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Ethio-SPaRe follow-up and Beta maṣāḥəft field research trips 2016-2019 (I). Further churches of Tigray and their manuscript collections (Denis Nosnitsin)



Hamburg University
2023

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After the termination of the project Ethio-SPaRe in May 2015 it was still possible to make a few field research trips to Ethiopia, Tigray, using the remaining funds and cooperation links, to wrap up some activities and evaluate prospects of the continuation of work. The trips took place in September 2016, September 2018, and March 2019¹. The report contains information on nine ecclesiastic institutions. The situation that I encountered in the area of research was much less conducive to the presence of non-Ethiopian researchers than in 2010–2015, and the field research endeavours resulted in successes of various degrees. Hopes to continue reconnaissance after March 2019 were dashed by the deteriorating political situation and the growing tension between the Government of Tigray and the Federal Government of Ethiopia, the pandemic, and finally by the outbreak of the dramatic Tigray war in November 2020. The conflict formally ended with a peace agreement between the warring parties in November 2022, but it caused a great loss of life, sufferings and irreparable cultural losses. I find it extremely important to keep gathering in a systematic way the information about the ecclesiastic sites and manuscript collections of northern Ethiopia, especially in the time when the need for their study and recording will be unlikely addressed in view of other formidable challenges, for several years at least. As before, I publish the report in the confidence that, unless seen by specialists, recorded and digitized, and in the best case made known through studies, the cultural riches are highly endangered. Their damage and disappearance due to any reason will be hardly noticed even under normal conditions, not to say during a time of military confrontations or natural calamities. Besides, the report below is meant to contribute to the study of ecclesiastic landscape of northern Ethiopia and its manuscript collections, known still by far not sufficiently enough, and from time to time surprising the researchers².

ፖንቅዳቅ ፖንድላ ማሃም ደሐረ ሙንግዳ

The church ፖንቅዳቅ ፖንድላ ማሃም (ደሐረ ሙንግዳ) is located in *wārāda* Naʿəder ʿAdet (Central Tigray), *ፓብያ ራራ*, just a few kilometers from the town of Sēmāma. To reach the church, one has to leave the flat highland and descend to a lowland area covered with thick vegetation. The foundation is of *däbr*-status, said to have been served by nearly 100 priests and deacons at the moment of the visit. The round church building stands hidden between the

¹ For the assistance in organization and carrying out the field research trips, I am grateful to Mr Mearg Abay (Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau [TCTB]), Mr Hagos Gebremariam (Adigrat University), His Holiness Abuna Makarios Archbishop of Axum Central Tigray Zone Diocese, to Dr Magdalena Krzyzanowska (Universität Hamburg), and all other people who helped my research in various ways.

² According to my knowledge, only two of the nine churches mentioned below appear in the research literature. There is no information on the manuscript collection of the last institution (see below), yet I decided to include it into the report for the purpose of completeness, and to enhance the photographic material on the site which has been meagre.

trees (**fig. 1**); it could not be older than the second half of the 19th or the 20th century. It was in the process of reconstruction in the time of the visit, an additional wall was erected around to



Fig. 1. 'Ēnda Maryam 'Ēnqwaqo. General view.

expand the old structure. Inside, the rectangular *māqdās* (sanctuary) was covered with murals (**figs 2, 3**). It was not possible to collect any specific information on the foundation of the church, except statements that it was founded long ago “by the local people”.



Fig. 2. 'Ēnda Maryam 'Ēnqwaqo. Painting on a side of the *māqdās* (sanctuary).



Fig. 3. 'Ēnda Maryam 'Ēnqwaqo. The church inside.

The manuscript collection turned out to encompass at least 30 books or more³, of different ages, quite interesting, but partly in a very bad state and kept in extremely poor conditions. Placed in a big old wooden chest behind the *māqdās* together with many other objects, in great disorder, many of the manuscripts were badly damaged, the older ones laying on the bottom of the chest. There was at least one plastic bag with fragments and destroyed manuscripts.

The most remarkable item of the library is a sizable volume of the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, dating to the second half of the 14th/ first half of the 15th century (**figs 4, 5**). It contains also a poorly understandable late 16th-/early 17th-document in Geez possibly telling about a legal procedure concerning a *rəst*-land (**figs 6, 7**). The manuscript was in poor condition; the leaves were in complete disorder, placed between the two thick wooden boards of the binding (**fig. 8**).

³ Contrary to the initial claims of the church possessing around 100 books.



Fig. 4. Ḥnda Maryam Ḥnqwaqo. Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, second half of the 14th/ first half of the 15th century.



Fig. 5. Ḥnda Maryam Ḥnqwaqo. Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, second half of the 14th/ first half of the 15th century, incipit on the recto-side, protective text on the verso-side.

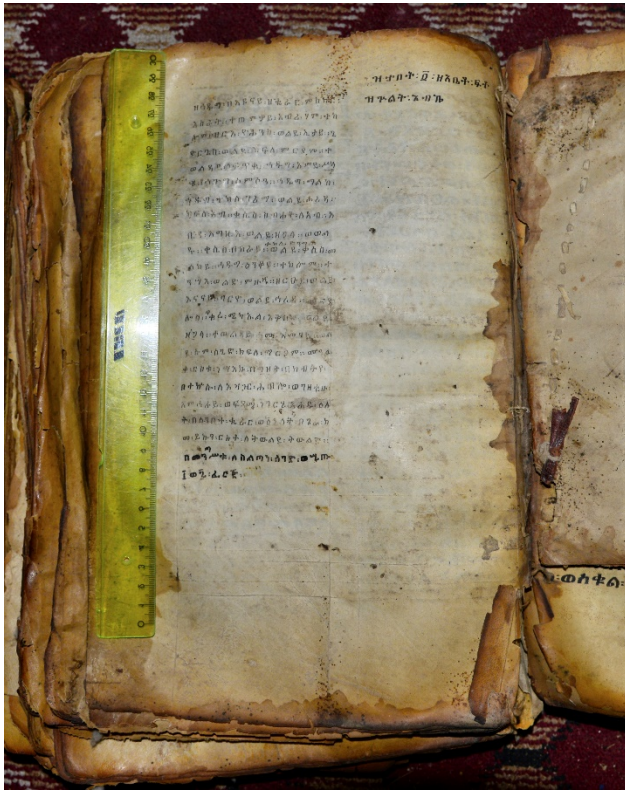


Fig. 6. ʾĒnda Maryam ʾEnqwaqo. A later document in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.

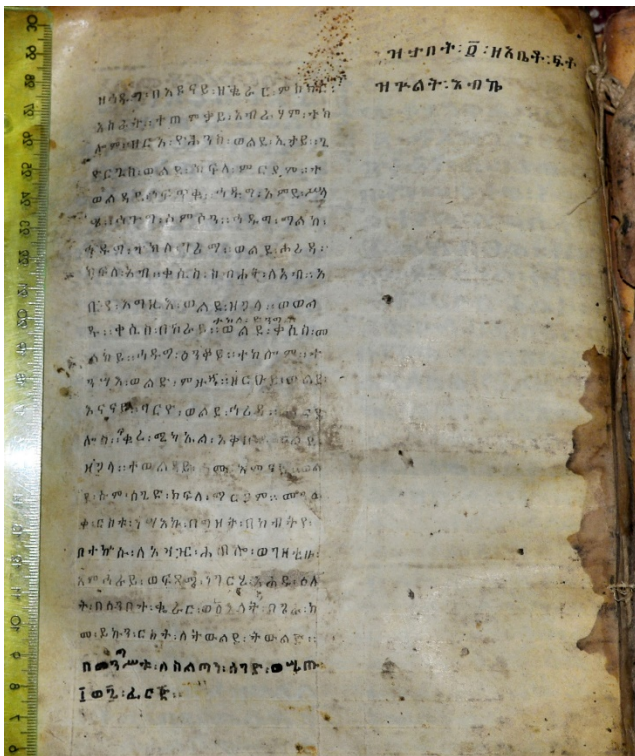


Fig. 7. ʾĒnda Maryam ʾEnqwaqo. A later document in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles.



Fig. 8. ʾĒnda Maryam ʾĒnqwaqo. Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, second half of the 14th/ first half of the 15th century. The upper board of the binding.

The Four Gospels of the church may be dated to the 18th century, with the preliminary texts (the first two quires) written in a better hand (**fig. 9**) and the rest in an inferior hand. A finely written Haymanotä ʾAbäw manuscript (**fig. 10**) and the first half of the Synaxarion with ʾarke-hymns added in the margins (**fig. 11**), their place in the text columns indicated with small crosses⁴, could be possibly datable to the same period. An 18th-/early 19th-century manuscript of the Miracles of Mary contained, apart from later additions, a few fine infixed miniatures (**figs 12-13**), originating from a different manuscript comparable in age with the main unit (**fig. 14**).

⁴ Sometimes a directive is added, ʾċh.: ስለ: 'say the ʾarke-hymn'.



Fig. 9. ጳጵሳውስ ወገኖቹ ጳጵሳውስ ወገኖቹ. Four Gospels, 18th century.



Fig. 10. ጳጵሳውስ ወገኖቹ ጳጵሳውስ ወገኖቹ. Haymanotä ጳጵሳውስ, 18th century.

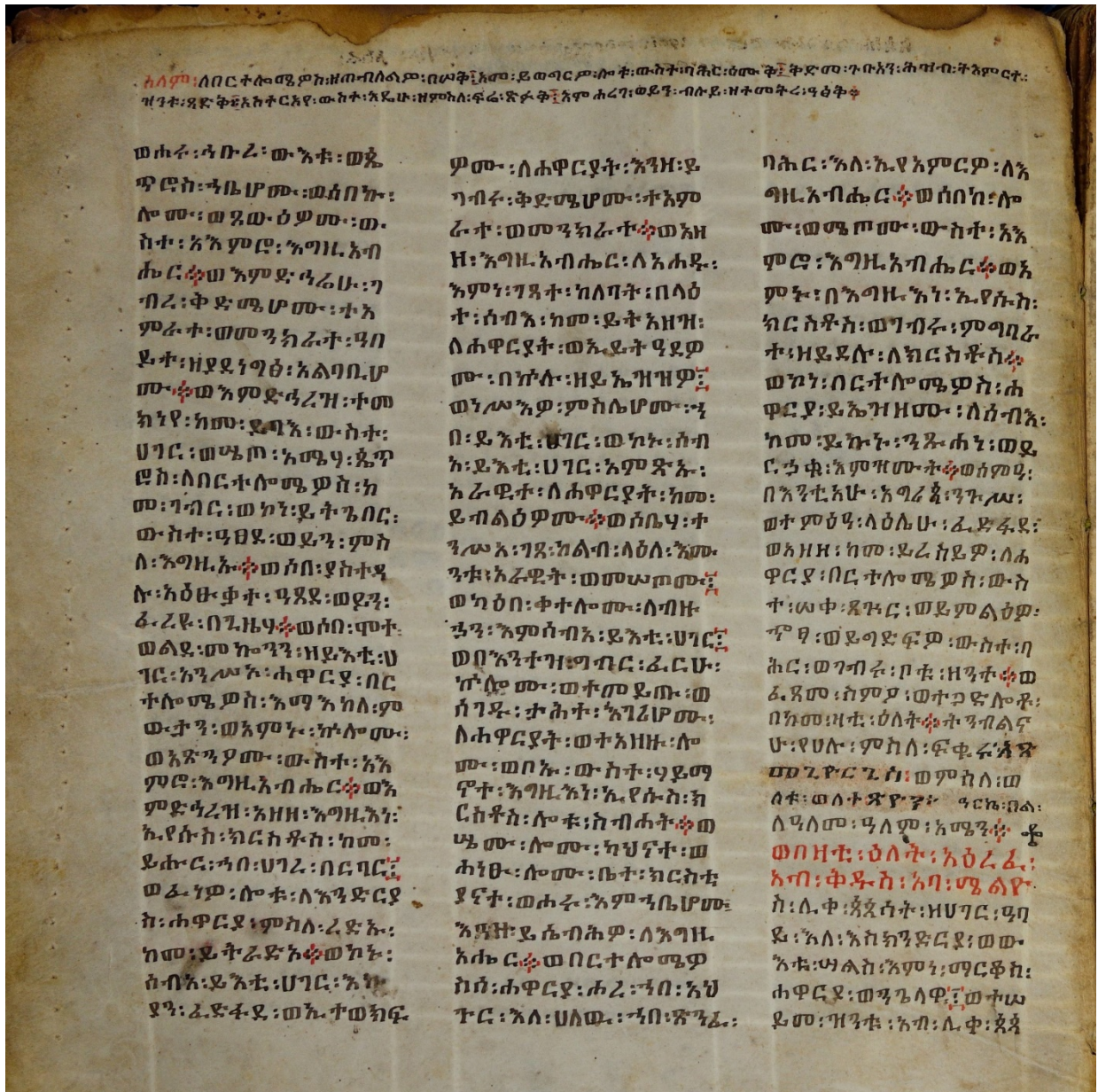


Fig. 11. ጸንዳ Maryam ጸንባዓባዒ. Synaxarion for the 1st half of the year, 18th century.



Fig. 12. 'Ēnda Maryam 'Ēnqwaqo. Miracles of Mary, 18th/early 19th century. Infixed miniatures.



Fig. 13. 'Ēnda Maryam 'Ēnqwaqo. Miracles of Mary, 18th/early 19th century. Infixed miniatures.



Fig. 14. ʾĒnda Maryam ʾĒnqwaqo. Miracles of Mary, 18th/early 19th century. Incipit on the recto-side, additional texts on the verso-side.

Before the visit, I was told that some ʾAksumite vestiges are preserved at or around the church but nothing could be discovered, at least at a quick look. However, a rusty iron cross was briefly shown to me, of the age difficult to define, said to have been found in the earth, and a small Gondärine triptych (fig. 15), the church reportedly possessing a few more of this kind. Another remarkable object shown was a round stone, of some 30 centimeters in diameter, very heavy, which was said to possess curative power healing sterile women.



Fig. 15. ʾĒnda Maryam ʾĒnqwaqo. Gondärine triptych and cross.

Zəqallay Mādḥane ʿAlām Bārākti, Zəqallay ʿOm Šällim Sellaše

Two small churches, Zəqallay Bārākti Mādḥane ʿAlām and Zəqallay ʿOm Šällim Sellaše, could be visited in *wārāda* Səbuḥa Saʿsiʿ (East Təgray), *tabiya* Bäläso⁵. The entire area around is marked by a concentration of ecclesiastical sites. The area of Zəqallay, extremely rugged, is located southwest from the town ʿƏdaga Ḥamus and represents the southern extremity of the Siʿet flat top mountains chain. On its western slope (in *wārāda* Ganta ʿAfāšum), the famous rock-church of Gʷahgot ʿIyāsus stands with a few affiliated churches around⁶. The church Siʿet Maryam is located at its northern end⁷. To reach the area, one drives from ʿƏdaga Ḥamus on a rural road along the slope, passing near another famous rock church, Maryam Dəngelat⁸. Further to the west from Zəqallay, there are such important rock-hewn churches as Qīʿat Däbrä Şeyon Maryam and Baḥəra Maryam⁹, the built church ʿAzäba Maryam (/Qirqos), the monastery Ḥaräykəwwa ʿƏnda Gäbrä Nazrawi, and others. Advancing further westward, one passes the area of the monastery Däbrä ʿAbbay and reaches the district of ʿAmba Sännayt, the church Wəgro Maryam¹⁰, the historical district Nəbälät and a number of other historical areas, sites and

⁵ In 2019, the former large *wārāda* Saʿsiʿ Şaʿda ʿƏmba was split into two administrative units, *wārāda* Səbuḥa Saʿsiʿ (with the administrative centre in the town ʿƏdaga Ḥamus), and *wārāda* Şaʿda ʿƏmba (the capital Fərewayni (/Sənqata)) [I thank Mr. Hagos Gebremariam for this detail].

⁶ According to a recent research, Gʷahgot ʿIyāsus is a “hewn copy” of the free-standing church of Yəmreḥannä Krastos in Lasta (see Muehlbauer 2020:32). Using the occasion, I want to add to the information provided in Muehlbauer 2020:36, fn. 31, that twelve manuscripts from the collection of Gʷahgot ʿIyāsus and two other church objects (a cross and a lectern) have been described in the database of the project Ethio-SPaRe (https://mycms-vs03.rz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_institution_00000117). The local tradition speaks of seven churches under the administration of Gʷahgot ʿIyāsus, though dedications of only five could be ascertained during my former visit (St. Mary, George of Lydda, Saviour of the World, ʿArägawi). Another significant church, dedicated to the Three Children in the Furnace (*Sälästu Däqiq*), is located not far Gʷahgot ʿIyāsus but appears to be independent. Mr. Hagos Gebremariam recently brought to my attention a sizable hagiographical work in Gəʿəz, *Gädlu lä-sälästu däqiq ʿAnanya wä-ʿAzarya wä-Misaʿel* (“Vita of the Three Children, Hananiah, Azariah and Mishael”) previously unknown, attested in at least one recent manuscript. It mentions some historical events that took place around the church, including the 16th-century Muslim wars. The local community seems to be preparing a printed edition of this work.

⁷ The area is sometimes referred to as “Haramat mountains”.

⁸ Shortly before the outbreak of the conflict, a project aimed at facilitating the entrance to the church by new means of ascent was completed (March 2019), carried out by a few Italian professionals and local enthusiasts (cp. <https://www.mountainwilderness.org/2019/04/06/mountain-wilderness-in-ethiopia-a-resounding-success/> [accessed on 15.08.2023]).

⁹ Sixteen sites could be reached by the team of Ethio-SPaRe in 2010–2015 in this wide part of Ganta ʿAfāšum district, which is delimited by the main roads ʿAddigrat – ʿAdwa and ʿAddigrat – Mägälä (Nosnitsin 2013, chapter 3, see also p. xx and the map on p. xxiii), while many more remained out of the reach. In that period the area lacked roads and travelling was very difficult.

¹⁰ On the identification of this church in the sixteenth-century narrative of Francisco Alvares, see Ancel 2013:94-95.

localities which are less known¹¹, and arrives in the region around ʿAdwa and approaches the vicinities of the monastery ʾĒnda ʾAbba Gärima¹².

Zəqallay abounds in legends about the 15th-century ʾabunä ʾĒstīfanos, the famous leader of the Stephanite monastic movement, since the locality is believed to have been the place where ʾĒstīfanos grew up. Indeed, the Vita of ʾĒstīfanos accounts that, still before ʾĒstīfanos' birth, his father died, and ʾĒstīfanos was brought up at a place called Zəqällay, in the family of his uncle¹³. This place may well be the same as today's Zəqallay in Səbuḥa Saʿsiʿ. Besides, the local tradition says that at one moment ʾĒstīfanos took the *tabot* from the monastery of Gundā Gunde and brought it to Zəqallay, hiding it from King Zärʾa Yaʿqob, the persecutor of the Stephanites. The *tabot* is told to have stayed there one year, to be later brought to other areas before returning to Gunda Gunde¹⁴.

The round churches Zəqallay, Bäräkti Mādḥane ʿAlām (**fig. 16**) and ʾOm Šällim Səllaṣe (**fig. 17**) look, at least at the first glance, as recent foundations which do not predate the 19th

¹¹ One of the historical place names to be found there is the monastery Däbrä Ḥamlo. It is mentioned in an additional note/colophon included in the important Ms. EMMML no. 2514 “Acts of the Martyrs”, recently analyzed by Martina Ambu (Ambu 2021:104-107); and probably in one of the additional notes in the ʾĒnda Abba Gärima Gospels I (Ḥamlo in ʾAmba Sənäyt, see Getatchew Haile 2016:8, 9, 20). The volume was kept in the church ʾAstī Kidanä Məḥrat in ʾAnkoba when microfilmed (Getatchew Haile – Macomber 1982:5-14), but according to the colophon it appears to have been written in the place called Däbrä Ḥamlo (datings of the manuscript range from the late 14th to the early 16th centuries, see Ambu 2021:98), probably a monastery said to have been elevated in the time of King Dawit (r. 1382–1413) and Metropolitan Sälama (in tenure 1348-1388). Däbrä Ḥamlo may be identical to ʾĒmba (Šaʿdat) Ḥamlo (14,1759°, 39,3092°), with the landscape strikingly similar including the surprising reference to the height of place (a rock?) where Däbrä Ḥamlo stood, that can be reached only with the help of a rope of “132 elbows” (see Ambu 2021:104). This corresponds exactly to the most remarkable physical feature of today's ʾĒmba Ḥamlo (cp. a photo <https://www.facebook.com/381633372388258/posts/413209039230691> [accessed 14.08.2023]).

¹² The entire area is located northward from the main A2 road leading from ʿAddigrat to the city of ʾAksum. While preparing the report, I came across a couple of place names which, when identified, can contribute to the understanding of Ethiopian sources. For instance, cp. the article Kim 2022 and the hypothesis concerning the origin of the volume ʾĒnda ʾAbba Gärima Four Gospels II, which is proposed to be seen in the monastery Däbrä Sina/ ʾĒnda ʾAbba Yoḥanni (Eritrea), basing on the interpretation of an additional note (C9, see Kim 2022:30-31, 46). It is quite possible that Däbrä Sina mentioned in the note is a monastery in Eritrea and the recorded donation concerns that institution (following Kim 2022:30-31). However, ʾAḥayle, the area mentioned in the land document, does not appear to be unknown (cp. Kim 2022:43). In my opinion, it corresponds to Ḥayale, located to the northeast from the monastery ʾĒnda Abba Gärima, a historical region and today a *wäräda* with the central city Färäsmay (formerly a part of the ʾAḥfärom *wäräda*). [As a sad coincidence, the social media have recently reported about a fire that happened in the church ʾĒnda Ḡawärḡes (Giyorgis), *ṭabiya* ʿAddi ʿEqoro, *wäräda* Ḥayalä, which destroyed its sizable library]. ʾAbba Set under whose administration ʾAḥayle was placed, according to the note C9, reminds of ʾabuna Set of Däbrä Bäkʾwər, a monastery located also in Ḥayale (Leake Teklebrhan 2019, though ʾabunä Set does not match precisely King Yəshaq in terms of chronology). The inclusion of this legal document into the ʾĒnda ʾAbba Gärima Gospels is logical because it was meant to document the transfer of the authority over and tributes from the neighbouring region (ʾAḥayle/ Ḥayale) to another distant institution (Däbrä Sina). The Four Gospels manuscript executes its classical “archival” function in this case, being used as repository of legal documents. It cannot be excluded that a document very similar to the note C9 will once turn up in Däbrä Sina. In my opinion, the note is unlikely an indication that the entire manuscript was produced in Däbrä Sina.

¹³ ወእንዘ፡ ሀሎ፡ ውስተ፡ ከርሁ፡ እሙ፡ ሞተ፡ አቡሁ፡ ወሶበ፡ ተወልደ፡ ሰመደዎ፡ ኅድገ፡ አንበሳ፡ ወሐነ፡ እሙ፡ ወልህቀ፡ በቤተ፡ እኅወ፡ አቡሁ፡ በምድር፡ እንተ፡ ይብልዋ፡ ዝቀላይ፡ (Getatchew Haile 2006a:1), “While he was still in the womb of his mother, his father died. When he was born, they named him Ḥädgä Anbäsa. His mother reared him; and he grew up in the home of his father's brother, in a district called Zəqäläy.” (Getatchew Haile 2006b:1). The passage and the place name have the same shape also in the two church editions of the Vita of Estifanos (cp. also <http://dehayagame.blogspot.com/2016/01/dehay-agame-adigrat-1262-1500-1406-1500.html> [accessed on 16.08.2023]).

¹⁴ Another historical place of prominence located near Zəqallay is ʾAḳora where a battle between *ras* Səbḥat of ʿAgamä and Gäbrä Šəllase Barya Gabər of ʿAdwa took place in 1914 (EAE IV, 588-589) and resulted in the death of Səbḥat.

century. Both are small round churches, the *māqdās* of ʾOm Şällim Sellaše is partly painted (figs 18-22).



Fig. 16. Zəqallay Bäräkti Mädhane ʿAlām. General view.



Fig. 17. Zəqallay ʾOm Şällim Sellaše. General view.



Fig. 18. Zəqallay 'Om Şəllim Səllaşe. Painted mąqdās.



Fig. 19. Zəqallay 'Om Şəllim Səllaşe. Painted mąqdās.



Fig. 20. Zəqallay 'Om Şällim Səllaše. Painted mäsḍäs.



Fig. 21. Zəqallay 'Om Şällim Səllaše. Painted mäsḍäs.



Fig. 22. Zəqallay 'Om Şällim Sallaše. Painted mäsḳäs.

The manuscript collections of these churches are small. As the most interesting items, for Bäräḳti Mädhane 'Alām one *Dərsana Mika'el* manuscript from the time of King Yoḥannēs IV (r. 1876–1882) has been recorded (fig. 23), and a calligraphically written late 19th-/early 20th-century Miracles of Jesus manuscript (fig. 24).



Fig. 23. Zəqallay 'Om Şällim Sallaše. *Dərsana Mika'el*, 1876–1882. Fol. 2r.



Fig. 24. Zəqallay ʾOm Şällim Səllasē. *Miracles of Jesus*, late 19th/early 20th century. Fols 2v–3.

May Lābay Däbrä Mäwi? Qəddus Minas

At a later date I was able to visit the church Däbrä Mäwi? Qəddus Minas May Lābay, or ?Ənda Minas May Lābay (*ṭabiya* ?Agʿazi, *wäräda* Şaʿda ?Əmba) which is located on the plain below the flat top mountain where the churches Bäräkti Mädhane ʿAläm and ?Om Şällim Səllaše stand. Being at the brink of the flat top mountain, not far from those churches, one can see ?Ənda Minas May Lābay below. Other foundations located not far from ?Ənda Minas are the church dedicated to ?*abba* Hadära (the same saint as the one venerated in Tämben), the churches ʿAddi Sämaʿt Mädhane ʿAläm and Däräba ?Arbaʿəttu ?Ənsəsa, and the aforementioned Gʷaḥgot ?Iyäsus. May Lābay Qəddus Minas is said to be formally still a *gədam* (monastery) but now no monks dwell there. Local priests claimed that one of the “Golden Gospels” books preserved in the city of ?Aksum keeps a record concerning the church. No information about the history of the foundation could be obtained *in situ* except that the church was established by the local people at an unknown time. The older church building is round and may date to the 19th or early 20th century; a new rectangular larger church was in the process of construction at the time of the visit (**figs 25-26**). The *mäqdäs* of the older round church is decorated with murals of recent age (**figs 27-31**).



Fig. 25. Däbrä Mäwi? Qəddus Minas May Lābay. General view.



Fig. 26. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. General view.



Fig. 27. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Painted mēqdās.



Fig. 28. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Painted mäsḳäs.



Fig. 29. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Painted mäsḳäs.



Fig. 30. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Lābay. Painted mäsḳäs.



Fig. 31. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Lābay. Painted mäsḳäs.

At a distance of several kilometres, on the top of a huge peak there is a cave church, looking very modest, without any decoration, now deserted and extremely difficult to access (**figs 32-33**). The local people said that it is dedicated to “Jacob”, with no further details. Some two kilometres away from ʿḤnda Minas there is another small rock-hewn structure, cut in the steep slope of a massive rock, difficult to see from the outside (**figs 34-36**). The slope around bears traces of work possibly indicative of the constructors’ bigger plans which were not fulfilled

(figs 37-38). The structure, of an undefined age¹⁵, was meant as burial chapel, and used in this way until recently, according to the community (figs 39-46). A cavity in the rock half-covered with slabs could be a grave. Now it is empty (figs 45-46). The structure is deserted and not in use for a number of years. The local people could not say anything more specific about it or its relation to ʾƏnda Minas and its community. The presence of other rock-hewn churches around ʾƏnda Minas was mentioned to us several times. All this again proves the suitability of the area for the rock-hewn architecture.

The church of May Lābay Minas owns some 20 to 25 rather recent manuscripts, one small icon and two crosses. One of them was a recent processional bronze cross, of the 19th century, but clearly following in its shape an old 14th-/15th-century model (fig. 47). The second one was a small iron hand-cross which can be dated to the 14th century¹⁶, being a possible hint to the foundation time of the church. Some fragments of parchment manuscripts were found scattered inside the church, probably representing an earlier layer of the local manuscript collection that has nearly completely vanished. Among the manuscripts there was a fine copy of the Acts of St. Minas, completed in the time of Ḥaylā Səllaše I by the scribe Gäbrä Ḥəywät of the monastery Gunda Gunde, as it was stated in the colophon. The church possesses also a fine recent votive image of St. Minas (fig. 48). The community of May Lābay was exceptionally friendly and hospitable.



Fig. 32. Däbrä Mäwiʾ Qəddus Minas May Lābay. Cave church on the peak.

¹⁵ A postcard hanging on a stick inside the church, probably left by some foreign visitors, had the date 1967 CE.

¹⁶ I thank Prof. Ewa Balicka-Witakowska (Uppsala) for help in dating the objects.



Fig. 33. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Cave church on the peak.



Fig. 34. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Burial chapel, entrance from the outside.



Fig. 35. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel, entrance from the outside.



Fig. 36. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel, entrance from the outside.



Fig. 37. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Traces of hewing on the slope near the burial chapel.



Fig. 38. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Traces of hewing on the slope near the burial chapel.



Fig. 39. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 40. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 41. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 42. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 43. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 44. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Burial chapel inside.



Fig. 45. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Burial chapel inside, empty grave.



Fig. 46. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Burial chapel inside, empty grave.



Fig. 47. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Läbay. Processional cross, 18th century.



Fig. 48. Däbrä Mäwi' Qəddus Minas May Ləbay. Votive image of St. Minas, 20th/21st century.

Ṣəlalməʿo Däbrä Ṣähay Qəddus Gäbrəʿel

The rock-hewn church of Ṣəlalməʿo Gäbrəʿel is located in *ṭabiya* May Mägälta (*wäräda* Ṣaʿda ʾƏmba), not far from the town ʿƏdaga Ḥamus, a few kilometres away eastwards from the main road to ʿAddigrat. The structure is hidden under a cliff; the spacy church compound is delimited by a wall with a solid gate tower (**figs 49-50**). Somewhere in the vicinity there is a *ṣäbäl*-source, and many faithful dwell outside the churchyard under a shelter (**fig. 51**), hoping for healing. The remarkable church has been rarely mentioned in the scholarly literature¹⁷, and should be certainly better attended by the students of the Ethiopian rock-hewn architecture (cp. some images, **figs 52-64**). The local tradition claims that the church was founded by King ʿAmdä Ṣəyon I (r. 1314–1344)¹⁸. Muslims are said to have lived in the area in the past, but went away at an unspecified time. Also monks reportedly resided around the church, but departed during the “Time of the Princes”¹⁹. Now Ṣəlalməʿo Gäbrəʿel is of the most common *däbr*-status.



Fig. 49. Ṣəlalməʿo Däbrä Ṣähay Qəddus Gäbrəʿel. Church compound.

¹⁷ Not appearing in Sauter 1963 and only mentioned in Sauter 1976 (no. 1103), with no further details and a small bibliography of three items, including the pioneering book of Georg Gerster (the second edition, see below).

¹⁸ Other data have been reported in Gerster 1972:147, underscoring the variability of the tradition over the span of some 55 years. According to this publication, the local tradition places the foundation in the time of King Yəkunno ʾAmlak (r. 1270–1285) and assigns it to ʾabba Danəʿel of Qorqor, the spiritual father of ʾabunä ʾEwostətewos (Lusini 2005).

¹⁹ *Zāmānä mäsaʾənt*, a period of extreme decentralization of the Ethiopian state (1769–1855).



Fig. 50. Şalalmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. Gate tower



Fig. 51. Şalalmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. Shelter near the church compound.

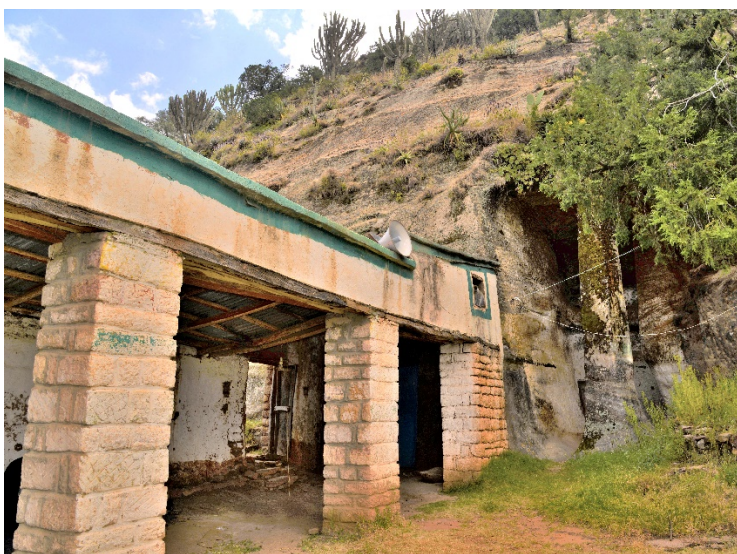


Fig. 52. Şalalmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. Entrance to the rock-hewn church.



Fig. 53. Şalalmə'ə Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrä'el. The church inside.



Fig. 54. Şalalmə'ə Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrä'el. The church inside.



Fig. 55. Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.



Fig. 56. Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.

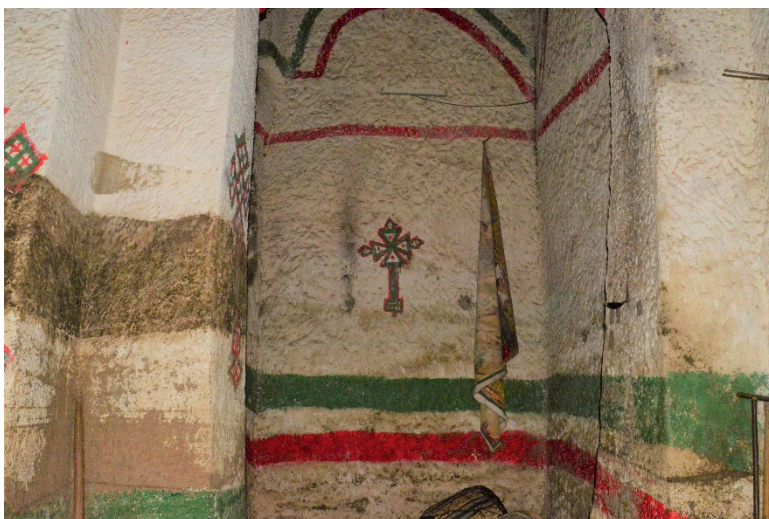


Fig. 57. Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.



Fig. 58. *Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrä'el. The church inside.*



Fig. 59. *Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrä'el. The church inside.*



Fig. 60. *Şalalma'ο Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrä'el. The church inside.*



Fig. 61. Şalalmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.



Fig. 62. Şalalmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.



Fig. 63. Şəlalma'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.



Fig. 64. Şəlalma'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. The church inside.

The manuscript collection, though not of a large size, encompasses some interesting manuscripts. A large *Gəbra həmamət* ("The Book of the Rite of the Passion Week") manuscript of the church is composed of two production units, incomplete, with some quires misplaced, possibly due to a recent rebinding (see fig. 65). The manuscript is marked by many irregularities concerning the number of written lines, size and shape of the parchment leaves and the written space (fig. 66), and cases of the break of Gregory's rule (see fig. 67). The reasons for that diversity and the age of the manuscript (19th century?) are difficult to define without a more detailed study.



Fig. 65. Şalalma'ō Dābrā Şāḥay Qaddus Gäbrä'el. Mäşḥafä gäbra ḥamamat, 19th century. Spine, heterogeneous textblock.



Fig. 66. Şalalma'ō Dābrā Şāḥay Qaddus Gäbrä'el. Mäşḥafä gäbra ḥamamat, 19th century. Fols 25v–26r.



Fig. 67. Şələlmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. Mäşhäfä gəbra həmamət, 19th century. Fol. 53v hair side, fol. 54r flesh side.

The Four Gospels manuscript of Şələlmə'o Gäbrə'el is datable to the second half of the 16th/first half of the 17th century (fig. 68).

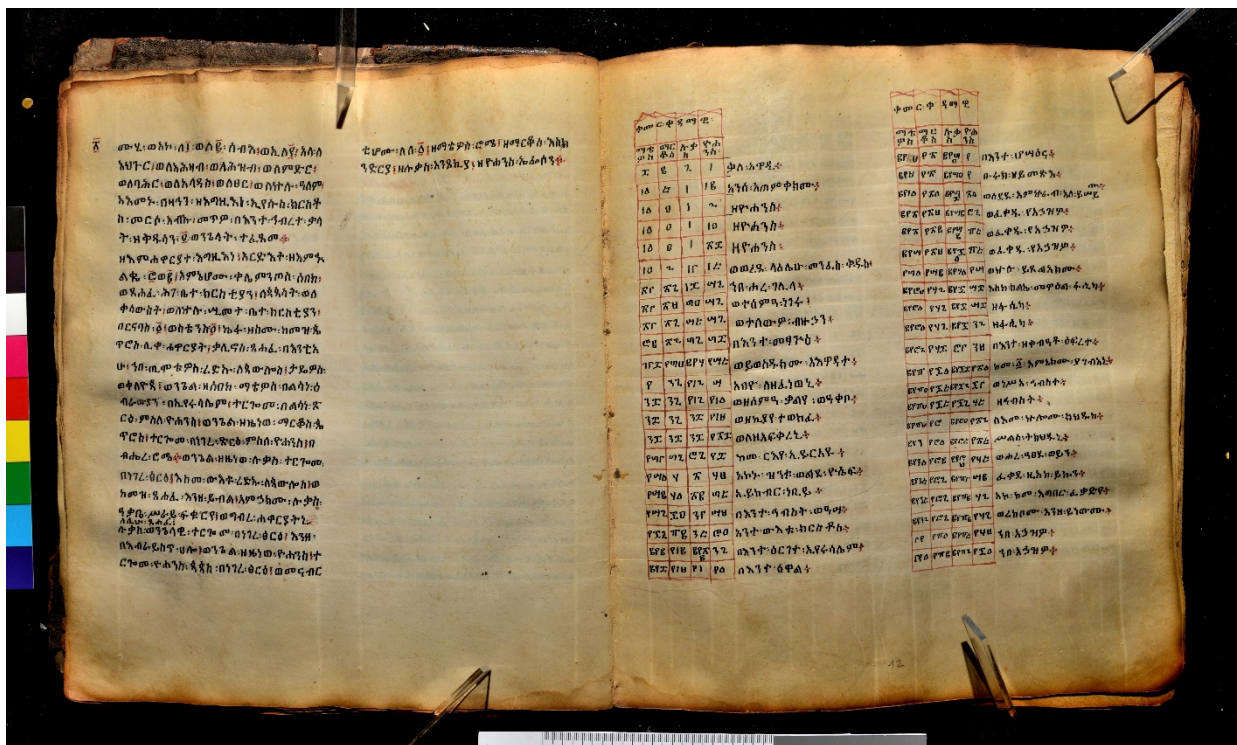


Fig. 68. Şələlmə'o Däbrä Şähay Qəddus Gäbrə'el. Four Gospels, second half of the 16th/first half of the 17th century. Fols 11v–12r, preliminary texts.

The most remarkable book of the collection is for sure the late 15th–16th-century Miracles of Mary manuscript. It contains a collection of over 90 stories and a few beautiful miniatures,

possibly non-original, added at a later time (figs 69-70). The manuscript shows many repairs and interventions in the binding and the textblock, suggestive of the manuscript's complex history. The original commissioner might have been *ʾabunä* Gäbrä Krastos, possibly the head of a monastic community; the scribe's name seems to be Färe Krastos (fig. 71, fol. 145rb). A monastic genealogy included as additional text hints to a possible connection of the manuscript to the monastic network of Däbrä Libanos of Šäwa (fig. 72). Another additional note mentions King Säršä Dəngəl (r. 1563–1597), and a few more notes are written in another hand of approximately the same period. But a recent (19th-century?) note written in red ink refers to Wäldä ʾAbiyä ʾƏgziʾ and his family members as those who donated the manuscript to the church of (Šəlalməʿo) Gäbrəʾel.



Fig. 69. Šəlalməʿo Däbrä Šäḥay Qəddus Gäbrəʾel. Miracles of Mary, late 15th/first half of the 16th century. Fols 10v–11r, text and miniatures.



Fig. 70. Šəlalməʿo Däbrä Šäḥay Qəddus Gäbrəʾel. Miracles of Mary, late 15th/first half of the 16th century. Fols 11v–12r, miniatures.



Fig. 71. Šəlalmaʿo Däbrä Šāḥay Qəddus Gäbräʿel. *Miracles of Mary*, late 15th/first half of the 16th century. Fols 144v–145r, explicit, supplication of the scribe, additional note.



Fig. 72. Šəlalmaʿo Däbrä Šāḥay Qəddus Gäbräʿel. *Miracles of Mary*, late 15th/first half of the 16th century. Fol. 147v, monastic genealogy.

The Missal manuscript of the church was produced in the time of King Mənilək II (r. 1889–1913), after the “destruction of Italy” (obviously at the battle of ʿAdwa of 1896) as it is stated in the colophon (**fig. 73**).



Fig. 73. Šəlalmoʿo Däbrä Šəḥay Qəddus Gäbräʾel. Missal, 1889–1913. Fol. 4rb, colophon.



Fig. 75. ʿĒnda Ṣadaḡan Məhrāta. General view.



Fig. 76. ʿĒnda Ṣadaḡan Məhrāta. General view.

No sufficient time was available to look carefully through the manuscript collection of the church on the day of the visit, but it appeared to embrace only recent manuscripts with very common texts. However, at least one manuscript turned out to be remarkable, datable to the second half of the 19th or early 20th century, containing Acts, Miracles and a *mālkə*²-hymn for Gābrā Nazrawi of Qāwāt. These texts were formerly known only indirectly (**fig. 77**)²¹. The manuscript contains the Vita of Gābrā Nazrawi's spiritual father, ʿabba Yoḥannēs, this text seems to have been unknown so far (**fig. 78**)²². The manuscript includes also a monastic

²¹ Cp. Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1975, no. 67.

²² Also it contradicts the information indicated above. Obviously, the uncertainties can be solved only after a detailed study of the relevant hagiographic traditions.

genealogy that starts with Taklā Haymanot “of Ethiopia” who is said to have generated Yoḥannēs whose spiritual son was Gäbrä Nazrawi of Qāwāt (fig. 79).



Fig. 77. ʿĒnda Ṣadaqan Maḥrāta. Acts, Miracles and Mälkäʾ of Gäbrä Nazrawi of Qāwāt, Acts of Yoḥannēs, second half of the 19th/20th century. Incipit of the Acts of Gäbrä Nazrawi.



Fig. 78. ʿĒnda Ṣadaqan Maḥrāta. Acts, Miracles and Mälkäʾ of Gäbrä Nazrawi of Qāwāt, Acts of Yoḥannēs, second half of the 19th/20th century. Incipit of the Acts of Yoḥannēs.



Fig. 79. ʿĒnda Ṣadaqan Məhräta. Acts, Miracles and Mälkäʾ of Gäbrä Nazrawi of Qäwät, Acts of Yohannäs, second half of the 19th/20th century. Monastic genealogy.

ʿAba Qəddus Qirqos

The church (ʿAddi) ʿAba²³ Qirqos (/Çärqos) is yet another one in the *ṭabiya* May Mägälta (*wäräda* Şaʿda ʔḔmba), not far from the town Fərewayni. The church, of common rectangular shape, standing on a rock hill, is very modest (figs **80-82**).



Fig. 80. ʿAba Qəddus Qirqos. General view.



Fig. 81. ʿAba Qəddus Qirqos. Detail of the church building.

²³ The pronunciation ʔAba appears to be acceptable as well.



Fig. 82. ‘Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Detail of the church building.

Unexpectedly, the manuscript collection turned out to be very interesting, containing a few remarkable manuscripts and objects. The church possesses a Four Gospels manuscript datable to the 17th century (figs 83-84). Two manuscripts containing the Acts of Cyriacus (Qirqos) turned up, both dating to the 19th or early 20th century, a first half of the 19th-century Missal manuscript donated to the church in the time of Yoḥannēs IV (figs 85-86), and a small 19th-century manuscript with the Prayer of Incense decorated with a fine headpiece (fig. 87).

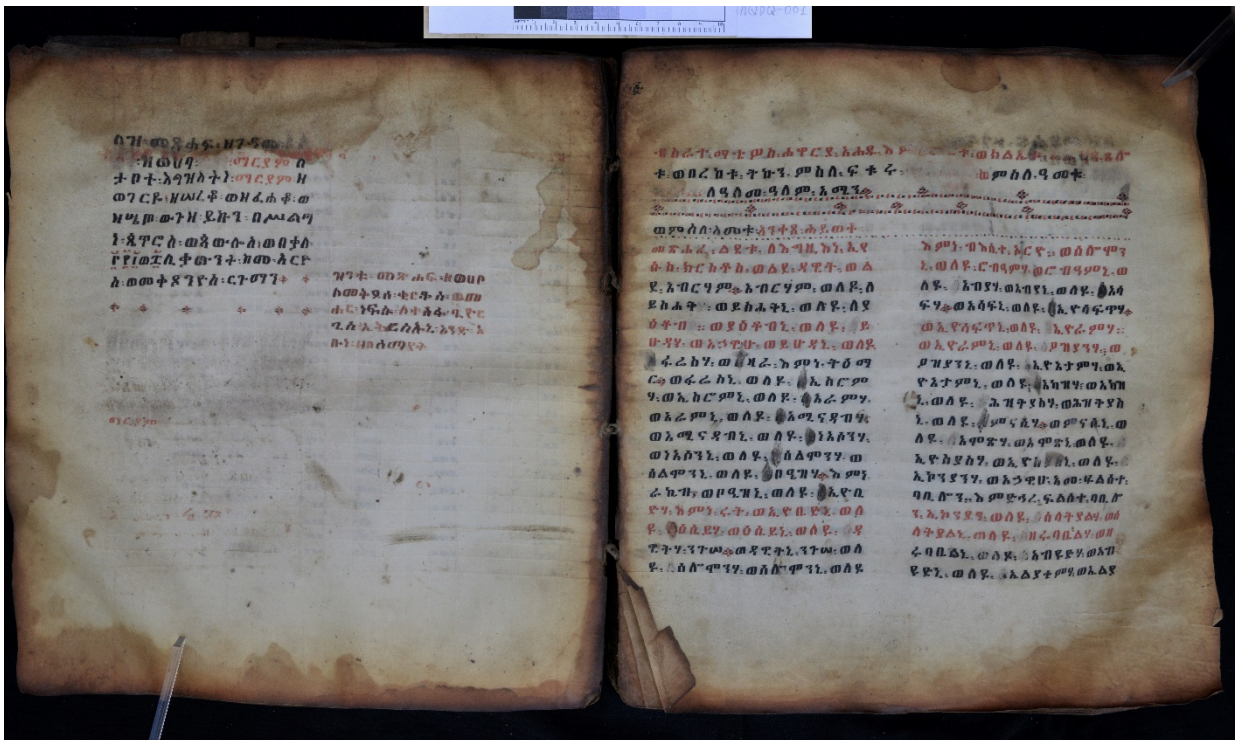


Fig. 83. ‘Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Four Gospels, 17th century. Fols 14v–15r, donation note, incipit of the Gospel of Matthew.



Fig. 84. 'Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Four Gospels, 17th century. Fol. 61r, Gospel of Mark.



Fig. 85. 'Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Missal, first half of the 9th century. Fols 1v–2r.

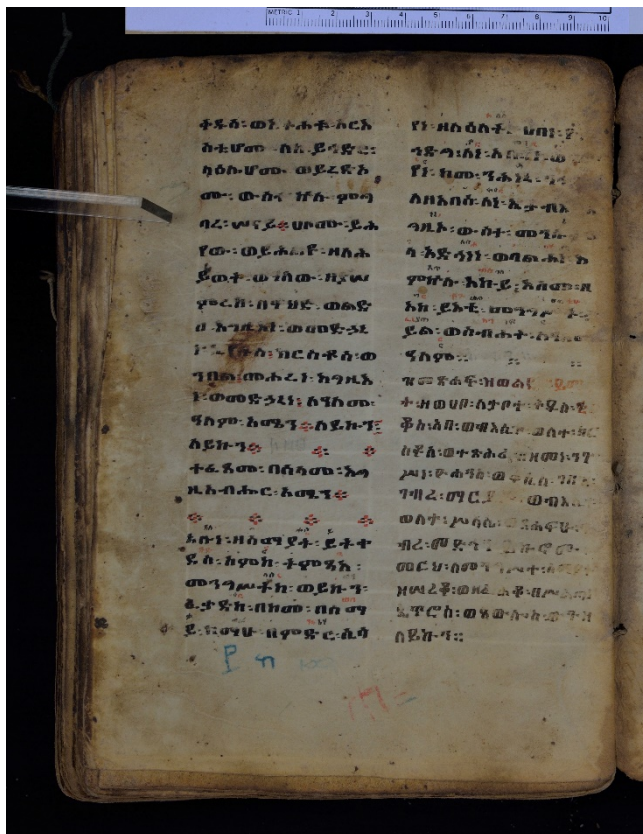


Fig. 86. 'Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Missal, first half of the 9th century. Fol. 144v. Donation note.



Fig. 87. 'Aba Qaddus Qirqos. Prayer of Incense, 19th century. Fol. 3r. Incipit, headpiece.

Ṭagot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam

At the distance of a few kilometres from the southern outskirts of the town ʿĒdaga Ḥamus (*wārāda* Səbuḥa Saʿsiʿ) there is the church Today Ṭagot ʾĒnda Şəyon (/Däbrä Şəyon) Maryam, yet another one of the numerous ecclesiastic sites located along the road which connects Mekelle to ʿAddigrat and leads further into Eritrea towards the Red Sea. Today Ṭagot Maryam is a large rectangular church with a spacious church compound and a massive gate tower (**figs. 88-90**)²⁴. The *tabots* of Ṭagot Maryam are said to be three, dedicated to St Mary, ʾUraʾel and the holy kings ʾAbreha and ʾAşbəḥa. Ṭagot Maryam reportedly possesses a considerable manuscript collection but it was not accessible on the day of the visit.



Fig. 88. Ṭagot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. General view.

²⁴ On the other side of the road, there is a recent church Ṭagot Kidanä Məhrät related to the *ras* Mängäša Yoḥannēs of Təgray (1865–1906).



Fig. 89. Taqot Maryam 'Enda Şayon Maryam. General view.



Fig. 90. Taqot Maryam 'Enda Şayon Maryam. Gate tower.

At a distance of some two hundred meters from the church there is a remarkable structure hewn from a stone rock overlooking the valley below. It is called the (deserted) rock-

hewn church of Ṭaqot²⁵; the local people call it *nākʷal ʕəmni* (Tgn. “stone with holes”) due to its peculiar shape (**figs 91-114**). The structure bears no obviously Christian symbols and shows a minimum of decorations.



Fig. 91. Ṭaqot Maryam ʕənda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, general view.



Fig. 92. Ṭaqot Maryam ʕənda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, general view.

²⁵ Cp. Ricci 1961. On the site see also Sauter 1963, no. 11; Sauter 1976, no. 11, Godet 1977:46.



Fig. 93. ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, general view.



Fig. 94. ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, general view.



Fig. 95. ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 96. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 97. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. View around the rock-hewn church.



Fig. 98. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. View around the rock-hewn church.



Fig. 99. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Archaeological area outside the church compound.



Fig. 100. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 101. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 102. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 103. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 104. Țaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 105. Țaqot Maryam 'Ēnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 106. Țaqot Maryam 'Ēnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 107. Țaqot Maryam 'Ēnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 108. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 109. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 110. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 111. Ṭaqot Maryam ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 112. Ṭaqot Maryam ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 113. Ṭaqot Maryam ʿĒnda Şəyon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.



Fig. 114. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Ṣayon Maryam. Rock-hewn church, details.

On the way to the *nāk^wal ʿəmni*, just outside the compound of the modern church Ṭaqot Maryam, there is a spot where the construction of a new bigger church started a few years ago (fig. 99) but the work was interrupted as soon as archaeological remains of an old settlement were unearthed. Comparing the western facade of the church as it appears in the photo printed in Ricci 1961²⁶ with its contemporary shape (fig. 89), one may assume that the church was heavily rebuilt but escaped the full demolition and was not substituted for with a completely new structure. The contemporary church building stands on an ancient stone foundation that is laid bare and well visible (figs 115-123). Inside the church compound, some ʾAksumite vestiges are visible (figs 89, 115-116, 124), and much more probably remains under the earth.



Fig. 115. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Ṣayon Maryam. ʾAksumite vestiges, foundation under the recent church.

²⁶ One of the few or maybe even the only one available, see Ricci 1961, fig. 2.



Fig. 116. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite vestiges, foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 117. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 118. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Ṣayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 119. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Ṣayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 120. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 121. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 122. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 123. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite foundation under the recent church.



Fig. 124. Ṭaqot Maryam ʾĒnda Şayon Maryam. ʾAksumite vestiges near the recent church.

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