice see I. Guidi, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, les Mois de Sanē, Hamlē et Nahasē, publiés et traduits (avec le concours de L. Desnoyers et A. Singlas)*, vol. 11: *Mois de Hamlē* (PO, 7,3 [33]), Paris, 1909 (repr. 1950), pp. 427–429 [411–413]. He is also commemorated in the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Church, see "Sālama (Kāsāte Bərḥan)," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 484a–488a (G. Fiaccadori), here p. 485a.

4 On the introduction and subsequent Christianization of the Aksumite Kingdom see H. Brakmann, *Tō parā tois βαρβάροις ἔργον θεῶν. Die Einwurzelung der Kirche im spätantiken Reich von Aksum*, Bonn, 1994, pp. 51–77; D. W. Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation: Aksum & the Northern Horn 1000 BC–AD 1300* (Eastern Africa Series), Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2012, pp. 91–106; P. Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica. Le iscrizioni reali aksumite*, con un'appendice di R. Fattovich, *La civiltà aksumita: aspetti archeologici e una nota editoriale* di A. Bausi (Testi del vicino oriente antico, 9; Lettura etiopica, 1), Brescia, 2014, pp. 36–76.

Christianity indisputably document the birth of Christianity in the Aksumite Kingdom. Given the fact that the famous letter of Constantius II written in 356/357 on an ecclesiastical matter was addressed to the 'most honoured brothers' Aizana and Sazana,⁵ some scholars⁶ suggest that 'Ezānā had ruled together with his brother Šə'azana (Š'zn)⁷ and that the names 'Abrəhā and 'Ašbəḥa (sometimes preceded by 'Īlla) belonged to their titulary.⁸ Other scholars dismiss this proposal as there is no evidence for a dual kingship during 'Ezānā's reign; such scholars suggest a possible conflation of the names of two other outstanding figures of the Aksumite Kingdom – namely the rebellious General and later Ethiopian vassal King of Yemen 'Abraha ('the king of

- 5 The text of the letter has been preserved in Athanasius' *Apologia ad Constantium Imperatorem* (Apology 31); see Athanase d'Alexandrie: *Apologie à l'empereur Constance, Apologie pour sa fuite*, ed. J.-M. Szymusiak (SC, 56), Paris, 1958; *Athanasius Werke*, 11: *Die 'Apologien'*, hg. H. C. Brennecke, U. Heil, A. V. Stockhausen, Berlin – New York, 2006; cf. T. D. Barnes, "The New Critical Edition of Athanasius' Defence before Constantius," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum. Journal of Ancient Christianity*, 11,2 (2007), pp. 378–401. See also the comments in S. C. Munro-Hay, *Aksum. An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity*, Edinburgh, 1991, p. 156; Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* (see n. 4), pp. 60–61; P. Piovaneli, "Reconstructing the Social and Cultural History of the Aksumite Kingdom: Some Methodological Reflections," in: *Inside and Out. Interactions between Rome and the Peoples on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. H. F. Dijkstra, G. Fisher (Late Antique History and Religion, 8), Leuven – Paris – Walpole, MA, 2014, pp. 331–352, here p. 335.
- 6 See for example E. Ullendorff, "Note on the Introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia," *Africa*, 19 (1949), pp. 61–62; Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270*, Addis Ababa, 1972, pp. 94, 108; W. Hahn, "Die Münzprägung des Aksumitischen Reichs (Mit Katalog, metallurgischem und theologischem Anhang)," *Litterae Numismaticae Vindobonenses*, 2 (1983), pp. 113–180, tables 12–15, here pp. 126–134; "Ezana," *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 478b–480b (W. Hahn).
- 7 When vocalised, the name is written in different ways: Sazana/Saizana (transliterated from Greek) or Šə'ezana in "Abrəha and 'Ašbəḥa," *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 45b–46a (S. C. Munro-Hay). See also Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation* (see n. 4), p. 83, n. 20.
- 8 The full royal titulary of the Aksumite kings consisted of four elements: the personal name, the 'Īlla name (that is the regnal name), the Ba'əsi name (referring to a military regiment or clan division) and the father's name. The full titulary is known only for King Kāleb; for all other kings elements are missing, e.g. the 'Īlla name of 'Ezānā. See Munro-Hay, *Aksum* (see n. 5), pp. 158–161; W. Hahn, "Ezanas and Caleb, the Pair of Sainly Kings," in: *Proceedings of the xvth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies Hamburg July 20–25, 2003*, ed. S. Uhlig, M. Bulakh, D. Nonsitsin, T. Rave (Aethiopistische Forschungen, 65), Wiesbaden, 2006, pp. 260–265, here pp. 261–262; Piovaneli, "Reconstructing the Social and Cultural History" (see n. 5), p. 339. For the meaning of 'Īlla see A. Bausi, "Etiopico 'ellē: a proposito di un'ipotesi recente," in: *Scr*, 1 (2005), pp. 3–11.

Najrān,⁹ c. 525—at least 547) and the Aksumite King 'Īlla 'Aṣbēḥa (that is the attested regnal name of King Kāleb, c. 510–540) – with that of 'Ezānā and Śə'azana.¹⁰ The famous names of the 6th-century personages would have been remembered by later Ethiopian historiographers and hagiographers as the brother kings who jointly ruled in the 4th century and who introduced Christianity into the kingdom. Perhaps the etymology of the names 'Abrēhā ('he illuminated') and 'Aṣbēḥa ('he made the dawn') made such a transposition more plausible.¹¹

However, neither 'Ezānā nor his brother Śə'azana (who is not bestowed with a king's title in any of the inscriptions) are mentioned in the post-Aksumite Gə'ez-historiography. Instead, the names of 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa are listed in the so-called 'Short Chronicle'¹² and in the king

9 On the 6th-century conflict between Aksum and Ḥimyar see recent publications with further references: Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* (see n. 4), pp. 82–178; Piovanelli, "Reconstructing the Social and Cultural History" (see n. 5), p. 343.

10 Munro-Hay, *Aksum* (see n. 5), pp. 155–157, 205; "Kaleb," *EAE*, vol. 3, pp. 329a–332b (G. Fiaccadori), here p. 329b; Phillipson, *Foundations of an African Civilisation* (see n. 4), p. 103; Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* (see n. 4), pp. 31–32. S. C. Munro-Hay alternatively suggests that the names 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa might have been successive 'Īlla names of 'Ezānā (Munro-Hay, *Aksum* (see n. 5), p. 205). See also Getatchew Haile, "An Anonymous Homily in Honor of King 'Īllā 'Aṣbāḥa of Axum, EMMI 1763, ff. 34v–35v," *Northeast African Studies*, 3,2 (1981), pp. 25–37, here pp. 26–28, where the author proposes that the later Ethiopian tradition transposed the adoption of Christianity ascribed to 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa to the reign of Kāleb when Christianity might have been promoted as the official religion of the Aksumite Kingdom. All these approaches are consistently opposed by W. Hahn (see Hahn, "Ezanas and Caleb," see n. 8).

11 Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* (see n. 4), p. 31.

12 R. Basset, "Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie. Première Partie: Chronique éthiopienne, d'après un manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris," *Journal Asiatique*, 7^e série, 17 (1881), pp. 315–434; 18 (1882), pp. 93–185, 285–389, here pp. 410–411 (the edition is based on Ms BnF Éthiop. 142, catalogued and dated to the 18th century by H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens (gheez et amharique) de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Manuscrits Orientaux, 3), Paris, 1877, pp. 214a–216a); F. Béguinot, *La Cronaca abbreviata d'Abissinia: nuova versione dall'Etiopico e commento*, Roma, 1901, p. 2 (based on Ms no 129 from Biblioteca Nazionale Vittorio Emanuele di Roma, dated to the second half of the 18th century; *ibid.*, vi); F. A. Dombrowski, *Ṭānāsee 106: eine Chronik der Herrscher Äthiopiens* (Äthiopistische Forschungen, 12 A, B), Wiesbaden, 1983, pp. 146–148 (based on Ms Ṭānāsee 106, the *terminus post quem* was set by F. A. Dombrowski in 1730 as the chronicle ends with the death of King Bakāffā, r. 1721–1730).

lists.¹³ 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa are also mentioned in a few literary works such as the prominent theological work *Maṣḥafa Məṣṭir* ('Book of Mystery')¹⁴ or the famous historiographical work *Maṣḥafa 'Aksum* ('Book of Aksum'),¹⁵ both works were composed in the 15th century (the *Maṣḥafa 'Aksum* was composed at different stages).

Since (if at all) only very few original literary works composed during the Aksumite era have been discovered so far,¹⁶ it is unlikely that the path along which these enigmatic names came to be remembered as those of two great kings whose conversion laid the foundation of Christian culture in Ethiopia can be traced. Nevertheless, due to the preeminent role attributed to them, 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa are venerated as saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church. The Ethiopic Synaxarion¹⁷ in its revised version contains a short commemorative notice for the 4 *Ṭəqəmt*:

- 13 Their names are also listed in the different lists (A–G) of the Aksumite kings prepared by C. Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum," *Journal Asiatique*, 10^e série, 14 (1909), pp. 263–320: list A (based on 22 documents dating to 16th–19th century), nos 15–16, p. 271; B (based on 33 manuscripts dating to 16th–19th century), nos 37–38, p. 280; C (based on 16 documents dating to 16th–19th century), nos 59–60, p. 292 (with 27.6 years of reign, 12 years for 'Aṣbəḥa alone); D (based on six documents), nos 38–39, p. 297; E (based on one document), nos 36–37, p. 299 (with 65 years of reign); F (based on one manuscript dating to the 16th century), nos 13–14, p. 300; G (based on one manuscript dating to the 18th century), nos 15–16, p. 301 (with the mention of the church of Aksum built on water).
- 14 For a concise introduction to this outstanding work see "Məṣṭir: Mäṣḥafä məṣṭir," *EAE*, vol. 3, pp. 941b–944a (A. Bausi). The *Maṣḥafa Məṣṭir* gives a short account of Frumentius who returned from the Patriarch of Alexandria as Metropolitan during the reign of 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa. See the edition by Yaqob Beyene, *Giyorgis di Saglā. Il libro del Mistero* (CSCO, 515, 516; *Scriptores Aethiopici*, 89, 90), Lovanii, 1990, pp. 121 (ed.), 73 (tr.).
- 15 See below (Ms C). For a general overview on this work see 'Aksum: Mäṣḥafä Aksum', *EAE*, I (2003), pp. 185a–186a (G. Lusini). The text was edited by C. Conti Rossini, *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam*, 1, *Liber Axumae* (CSCO, 54, 58; *Scriptores Aethiopici* 24, 27), Paris – Leipzig, 1909–1910.
- 16 One of those few may be the homily edited by Getatchew Haile, "An Anonymous Homily" (see n. 10) which is preserved in a manuscript (EMML no. 1763) dating from the first half of the 14th century (see also Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica*, p. 57).
- 17 The Ethiopic Synaxarion (the Ethiopic term is *Sənkəssār*) was first translated from the Copto-Arabic Synaxarion at the end of the 14th century and later, between 1563–1581, thoroughly revised with added commemorative notices for Ethiopian saints, see "Sənkəssār," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 621a–623a (G. Colin and A. Bausi).

ወበዛቲ፡ ፅለት፡ ካዕበ፡ ኮነ፡ ተዝካረ፡ ዕረፍቶሙ፡ ለነገሥት፡ ጸድቃን፡
 አብርሃ፡ ወፀብሐ፡ (sic!) ዘነግሡ፡ በኢትዮጵያ፡ በመካነ፡ አክሡም፡ ኅቡረ፡
 በኢተባርዮ ። ጸሎቶሙ፡ ወበረከቶሙ፡ የሀሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ...¹⁸

'Furthermore, on this day the passing of the righteous kings 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa who together jointly reigned in Ethiopia at the place of Aksum is commemorated. May their prayer and their blessing be with ...'.

The aforementioned manuscript EMMML no. 1763¹⁹ – containing the 'homily for the (commemoration) day of 'Ḫlla 'Aṣbaḥā' (that is King Kāleb) which might originate in the Aksumite era – may provide an indication, albeit vague, to an early veneration of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa. The incipit folio of this homily contains a marginal note written in the same hand as the homily referring to no other date than to the commemoration day of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa: **እምረቡዑ፡ ለጥቅምት፡ በተዝካረ፡ እለ፡ አጽብሐ ።** (sic!) 'On the fourth of *Ṭeqəmt* for the commemoration of 'Ḫlla 'Aṣbaḥā'.²⁰ Nevertheless, it is possible that the scribe of EMMML no. 1763 did not copy this note from his *Vorlage* but added it to his text according to the tradition of the scribe's time.

However, as will be soon demonstrated, the veneration of the saintly kings enjoyed a revival in the mid-19th century when their hagiography, the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa*, was most probably written down for the first time. The text has not yet been edited, but P. Marrassini published a commented summary.²¹ Before I discuss its content and its purpose, I would like to briefly present the available text witnesses.

18 G. Colin, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, Mois de Ṭeqemt* (PO, 44,1 [197]), Turnhout, 1987, p. 16. It seems rather striking that the Aksumite king Kāleb is venerated with a much longer commemorative notice on 20 *Gənbət* (G. Colin, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, Mois de Genbot* (PO, 47,3 [211]), Turnhout, 1997, pp. 298–303 [106–111]).

19 See n. 16.

20 Getatchew Haile, "An Anonymous Homily" (see n. 10), p. 31. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to Getatchew Haile who again checked the microfilm copy of this manuscript and confirmed in a personal e-mail (17 April 2016) that this note was written by the same scribe who wrote the homily.

21 P. Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa. Indicazioni preliminari," in: *Miscellanea Aethiopica reverendissimo domino Stanislaw Kur septuagenario professori illustrissimo viro amplissimo ac doctissimo oblata* (Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne, 12,2, 1999), Warszawa, 2000, pp. 159–179.

Text Witnesses of *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*

Given the central role in the Christianization of the country attributed to 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa, one would expect a large number of extant manuscripts containing the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*. The *Lives* of great saints venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church (such as Takla Hāymānot, Gabra Manfas Qəddus, 'Ewostātewos) have survived in an astonishing number of codices (there is a good chance of finding the *Life* of at least one of those great saints in almost any church in Ethiopia). Yet indeed, only one single manuscript with the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* among the thousands of manuscripts registered in western collections (as books, microfilms and/or digitized images) has been catalogued so far (see below). Three more manuscripts with the *Life* were photographed by different scholars during their individual fieldwork in Ethiopia.

Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Conti Rossini, Ms no. 19

This manuscript was commissioned by the renowned scholar, C. Conti Rossini, in 1938 and was copied for him on paper. It is preserved in the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, and was catalogued by S. Strelcyn.²² Unfortunately, there is no information about the scribe who copied it nor about the provenance and date of its *Vorlage*. However, this copy was the main text witness used by P. Marrassini²³ to provide a summary of the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*. The manuscript comprises the *Life* (ff. 1^{ra}–72^{ra}), twelve miracles (ff. 72^{ra}–87^{vb}), a colophon (f. 88^{ra}–v^b) and a *Malkə'-hymn*²⁴ (ff. 90^{ra}–97^{rb}).

Ms A: Eastern Təgrāy, Šəṛā' 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa, C3-IV-330

The rock-hewn church Šəṛā' 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa²⁵ located in Təgrāy in the former district Kələtta 'Awla'əlo houses one parchment manuscript with the *Life*; this was photographed by Michael Gervers in 2005.²⁶ As the church is ded-

22 S. Strelcyn, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Fonds Conti Rossini et Fonds Caetani* 209, 375, 376, 377, 378 (Indice e Sussidi Bibliografici della Biblioteca, 9), Roma, 1976, pp. 67–70.

23 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha wa'Aṣbeḥa" (see n. 21), p. 159.

24 *Malkə'-hymns* belong to the Ethiopic hagiographical genre and were composed for many saints. The stanzaic hymn praises all parts of the saint's body.

25 For more information about this church and a photograph of its interior see "Šəṛā' 'Abrəhā wā-'Aṣbəḥa," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 628a–630a (E. Balicka-Witakowska).

26 I. Fridman consulted this manuscript for his article published in 2015: "The Aksumite Kingdom in the Lives of Aksumite Saints," in: *Veneration of Saints in Christian Ethiopia. Proceedings of the International Workshop, Saints in Christian Ethiopia: Literary Sources*

icated to the saintly kings, it is often referred to as the 'Church of 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣḃəḥa'.

The codex comprises at least seventy-nine folia²⁷ and contains the *Life* (ff. 2^{ra}–66^{rb}), twelve miracles (ff. 66^{va}–77^{ra}), a colophon (f. 77^{rb}–^{va}), a note on the donation to the church by *Rās* Gugṣā of one third of the collected grain tax from Gamād (f. 66^{rb}), all written in the same hand, with two rhymed texts²⁸ written in pen (ff. 78^v–79^r). The miniature on f. 1^v shows the two kings (see the detail above), probably the Metropolitan *ʿAbbā* Salāmā standing to their left and a prone figure below (probably the donor). The shelf mark C₃-IV-330 is written in pen on f. 2^r. Folia 2, 66 and 78 bear the stamp of *Rās* Gugṣā ʿArʿayā Ṣəllāse.

According to the colophon, the manuscript was donated in 1917 *‘Āmata Maḥrat* (= 1924/1925 CE) by *Rās Gugśā ‘Ar’ayā*²⁹ (b. 1882, d. 1933, baptismal name Walda Giyorgis) ‘to (the *tābot* of) ‘Abrəhā and ‘Aṣbəḥa, kings of Aksum, from the land of Gamād’ during the reign of Empress Zawditu (r. 1916–1930, here mentioned with her baptismal name ‘Askāla Māryām) and during the tenure of Metropolitan Mātewos³⁰ (1889–1926). The donor’s father *Rās ‘Ar’ayā Šəllāse Yohannəs*, son of Emperor Yohannəs IV (r. 1871–1889), is also mentioned.³¹

and Veneration, Hamburg, April 28–29, 2012, ed. D. Nosnitsin (Supplement to *Aethiopica*, 3), Wiesbaden, 2015, pp. 51–65.

- 27 As only folia with text were photographed, it is not clear whether one single leaf with the
miniature on its verso side or one bifolio precede the first numbered quire (**፩፻፭** :).
- 28 While one text records the expulsion of a demon from the Dabra Nagašt, the other texts
narrates that the Ethiopians adhered to Christianity but received baptism only during the
reign of the brother kings (allusion to the *Gadla Ἀβρηᾶ wa-ʾAṣḥaḥa*). The names Takla
Häymānot and Gabra Masqal (referred to as the authors of the *Gadla Ἀβρηᾶ wa-ʾAṣḥaḥa*,
see below) are written beneath both texts.
- 29 *Rās* Gugṣā was a Təgrean nobleman who was appointed *Rās* in 1918, see “Gugsas Ar’aya,”
EAE, vol. 2, pp. 905a–906a (H. Erlich).
- 30 Metropolitan Mātewos is also mentioned in the Dimā Document, see below and note 118.
- 31 The colophon reads as follows: **ዝመጽሐፍ ፡ ዘራስ ፡ ጉግሣ ፡ ወስመ ፡ ጥምቀቱ ፡ ወልደ ፡**
ጊዮርጊስ ፡ ወአቡሁ ፡ ራስ ፡ አርአያ ፡ ሥላሴ ፡ ወልዱ ፡ ለዮሐንስ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ንጉሠ ፡
ነገሥት ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ፡ ዘወሀቦሙ ፡ ለአብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ነገሥተ ፡ ኢክስም ፡ ዘሀገረ ፡
ገማድ ፡ በዘመነ ፡ መንግሥታ ፡ ለንግሥትነ ፡ ኢክሳለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ወእንዘ ፡ ጳጳስነ ፡ ማቴ
ዎስ ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ጳጳሳት ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ፡ ከመ ፡ ደኩኖ ፡ መድኃኒተ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ ወነፍስ ፡ ስብ
ሐት ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር ፡ ለዘአብጽሐነ ፡ እስከ ፡ ዛቲ ፡ ሰዓት ፡ ወለወላዲቱ ፡ ቅድስት ፡ ድን
ግል ፡ ማርያም ፡ ወላሳሌነ ፡ ይኩን ፡ ነህል ፡ ወምህረት ፡ ለዓለም ፡ ወለዓለመ ፡ ዓለም ፡
አሜን ፡ ዘሠረቆ ፡ ወዘፈሐቆ ፡ በሥልጣነ ፡ ጴጥሮስ ፡ ወጳውሎስ ፡ ውጉዝ ፡ ለይኩን ፡ በ፲
ወ፱፻ ፡ ፲ ወ፯ዓመተ ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ተጻፈ ፡ (sic!, Amharism).

Ms B: Eastern Goḡḡām, Maṛṭula Māryām, G₁-IV-53

The monastery Maṛṭula Māryām³² in Eastern Goḡḡām also possesses one parchment manuscript with the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-ʿAṣbəḥa* which was photographed by Claire Bosc-Tiessé and Anaïs Wion in 2004. The shelf mark of this codex was noted by the two scholars as G₁-IV-53, but it is not written on the digitized folia (the shelf mark could be written on the inner side of one of the boards; both are wrapped into a secondary cloth cover).

The manuscript contains the *Life* (ff. 9^{ra}–70^{vb}), twelve miracles (ff. 71^{ra}–82^{rb}) and the *Malkəʿ*-hymn (ff. 82^{va}–88^{rb}) written by the same scribe whose name, Habta Šəllāse, is mentioned on ff. 17^{rb}, 82^{rb}. Beside an excerpt from the *Malkəʿa Šəllāse* ('Image of the Trinity') crudely written on ff. 2^r–3^v, the full text of the *Malkəʿa Šəllāse* is written on ff. 5^{ra}–8^{va} in a different hand but probably at the same time as the main text; following this, in the same hand, is written a short poem (*qəne*) mentioning Emperor Hāyla Šəllāse. A note is written on f. 8^{vb} in pen.³³ Folia 1, 4, 88^v are blank.

The codex might be dated to the early reign of Emperor Hāyla Šəllāse (r. 1930–1974). Given the fact that in almost all of the supplication formulas 'the children of Maṛṭula Māryām' (ደቂቃ ፡ ለመርጡለ ፡ ማርያም ፡) are indicated, one might assume that the monastery itself commissioned the writing. Only once, on f. 33^{vb}, is the name 'Ar'ayā Šəllāse³⁴ (without any title), together with the name of his mother Tābota Muse, mentioned in the supplication formula.

32 The monastery was famous for the remarkable architectural construction of its old church (only the ruins of which now remain) and for its former great wealth. It was founded by Queen 'Eleni in the second half of the 15th century. For the queen's patronage see: I. Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I, Iyasu I, Bakaffa* (CSCO, 24, 25; Scriptores Aethiopici 7, 8), Paris – Leipzig, 1903 (repr. 1960–1961), pp. 72 (ed.), 71 (tr.); C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia, 1593–1646. Being Extracts from the History of High Ethiopia or Abassia by Manoel de Almeida. Together with Bahrey's History of the Galla* (Hakluyt Society Works, Series 2, 107) London, 1954, pp. 103–105; C. F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies: a true relation of the lands of the Prester John; being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520 / written by Father Francisco Alvares. The translation of Lord Stanley of Alderley (1881) revised and edited with additional material*, 11 (Hakluyt Society Works, Series 2, 115), London, 1961, p. 459. The date of its foundation will be discussed in more detail in my forthcoming dissertation.

33 The note, partly illegible, states that the church of Maṛṭula Māryām was built by 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa and consecrated by Abbā Salāmā. Emperor Hāyla Šəllāse contracted a Greek worker named Yoḥannəs Lutəstas (?) to rebuild the church with colourful stones during the time of Rās 'İmməru, governor of Goḡḡām, and Rə'əsa Rə'usān Kənfu, the then abbot of the monastery.

34 It is not the same 'Ar'ayā Šəllāse mentioned in the colophon of Ms A. The mother of the only son of Yoḥannəs IV was Təbaba Šəllāse. The Crown Prince, who was the first husband

Ms C: Təgrāy, Aksum, 'Aksum Ṣəyon, C2-IV-411

The church 'Aksum Ṣəyon³⁵ at Aksum is also in possession of a 20th-century parchment manuscript with the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa*. The codex was photographed by Antonella Brita in 2005 and contains the *Life* (ff. 4^{ra}–72^{rb}), a miracle of 'Abbā Salāmā (f. 72^{rb}) and thirteen miracles of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa (ff. 72^{va}–87^{vb}).

The miracle of 'Abbā Salāmā³⁶ and the first miracle of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa³⁷ are excerpts from the *Maṣḥafa 'Aksum*.³⁸ The later miracle narrates that the church was built 'for the third time' by 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa who climbed on a high mountain called Məkyāda, Christ appeared and filled a great lake with earth so that the church could be built on that spot. The miracle further narrates that the church was destroyed by Gwədit and restored by 'Aḍe 'Anbasā Wədəm in 910 'Āmata Məḥrat; furthermore the narration gives some details on the construction. The last (thirteenth) miracle is incomplete. The scribe stopped abruptly, in the middle of a sentence, on f. 87^{vb} and continued with another text on ff. 88^{va}–90^{ra}. This text briefly recounts the story of the baptism of the saintly kings and repeats the narration about the miraculous construction of the church.³⁹ Folio 88^r is blank.

of Empress Zawditu, bore the title *Rās*, he died suddenly in 1888 at the age of only eighteen. See "Ar'aya Šallase Yoḥannəs," *EAE*, vol. 1, p. 314b (Zewde Gabre-Sellassie) and "Yoḥannəs IV," *EAE*, vol. 5, pp. 73a–80a (Bairu Tafla), here p. 77a.

35 For general information on this famed church, see "Aksum Ṣəyon," *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 183b–185a (S.C. Munro-Hay).

36 The text reads: ተአምር ፡ ዘገብረ ፡ አቡነ ፡ ሰላማ ፡ ከሣቴ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ ወሀሎ ፡ ጸላሎተ ፡ ሥዕለ ፡ መስቀሉ ፡ ከቡር ፡ በበዓተ ፡ ባርያ ፡ ወእንዘ ፡ ይትመያየጥ ፡ በቤቶ ፡ መንግሥቶሙ ፡ ለአብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ወወጺኦ ፡ አዕረፈ ፡ ወነበረ ፡ ኀበ ፡ ይእቲ ፡ ዕብን ፡ ተሥዕለ ፡ ሥዕለ ፡ መስቀሉ ፡ ከቡር ፡ ወሀሎ ፡ ይትረክይ ፡ እስከ ፡ ይእዜ ፡ ጸሎተ ፡ የሃሉ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩልነ ፡ ደቂቀ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ገበዘ ፡ አክሱም ፡ ለዓ ፡

37 The incipit is as follows: በሰመ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ጀአምላክ ፡ ንቅድም ፡ በረድኤተ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ወበስእለታ ፡ ለእግዝእትነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ድንግል ፡ ወላዲተ ፡ አምላክ ፡ በጽሒፈ ፡ ተአምር ፡ ዘአብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ጸሎቶሙ ፡ ወበረከቶሙ ፡ የሀሉ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ... ከመዝኦ ፡ ጥንተ ፡ ሱራሬሃ ፡ ለእምነ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ገበዘ ፡ አክሱም ፡ ቀዲሙኒ ፡ ተሣረረት ፡ በመዝብር ፡ ኀበ ፡ ሀሎ ፡ መቃብሪሁ ፡ ለኢትዮጵስ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ኩሳ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ካም ፡ ወነበረት ፡ ብዙኃ ፡ አዝማኖተ ፡ ወድኅሪሁ ፡ ወለጠተ ፡ ማክዳ ፡ ወሐነጸት ፡ በምድረ ፡ ዓስባ ፡ ዘበእንቲአሃ ፡ ይቤ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ንግሥተ ፡ ሳባ ፡ ...

38 See Conti Rossini, *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam* (see n. 15), pp. 3, 6 (ed., tr.).

39 The text begins with the arrival of the trader Meropius together with the two children Frumentius and Sidrakos and reads as follows: ወእምዝ ፡ ንጽሕፍ ፡ ታሪክ ፡ ዘነገሥት ፡ ጳድቃን ፡ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ ፡ ዘነግሡ ፡ በ፫፻፴ወ፪ ፡ ዓመተ ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ወበዓመተ ፡ መንግሥቶሙ ፡ ፲ወ፭ ፡ መጽአ ፡ ፩ነጋዲ ፡ እምብሔረ ፡ ጢሮስ ፡ ዘስሙ ፡ መረጳዎስ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ጀደቂቁ ፡ ለጀስሙ ፡ ፍሬ ፡ ምናጦስ ፡ ወስመ ፡ ካልኡ ፡ ሲድራኮስ ፡ ወኀደፋ ፡ በሀገረ ፡

Folia 90^{ra}–92^{rb} contain a register of land rights (*gʷəlt* and *rəst*) granted to 'Aksum Šəyon. A list of predecessors of the kings 'Abrəhā and 'Ašbəḥa ('ጉልቁ : ትውልድ : ዘነገሥት : አብርሃ : ወአጽብሐ :) before the birth of Christ, from 'Arwe to Bāzen, and a list of kings after the birth of Christ (ከልደት : በኋላ : በኢትዮጵያ : የነግሡ :), non-Christian: from Šənfa 'Asgad to Queen Sofyā and Christian: from 'Abrəhā and 'Ašbəḥa to Hāyła Šəllāse (including also various governors of Təgrāy), are given on ff. 92^{rb}–95^{rb}. The codex contains two miniatures (ff. 95^v, 96^r) depicting the metropolitans Frumentius and 'Enbaram⁴⁰ and the brother kings 'Abrəhā and 'Ašbəḥa.⁴¹ Several notes are written on ff. 1^v–3^v. The shelf mark C2-IV-411 is written on ff. 1^r, 44^v, 45^r.

According to the donation note (f. 3^v), *Qes Gabaz* Takla Hāymānot donated this manuscript, among others, to 'My Mother, the Heavenly Zion, Treasury of Aksum' (ለእምየ : ጽዮን : ሰማያዊት : ገበዘ : አክሱም :) in 1944 *Āmata Məḥrat* (= 1951/1952 CE), in the year when 'Abbā Bāsəlyos⁴² was consecrated Metropolitan (= 1951 CE), in the 22nd year of the reign of Emperor Hāyła Šəllāse.

The three manuscripts, Ms A, Ms B and Ms C, contain the same version of the *Life* as in Ms Rome,⁴³ followed by the same sequence of miracles (with the exception of the first miracle in Ms C). Also, the *Malkə*-hymn in Ms Rome seems to be the same as the one transmitted in Ms B (the first stanza is the only one given in the catalogue).

አክሱም : በውስተ : ቤቱ : ለእንበረም : ሊቀ : ካህናት ። ዘእምነገደ : አዛርያስ : ... The name Meropius is not mentioned in the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Ašbəḥa* (see n. 55).

40 The legend on f. 95v reads: 'Fəre, son of Məntos whose metropolitan's name was Salāmā Kašāte Bərhān. 'Enbaram, son of Səmə'on the Aksumite, whose metropolitan's name was Həzba Qəddus' (ፍሬ : ወልደ : ምንጦስ : ዘስመ : ጵጵስናው : ሰላማ : ካሣቱ : ብርሃን ። እንበረም : ወልደ : ስምዖን : አክሱማዊ : ዘስመ : ጵጵስናው : ሕዝበ : ቅዱስ ።).

41 The legend on f. 96r reads: 'Behold the goodness and behold the beauty when the brothers were together (ናው : ሠናይ : ወናው : አዳም : ሶበ : ይሔልዉ : አኃው : ኅቡረ :).

42 'Abuna Bāsəlyos was consecrated in Cairo as the first Ethiopian Metropolitan and became the first Ethiopian Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church in 1956, see "Bāsəlyos," *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 183b–185a (Bairu Tafla).

43 The incipit given in the catalogue (Strelcyn 1976, p. 67, see n. 22) omits several words due to homoioteleuton, committed either by the copyist or by the cataloguer. Between the words ወምስለ : መንፈስ : ቅዱስ : and እምአብ : ዘይወጽእ : (= lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ኅቡር : ህላዊው ። [ህላዊው : ኅቡር ። transp. Ms C] ወበስመ : እግዚአብሔር : [om. Ms A] መንፈስ : ቅዱስ : .

Ms D: Təgrāy, ʾAddi Qešo Madhāne ʾĀlam, no shelf mark

Another parchment manuscript containing the *Life* is housed in the 14th-century rock-hewn church ʾAddi Qešo Madhāne ʾĀlam in Təgrāy.⁴⁴ The codex was photographed by Antonella Brita in 2005 and comprises seventy-five folia with the *Life* (ff. 3^{ra}–57^{vb}), twelve miracles (ff. 58^{ra}–70^{rb}) and the *Malkəʿ*-hymn (ff. 70^{ra}–73^{vb}). The names of the months are written in the upper margin and indicate monthly readings of the *Life*. Notably, Ms *D* does not contain the same version of the *Life* or of the miracles as that transmitted in the other presented manuscripts. The offered text – though undoubtedly based on the same text material – represents a shorter version (see also below).

According to the purchase note (f. 74^{va}), the manuscript was sold by ʾAlaqā Lāʾəka Māryām (baptismal name: Gabra Mikāʾel) to ʾAlaqā Gabra Māryām (baptismal name: Gabra ʾĒgziʾ) for sixty Ethiopian *Bərr* on 2 *Təqəmt* [19]52 *Āmata Məḥrat* (= 12 October 1961 CE). Lāʾəka Māryām is mentioned as the scribe on f. 14^{ra}. The purchase note is followed by a donation note (f. 74^{vb}) which states that the book was given by *Halaqā* Gabra Māryām to the *tābot* of ʾĀlam Madhāne ʾAddi Qāšo. Folia 1, 2, 74, 75 are blank.

Significantly, all the above mentioned manuscripts containing the *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAṣbəḥa* are recent text witnesses dating from the 20th century. Given the fact that thousands of manuscripts housed in the many churches and monasteries of Ethiopia are not yet registered, it is distinctly possible that more text witnesses exist. But it stands to reason – as we will also learn from the Dimā Document – that, firstly, only selected churches are in possession of this text (most probably including the church Tadbāba Māryām in ʾAmḥārā, see below), and, secondly, that all manuscripts containing this text almost certainly date back to the second half of the 19th century at the earliest.

The existence of one or two additional manuscripts is indicated in the literature. Aleme Teferu and R. Cowley⁴⁵ list two manuscripts containing the *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAṣbəḥa*: in the church of Takla Hāymānot in Ḥawzen, ʾĀgāme (Northeastern Təgrāy) and in the church of ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAṣbəḥa in ʾĀyba, Hulāt (Eastern Təgrāy, Ms *A?*). Also Sergew Hable Selassie refers in his major work⁴⁶ to one manuscript containing the *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAṣbəḥa*, which he ‘recent-

44 For a photograph of this church see “Rock-hewn churches and churches-in-caves,” *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 400a–404b (M. Gervers and E. Fritsch), here p. 403.

45 Aleme Teferu and R. Cowley, “The Study of Geez Manuscripts in Tēgre Province,” *JES*, 9.1 (1971), pp. 21–25, here pp. 23, 25. One of the two was also consulted by P. Marrassini, and is referred to as Ms *S* in his article (Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa” (see n. 21), p. 159).

46 Sergew Hable Selassie, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History* (see n. 6), pp. 92–93.

ly copied from the Church of Abreha and Arbeha (sic!) in Tigre', most probably again Ms A. Finally, Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke⁴⁷ lists three text witnesses: a) from Aksum (probably Ms C) together with b–c) apparent reproductions of this manuscript [= b) microfilm no. 193 kept in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa⁴⁸ and c) a microfilm? copy hold in the former Organization for Preservation of Antiquities in Maqala]; d) and e) are those listed by Aleme Teferu and R. Cowley. As stated above, the *Vorlage* of Ms Rome could not yet be identified.

Content of *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣḃəḥa*

In the following, the content of the text is briefly summarized, concentrating on those points which are relevant for the article.

The *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣḃəḥa* opens with a prologue and continues with the origin and youth of the protagonists.⁴⁹ 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣḃəḥa were born as twins to King Tāzer (regnal name: Sayfa 'Ar'ād) and Queen Sofyā from the tribe Levi in Gamād on 29 *Tāḥśaś* (that is the Nativity). This section includes a list of biblical kings up to and including Solomon followed by the story of the 'Queen of the South' (that is the Ethiopian queen Mākəddā, ንግሥተ ፡ አዜብ ፡ [ዘንግሠት ፡ om. Ms D] በምድረ ፡ ትግራ ፡ [አክሱም ፡ Ms C]), who visited Solomon in Jerusalem and returned pregnant. Finally, her son, Mənilək⁵⁰ (ዕብነ ፡ ሐኪም ፡ ዘውእቱ ፡ ምኒልክ ፡), brought the Ark of the Covenant (*Tābota Ṣəyon*) to Ethiopia.⁵¹ Hereafter, the kings are listed from Mənilək to 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣḃəḥa.

The brothers became kings of Ethiopia at the age of twelve after their father died.⁵² The people of Ṣawā refused to follow the newly crowned kings through satanic intervention, but eventually with the help of God, their hearts were turned.⁵³ After fifteen years, 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣḃəḥa jointly (በጎብረተ ፡ ቃል ፡)

47 Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke, "Bibliography of the Ethiopic Hagiographical Traditions," *JES*, 13,2 (1975), pp. 57–102, here p. 60.

48 Now merged with microfilm IES no. 194, see G. Lusini, *Studi sul monachesimo eustaziano (secoli XIV–XV)*, Napoli, 1993, p. 70.

49 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣḃəḥa" (see n. 21), pp. 160–161; Ms A: ff. 2ra–16vb; Ms B: ff. 9ra–23ra; Ms C: ff. 4ra–21va; Ms D: ff. 3ra–22vb.

50 Ms Rome, Ms A, Ms B and Ms C read ምንይልክ ፡.

51 This story is an allusion to the tradition, the most famous version of which is recorded in the *Kəbra Nagaśt* ('Glory of the Kings').

52 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣḃəḥa" (see n. 21), pp. 161–162; Ms A: ff. 16vb–21va; Ms B: ff. 23ra–27vb; Ms C: ff. 21va–27ra; Ms D: ff. 22vb–28rb.

53 Ibid., 162; Ms A: ff. 21va–23ra; Ms B: ff. 27vb–29va; Ms C: ff. 27rb–29ra; Ms D: ff. 28rb–29vb.

asked the high priest why no Apostle had been sent to them so far even though two hundred forty-seven years had already passed since the birth of Christ. The high priest told them about the 'Egyptian' Frumentius who 'always said: you people of Ethiopia have the circumcision and the faith but not baptism and not Holy Communion'. This is followed by the story of Frumentius who was then asked by 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa to teach the faith in the whole country. Frumentius declined as he had no authorization to fulfil their request. Thus Frumentius travelled with a letter from 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa to Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria. The Patriarch ordained him priest, gave him the name 'Salāmā that is Kaṣāte Bērḥān' (ሰላማ ፡ ዝው-እቲ ፡ ከ-ጊድ ፡ ብርሃን ፡ 'that who reveals the light') and eventually appointed him as the first Metropolitan (ጳጳስ ፡) of Ethiopia. Frumentius (from here on always referred to as 'Abbā Salāmā) also received the books of the Old and New Testament as well as the *tābot* of St Mary and the *tābotāt* of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel⁵⁴ and returned by ship to Ethiopia. When 'the kings of Aksum' heard about his coming they received him at a city named Pəsəforā (ጽርስፎራ ፡). The kings were the first to be baptized and were then sent to teach the faith 'to all corners of Ethiopia'. Soon the members of the royal court (the 'seven children') and their army were baptized, deacons and priests were ordained, and Takla Hāymānot and Gabra Masqal were appointed to translate books from Arabic into Gə'əz.⁵⁵

The story further relates the Christianization of many places and in various regions as well as the foundation of known churches due to the missionary work of the twin brother kings 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa. After having stayed for a while in Ḥamāsen (ሐማሴን ፡),⁵⁶ converting all people of this region, they went with their army to Nāgrān (ናግራን ፡)⁵⁷ where they miraculously fought against demons (that vanished like 'a cloud of steam') and successfully convinced the people to give up their idolatry and to commit themselves to Christianity.⁵⁸ Hereafter they successfully continued their missionary work in Śar'āwe (ሠርዓ

54 On the three *tābotāt* see the comment by Fridman, "The Aksumite Kingdom" (see n. 26), p. 54.

55 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa" (see n. 21), pp. 162–163; Ms A: ff. 23ra–28ra; Ms B: ff. 29va–34va; Ms C: ff. 29ra–34rb; Ms D: ff. 30ra–35rb. The brother of Frumentius is called 'Adəyos (that is Edesius) in Mss A, B and D, and Sidrakos in Ms C (see already n. 39). All Mss do not explicitly mention the name of Meropius but refer to him as a 'trader from the land of Tyre'.

56 Ḥamāsen is a historical province in the northern Eritrean highlands, see "Ḥamasen," EAE, vol. 2, pp. 987a–990a (W. Smidt). Ms D reads ሐሚን ፡ (f. 35rb).

57 See the comments by Fridman, "The Aksumite Kingdom" (see n. 26), pp. 57–58.

58 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa" (see n. 21), pp. 163–164; Ms A: ff. 28ra–30va; Ms B: ff. 34va–36va; Ms C: ff. 34rb–37rb; Ms D: ff. 35rb–37rb.

ዌ ፤),⁵⁹ Gamād (ገማድ ፤, the home region of their mother), 'Aybā or 'Āyba (አይባ ፤ or ዓይባ ፤) and Mandā (መንዳ ፤), where they fiercely fought against the demons and idolatry of their own ancestors, until they finally returned to Aksum.⁶⁰ There they built the church Gabaza 'Aksum ('Treasury of Aksum', that is 'Aksum Ṣəyon).⁶¹ After having finished the construction of the church, they set out to the region of 'Amḥārā where they built a church in the name of St Cyriacus (በስመ ፡ ቂርቆስ ፡ ሕዋን ፤) and of St Mary on an island in Lake Ṣānā (that is the famous church of Ṭānā Qirqos and the island where the Holy Family is believed to have sought shelter).⁶² They returned to Təgrāy where they built churches, among them one in Ṣərā'; in Aksum they erected a stele in form of the cross (ወወቀሙ ፡ በህየ ፡ ሐውልተ ፡ በአምሳለ ፡ ትእምርተ ፡ መስቀል ፤).⁶³ They travelled further south, crossed the river Takazzi and founded the church Tadbāba Māryām (ተድባበ ፡ ማርያም ፤) in the 'Amḥārā region and appointed its head with the title *Batra Yārek* (በትረ ፡ ያሬክ ፤).⁶⁴ Hereafter they reached the region of Goḡḡām where they encountered people practising witchcraft. They miraculously destroyed their idols (which 'cracked like ice'). All magicians were converted and baptized, and another sanctuary, named Marṭula Māryām, was built; the appointed head was given the title *Rə'asa Rə'usān* (ርእሰ ፡ ርእሳን ፤).⁶⁵ Thereupon 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa went via Qarānyo (in Eastern Goḡḡām)

-
- 59 Ibid., p. 164; Ms A: f. 30va–vb; Ms B: f. 36va; Ms C: f. 37rb–va. The episode with Ṣar'āwe is not mentioned in Ms D.
- 60 Ibid., pp. 164–165; Ms A: ff. 31rb–36rb; Ms B: ff. 37rb–41rb; Ms C: ff. 38rb–43ra; Ms D: ff. 38ra–42va. For the place names see *ibid.*, pp. 175–176.
- 61 Ibid., pp. 165–166; Ms A: ff. 37va–42rb; Ms B: ff. 42vb–47vb; Ms C: ff. 44rb–48ra; Ms D: ff. 43vb–46vb (different from the other witnesses). See also the mention in the king list *G* edited by Conti Rossini, "Les listes des rois d'Aksoum" (see n. 12), p. 301 and in the Short Chronicle edited by Dombrowski, *Ṭānāsee 106* (see n. 13), pp. 147–148 as well as the remarks by Fridman, "The Aksumite Kingdom" (see n. 26), pp. 61–63.
- 62 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa" (see n. 21), pp. 166–167; Ms A: ff. 42rb–46ra; Ms B: ff. 47vb–51va; Ms C: ff. 48ra–51rb; Ms D: ff. 46vb–48ra (different from the other witnesses). See also note 77.
- 63 Ibid., pp. 167–168; Ms A: ff. 46rb–48va; Ms B: ff. 51va–53vb; Ms C: ff. 51rb–53rb; Ms D: ff. 48ra–50rb.
- 64 Ibid., p. 168; Ms A: f. 48va; Ms B: f. 53vb; Ms C: f. 53rb–va; Ms D: f. 50rb. For the title see also "Tādbabā Maryām," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 807a–808b (A. Wion), here p. 807a.
- 65 Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa" (see n. 21), p. 168; Ms A: ff. 48vb–49va; Ms B: f. 54ra–va; Ms C: ff. 53vb–54rb; Ms D: ff. 50rb–50va (different shorter version; the church is named Marṭula Ṣāllāse – the scribe probably erroneously filled the space left for the expected, rubricated name of St Mary, that is 'Māyram'). For the title see the reference in n. 83.

to Šawā, chased away demons (that again vanished in 'a cloud of steam'), converted all people, and constructed many churches.⁶⁶

After fifteen years together, the brothers decided to part from each other for further missionary work, for the continuing fight against demons and for the salvation of sinners – 'Abrēhā went together with 'Abbā Salāmā to Təgrāy and 'Aṣbēḥa went to Šawā.⁶⁷ The brothers were reunited shortly before 'Abrēhā went unarmed into his last battle against an unbeliever who finally killed him, cutting off his head with a sword. The unbeliever was then baptized by 'Abbā Salāmā, given the name Ɖewā Hāymānot ('prisoner of the faith'), and was later appointed head of the sanctuary of Gamād.⁶⁸

Jesus appeared together with St Mary, the archangels, the apostles, the prophets and the holy fathers. 'Abrēhā's head was reattached to his neck, the Lord ordered 'Abbā Salāmā to cut his hair every day, and his body was brought first to Aksum and Mandā, and finally to Gamād where he was buried. His life story is given as follows: he lived for fifty-two years, of which he stayed five years in the parental home, seven in the sanctuary (ቤተ ሐዋርያት), fifteen years as king following the law of the Old Testament (በሕግ ሕረግ), a further fifteen years preaching the Gospels and finally ten years in Təgrāy separated from his brother. 'Aṣbēḥa determined three commemoration days to be celebrated annually: 4 *Təqamt* (day of death), 13 *Naḥase* (arrival of the saint's body into the sanctuary of Gamād), 29 *Tāḥśās* (day of birth).⁶⁹

'Aṣbēḥa thereupon reluctantly married a virgin and gave birth to a son named 'Asfāḥ. When his son turned twelve, 'Aṣbēḥa died at the hand of an unbeliever in the same way as his brother. Thus 'Aṣbēḥa lived 13 years longer than his brother. He was honoured with the same ceremony performed for his brother and was also buried in the sanctuary of Gamād on 12 *Ḥədār*. 'Asfāḥ ordered the same commemoration days as for the brother to be celebrated, assigned the head of the sanctuary to cut the hair of 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa, and provided the sanctuary with all necessary objects and paraphernalia as well as

66 Ibid., pp. 168–169; Ms A: ff. 49va–51ra; Ms B: f. 54va–56ra; Ms C: ff. 54rb–55va. This episode is not included in Ms D.

67 Ibid., pp. 168–169; Ms A: ff. 51ra–58va; Ms B: ff. 56ra–63va; Ms C: ff. 55va–63va; Ms D: ff. 50va–55ra.

68 Ibid., p. 170; Ms A: ff. 58va–60ra; Ms B: ff. 63va–64vb; Ms C: ff. 63va–65rb; Ms D: f. 55ra–vb. The circumstances of 'Abrēhā's death are not narrated in Ms D.

69 Ibid., pp. 170–171; Ms A: ff. 60ra–62vb; Ms B: ff. 64vb–67va; Ms C: ff. 65rb–68rb; Ms D: ff. 55vb–57va.

books of the Old and New Testament so that it resembles the Heavenly Jerusalem.⁷⁰

An evaluation of *Gadla 'Abrahā wa-'Aṣḥā*

Various scholars who have worked on and with the *Gadla 'Abrahā wa-'Aṣḥā* have pointed out that the text contains anachronistic elements and entirely lacks historical value.⁷¹ Indeed, the hagiography of the saintly kings represents an example of 'an artificially constructed Vita'⁷² and seems to have been written by an author who had only the most superficial knowledge of the early Ethiopian-Christian era. In the prologue, the authorship is attributed to 'Abbā Salāmā and the translation into Gə'əz to the Levite priests Takla Hāymānot and Gabra Masqal. Based on this passage, P. Marrassini dated the *Life* to the Metropolitanate of 'Abuna Salāmā II (1348–1388); this was rightly questioned by I. Fridman, who suggests that the text 'could be composed any time within the Solomonic era, up to the late nineteenth century, with the exception of the late thirteenth and the first half of the fourteenth century'.⁷³ The mention of the church Tadbāba Māryām,⁷⁴ which was founded by King Galāwdewos in 1552

70 Ibid., pp. 171–172; Ms A: ff. 63ra–66ra; Ms B: ff. 67va–70vb; Ms C: ff. 68rb–72rb; Ms D: f. 57va–vb (short version without giving any details). In contrast to *ibid.*, p. 172 ("Inoltre, le 80 chiese costruite da AA sono state registrate interamente a Gamād e a 'Aybā [*wasemo-mussa lazatahanṣu 'abyāta krestiyānāt 80 ba'edawihomu la'abreha wa'aṣḥa nagašt ṣahāfna h'wellāq'ēhomu hagara gamādessa wa'aybā bamel'omu*]", Mss A, B and C read only eight churches. Ms B adds the attribute 'rock-hewn' (ዘዕብን፣ ወቅር፣); Ms D does not include this passage.

71 Getatchew Haile, "An Anonymous Homily" (see n. 10), p. 26 refers to the text as 'another confused legend of no historical value'. Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣḥa" (see n. 21), p. 159: "Si tratta in ogni caso di un testo molto povero non solo di fatti storici, ma anche di motivi letterari e agiografici." Marrassini, *Storia e leggenda dell'Etiopia tardoantica* (see n. 4), p. 57: "Testo [...] totalmente privo di valore storico." I. Fridman carried out a critical analysis of some elements of the text and convincingly concludes e.g. that the Nāgrān episode is not based on any historical source but solely on the author's own imagination (Fridman, "The Aksumite Kingdom" (see n. 26), p. 58).

72 Fridman, "The Aksumite Kingdom" (see n. 26), p. 52.

73 Ibid., pp. 52–53.

74 W. E. Conzelman, *Chronique de Galāwdewos (Claudius), Roi d'Éthiopie* (Bibliothèque de l'École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sciences philologiques et historiques, 104), Paris, 1895, pp. 49–51, 58–59, 73–74 (ed.), pp. 150–151, 156, 163–164 (tr.); see also Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens* (see n. 12), p. 215b; Basset, "Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie" (see n. 12), pp. 336 (ed.), 109 (tr.); "Tädbabä Maryam," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 807a–808b (A. Wion).

enables us to fix the earliest possible date of composition to the mid-16th century, based on only the most obvious text internal evidence. A thorough examination of the text (especially of the historicity of the various toponyms occurring in it) will almost certainly allow us to establish a much later *terminus post quem*.

Although anachronistic and ahistorical elements are often found in hagiographical works, their frequency in the present case is very striking. In addition, the text suffers from a rather poor literary style characterized by the monotonous repetitions of the fights against evil demons and idolatry in various places and regions of Ethiopia which were certainly not defined in such a way during the Aksumite era. The brothers are always portrayed as living and acting as one king. Consequently, they died the same martyr's death – but at different times so that one of the twin brother would beget a successor of both kings. That would have been impossible with both brothers alive. I would like to point out that this text, with its predictable and trivial narrative structure, is in no way a typical example of Ethiopic hagiography. In fact, it is the opposite. In terms of its historicity and literary value, the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbēḥa* is very distinct from the many, elaborately written hagiographical works devoted to the various saints venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church.

However, the writing of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbēḥa* seems to have been inspired not only by the sainthood of the kings, to honour and glorify them as the first Christian kings and the earliest missionaries of Ethiopia. Equally important is the fact that the text provides foundation narratives of some churches, to which – as we have seen – the following belong: the church at Ṭānā Qirqos (or Ṣānā Qirqos), Tadbāba Māryām in 'Amḥārā and Marṭula Māryām in Eastern Goḡḡām. This tradition is also attested for Ṭānā Qirqos in a late-15th-century version of the *Maṣḥafa Kidāna Məḥrat* ('Book of the Covenant of Mercy').⁷⁵ This text includes one 'miracle of the Covenant of our Lady Mary which was performed in the sanctuary of Ṣānā where this book was written'.⁷⁶ It narrates that St Mary with her holy Child found shelter on the island during their flight from Herod's persecution, and that because of this, 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa built a sanctuary on that island.⁷⁷ Indeed, it is assumed that Ṭānā Qirqos belongs to the oldest (though not Aksumite) Christian communities in

75 This version was partly edited and translated by C. Conti Rossini, "Il Convento di Tsana in Abissinia e le sue Laudi alla Vergine," *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, 5, 19 (1910), pp. 581–621. Conti Rossini dates this version back to the reign of King Nā'od (r. 1494–1508) (*ibid.*, p. 591).

76 *Ibid.*, pp. 602 (ed.), 617 (tr.).

77 *Ibid.*, pp. 603 (ed.), 618 (tr.).

that region and may have already existed in the era of the Zāgwe dynasty (mid-12th century–mid-13th century).⁷⁸

This is certainly not the case for the royal churches of Maṛṭula Māryām and Tadbāba Māryām, that were founded in the second half of the 15th century and mid-16th century. Notwithstanding these historical facts, both churches claim an Aksumite foundation ascribed to the kings 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəha.⁷⁹ Those local traditions do not seem to have been long established. To the best of my knowledge, they were not recorded before the 20th century.⁸⁰

However, the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəha* affected other institutions which are not explicitly mentioned in the text. In the case of the monastery of Dabra Warq, the daughter monastery of Maṛṭula Māryām, it had even led to an extensive re-writing of the *Life* of its founder Śarḏa Pēṭros (that is the *Gadla Śarḏa Pēṭros*), revising its own founding history. This extraordinarily well documented re-writing process took place around 1900, and resulted in a new recension of the *Gadla Śarḏa Pēṭros*, in which the original foundation of the monastery is ascribed to 'Asfāḥ, son of 'Aṣbəha and its re-foundation to the 15th-century monk Śarḏa Pēṭros (thus following the historical fact that Dabra Warq was founded after the establishment of Maṛṭula Māryām).⁸¹

78 Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527*, Oxford, 1972, p. 190.

79 For Tadbāba Māryām see D. Spencer, "In search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," *JES*, 10,2 (1972), pp. 67–95, here p. 68. For Maṛṭula Māryām see D. Spencer, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancalion Re-discovered," *JES*, 12,2 (1974), pp. 201–220, here p. 204. In my interview with the abbot of Maṛṭula Māryām, Rə'əsa Rə'usān 'Abbā Hāyla Giyorgis, all historical facts (foundation by Queen 'Īleni, the tenure of the first abbot Takla Māryām) were denied, instead the Aksumite foundation was strongly affirmed (interview in Maṛṭula Māryām on 12 June 2012).

80 For Maṛṭula Māryām see for example Beckingham and Huntingford, *Some Records of Ethiopia* (see n. 32), pp. 103–105; Beckingham and Huntingford, *The Prester John of the Indies* (see n. 32), p. 459; there is no mention of 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəha but of Queen 'Īleni as its founder. Even C. T. Beke, who visited the monastery in 1842, was told nothing of an Aksumite foundation, rather that the church existed before 'Aḥmad Grāñ (who led the disastrous jihad against the Christian Empire in the first half of the 16th century); C. T. Beke, "Abyssinia. Being a Continuation of Routes in That Country," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, 14 (1844), pp. 1–76, here pp. 26–27.

81 The re-writing process will be intensively discussed in my forthcoming dissertation which offers a critical edition of the *Gadla Śarḏa Pēṭros* taking both recensions into account.

Controversy among church scholars and monastic conflict in Eastern Goḡḡām

It comes as no surprise that the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa* led to heated controversy among Ethiopian church scholars, as it clearly favours selected churches over other historical institutions. The authenticity of this text (together with another text, see below) was strongly disputed by the clerics of the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis⁸² (known also as Dabra Dēmāḥ). The strong opposition to this text provoked severe conflict over primacy between the monasteries of Dimā Giyorgis and Marṭula Māryām.⁸³

This dispute arose – as we will see – in the second half of the 19th century, most probably shortly after the writing of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa* in which Marṭula Māryām is accredited with an Aksumite foundation and thus wins the unrivalled status of the oldest monastery in Goḡḡām, its foundation dating back to the earliest possible period with the blessings of the first Christian Ethiopian kings. More than eighty years ago, E. Cerulli noted an ongoing ('e dura ancor oggi') heated dispute over primacy between Marṭula Māryām

82 Dimā Giyorgis is believed to have been founded by Takaṣta Bərḥān who was presumably a contemporary of King Dāwit I (1379/80–1413). See Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia* (see n. 78), p. 202, n. 3; "Dima Giyorgis," *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 161b–162b (J. Persoon), and "Tākāṣtā Bərḥān," *EAE*, vol. 4, p. 822a–b (J. Persoon) with further references.

83 Dimā Giyorgis and Marṭula Māryām together with Dabra Warq are still today the main monastic centres in Eastern Goḡḡām. They are famous for their rich and precious collections of manuscripts as well as for their prestigious traditional schools (especially *qəne*). These monasteries are not only flourishing centres of religious education and teaching but are also influential institutions, and, since they belong to different monastic affiliations, their history is also marked by competition for patronage and power. While Dimā Giyorgis, with strong links to Dabra Libānos, is affiliated to the monastic line of Takla Hāymānot, the monasteries of Marṭula Māryām and Dabra Warq traditionally belong to the monastic line of 'Ewoṣtātewos. Their monastic affiliations are stated, inter alia, in the chronicle of King 'Iyāsu I, Guidi, *Annales Iohannis I* (see n. 32), p. 69 (ed.): ... ሂዳሚ : እንተ : ይእቲ : ምኒተ : አቡነ : አባ : ተከሥተ : ብርሃን : ዘእምነገደ : ደቂቀ : ቤቱ : ለአቡነ : ተከለ : ሃይማኖት : ... "... Dimā, which is the monastery of 'Abuna 'Abbā Takaṣta Bərḥān who descended from the sons of the house of Takla Hāymānot ..." and for Marṭula Māryām: Ibid., p. 72 (ed.): ... ወሊቆሙ : ይሰመይ : ርእሰ : ርእሱን : ወምኒቱ : ይእቲ : ለአቡነ : ገብረ : ኢየሱስ : ዘእምደቂቀ : ቤቱ : ለአቡነ : ኤዎስጣኑስ ። "... And their head is called *Rə'asa Rə'usān* and it is the monastic community of Gabra 'Iyasus who is of the sons of the house of 'Abuna 'Ewoṣtātewos." Furthermore the monastic lines are transmitted in monastic genealogies found in various manuscripts.

and Dimā Giyorgis.⁸⁴ According to him, the clerics of Dimā Giyorgis argued that Marṭula Māryām was founded by Queen ʾĒleni, while in turn the clerics of Marṭula Māryām insisted on the Aksumite foundation, claiming that Queen ʾĒleni had only renewed the then old church.

The sensitive issue of this dispute, primacy, was also vividly expressed in poetry. One poem (‘qenē 6o8’ of the ʾHərūy-collection’) composed by a cleric of Marṭula Māryām was published and translated by E. Cerulli in 1933.⁸⁵ I would like to present another *qəne*, that was composed during the time of Takla Hāymānot, King of Goḡgām (b. c. 1850, d. 1901) and was recited to me in June 2015 by *Qasis* ʾĀlamnaw ʾAzzana, former head of the ʾĪqā bet (that is the store house) of Dabra Warq:

መርጡላ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ሥእርት ፡ በላዕለ ፡ ድማህ ፡ ዘበቆለት ።

Marṭula Māryām is the hair grown on the *head*.

ሥእርትህ ፡ ይትላፀይ ፡ ወድማህ ፡ ይተርፍ ።

But the hair will be cut off and the *head* will remain.

In the first line, Marṭula Māryām claims its primacy over Dimā Giyorgis, here called by its other name, Dəməh, which literally means ‘head’ and thus conveys the inner meaning (ambiguity is the cardinal feature of *qəne*). But in its reverse answer, Dimā Giyorgis unanimously upholds its primacy.

Eventually, no other than Emperor Mənilək II (r. 1889–1913) became involved in the dispute over primacy and was asked to decide over the primacy issue. The king’s decision in favour of Marṭula Māryām was announced in a royal letter dating to 28 Ṭərr 1889 ʾĀmata Məhrat (= 4 February 1897 CE) which was sent to Takla Hāymānot, King of Goḡgām. This letter is still displayed in Marṭula Māryām, hanging in a frame where it can be read by everyone visiting the ʾĪqā bet. This royal letter together with other documents will be edited and discussed in detail by Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne in his forthcoming article.⁸⁶ Here, it can be revealed that Emperor Mənilək II based his decision on ‘an old book of the *Gadla ʾAbrəhā wa-ʾAṣbəha* found in Təgrāy’. As we will see, there are

84 E. Cerulli, “L’Etiopia del secolo xv in nuovi documenti storici,” *Africa Italiana*, 5,2 (1933), pp. 57–112, here pp. 107–112 (V. Arte italiana nelle sculture di Marṭula Māryām), esp. p. 108. He does not give the source of his information.

85 Ibid., pp. 107–108. This collection was compiled by *Nəbura ʾĪd* Gabra Šəllāse, *Ṣahāfə təʾəzāz* (“Scribe of the Orders”) of Emperor Mənilək II on the basis of different manuscripts from Šawā (ibid., p. 100).

86 “Dispute over Precedence and Protocol: Hagiography and Forgery in Nineteenth-Century Ethiopia,” *Afriques* [en ligne], 7 (2016), <<http://afriques.revues.org>>.

strong reasons for doubting the existence of an 'old book' dating prior to the mid-19th century. The timing of the dispute between Dimā Giyorgis and Maṛṭula Māryām is in itself a strong indication of a mid-19th-century composition. However, the fact that Emperor Mənilək II interpreted the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* as a source of factual information to reconstitute historical realities clearly demonstrates the enormous importance of hagiographical works in Christian Ethiopia.

Introduction to the Dimā Document

In the following, I would like to present a remarkable document written in Amharic by an unnamed church scholar from Dimā Giyorgis which reveals so far unknown, crucial details about the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* and provides valuable insights into the controversy over this text as well as over another text, namely the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* ('Homily of Uriel'). Written from an inside perspective it is a startling historiographic document.

Fortunately, some manuscripts of Dimā Giyorgis were once microfilmed by the UNESCO mobile microfilming unit between 8 September 1969 and 12 February 1970. That project made plans to visit twelve sites but was successful only in ten of the locations. The tenth of these was the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis (referred to as 'Qedus Giorgis Church, Dimma Monastery, Gojjam' in the project report). The microfilms were held in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa and digitized by the team around Steve Delamarter in 2011.⁸⁷

The Dimā Document was microfilmed together with a manuscript containing the *Sənkəssār* into which its loose folia were put (for the purpose of microfilming?).⁸⁸ It consists of three parchment bifolia of which ff. 1^r–4^r are written with each eighteen lines, f. 5^r contains only five lines. The document is not dated but must have been written in late 1889 as the author refers to a letter of Emperor Mənilək II (see below) dating to 5 September 1889.

In the first part of the document, the author deals with the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*, and tells us that the *Life* was written around 1850 and commissioned by 'the people of Goḡḡām and of Təgrāy'. The author further tells us that the 'people of Aksum and the people of Gamād' came into conflict over this text during the reign of Emperor Yoḥannəs (r. 1872–1889), and that this conflict was at first resolved in favour of the opponents ('people of Aksum') who had

87 I thank Steve Delamarter for this information.

88 This *Sənkəssār*, which contains the commemorative notices for the months of *Maskaram* to *Yakkātīt*, was the fifth of the manuscripts microfilmed at Dimā Giyorgis (thus UNESCO 10.5).

successfully shown that the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-ʿAšbəḥa* was ‘falsely written, without text witness, without *Vorlage*’. However, we know from the royal letter (dated 4 February 1897) preserved in Marṭula Māryām that Emperor Mənilək II arrived at a different decision only a few years later.

Hereafter, the author focuses on another text, namely the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*. This text is devoted to the Archangel Uriel who is commemorated on 21 Ḥamle and remembered as he who appeared to Enoch and Ezra.⁸⁹ Apparently, there are several versions of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*. A short version of the text was edited by A. Caquot⁹⁰ on the basis of one manuscript which was in the private possession of Səyyum Walda Giyorgis, Addis Ababa. A. Caquot assumes that the version in the form presented must have been completed during the reign of Mənilək II (r. 1889–1913).⁹¹

This work is ascribed to ‘Tewodoṣ, son of the archbishop of Bəḥənsā, ‘disciple of ‘Abrokoros who was a disciple of John’ the Evangelist.⁹² However, there are strong reasons to assume that this work (at least in the here relevant versions) was written in Ethiopia – as the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-ʿAšbəḥa* – not before the mid-19th century. A brief glance into the available catalogues confirms this assumption (which nevertheless needs to be checked thoroughly).⁹³ The text

89 See the short commemorative notice in the Synaxarion edited by Guidi, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien*, vol. II (see n. 3), p. 377 [361]. For more information on the archangel in the Ethiopian tradition see the article by R. Beylot, “Recherches sur l’homiliaire éthiopien en l’honneur d’Ouriel,” *Pount*, 6 (2012) pp. 143–155, here pp. 146–147.

90 A. Caquot, “L’homélie en l’honneur de l’archange Ouriel (Dərsāna Urā'el),” *Annales d’Éthiopie*, 1 (1955), pp. 61–88.

91 Ibid., p. 63: “On est ainsi amené à placer sous le règne de Ménélik II la composition sous sa forme actuelle du *dərsāna Urā'el*.”

92 Ibid., pp. 66 (ed.), 79 (tr.).

93 Through my brief investigation, I was able to detect only recent manuscripts containing the here discussed versions of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*. One paper manuscript (dated 1951, and apparently different from the one edited by A. Caquot) housed in ‘Ambasat Kidāna Məḥrat, Təgrāy. This manuscript was digitized by the Ethio-SPaRe team headed by D. Nonsitsin, given the project’s shelf mark AKM-010 and catalogued by M. Villa (<http://mycms-vs03.rz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_document_00002762>, last access on 6 May 2016). Furthermore EMMI nos. 54, 79 (dated to the late 19th century) and 1942 (dated 1920/21); see W. F. Macomber and Getatchew Haile, *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts Microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library, Collegeville*, 10 vols., Collegeville, Minnesota, 1975–1993, here vol. I: *Project Numbers 1–300* (1975), pp. 57, 83 and vol. V: *Project Numbers 1501–2000* (1981), pp. 440–447. The version included in EMMI no. 1835, which dates back to the reign of King Zar’a Yā’qob (r. 1434–1468), is different since it is based on ‘I Ezra [Sutu’el], f. 166a, Jubilees [Kufālē], f. 174b, the Maṣḥafā kidān, f. 174b and Enoch [Hēnok], f. 76a’ (ibid., pp. 318–329,

narrates that Archangel Uriel gathered the divine blood, poured out from the side of Jesus, to purify and sanctify the whole world.⁹⁴ The archangel spread the blood over different places, churches and monasteries in Ethiopia. The storyline follows a north to south axis.⁹⁵ Significantly, in the version edited by A. Caquot there is no explicit mention of any churches and monasteries from Lake Ṭānā, Amḥārā and Goḡḡām.⁹⁶

Therefore, the author of the Dimā Document must have referred to a different version. It could have been a similar version to the one published in Addis Ababa⁹⁷ in 1993, because most of the passages our author refers to are found in this version, whereas none of these are found in the version published by A. Caquot. The later, larger, version contains around four hundred pages (Gə'əz and Amharic) and covers three main topics: a general prophecy concerning Ethiopia, the flight of St Mary with the Holy Child from Jerusalem via Egypt to Ethiopia and finally an extended version of the text published by A. Caquot – namely the sanctification of numerous places in Ethiopia with the blood of Christ. The text is divided into twelve monthly readings.

As demonstrated in the Dimā Document, the version of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* which was written by 'the people of Šawā and the people of Goḡḡām' during the reign of Mənilək II was also shown to be false, written down 'with malice, with envy, based on orality'. As a result, Emperor Mənilək II ordered the removal of this version and that it be 'cut it into pieces'. His royal announcement was issued in a letter sent to various churches and monasteries. Fortunately, a copy of the letter sent to the church of Beta Ləḥem was photographed by D. Crummey⁹⁸ in 1980 and will be presented following the Dimā Document.

here pp. 326–327). For the EMMML manuscripts see also Beylot, "Recherches sur l'homiliaire" (see n. 89).

94 Caquot, "L'homélie" (see n. 89), pp. 67 (ed.), 80 (tr.).

95 For a brief list of the main localities see *ibid.*, pp. 63–64.

96 A fact which also surprises Caquot, "L'homélie" (see n. 89), p. 64: "On s'étonne de n'y trouver ni les monastères du lac Ṭānā, ni les églises royales de l'Amhara, ni aucun sanctuaire du Godjam." A church on an island of Lake Ṭānā, "which was built by 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa," is mentioned at the end of the text (*ibid.*, pp. 77 [ed.], 87–88 [tr.]).

97 **ድርሳነ፡ ዑራኡል ፡ ግዕዝ ፡ አማርኛ ፡ መልክ፡ ዑራኡል ፡ በልሳነ፡ ግዕዝ ፡** (*Dərsāna 'Urā'el. Gə'əzə-nnā 'Amarəññā. Malkə'a 'Urā'el ba-ləssāna Gə'əz*, "Homily of Uriel. Gə'əz and Amharic. Image of Uriel in Gə'əz"), Addis Ababa, 1985 *Āmata Məḥrat* [= 1993 CE].

98 I sincerely thank Marie-Laure Derat and Anaïs Wion who draw my attention to this letter. The letter is indicated in the unpublished list prepared by Shumet Sishagne, "A catalogue of land tenure related microfilm from churches and monasteries of Gondar province recorded in 1984 and between January and July 1988," P88, xxiv.3–8. The copy of the letter

Text of the Dimā Document

One might imagine that the author wrote his report in an agitated state that this might have led to some scribal errors and the unusual spelling of certain proper names (due to the ‘Goḡḡāmite’ pronunciation?). The name of ‘Abrēhā is, with one exception, constantly written as ‘Arbēḥa or ‘Arbēhā (አርብሐ : or አርብሃ :), the name of ‘Aṣḥā once with Ṣəbāḥ (ጽባሐ :), the title of the work *Dərsāna ‘Urā’el* is always given as ድርሳነ : ዑርኤል : *Dərsāna ‘Urēl*, the monastery Marṭula Māryām is also referred to as Manṭola Māryām (መንጦለ : ማርያም :), the king’s name Mənilək is written as Məniləḥ, Məniləḥ or Mənyələḥ (ምኒሉ : , ምኒሉክ : , ምንይሉ :). Assimilations are found in e.g., በስክሳር : (once for በስንክሳር :), ሰእልጅ : (for ሰእል : እንጅ :) or ያፌድንኪን : (for ያፌድ : እንኪን :). The author wrote one illegible word (ወጀይ : , a writing exercise?) in the upper margin of the incipit folio. I have corrected only a very few obvious scribal errors and placed the original reading in the corresponding footnote (see below). However, I considered the very few scribal corrections indicated with thin lines above and below the characters to be cancelled; such errors, corrected by the scribe, were not recorded in the transcription. Proper names were not normalized in the text, but were standardized for consistency in the translation. Finally, I introduced punctuation marks to indicate the end of a sentence in order to facilitate reading since the document was written almost entirely without punctuation marks.

(f. 1r) በደጃዝማች : ውቤ : ዘመን : ትግሬን : ሲገዙ : እራስ : አሊ : ብቸኖ : ሳሉ : የአርብሐ : ወአጽብሐ : ገድል : በሐሰት : ከጣኖ : ቂርቆስ : አገኘን : ብለው : ጸፉ : አጻፎች : ጐዣዎችኖ : ትግሮች : ኖቸው : ጸሐፊው : አገሩ : በለሳ : ነው : ቤቱ : ደብር : ሚካኤል : ነው : ሲጻፍ : ግን : ያለመዝገብ : በቃል : እየተደረሰ : ነው : እስከ : አፄ : ዮሐንስ : መንግሥት : ድረስ : በሐሰት : እንደ : ተጻፈ : ሳይመረመር : ኖረ :

አስተኝነቱም : ከሞቱ : በኋላ : የአርብሐ : ወአጽብሐ : ጸጉራቸው : እያደገ : ይላጭ : ይቆረጥ : ነበረ : እያለ : ይተርካል : ጐዣም : ሣያምን : ሳይጠመቅ : አማራ : ሸዋ : ሳያምን : ሳይጠመቅ : በአማራ : ተድባበ : ማርያም : በጐዣም : መንጦለ : ማርያም : አርብሐ : ወአጽብሐ : ተከሉ : ብሎ : ይተርካል : መንጦለ : ማርያም : ዕሉኒ : ንግሥት : ተድባበ : ማርያም : አፄ : ገላውዴዎስ : እንደ : ተከሉ : በታሪክ : ነገሥት : ይረታል : ጐዣምም : የተጠመቀ : በተከሥተ : (f. 1v) ብርሃን : ዘመን : እንደ : ሆነ : በስንክሳር : ይረታል : አማራም : የአመነም : የተጠመቀም : በአጽቅ : ሌዊ : እንደ :

is written on an endleaf of a manuscript containing a collection of miracles of St Mary (*Ta’amra Māryām*).

ሆነ፡ በገድለ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ይረታል። ሸዋም፡ የአመነ፡ የተጠመቀ፡ በአባ፡ ይድላ፡ ስብከት፡ እንደ፡ ሆነ፡ በገድለ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ይረታል።

ይኸውም፡ ገድል፡ በሐሰት፡ እንደ፡ ተጻፈ፡ አኩስሞችና፡ ገማዶች፡ በአፄ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ መንግሥት፡ ተጻፈተው፡ በእጨጌ፡ ዳኛ፡ ቴዎፍሎስ፡ ፊት፡ በአምሳ፡ በቅሎ፡ ተወራርደው፡ ያለናት፡ ያለመዝገብ፡ በሐሰት፡ የተጻፈ፡ ሆኖ፡ ተገኘ። ሲከራከሩም፡ አኩስሞች፡ ያለናት፡ ያለመዝገብ፡ በሐሰት፡ የተጻፈ፡ ነው፡ ብለው፡ ነው። ገማዶችም፡ ገድሉን፡ ከጻና፡ ቂርቆስ፡ አግኝተን፡ ጻፍን፡ ብለው፡ ነው። ከዚህ፡ (f. 2r) በኋላ፡ ጻና፡ ቂርቆስ፡ ገድለ፡ አርብሐ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ ቢፈለግ፡ ታጣ። ጃንሆይም፡ እጨጌም፡ በአድባራቱ፡ በደስዖቱ፡ ፈልጉ፡ ቢሉ፡ ታጣ። አኩስሞች፡ ረቱ፡ ገማዶች፡ ተረቱ።

ከዚህ፡ ወዲህ፡ ከፍለን፡ በአፄ፡ ምኒልህ፡ መንግሥት፡ ሼዎችና፡ ጐዣሞች፡ ሐሰተኛ፡ ድርሳነ፡ ዑርኤል፡ ጽፈው፡ ከቤተ፡ መንግሥት፡ አገቡ። ሸዎች፡ ደብረ፡ ሊባኖስን፡ ጐዣሞች፡ ዲማን፡ ዙር፡ አንቦች፡ ቤተ፡ ልሔምን፡ ለመንቀል፡ በዚኸውም፡ ውስጥ፡ የተነቀለው፡ ብዙ፡ ነው። ጥንቱንም፡ ምቀኛ፡ የሰው፡ አባት፡ አሳንሶ፡ ማጻፍ፡ የነበረ፡ ነው። የካህን፡ ምቀኛ፡ እንኳን፡ የራሱን፡ ደብር፡ አልቆ፡ መጻፍ፡ ሌላም፡ ያደርጋል።

በዚሁም፡ ምክንያት፡ ዲሞች፡ ከአፄ፡ ምኒልክ፡ ዘንድ፡ አራት፡ ጊዜ፡ ተመላልሰው፡ (f. 2v) ጨኸው፡ እንጦጦ፡ ላይ፡ በአቡነ፡ ማቴዎስ፡ ፊት፡ እንጦጦ፡ ባሉቱ፡ አድባራት፡ ሊቃውንት፡ ፊት፡ ተነጋግረው፡ ቢነበብ፡ ቢተረጉም፡ ያለናት፡ ያለመዝገብ፡ በተንኮል፡ በምቀኝነት፡ በቃል፡ የተጻፈ፡ ሆኖ፡ ተገኝቶ። ተፋቀ፡ ተቀደደ። አሰተኝነቱም፡ የታወቀ፡ በነባሩ፡ በብሉዩ፡ እመን፡ ባለው፡ ድርሳነ፡ ዑርኤል፡ ያልተጻፈው፡ ተጽፎ፡ ቢገኝበት፡ ነው።

ከሰላማ፡ ከሣቴ፡ ብርሃን፡ ከክርስትና፡ በፊት፡ ተሳቱ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ መጡ፡ ብሎ፡ ይተርካል። ሰላማ፡ ከሣቴ፡ ብርሃን፡ በአርብሐ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ መንግሥት፡ በፊት፡ እንደ፡ መጡ፡ ተሳቱ፡ ቅዱሳን፡ በአላሜዳ፡ መንግሥት፡ በኋላ፡ እንደ፡ መጡ፡ በሶስት፡ ታሪክ፡ ነገሥት፡ በጉለት፡ ስንክሳር፡ በገድለ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ተረታ። (f. 3r) በመስከረሙ፡ ስንክሳር፡ ከአባ፡ ጳንጦሌዎን፡ ከመጋቢት፡ ስንክሳር፡⁹⁹ ከአባ፡ ገሪማ፡ አሰተኝነቱ፡ ታወቀ። ከሌዊ፡ ጀምሮ፡ እስከ፡ አሣርያስ፡ ድረስ፡ ከአሣርያስ፡ እስከ፡ አቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ በልደተ፡ ሥጋ፡ የወረደውን፡ ዓፄ፡ ይኩኖ፡ አምላክ፡ የኢትዮጵያን፡ ሊቀ፡ ካህናትነት፡ ለሐይቅ፡ ሰጡ፡ ብሎ፡ አፋልሶ፡ ጽፎ፡ ተገኘ። ሊቀካህናትነት፡ ለአሣርያስ፡ ልጆች፡ ለአቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ እንደሆነ፡ በገድል¹⁰⁰ም፡ በታሪክ፡ ነገሥት፡ ተጽፎ፡ ተገኘ። ኢትዮጵያንም፡ ያጠመቁ፡ ያስተማሩ፡ የአሣርያስ፡ ልጆች፡ የአቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ አባቶች፡ እንደሆኑ፡ በስክሳር፡ ተጽፎ፡ ተገኘ፡ በነሐሴ፡ በጳጳቀን፡ (f. 3v) ተጐጃም፡ አድባራት፡ ዲማ። ተጐጃም፡ መምህራን፡ ተከሥተ፡ ብርሃን፡ እንዲቀድም፡ ጐጃምንም፡ እንዳጠመቀ፡ እንዳ

99 Dittogaphical error: the author repeats ከመጋቢት፡ ስንክሳር፡.

100 The text reads በገድለም፡.

ስተማረ ፡ በስንክሳር ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ ተገኘ ። የነዚህ ፡ መምህራን ፡ ሳይጻፉ ፡ ዓፄ ፡ ዳዊትን ፡ ወአምጽአን ፡ ለስእሳተ ፡ ሉቃስ ፡ ወአንብራ ፡ ለአሐቲ ፡ በጂባላ ፡ ወአሐቲ ፡ በደብረ ፡ ወርቅ ፡ ወለአሐቲ ፡ በምጽርሐ ፡ ብሎ ፡ ጽፎ ፡ ተገኘ ። ባፄ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ መንግሥት ፡ አንዲት ፡ ስኢልጅ ፡ ሶስት ፡ ስኢል ፡ እንዳልመጣ ፡ በታሪክ ፡ ነገስት ፡ አስተኛ ፡ ሁኖ ፡ ተረታ ።

ጐጃም ፡ ላይ ፡ በአርብሃ ፡ ወጽባሐ ፡ መንግሥት ፡ እንኳን ፡ መርጡለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ትተከል ፡ እንዳላመነ ፡ እንዳልተጠመቀ ፡ በገድለ ፡ ተክለ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ (f. 4r) ተገኘ ። ከዚህ ፡ ወዲህ ፡ ቅሉ ፡ በገድለ ፡ ላሊባላ ፡ በገድለ ፡ ነአኩቶ ፡ ለአብ ፡ መኩንን ፡ አረሚ ፡ እንደነበረበት ፡ ተጽፎዓል ። መጻሕፍት ፡ ሐዲሳትም ፡ የመጡ ፡ ትግሬ ፡ ዕንኳን ፡ ፈጽሞ ፡ ያመነ ፡ የተማረ ፡ በተሳቱ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ ነው ። ያፌድንኳን ፡ የተነሳ ፡ ከዚህ ፡ ወዲህ ፡ ነው ።

በስንክሳር ፡ በገድለ ፡ አረጋዊ ፡ በታሪክ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ በገድለ ፡ ያፌድ ፡ ዙር ፡ አባ ፡ መጡ ፡ ብሎ ፡ ያልተጻፈውን ፡ አፄ ፡ ገብረ ፡ መስቀል ፡ አቡነ ፡ አረጋዊ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ያፌድ ፡ ዙር ፡ አባ ፡ መጡ ፡ ብሎ ፡ በመጻፉ ፡ አስተኛ ፡ ሁኖ ፡ ተረታ ። በደስያቱ ፡ አድባራት ፡ ታሪክ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ በደስያቱ ፡ አድባራት ፡ ገድለ ፡ ቅዱሳን ፡ ያልተጻፈውን ፡ አርብሃ¹⁰¹ ፡ ወአጽብሃ ፡ በደስያቱ ፡ አርባ ፡ <አ>ራት ፡¹⁰² ደብር ፡ ተከሉ ፡ ብሎ ፡ በመጽሐፉ ፡ (f. 4v) አስተኛ ፡ ሁኖ ፡ ተገኘ ። ያፄ ፡ በእደ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ምሽት ፡ እሌኒ ፡ ንግሥት ፡ የሰራችውን ፡ ግንብ ፡ በታሪክ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ የተፃፈውን ፡ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሃ ፡ ሰሩት ፡ ተብሎ ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ በመገኘቱ ፡ አስተኛ ፡ ሁኖ ፡ ተገኘ ።

ከሁሉ ፡ ይልቅ ፡ በብሉይ ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ ዑርኤል ፡ የሌለውን ፡ ሁሉ ፡ ነገር ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ በመገኘቱ ፡ ጃንሆይ ፡ ዓፄ ፡ ምንይልህ ፡ በብሉይ ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ ዑርኤል ፡ የሌለ ፡ ባባቶች ፡ ጊዜ ፡ ያልተገኘ ፡ በዚህ ፡ ጊዜ ፡ አስተኛ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ ቢገኝ ፡ ደብሬንም ፡ ያቀለዋል ፡ ያስነቅፈዋል ፡ አገሬንም ፡ ያስነውረዋል ፡ ያስነቅፈዋል ፡ ብለው ፡ አስፋቁልን ፡ አስቀድዱልን ። እኛም ፡ እቀብ ፡ ንግሥ ፡ ወሠራዊቶ ፡ ለሃህለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ እያል ፡ እናዝናለን ፡ እንጸልያለን ። ድርሳነ ፡ ኡርኤል ፡ (f. 5r) ተፍቆ ፡ ምስክር ፡ ቢሆን ፡ የተጻፈ ፡ ጦማር ፡ ሁሉቱ ፡ ደብረ ፡ ሊባኖስ ፡ ሁሉቱ ፡ ዝቋላ ፡ ሁሉቱ ፡ አንኮ ፡ በር ፡ መድኃኔ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ሁሉቱ ፡ ግሼን ፡ ፩ቤተ ፡ ልሄም ፡ ተቀምጦአል ፡ ሶስቱ ፡ ዲማ ፡ አለ ።

101 The author erroneously adds hereafter ወጽባሃ ፡ (sic!).

102 The text reads ራት ፡.

Translation of the Dimā Document

(f. 1r) During the time of *Daḡḡāzmāč Wəbe* (b. c. 1799, d. 1867),¹⁰³ when he ruled over Təgrāy, when *Rās'Ali* (b. 1818, d. 1866)¹⁰⁴ was in Bəčanā,¹⁰⁵ they wrote the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa*, falsely claiming that they found it in (the church of) Ṭānā Qirqos. Those who commissioned the writing were the people of Goḡḡām and of Təgrāy. The region of the scribe was Balasā, his (monastic?) house was at Dabra Mikā'el.¹⁰⁶ But having written it without text witness,¹⁰⁷ it was based on orality. Falsely written, it had not been examined (in the sense of an evaluation) until the reign of 'Aḏe Yoḥannəs (r. 1872–1889).

Its falsehood lies also in the narration that the hair of 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa was still growing and used to be cut after their death.¹⁰⁸ (Furthermore), it narrates that 'Abrēhā and 'AṣbēḤa had founded Marṭula Māryām in Goḡḡām and Tadbāba Māryām in 'Amḥārā when Goḡḡām had not yet believed and received baptism [as well as] when 'Amḥārā and Ṣawā had not yet believed and received baptism. It is recognized by the *Tārika Nagašt* that Marṭula Māryām was founded by Queen 'Ēleni and Tadbāba Māryām by 'Aḏe Galāwdewos (r. 1540–

103 *Daḡḡāzmāč Wəbe* Ḥāyła Māryām was an outstanding figure of his time, both on the military and political stage. See "Wəbe Ḥāyła Maryam," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 1169b–1172a (D. Nosnitsin); Girma Getahun, *The Goḡḡām Chronicle by Alāqa Täklä İyäsus Waqḡera. Translated from the Amharic and edited*, Oxford, 2014, p. 288, n. 39 and index.

104 For *Rās'Ali* 'Alulā, who was an important ruler of central Ethiopia in the years 1830–1853; see "Ali Alula," *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 199a–199b (S. Rubenson) and Girma Getahun, *The Goḡḡām Chronicle*, p. 291, n. 7 and index. Notably, *Rās'Ali* is "known to have been active as a peacemaker between quarrelling factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church" (*EAE*, vol. 1, p. 199a). *Rās'Ali*'s temporary residence in Bəčanā is also reported in the Goḡḡām-Chronicle. According to this source, *Rās'Ali* came from Dabra Tābor and stayed in Bəčanā in around 1852, for the death of *Daḡḡāzmāč* Goṣṣu Zawde is mentioned shortly afterwards (Girma Getahun, *The Goḡḡām Chronicle*, pp. 74–75). *Rās'Ali* had stayed in Bəčanā between 1835–1837 as reported by E. Combes and M. Tamisier, *Voyage en Abyssinie, dans le pays des Galla, de Choa et d'Ifat: précédé d'une excursion dans l'Arabie-Heureuse, et accompagné d'une carte de ces diverses contrées, 1835–1837*, vol. III, Paris, 1938, p. 268.

105 Bəčanā is a small town in Eastern Goḡḡām, capital of 'Ēnnamāy district.

106 The author is most probably referring to the church Dabra Mikā'el in 'Abiy 'Addi in central Təgrāy (therefore the other name of the church: 'Abiy 'Addi Mikā'el). See "Gär'alta," *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 697b–698b (N. Finneran and eds), here p. 698a; "Gär'alta churches," *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 699a–700b (E. Balicka-Witakowska), here p. 699a. For Balasā (where *Daḡḡāzmāč Wəbe* was also active) see "Bälāsa," *EAE*, vol. 1, pp. 454b–455a (W. Smidt).

107 For the translation of መገገብ ፡ (lit. 'register') see the explanation 'complete copy of a ms. from which other copies are made' by T. L. Kane, *Amharic English dictionary*, vol. 1: 0–7, Wiesbaden, 1990, p. 316b.

108 See above and the comment by Marrassini, "Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḤa" (see n. 21), p. 178.

1559).¹⁰⁹ Moreover, it is recognized by the *Sənkəssār* that Goḡḡām was baptized at the time of Takašta (*f. 1v*) Bərḥān.¹¹⁰ Indeed, it is recognized by the *Gadla Takla Hāymānot* that 'Amḥārā believed and received baptism by 'Aṣq Lewi.¹¹¹ Indeed, it is recognized by the *Gadla Takla Hāymānot* that Šawā believed and received baptism through the preaching of 'Abbā Yədlā.¹¹²

As this *Life* was falsely written, the people of Aksum and the people of Gamād came into conflict during the reign of 'Aḏe Yoḥannəs and placed a bet with Dāññā 'Iḏḏage Tewoflos¹¹³ for fifty mules that it will be found to be falsely written, without *Vorlage*,¹¹⁴ without text witness. While debating, the people of

109 The author is probably referring here to the royal chronicles. Indeed, the chronicle of King 'Iyāsu I (r. 1682–1705) clearly states that Maṛṭula Māryām was founded by Queen 'Ēleni (Guidi, *Annales Iohannis 1*, pp. 72 [ed.], 71 [tr.]). Whereas the chronicle of King Galāwdewos includes a longer passage on the construction of the church Tadbāba Māryām initiated by the king (Conzelman, *Chronique de Galāwdewos*, pp. 49–51 [ed.], 150–151 [tr.]). Further references are given in notes 32 and 74. Whereas 'Amḥārā and Šawā became important provinces of the Christian kingdom soon after the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty in c. 1270 (for example with the establishment of the great monastery of Dabra Libānos in Šawā by St Takla Hāymānot in the late-13th century), Goḡḡām 'continued to be a strong bastion of paganism until the first years of the fifteenth century' (Taddeesse Tamrat, "A Short Note on the Traditions of Pagan Resistance to the Ethiopian Church (14th and 15th Centuries)," *JES*, 10,1 (1972b), pp. 137–150, here p. 145).

110 Takašta Bərḥān is venerated in Dimā Giyorgis as a saint and as founder of the monastery (for references see notes 82 and 83). Most probably the monastery is in possession of a local version of the Synaxarion (referred to as *Sənkəssār* in Gə'əz) which includes a commemorative notice for Takašta Bərḥān. The general version of the Synaxarion, authorized by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church, does not include an entry for this saint (as is the case for many local saints).

111 See the corresponding passages in the ገድለ : ተክለ : ሃይማኖት ፡ የትልቁ : ኢትዮጵያዊ ፡ ጳጳስ ፡ የአቡነ ፡ ተክለ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ዜና ፡ ሕይወትና ፡ ሥነ ፡ ገድለ ፡ (Gadla Takla Hāymānot. *Ya-təlləqu* 'ityopṗyāwī šādq ya-'Abuna Takla Hāymānot zenā ḥaywatə-nna šəna gadl, "Life of Takla Hāymānot. The life story and the beauty of the combat of the great Ethiopian righteous 'Abuna Takla Hāymānot"), Addis Ababa, 1946 *Āmata Məḥrat* [= 1953 CE], p. 24, verses 31–33.

112 See the corresponding passages in the ገድለ : ተክለ : ሃይማኖት ፡ (Gadla Takla Hāymānot) (1953), pp. 24–25, verses 40–49 (here named 'Abbayədlā). See also the reference in "Ḑtissa," *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 446a–447b (J. Persoon).

113 'Iḏḏage Tewoflos was abbot of Dabra Libānos at the end of the 19th century, see "Tewoflos," *EAE*, vol. 4, pp. 937b–938a (S. Dege).

114 For the translation of እናት ፡ (lit. 'mother') see the explanation 'original (from which a copy is made)' by T. L. Kane, *Amharic-English dictionary*, 11: ፕ–ፒ, Wiesbaden, 1990, p. 1221b. In Gə'əz, the word አባ ፡ (lit. 'father') is used for 'prototypum, archetypum', see C. F. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopicae*, Lipsiae, 1865, col. 754–755.

Aksum claimed that it was falsely written, without *Vorlage*, without text witness. And the people of Gamād claimed, 'we have copied the *Life* from an exemplar found in Ṭānā Qirqos'. (f. 2r) Thereafter, the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbāḥa*, although sought in Ṭānā Qirqos, was not found. And his Majesty and the 'Eṣṣage themselves ordered to search for it in the monasteries and on the islands, it was not found. The people of Aksum won and the people of Gamād were defeated.

Beyond this chapter, the people of Šawā and the people of Goḡḡām wrote a false *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* during the reign of 'Aḍe Mənilək and brought it to the palace. The people of Šawā intended to supplant Dabra Libānos,¹¹⁵ the people of Goḡḡām (to supplant) Dimā, the people of Zur 'Ambā¹¹⁶ (to supplant) Beta Ləḥem;¹¹⁷ those to be supplanted were many. Since ancient times, it is an envious man who writes in order to demean someone's father. An envious priest does not only write to magnify his own church, indeed he is capable of doing other things.

For that reason, the people of Dimā went four times back and forth to 'Aḍe Mənilək, (f. 2v) arguing in front of 'Abuna Mātewos¹¹⁸ at 'Enṭoṭṭo, discussing with the church scholars at 'Enṭoṭṭo. After having read and interpreted it, it was found to be written without *Vorlage*, without text witness, rather with malice, with envy, based on orality. It was erased and torn apart. Its falsehood was confirmed by the fact that things not written in the oldest *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, housed in 'Emmagwā,¹¹⁹ were found in it.

¹¹⁵ Dabra Libānos is located in Šawā and was founded by the great Ethiopian saint Takla Hāymānot. It is one of the principal monasteries of Ethiopia that successfully maintained its central role throughout the past troublesome centuries.

¹¹⁶ The name Zur 'Ambā (written here as 'Anbā), might refer (not to a region? but) to the church known as Zurāmbā about which different founding legends are known, see "Zuramba," *EAE*, vol. 5, pp. 201b–203b (Abreham Adugna).

¹¹⁷ For a brief description of the ancient church see "Betā Ləḥem," *EAE*, vol. 1, p. 560a–b (C. Bosc-Tiessé).

¹¹⁸ 'Abuna Mātewos was Metropolitan between 1889–1926, see "Matewos," *EAE*, vol. 3, pp. 867a–868a (S. Kaplan).

¹¹⁹ 'Emmagwā is mentioned as a place name in both published versions of the homily: Caquot, "L'homélie" (see n. 89), p. 73 (ed.): "in Dabra Qoṗros that is the part of Kalenā which is (called) 'Emma Gwā" (ወ-ሰተ : ደ-ብረ : ቆጵሮስ : እንተ : ደ-አቲ : ምድረ : ከሌና : ዘው-እቲ : እመ : ን :) and Caquot, "L'homélie" (see n. 89), p. 77 (ed.): "from the region of Šawā: the land Kālenā which is (in) Manzəh, Dabra Məs'āla Māryām, the part which is called 'Emma Gwā" (እምሀገረ : ሸዋ : ምድረ : ካሌና : ዘው-እቲ : መንዝህ : ደ-ብረ : ምስዓለ : ማርያም : ዘደ-ብልዋ : እመ : ን :). In ድርሳነ : ዑራኡል # (*Dərsāna 'Urā'el*) (1993), p. 48, verse 27 it is referred to as 'Gadām 'Emmagwā' (ገዳም : እመን :) and is mentioned together with Dabra Kālinā and Dabra Qoṗros (ደ-ብረ : ከሌና : ወደ-ብረ : ቆጵሮስ :).

It narrates that the Nine Saints¹²⁰ came before Salāmā Kaśāte Bərḥān and Christianity.¹²¹ However, it is recognized by three (books of the) *Tārika Nagašt*, two (books of the) *Sənkəssār* and by the *Gadla Takla Hāymānot*, that Salāmā Kaśāte Bərḥān came before the reign of 'Abrəḥā and 'Aṣbəḥa,¹²² whereas the Nine Saints came after the reign of 'Īlla 'Āmidā.¹²³ (f. 3r) Its falsehood is confirmed by the *Maskaram Sənkəssār* of 'Abbā Pāntalewon and through the *Maggābit Sənkəssār* of 'Abbā Garimā.¹²⁴ It was found to be deceptively written that 'Aḍe Yəkunno 'Amlāk (r. 1270–1285) gave the Ethiopian archpriesthood to

- 120 The name “Nine Saints” is commonly applied to the group of foreign monks who arrived in Ethiopia at the beginning of the 6th century (thus in the Aksumite period.) They played a major role in the “second Christianization,” propagating the Christian faith and monasticism. For basic information and further references see “Nine Saints,” *EAE*, vol. 3, pp. 1188a–1192a (A. Brita).
- 121 See *ጽርዓት ሰባ ልብ ልብ* # (*Dərsāna 'Urā'el*) (1993), pp. 67–99, esp. p. 99. In this version, the Metropolitan 'Abbā Salāmā, the Nine Saints and the kings 'Abrəḥā and 'Aṣbəḥa are indeed presented as contemporaries of each other.
- 122 It is not clear which sources the author used. In the 1953 published version of the *Gadla Takla Hāymānot*, it is written that 'Abbā Salāmā came to Ethiopia during the “days of the kings 'Abrəḥā and 'Aṣbəḥa” (*ገደለ ሰባ ልብ ልብ* : *ገደለ ሰባ ልብ ልብ* # (*Gadla Takla Hāymānot*) (1953), p. 23, verse 3). Whereas the commemorative notice clearly distinguishes the different reigns, and offices of its protagonist. Frumentius, yet a child, arrived together with his brother during the reign of 'Īlla 'Aladā (who is the early-4th-century king 'Īlla 'Āmidā, father of 'Ezānā), and returned from Alexandria as the first Metropolitan, now named 'Abbā Salāmā, during the reign of 'Abrəḥā and 'Aṣbəḥa (26 *Ḥamle*, Guidi, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien*, vol. 11 (see n. 3), pp. 427–429 [411–413]). The *Gadla 'Abrəḥā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* also places the arrival of Frumentius together with his brother Edesius (Ms C: Sidrakos) during the reign of 'King 'Al'āmidā' (Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha wa'Aṣbəḥa” (see n. 21), p. 162; Ms C reads 'King Tāzer', written over erasure (f. 29vb).
- 123 The name 'Īlla 'Āmidā refers to two Aksumite kings. Apart from the one just mentioned in note 122, the second 'Īlla 'Āmidā reigned in the late-5th/6th century. In fact, at least some of the Nine Saints are believed to have come to Ethiopia during his reign, see “'Īllā 'Āmidā,” *EAE*, vol. 2, pp. 259b–261a (G. Fiaccadori).
- 124 Both Pāntalewon and Garimā are believed to belong to the Nine Saints and are commemorated on 6 *Ṭəqəmt* (Pāntalewon) and 17 *Sane* (Garimā). Their arrival during the reign of 'Īlla 'Āmidā is also reported in their commemorative notices edited by I. Guidi, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, les Mois de Sanē, Hamlē et Nahasē, publiés et traduits* (avec le concours de L. Desnoyers et A. Singlas), vol. 1: *Mois de Sanē* (PO, 1,5 [5]), Paris, 1905 (repr. Turnhout, 1981), pp. 626–628 [108–110], here p. 627 [109] and by Colin, *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien* (see n. 18), pp. 22–25, here p. 22. It is strange that the author refers to different months – maybe another tradition followed in Dimā?

Ḥayq¹²⁵ which, however, was inherited from Lewi to Azariah, from Azariah to 'Abuna Takla Hāymānot through physical birth. Moreover, it is found written in the *Life* (of *Takla Hāymānot*) and in the *Tārika Nagašt* that the archpriesthood belonged to the children of Azariah, (thus) to 'Abuna Takla Hāymānot.¹²⁶ Indeed, it is found written in the *Sənkəssār* of Dimā, one of Goḡḡām's monasteries, (in the entry for) the 24 *Naḥase* (f. 3v) that the children of Azariah, who baptized and taught the Ethiopians, were the fathers of 'Abuna Takla Hāymānot.¹²⁷ Indeed, it is found written in the *Sənkəssār*, that Takašta Bərḥān was one of the teachers of Goḡḡām, who at first baptized and taught (the people of) Goḡḡām. Without having written about these teachers, it is found written that 'Ade Dāwit (r. 1379/1380–1413) brought three icons of St Luke, and brought one to Ġəbalā, one to Dabra Warq and one to Məṣrāḥā.¹²⁸ Its false [reading] is recognized by the *Tārika Nagašt*, since only one icon, not three were brought during the reign of 'Ade Dāwit.¹²⁹

- 125 The 1993 published version of the homily (ድርሳኑ : ዑራኤል # (*Dərsāna 'Urā'el*), pp. 275–276) recounts that King Yəkunno 'Amlāk went to the island of Lake Ḥayq to build a church for St 'Iyasus Mo'a. He named the church Dabra Nag'adg'wad ("Mount of Thunder," that is Dabra Ḥayq 'Āstifānos) because Archangel Uriel appeared from heaven with thunder and lightning just when the construction of the church was completed. The king hereafter appointed 'Iyasus Mo'a archbishop over whole Ethiopia.
- 126 The consulted *Gadla Takla Hāymānot* indeed briefly tells the story of Azariah, son of Zadok, who after having become a priest, accompanied Mənilāk 1, son of Solomon and Mākəddā (see above) and the Ark of Covenant on their way to Ethiopia (ገድለ : ተክለ : ሃይማኖት # (*Gadla Takla Hāymānot*) (1953), pp. 20–21, verses 44, 1–8). As is well known, the main source of this story is the famous work *Kəbra Nagašt* ("Glory of the Kings"). The *Life* also refers to the genealogy of the "Levite fathers" from Azariah via 'Ēnbaram to Takla Hāymānot (ገድለ : ተክለ : ሃይማኖት # (*Gadla Takla Hāymānot*) (1953), p. 29, verses 17–20).
- 127 The author is referring to the commemorative notice of Takla Hāymānot; such knowledge is not reported in the version edited in *Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, les Mois de Sanē, Hamlē, Nahasē et Pāquemēn*, vol. III: *Mois de Nahasē et Pāquemēn*, ed I. Guidi, tr. S. Sylvain (PO, 9, 4 [44]), Paris, 1912 (repr. Turnhout, 1981), pp. 377–383 [581–587].
- 128 The 1993 published version of the homily (ድርሳኑ : ዑራኤል # (*Dərsāna 'Urā'el*), pp. 283–284) includes exactly this passage. The names of the icons can be identified as follows: at Ġəbalā: Ṣə'la 'Ohobahālīt, at Dabra Warq: Ṣə'la Waynut and on the Ṭānā island Məṣrāḥā: Ṣə'la Qisāryā. However, the tradition usually refers to seven Marian icons attributed to St Luke, and their arrival in Ethiopia is often linked to King Dāwit. See esp. Spencer, "In search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia" and "Travels in Gojjam" (see n. 79); V. Krebs, *Windows onto the World: Culture Contact and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543*, Universität Konstanz – Mekelle University, unpublished dissertation, 2014, esp. chapter six.
- 129 Most probably our author did not have a Marian icon, but the icon known under the name K'wər'āta Rə'əsu (*percussio capitis*), in mind. This icon belonged to the Ethiopian

It is found written in the *Gadla Takla Hāymānot* that Goḡḡām¹³⁰ had not yet believed and not received baptism during the reign of 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa, let alone that (in Goḡḡām) Marṭula Māryām was founded.¹³¹ (f. 4r) Moreover, it is written in the *Gadla Lālibalā* and in the *Gadla Na'akk'wəto La-'Ab* that a pagan ruler used to live in (Goḡḡām).¹³² Indeed, the books of the New Testament arrived, and even Təgrāy fully believed and was taught (the Christian faith) by (the initiative of) the Nine Saints. Even Yāred emerged only after that.

Its false [reading] is recognized by the *Sənkəssār*, the *Gadla 'Aragāwi*, the *Tārika Nagašt* and the *Gadla Yāred*, as it is not written there that they came to Zur 'Ambā, whereas it is written in the book that 'Ade Gabra Masqal, 'Abuna 'Aragāwi, St Yāred came to Zur 'Amba.¹³³ It was found to be false with the *Tārika Nagašt* of the island monasteries and the *Gadla Qəddusān* of the island monasteries, as it is not written there that 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa founded forty-four monasteries on the islands, but it is said in the book.¹³⁴ (f. 4v) It was found to be false with the *Tārika Nagašt* – in which is written that it was Queen 'Ēleni, wife of 'Ade Ba'əda Māryām (r. 1468–1478), who built the building (of Marṭula Māryām)¹³⁵ – that 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa constructed it as written in the book.

emperors, accompanying them in wars (until it left Ethiopia and landed in a private European collection). On the traditional historiography (with a link to King Dāwit) and references to the royal chronicles see "K'wər'atā Rə'əsu," *EAE*, vol. 3, pp. 465a–468b (E. Balicka-Witakowska), here p. 466b.

- 130 The place name G'wazzāma (ጉዛመ ፡) is referred to in the version edited by C. Conti Rossini, *Il 'Gadla Takla Hāymānot', secondo la redazione Waldebbana*, Roma, 1896, pp. 109 (ed.), 135 (tr.). The saint baptized a magician who originated from 'G'wazzāma', which is most probably Goḡḡām (also *ibid.*, p. 135, n. 1). The region is still known (and for this feared) for its powerful magical practises; alluded to also in the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbēḥa* (see above).
- 131 As written in the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'Aṣbēḥa*, the 1993 published version of the homily also lists Marṭula Māryām among those churches that were built by the brother kings, and even refers to it as 'head of the monasteries of Ethiopia' (ድርሳኑ ፡ ዑራኤል # (*Dərsāna Urā'el*), p. 254). The locations founded by 'Abrēhā and 'Aṣbēḥa are listed in the following order: Aksum, Nāgrān, Ḥawzen, forty-four churches on the islands of Lake Tānā and Marṭula Māryām.
- 132 For a few names of 'Kings of Goḡḡām' with references to different Ethiopic texts see Taddeesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia* (see n. 78), p. 202, n. 2.
- 133 Their journey is narrated in ድርሳኑ ፡ ዑራኤል # (*Dərsāna Urā'el*) (1993), pp. 258–261. The name of the monastery is 'Ṣərḥa 'Aryām' ('Palace of the Highest Heaven') in the Gə'əz text but 'Zur 'Abbā (Zur 'Ambā)' in the Amharic translation.
- 134 See n. 131.
- 135 See n. 109. The chronicle of King 'Iyāsu I refers to 'Ēleni as wife of King Ba'əda Māryām, as in other sources (see for example n. 80). As she was given in marriage to King Zar'a Yā'qob

Above all, for each and everything that is not found written in the old *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* but found written in the false book of this time, his Majesty 'Aḏe Mənilək said, everything not found in the old *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* of the time of our fathers, would disgrace my church and would bring discredit to it, would shame my country and would bring discredit to it. He (his Majesty) ordered to discard it and to cut it into pieces. We sorrow and pray; may the reign and the army of Šāhla Māryām (Mənilək's baptismal name) be protected. After the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* (f. 5r) had been erased, a letter of evidence was written: two (letters) were placed in Dabra Libānos, two in Zəq'ālā, two in 'Ankobar Madhāne Ālam, two at Gəšen, one in Beta Ləhem, and three are in Dimā.

A royal letter to Beta Ləhem

ሞዓ ፡ አንበሳ ፡ ዘእምነነገደ ፡ ይሁዳ ፡ ዳግማዊ ፡ ምኒልክ ፡ ሥዊመ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡
ንጉሠ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ ፡

አሁን ፡ እየተጻፈ ፡ የሄደው ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ ኡሩኤል ፡ ሁሉ ፡ በሐሰት ፡ በምቀኝነት ፡ ያለ
ውነት ፡ ያለመዝገብ ፡ በቃል ፡ የተጻፈ ፡ ነው ፡ ብለው ፡ ዲሞች ፡ ቢጮሁልኝ ፡ ብሉይ ፡
ድርሳነ ፡ ኡርኤል ፡ ሌሎችም ፡ መጻሕፍት ፡ አስመጥቼ ፡ በባችን ፡ በአቡነ ፡ ማቴዎስ ፡
ፊት ፡ ደግሞም ፡ እንጦጦ ፡ ባሉት ፡ ሊቃውንት ፡ ፊት ፡ በጉባኤ ፡ ባስነብበው ፡ መዝገ
ብ ፡ የሌለው ፡ ሐሰተኛ ፡ ሆኖ ፡ ተገኘ ። ስለዚህ ፡ ግን ፡ በባቶቼ ፡ ያልተገኘ ፡ በኔ ፡ ጊዜ ፡
ሐሰተኛ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ተጽፎ ፡ ቢገኝ ፡ ሀገራንም ፡ ያስነቅፈዋል ፡ ደብራንም ፡ ያቀለዋ
ል ፡ ብዬ ፡ ይፋቅ ፡ ብዬ ፡ አለሁ ። የኡሩኤል ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ የማይጠረጠር ፡ የማይነቀፍ ፡
የአመት ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ አለውና ፡ በዚያ ፡ እንዲጻፍ ፡ አዝግጥለሁ ። ይሕንን ፡ ሐሰተኛው
ን ፡ ያልፋቀ ፡ እንዳይፍቅም ፡ ደብቆ ፡ የተገኘ ፡ ይቀጣ ።

በጳጉሜን ፡ በ፩ቀን ፡ በእንጦጦ ፡ ከተማ ፡ በ፲ወ፰፻፹ወ፩ ፡ አመተ ፡ ምሕረት ፡ ተጻ
ፈ ።

The Lion of the Tribe of Judah has prevailed. Mənilək II, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia.

When the people of Dimā appealed to me, they claimed concerning the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, which was now written and distributed, that everything is written in falsehood, with envy, without any truth, without text witness, based on orality. I ordered to bring an old (book of the) *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* and other books to be read in an assembly in front of our father 'Abuna Māteḡos and also in front of other scholars at 'Ēnoṭṭo. It was found to be falsely (written), without any text witness. For it was not found in (the time of) my fathers, and if a false book written in my time should be found, it would bring discredit to my country and disgrace to my church, thus I gave the order to erase it.

(r. 1434–1468) she could not have been also the son's wife. During the reign of Ba'əda Māryām she was most probably a powerful Queen Mother.

As there exists [a version of] the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, the annual homily without doubt and without discredit, I give order to write this [version]. Anyone who does not erase this false [version] or will be found hiding it from erasure, he will be punished.

Written in the town of 'Ēntōtṭo on 1 *Ṗagwāmen* 1881 *Āmata Məḥrat* (= 5 September 1889 CE).

Conclusion

The brothers 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa are remembered as the first Christian kings of Ethiopia and are venerated as saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church. Even though they are believed to have played a central role in the early Christianization of the Aksumite Kingdom, it seems that 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa did not enjoy popularity until the mid-19th century, and no substantial hagiographical work appears to have been composed to commemorate them before this time. The Ethiopic Synaxarion contains just a brief notice on them for the 4 *Ṭəqəmt* and only brief mentions of the brother kings are found in a few literary works.

It is only with the composition of the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* ('Life of 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa') in the 19th century that the saintly kings started to enjoy a more widespread veneration. As I have argued before, it seems obvious that this work was not only written to venerate the brother kings but also to provide new foundation narratives to a few selected churches, dating their foundation back to the earliest possible period when Christianity was introduced to the Aksumite Kingdom. The writing might have been inspired by the older traditions of 'Aksum Ṣəyon or Ṭānā Qirqos. Furthermore, I would argue that (the longer version of) the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* ('Homily of Uriel') was written for that same purpose at the end of the 19th century.

Although various scholars had already noticed that the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* entirely lacks historical value, detailed information on place, date and specific circumstances of the writing of the *Life* (as well as of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*) were hitherto unknown to scholars. It is thanks to a document penned by a church scholar from the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis, who reported on a heated controversy over the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa* and (the long version of) the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, that we can now understand the situation from a new perspective. We learn from this document (the 'Dimā Document' in this paper) that the writing and distribution of both texts provoked a fierce debate among various church scholars into which even emperors as well as the metropolitan became involved.

The Dimā Document belongs to those pieces of evidence which are rarely available to scholars, since it documents in detail how those texts were analysed and evaluated by the church scholars. Evidence against the authenticity of the *Life* and of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* was based on several authoritative sources (of which the main ones are *Tārika Nagašt*, *Sənkəssār*, *Gadla Takla Hāymānot*). Remarkably, the author of the Dimā Document made use of specific technical terms, መዝገብ ፡ (lit. 'register') for 'text witness' and እናት ፡ (lit. 'mother') for 'Vorlage', which were crucial in the evaluation of both texts. The Dimā Document clearly points out that oral tradition is not to be considered a more reliable source in historical/hagiographical debates (neither by the church scholars nor by the metropolitan, nor by the emperor). Indeed, the parties in conflict were particularly concerned to prove (or disprove) the authenticity of the works with the existence of an earlier text witness, namely of an 'old book'. In the case of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa*, it was claimed that an earlier text witness from Ṭānā Qirqos served as a *Vorlage*, even though when it was sought for, it could not be found. Similar is the case of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*. Its 'false' readings were compared with the 'oldest book' containing this work, and everything not found in the 'old book' was considered to be false.

The author of the Dimā Document must have been actively involved in the critical discussion about the texts at issue in general and in the argument with Maṛṭula Māryām in particular. He precisely refers to various passages from both texts. Those passages were most probably also examined by the church scholars at 'Ēntoṭto in front of the metropolitan. The author focuses in his report on the 'false' version of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, since the conflict over the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa* was handled by two other parties, namely by the 'people of Aksum and the people of Gamād', and was at first resolved already during the reign of Emperor Yoḥannəs (r. 1872–1889). In the case of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el*, the author might be identified with the leading opponent who initiated the controversy concerning the 'false' version of this text. As recounted in the document, it were the people of Dimā who 'went four times back and forth' to the royal court of Emperor Mənilək II (r. 1889–1913) and to the metropolitan, claiming that this version of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* was false and lacked any authenticity.

We learn from the Dimā Document that the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa* was first written down in the mid-19th century and the 'false' version of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* during the early reign of Emperor Mənilək II. No sources are given; timing and circumstances are presented as well-known and undisputed facts.

However, the information seems to be absolutely reliable. There are other indications (independent from the Dimā Document) that point towards a recent, mid-19th-century composition of the *Gadla 'Abrēhā wa-'AṣbēḤa*. This is

most probably true also for the version of the *Dərsāna 'Urā'el* discussed in the Dimā Document, since both texts attribute the foundation of some churches and monasteries to the Aksumite brother kings 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa and thus to the 4th century. The author of the Dimā Document provides (from his point of view) the intention of the writings: to supplant various historical churches and monasteries while magnifying others.

As I presented, all text witnesses of the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*, which are accessible to scholars, date from the 20th century. So far, no older manuscript containing this work could be discovered and examined. The fact that the local traditions of Marṭula Māryām and Tadbāba Māryām, that attribute their own respective foundation to the brother kings 'Abrəhā and 'Aṣbəḥa, were not recorded before the mid-19th century is another strong indication for a recent composition of this text. Furthermore, the timing of the conflict between the monasteries of Dimā Giyorgis and Marṭula Māryām, documented in late-19th-century poetry and in a royal letter dated to 1897, also hints at the same conclusion. A deep examination of the content of the *Gadla 'Abrəhā wa-'Aṣbəḥa*, especially of its narrative structure and of the mentioned toponyms, may provide further evidence.

Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to various friends and scholars who generously contributed in different ways: Solomon Gebreyes Beyene for his constructive comments and his assistance for the Amharic; Claire Bosc-Tiessé, Antonella Brita, Steve Delamarter, Marie-Laure Derat, Michael Gervers and Anaïs Wion for sharing their precious material; Alessandro Bausi, Thomas Rave and Massimo Villa for critical proofreading and comments, Hiruie Ermias for his expert help with Ethiopic works and Joseph McIntyre for the English proofreading.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/ 2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement n° 322849.