The Disputed *Life* of the Saintly Ethiopian Kings ’Abrēhā and ’Aṣbēha

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Summary

The discovery of an Amharic document written by a church scholar from the monastery of Dimā Giyorgis in Eastern Goǧġām (Ethiopia) throws fresh light on the circumstances and disputes behind the composition of the *Life* of the Ethiopian twin brother kings ’Abrēhā and ’Aṣbēha, as well as on the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel* (‘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 *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel* is edited with an annotated English translation.

Keywords

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

’Abrēhā and ’Aṣbēha 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.

(excerpt from the prologue of the *Gadla ’Abrēhā wa-’Aṣbēha*)
During my research on the early history of the monastery of Dabra Warq located in Eastern Goǧǧām (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) 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 Tawāḥǝdo Church – namely the text known as *Gadla Ṭabrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa* (*Life of Ṭabrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa’*).

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

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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 Goǧǧām 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 Mǝnilǝk I, form the last part of my article. The article ends with a conclusion.

‘Abrǝhā and ’Aṣbǝḥa – Historical Figures?

As triumphantly announced in the prologue of the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa (‘Life of ’Abrǝhā and ’Aṣbǝḥa’), the Ethiopian tradition refers to ’Abrǝhā and ’Aṣbǝḥa as the first Christian kings of Ethiopia who jointly ruled on Aksum. In contrast to post-Aksumite literary sources, it is firmly attested by numismatic and inscriptive evidence that the introduction of Christianity into the Aksumite Kingdom is linked to the well documented historical figure of King ʿEzānā (c. 320–360).

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

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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 ʾAbbā Salāmā Kašate Bǝrhān 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 Sanê, Hamlê et Nahasê, publiés et traduits (avec le concours de L. Desnoyers et A. Singlas), vol. 11: Mois de Hamlê (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 “Sälama (Kašate Bǝrhan),” EAE, vol. 4, pp. 484a–488a (G. Fiaccadori), here p. 485a.

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, some scholars suggest that ʿEzānā had ruled together with his brother Šaʾazana (ʾṢʿzn) and that the names ʿAḥrahā and ʿAṣbḥa (sometimes preceded by ‘Ĕlla) belonged to their titulary. Other scholars dismiss this proposal as there is no evidence for a dual kingship during ʿEzānā’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 ʿAbraha (‘the king of


7 When vocalised, the name is written in different ways: Sazana/Saizana (transliterated from Greek) or Šǝʾezana in “Abrǝha and ʾAṣbǝḥa,” 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 ʿĔlla name (that is the regnal name), the Boʾʾsi 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 ʿĔlla name of ʿEzānā. See Munro-Hay, Aksum (see n. 5), pp. 158–161; W. Hahn, “Ezanas and Caleb, the Pair of Saintly Kings,” in: Proceedings of the xvth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies Hamburg July 20–25, 2003, ed. S. Uhlig, M. Bulakh, D. Nosnitsin, T. Rave (Aethiopistische Forschungen, 65), Wiesbaden, 2006, pp. 260–265, here pp. 261–262; Piovanelli, “Reconstructing the Social and Cultural History” (see n. 5), p. 339. For the meaning of ʿĔlla see A. Bausi, “Etiopico ʿellē: a proposito di un’ipotesi recente,” in: Scr, 1 (2005), pp. 3–11.
Najrān,9 c. 525–at least 547) and the Aksumite King ʾIllā ʾAṣbǝḥa (that is the attested regnal name of King Kāleb, c. 510–540) – with that of ʿEzānā and Šaʿazana.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 ʾAbrahā (‘he illuminated’) and ʾAṣbǝḥa (‘he made the dawn’) made such a transposition more plausible.11

However, neither ʿEzānā nor his brother Šaʿazana (who is not bestowed with a king’s title in any of the inscriptions) are mentioned in the post-Aksumite Gaʿoz-historiography. Instead, the names of ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝḥa might have been successive ʾIllā names of ʿEzānā (Munro-Hay, *Aksum* (see n. 5), p. 205). See also Getatchew Haile, “An Anonymous Homily in Honor of King ʾIllā ʾAṣbǝḥa of Axum, EMML 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 ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝḥa 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.

lists. They are also mentioned in a few literary works such as the prominent theological work Maṣḥafa Maṣṭir (‘Book of Mystery’) or the famous historiographical work Maṣḥafa ʾAksum (‘Book of Aksum’), both works were composed in the 15th century (the Maṣḥafa ʾAksum 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, 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, ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝḥa are venerated as saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawḥǝdo Church. The Ethiopic Synaxarion in its revised version contains a short commemorative notice for the 4 Ṭǝqǝmt:

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, 10e 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 ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 “Maṣṭir: Māṣḥafā māṣṭir,” EAE, vol. 3, pp. 941b–944a (A. Bausi). The Maṣḥafa Maṣṭir gives a short account of Frumentius who returned from the Patriarch of Alexandria as Metropolitan during the reign of ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝḥa. See the edition by Yaqob Beyene, Gıyorgis 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: Māṣḥafā Aksum’, EAE, I (2003), pp. 185a–186a (G. Lusini). The text was edited by C. Conti Rossini, Documenta ad illustrandum 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 Sǝnkǝssār) 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 “Sǝnkǝssǝr,” EAE, vol. 4, pp. 621a–623a (G. Colin and A. Bausi).
‘Furthermore, on this day the passing of the righteous kings ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa who together jointly reigned in Ethiopia at the place of Aksum is commemorated. May their prayer and their blessing be with …’.

The aforementioned manuscript EMML no. 1763\textsuperscript{19} – containing the ‘homily for the (commemoration) day of ʾƎlla ʾAṣbaḥā’ (that is King Kāleb) which might originate in the Aksumite era – may provide an indication, albeit vague, to an early veneration of ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa. 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 ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa: እም ጋ ቡዑ፡ ብተዝ ካረ፡ እለ፡ አጽበሓ። (sic!) ‘On the fourth of Ṭǝqǝmt for the commemoration of ʾƎlla ʾAṣbaḥā’.\textsuperscript{20} Nevertheless, it is possible that the scribe of EMML 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, was most probably written down for the first time. The text has not yet been edited, but P. Marrassini published a commented summary.\textsuperscript{21} Before I discuss its content and its purpose, I would like to briefly present the available text witnesses.


\textsuperscript{19} See n. 16.

\textsuperscript{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.

Text Witnesses of Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa

Given the central role in the Christianization of the country attributed to ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa, one would expect a large number of extant manuscripts containing the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa. The Lives of great saints venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥǝdo Church (such as Takla Häymǝnot, Gabra Manfas Qǝddus, ᖋwǝstǝtǝwos) 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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. 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. Marrassini to provide a summary of the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa. The manuscript comprises the Life (ff. 1ra–72ra), twelve miracles (ff. 72ra–87vb), a colophon (f. 88ra–vb) and a Malkǝʿ-hymn (ff. 90ra–97rb).

Ms A: Eastern Tǝgrāy, Ṣǝrāʿ ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, C3-IV-330
The rock-hewn church Ṣǝrāʿ ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa located in Tǝgrāy in the former district Kalatta ᖡwla‘oļo houses one parchment manuscript with the Life; this was photographed by Michael Gervers in 2005. As the church is ded-

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23 Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa” (see n. 21), p. 159.
24 Malkǝʿ-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 “Ṣǝraʿ ʾAbrǝha wä-ʾAṣbǝḥa,” EAE, vol. 4, pp. 628a–630a (E. Balicka-Witakowska).
icated to the saintly kings, it is often referred to as the ‘Church of ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa’.

The codex comprises at least seventy-nine folia and contains the Life (ff. 2va–66rb), twelve miracles (ff. 66va–77ra), a colophon (f. 77vb–va), a note on the donation to the church by Rās Gugšā of one third of the collected grain tax from Gamād (f. 66rb), all written in the same hand, with two rhymed texts written in pen (ff. 78v–79r). The miniature on f. 1r 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 C. IV-330 is written in pen on f. 2r. Folia 2, 66 and 78 bear the stamp of Rās Gugšā ʾArʾayā Śǝllāse.

According to the colophon, the manuscript was donated in 1917 ʿĀmata Mǝḥrat (= 1924/1925 CE) by Rās Gugšā ʾArʾayā (b. 1882, d. 1933, baptismal name Walda Giyorgis) ‘to (the tābot of) ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa, kings of Aksum, from the land of Gamād’ during the reign of Empress Zawditu (r. 1916–1930, here mentioned with her baptismal name ʾAskāla Māryām) and during the tenure of Metropolitan Mātewos (1889–1926). The donor’s father Rās ʾArʾayā Śǝllāse Yoḥannǝs, son of Emperor Yoḥannǝs IV (r. 1871–1889), is also mentioned.

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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 (፩ጥራዝ፡).

28 While one text records the expulsion of a demon from the Dabra Nagaśt, 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa). The names Takla Ḥāymānot and Gabra Masqal (referred to as the authors of the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, see below) are written beneath both texts.

29 Rās Gugšā was a Tǝgrean nobleman who was appointed Rās in 1918, see “Gugsa Arʾaya,” 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: ከመጽሐፍ፡ ዘራስ፡ ጉግሣ፡ ወ ስመ፡ ጥም  ቀቱ፡ ወል ደ፡ ከዮር ጊስ፡ ወአ ቡሁ፡ ራስ፡ አር አ ያ፡ ሥላ ሴ፡ ወል ዱ፡ ለዮ ሐ ን ስ፡ ንጉ ሠ፡ ጽዮን፡ ንጉሠ፡ ስግማድ። በዘመነ፡ መንግ  ሥ ታ፡ ለን ግ ሥ ትነ፡ አስ ካለ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ ወእ ን ዘ፡ ጳጳ ስ ነ፡ ማቴ ṇሰ፡ ሳ ት፡ ዘኢ ት ዮ ጵያ። ዘ ወ ሀቦሙ፡ ለአ ብ ር ሃ፡ ወአ ጽ ብ ሐ፡ ነገ ሥተ፡ አክ ሱም፡ ዘሀገረ፡ ሣህ ፲ ን። በ፲ ም፡ ወለ ን ዓ ለ መ፡ ዓለ ም፡ አሜ ን። ዘሠ ረ ቆ፡ ወዘ ፈ ሐ ቆ፡ በሥ ል ጣ ነ፡ ጴጥ ሮ ስ፡ ወጳ ው ሎ ስ፡ ውጉ ዘ፡ ለይ ኩ ን። በ፲ ለ ፱ ፻፡ ፲ወ ፯ ዓ መ ተ፡ ምሕ ረ ት፡ ተጻ ፈ። (sic!, Amharism).
Ms B: Eastern Goǧǧām, Marṯula Māryām, G̣-IV-53

The monastery Marṯula Māryām32 in Eastern Goǧǧām also possesses one parchment manuscript with the Gadla ʿAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 G̣-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. 9ra–70vb), twelve miracles (ff.71ra–82rb) and the Malkǝʿ-hymn (ff. 82va–88rb) written by the same scribe whose name, Habta Śǝllāse, is mentioned on ff. 17rb, 82rb. Beside an excerpt from the Malkǝʿa Śǝllāse (‘Image of the Trinity’) crudely written on ff. 2r–3v, the full text of the Malkǝʿa Śǝllāse is written on ff. 5ra–8va 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 (qǝne) mentioning Emperor Ḥāyla Śǝllāse. A note is written on f. 8vb in pen.33 Folia 1, 4, 88v are blank.

The codex might be dated to the early reign of Emperor Ḥāyla Śǝllāse (r. 1930–1974). Given the fact that in almost all of the supplication formulas ‘the children of Marṯula Māryām’ (ደቂ ቃ፡ ለመር ጡለ፡ ማር ያም፡) are indicated, one might assume that the monastery itself commissioned the writing. Only once, on f. 33vb, is the name ‘Arʾayā Śǝllāse34 (without any title), together with the name of his mother Ṭǝbota Muse, mentioned in the supplication formula.


33 The note, partly illegible, states that the church of Marṯula Māryām was built by ʿAbrǝhā and ʿAṣbǝḥa and consecrated by ʾAbbā Salāmā. Emperor Ḥāyla Śǝllāse contracted a Greek worker named Yohǝhanna Lutǝstas (?) to rebuild the church with colourful stones during the time of Rās ʾImmaru, governor of Goǧǧām, and Raʾosa Raʾusān Kǝnfu, the then abbot of the monastery.

34 It is not the same ʾArʾayā Śǝllāse mentioned in the colophon of Ms A. The mother of the only son of Yoḥannas IV was Ṭǝbaba Śǝllāse. The Crown Prince, who was the first husband
Ms C: Tǝgrāy, Aksum, ሀክምት ሰዩን, C2-IV-411

The church ሀክምት ሰዩን at Aksum is also in possession of a 20th-century parchment manuscript with the Gadla እብረሃ ወ-አሽቦሓ. The codex was photographed by Antonella Brita in 2005 and contains the Life (ff. 4va–72vb), a miracle of እብሃ ሰላምእ (f. 72vb) and thirteen miracles of እብረሃ and እአሽቦሓ (ff. 72va–87vb).

The miracle of እብሃ ሰላምእ and the first miracle of እብረሃ and እአሽбоሓ are excerpts from the Masqafa አክሬም. The later miracle narrates that the church was built ‘for the third time’ by እብረሃ and እአሽቦሓ who climbed on a high mountain called Mǝkyāda, 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 Gwǝdit and restored by እወታ ሁንባሃ ኦወወ ሌው ብወ ካሃ in 910 ወ-አማታ በሃበር; 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 ff. 88va–87vb.

Folio 88r is blank.

of Empress Zawditu, bore the title ሀራስ, he died suddenly in 1888 at the age of only eighteen. See “Ar’aya ሂላይ ወት ከዓለኝ,” EAE, vol. 1, p. 314b (Zewde Gabre-Sellassie) and “ወት ከዓለኝ iv,” EAE, vol. 5, pp. 73a–80a (Bairu Tafla), here p. 77a.

For general information on this famed church, see “Ḵእንወ ሰዩን,” EAE, vol. 1, pp. 183b–185a (S.C. Munro-Hay).

The incipit is as follows: ወእምዝ፡ እስንሕፋ፡ ታሪክ፡ ዘኋገሥት፡ ጼድ ቁን፡ እብርሃ፡ ወአጽ ዥ ይ ብ ሊ ጸሎት፡ በመ ዝ ብር፡ ኢቡ፡ ሀሎ፡ መቃ ዥ ሪሁ፡ ወኢ ጳስ፡ ወልደ፡ ኩሳ፡ ወልደ፡ እምኰ። ወነበ ዥት፡ ዥውስ፡ ሊጆ ጸንተ፡ ሱራ ሬሃ፡ ወእምነ፡ ጽንዮ፡ ገበዘ፡ እክ  ሱም። ቀዲ ሙኒ፡ ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ኢልነ፡ ደ ሲቀ፡ ጽንዮ፡ ገበዘ፡ እኩ  ሱም። ቀዲ ሙኒ፡ ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ኢልነ፡ ደ ሲቀ፡ ጽንዮ፡ ገበዘ፡ እኩ  ሱም። ቀዲ ሙኒ፡ ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ፡ ኢልነ፡ ደ ሲቀ፡ ጽንዮ፡ ገበዘ፡ እኩ  ሱም። ቀዲ ሙኒ፡ ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሉ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙኒ። ጸሎት፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ። ቀዲ ሙ旎。“
Folia 90ra–92rb contain a register of land rights (gʷǝlt and rǝst) granted to 'Aksum Ṣǝyon. A list of predecessors of the kings 'Abrǝhā and 'Aṣbǝḥa ( ኣብ ርሃ፡ ወአ ጽ ብሐ፡ ) before the birth of Christ, from 'Arwe to Bāzen, and a list of kings after the birth of Christ ( ኣብ ርሃ፡ ወአ ጽ ብሐ፡ ) , non-Christian: from Ṣǝnfa 'Asgad to Queen Sofyā and Christian: from 'Abrǝhā and 'Aṣbǝḥa to Ḫāyla Śǝllāse (including also various governors of Tǝgrāy), are given on ff. 92rb–95rb. The codex contains two miniatures (ff. 95v, 96r) depicting the metropolitans Frumentius and ʾƎnbaram40 and the brother kings 'Abrǝhā and 'Aṣbǝḥa.41 Several notes are written on ff. 1v-3v. The shelf mark C2-IV-411 is written on ff. 1r, 44v, 45r.

According to the donation note (f. 3v), Qes Gabaz Takla Hāymānot donated this manuscript, among others, to ‘My Mother, the Heavenly Zion, Treasury of Aksum’ (ለእም የ፡ ጽዮ ን፡ ሰማ ያ ዊት፡ ገበዘ፡ አ ክ ሱም፡ ) in 1944 ሊቀ፡ ካህናት። ዘእም ገነደ፡ አዛር ያስ፡ ... The name Meropius is not mentioned in the Gadla 'Abrǝhā wa-'Aṣbǝḥa (see n. 55).

The legend on f. 95v reads: 'Fǝre, son of Mǝnṭos whose metropolitan's name was Salāmā Kašāte Bǝrhān. Ṣǝnfa’s son on the Aksumite, whose metropolitan's name was አክ ሱም፡ በ ው ስተ፡ ቤቱ፡ ለ እ ንበረም፡ ሊቀ፡ ካህናት። ዘእም ገነደ፡ አዛር ያስː The legend on f. 96r reads: 'Behold the goodness and behold the beauty when the brothers were together (ናሁ፡ ሠናይ፡ ስምዖን፡ አክ ሱ ማዊ፡ ዘስመ፡ ጵ ጵ ስናሁ፡ ሕዝበ፡ ቅዱስ። ).

ʾAbuna Bāsǝlyos was consecrated in Cairo as the first Ethiopian Metropolitan and became the first Ethiopian Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥǝdo Church in 1956, see "Basǝlyos," e.a.e., vol. 1, pp. 183b–185a (Bairu Tafla).

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 እም አብ፡ ዘ ይ ወ ጽእ፡ ( = lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ሊወምስ ለ፡ መን ፈ ስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ and እም አብ፡ ዘ ይ ወ ጽእ፡ ( = lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ሊወምስ ለ፡ መን ፈ ስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ and እም አብ፡ ዘ ይ ወ ጽእ፡ ( = lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ሊወምስ ለ፡ መን ፈ ስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ and እም አብ፡ ዘ ይ ወ ጽእ፡ ( = lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ሊወምስ ለ፡ መን ፈ ስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ and እም አብ፡ ዘ ይ ወ ጽእ፡ ( = lines 3–4), Mss A, B, C and D read: ሊወምስ ለ፡ መን ፈ ስ፡ ቅዱስː
Another parchment manuscript containing the Life is housed in the 14th-century rock-hewn church 'Addi Qešo Madḥāne 'Ālam in Tagrāy.44 The codex was photographed by Antonella Brita in 2005 and comprises seventy-five folia with the Life (ff. 3ra–57vb), twelve miracles (ff. 58ra–70rb) and the Malkǝ‘-hymn (ff. 70ra–73vb). 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. 74ra), the manuscript was sold by ʾAlaqā Lāʾǝka Māryām (baptismal name: Gabra Mikāʾel) to ʾAlaqā Gabra Māryām (baptismal name: Gabra ‘Igzi’) for sixty Ethiopian Bǝrr on 2 Ṭeqǝmt [19]52 ʿĀmata Mǝḥrat (= 12 October 1961 CE). Lāʾǝka Māryām is mentioned as the scribe on f. 14ra. The purchase note is followed by a donation note (f. 74vb) which states that the book was given by Ḥalaqā Gabra Māryām to the tābot of ‘Ālam Madḥāne ‘Addi Qāšo. Folia 1, 2, 74, 75 are blank.

Significantly, all the above mentioned manuscripts containing the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 ‘Amhārā, 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa: in the church of Takla Hāymānot in Ḥawzen, ‘Agāme (Northeastern Tagrāy) and in the church of ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa in ʾĀyba, Hulat (Eastern Tagrāy, Ms A?). Also Sergew Hable Selassie refers in his major work46 to one manuscript containing the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, 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 Tégre 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 ′Abrǝhā wa-ʾAšbǝḥa

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

The Gadla ′Abrǝhā wa-ʾAšbǝḥa opens with a prologue and continues with the origin and youth of the protagonists.49 ′Abrǝhā and ′Ašbǝḥa were born as twins to King Tāzer (regnal name: Sayfa Arʿād) and Queen Sofyā from the tribe Levi in Gamād on 29 Tāḫšaś (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 Mākǝddā, ንግ ሥተ፡ አዜ ብ፡[ዘ ነ ግ ሠት፡ om. Ms D] እቡፋ፡ የፋ፡ ከፋ፡[ለፋ የፋ፡ Ms C]), who visited Solomon in Jerusalem and returned pregnant. Finally, her son, Monilǝk50 ለፋ፡ የፋ፡ ከፋ፡[ለፋ የፋ፡ Ms D], brought the Ark of the Covenant (Tābota Ṣǝyon) to Ethiopia.51 Hereafter, the kings are listed from Monilǝk to ′Abrǝhā and ′Ašbǝḥa.

The brothers became kings of Ethiopia at the age of twelve after their father died.52 The people of Šawā 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, ′Abrǝhā and ′Ašbǝḥa jointly (በ ኅ ብ ረተ፡ ቃል፡)

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 waʾAšbeḥa” (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 ምንይላክ፡.
51 This story is an allusion to the tradition, the most famous version of which is recorded in the እብና ከኔፋ (‘Glory of the Kings’).
52 Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha waʾAšbeḥa” (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 ‘Abrahā 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 ‘Abrahā and ‘Aṣbēḥa to Athanasius, Pa-
triarch of Alexandria. The Patriarch ordained him priest, gave him the name
‘Salāmā that is Kaštē Bǝrhān’ (ሰላማ፡ ዝ  ው እቱ፡ ከሣቴ፡ ብር  ሃን፡ ‘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 com-
ing they received him at a city named Ṗǝsǝforā (ጆስፎራ፡). The kings were the
first to be baptized and were then sent to teach the faith ‘to all corners of Ethi-
opia’. Soon the members of the royal court (the ‘seven children’) and their army
were baptized, deacons and priests were ordained, and Takla Hāymān and
Gabra Masqal were appointed to translate books from Arabic into Gǝ’ǝz.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 ‘Abroḥā and ‘Aṣbēḥa. After having stayed for a
while in Ḥamāsēn (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 Śarʿāwe (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–33rb. The brother of Frumentius is called
‘Adayos (that is Edesius) in Mss A, B and D, and Sidrakos in Ms C (see already n. 39). All
Mss do not explicity mention the name of Meropius but refer to him as a ‘trader from the
land of Tyre’.
56 Ḥamāsēn is a historical province in the northern Eritrean highlands, see “Ḥamasen,” EAE,
vol. 2, pp. 987a–990a (W. Smidt). Ms D reads አጳን (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.
Gamād (ጎማድ፡), ʾAybā or Ṭayba (አይባ፡ or ṹayba፡) and Mandā (መንዳ፡), the home region of their mother, where they fiercely fought against the demons and idolatry of their own ancestors, until they finally returned to Aksum. There they built the church Gabaza Ṭaksum (ትወወ ሠ ሙ፡ ሐ  ው ልተ፡ በአ ም ሳለ፡ ትእ ም ርተ፡ መ ስ ቀል፡), 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). They returned to Ṭagāy where they built churches, among them one in Ṣārā; in Aksum they erected a stele in form of the cross (መስመ፡ ቂርቆስ፡ ሕፃን፡). They travelled further south, crossed the river Takazzi and founded the church Tadbāba Māryām (ተድ ባ በ፡ ማር ያም፡) in the Ṭamhārā region and appointed its head with the title ዱል ከሥል ያሬክ፡ (Batra Yārek). Hereafter they reached the region of Goḡgām 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 የሱወ ያሥวลን (CλHİndon፡ CΗH #:). Thereupon Ṭabrā and Ṭāṣbōḥa went via Ṭarānyo (in Eastern Goḡgām)

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’Aksum” (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 Māryam,” 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: f. 50rb–50va (different shorter version; the church is named Martula Śallāse – the scribe probably erroneously filled the space left for the expected, rubricated name of St Mary, that is ‘Māyrām’). 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 – ʿAbrahā went together with ṬAbbā Salāmā to Tǝgrāy and ʿAṣbǝḥa went to Šawā.67 The brothers were reunited shortly before ʿAbrahā 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 ṬAbbā Salāmā, given the name Dewā Háymānot (‘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. ʿAbrahā’s head was reattached to his neck, the Lord ordered ṬAbbā 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፡ መቅደስ፡), fifteen years as king following the law of the Old Testament (በሕገ፡ ኦሪት፡), a further fifteen years preaching the Gospels and finally ten years in Tǝgrāy separated from his brother. ʿAṣbǝḥa determined three commemoration days to be celebrated annually: 4 Ṭeqeq (day of death), 13 Naḥase (arrival of the saint’s body into the sanctuary of Gamād), 29 Ṭahšās (day of birth).69

ʿAṣbǝḥa thereupon reluctantly married a virgin and gave birth to a son named ʿAsfāḥ. When his son turned twelve, ʿAṣbǝḥa died at the hand of an unbeliever in the same way as his brother. Thus ʿAṣbǝḥa 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 Ḥadār. ʿAsfāḥ ordered the same commemoration days as for the brother to be celebrated, assigned the head of the sanctuary to cut the hair of ʿAbrahā and ʿAṣbǝḥa, 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 ʿAbrahā’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 ʿAbrēhā wa-ʾAṣbēḥa**

Various scholars who have worked on and with the *Gadla ʿAbrēhā wa-ʾAṣbēḥa* 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 ʿAbbā Salāmā and the translation into Goʾaz to the Levite priests Takla Hāymānot and Gabra Masqal. Based on this passage, P. Marrassini dated the *Life* to the Metropolitan of *ʿAbuna* Salāmā 11 (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

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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 [wasemomussa lazataḥansu ʾabyāta krestiyānāt 80 baʾedawihomu laʾabreha waʾaṣbeḥa nagāšt șaḥafna hʾellāqʾehomu ḥagara gamādessa waʾaybā bamelʾomu’], Ms A, B and C read only eight churches. Ms B adds the attribute ‘rock-hewn’ (ibḥāl ʾa ḥeřē ’t); 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 waAṣbeḥa” (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 tardaantica* (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.

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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa is very distinct from the many, elaborately written hagiographical works devoted to the various saints venerated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥǝdo Church.

However, the writing of the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 Ṣāmḥārā and Marṭula Māryām in Eastern Goǧǧām. This tradition is also attested for Ṭānā Qirqos in a late-15th-century version of the Maṣḥafa Kidāna Mǝḥrat (‘Book of the Covenant of Mercy’). 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’. 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, ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa built a sanctuary on that island. 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, 5,49 (1910), pp. 581–621. Conti Rossini dates this version back to the reign of King Nāʾod (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 Zägwe dynasty (mid-12th century–mid-13th century).78

This is certainly not the case for the royal churches of Marṭula 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 ʾAbrahā and ʾAṣbǝha.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 ʿAbrahā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa affected other institutions which are not explicitly mentioned in the text. In the case of the monastery of Dabra Warq, the daughter monastery of Marṭula Māryām, it had even led to an extensive re-writing of the Life of its founder Śarḍa Ṗeṭros (that is the Gadla Śarḍa Ṗetros), 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 Śarḍa Ṗetros, in which the original foundation of the monastery is ascribed to ʾAsfāḥ, son of ʾAṣbǝḥa and its re-foundation to the 15th-century monk Śarḍa Ṗetros (thus following the historical fact that Dabra Warq was founded after the establishment of Marṭula Māryām).81

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 Marṭula Māryām see D. Spencer, “Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-discovered,” JES, 12,2 (1974), pp. 201–220, here p. 204. In my interview with the abbot of Marṭula Māryām, Roʿessa Roʿusān Ṭabbā Ḥaylä Giyorgis, all historical facts (foundation by Queen ʾƎleni, the tenure of the first abbot Takla Māryām) were denied, instead the Aksumite foundation was strongly affirmed (interview in Marṭula Māryām on 12 June 2012).
80 For Marṭula 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 ʿAbrahā and ʿAṣbǝḥa but of Queen ʾƎleni 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 ʾAḥmad 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 Śarḍa Ṗetros taking both recensions into account.
Controversy among church scholars and monastic conflict in Eastern Goğgäm

It comes as no surprise that the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 Dǝmāḥ). 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa in which Marṭula Māryām is accredited with an Aksumite foundation and thus wins the unrivalled status of the oldest monastery in Goğgäm, 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 and Marṭula Māryām83

82 Dimā Giyorgis is believed to have been founded by Takašta Bǝrhān who was presumably a contemporary of King Dāwit II (1379/80–1413). See Taddesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia (see n. 78), p. 202, n. 3; “Dima Giyorgis,” EAE, vol. 2, pp. 161b–162b (J. Persoon), and “Takáśtä Bǝrhan,” 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 Goğgäm. They are famous for their rich and precious collections of manuscripts as well as for their prestigious traditional schools (especially qǝne). 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 ʾEwostātewos. Their monastic affiliations are stated, inter alia, in the chronicle of King ʾIyāsu I, Guidi, Annales Johannis I (see n. 32), p. 69 (ed.): … Ṣตกወ WS ምርወ ምር ከላይ ከልማን ኩን ከምኔነ ያገደ ያቂቀ ያለ ከአቡነ ያተከ ያሃይ ያኖት … “… Dimä, which is the monastery of ʾAbuna ʾAbbā Takaśta Barhan who descended from the sons of the house of Takla Hāymānot …” and for Marṭula Māryām: Ibid., p. 72 (ed.): ይወ ይመወ ያጠወ ያር ያመ ከላይ ከልማን ኩን ከምኔነ ያገደ ያቂቀ ያለ ከአቡነ ያተከ ያሃይ ያኖት። ይስ ያጣ ያወስ ያወስ። “… And their head is called Roʾasa Roʾusān and it is the monastic community of Gabra ʾIyasus who is of the sons of the house of ʾAbuna ʾEwostātewos.” Furthermore the monastic lines are transmitted in monastic genealogies found in various manuscripts.
and Dimā Giyorgis. According to him, the clerics of Dimā Giyorgis argued that Martula Māryām was founded by Queen ʾĔleni, while in turn the clerics of Martula Māryām insisted on the Aksumite foundation, claiming that Queen ʾĔleni had only renewed the then old church.

The sensitive issue of this dispute, primacy, was also vividly expressed in poetry. One poem (‘qenē 608’ of the ‘Ḥǝruy-collection’) composed by a cleric of Martula Māryām was published and translated by E. Cerulli in 1933. I would like to present another qǝne, that was composed during the time of Takla Hāymānot, King of Goǧǧām (b. c. 1850, d. 1901) and was recited to me in June 2015 by Qasis ʿĀlamnaw ʾAzzana, former head of the ‘ʾEqā bet (that is the store house) of Dabra Warq:

\[
\text{መርጡለ፡ ማርያም፡ ሥእርት፡ በላዕለ፡ ድማህ፡ ዘበቆለት።}
\]
Marṭula Māryām is the hair grown on the head.
\[
\text{ሥእርትሰ፡ ይትላፀይ፡ ወድማህ፡ ይተርፍ።}
\]
But the hair will be cut off and the head will remain.

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

Eventually, no other than Emperor Mǝnilǝk 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 Martula Māryām was announced in a royal letter dating to 28 Ṭǝrr 1889 Ṭamata Mǝḥrat (= 4 February 1897 CE) which was sent to Takla Hāymānot, King of Goǧǧām. This letter is still displayed in Martula Māryām, hanging in a frame where it can be read by everyone visiting the ‘ʾEqā bet. This royal letter together with other documents will be edited and discussed in detail by Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne in his forthcoming article. Here, it can be revealed that Emperor Mǝnilǝk II based his decision on ‘an old book of the Gadla Ḩbrǝhā wa-ʾAsbǝha found in Ṭǝgrāy’. As we will see, there are

85 Ibid., pp. 107–108. This collection was compiled by Nǝbura ʾƎd Gabra Śallāse, Ṣahāfe taʾǝzās (“Scribe of the Orders”) of Emperor Mǝnilǝk II on the basis of different manuscripts from Šawā (ibid., p. 100).
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 Maṛtula Māryām is in itself a strong indication of a mid-19th-century composition. However, the fact that Emperor Mnēlēk II interpreted the Gadla Ābrāhā wa-ʾAṣbēha 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 Ābrāhā wa-ʾAṣbēha and provides valuable insights into the controversy over this text as well as over another text, namely the Dārsaṇa ʿUrāʾel (‘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 Sānkassār into which its loose folia were put (for the purpose of microfilming?).88 It consists of three parchment bifolia of which ff. 1r–4r are written with each eighteen lines, f. 5r 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 Mnēlēk II (see below) dating to 5 September 1889.

In the first part of the document, the author deals with the Gadla Ābrāhā wa-ʾAṣbēha, and tells us that the Life was written around 1850 and commissioned by ‘the people of Goǧǧām and of Tǝgrāy’. The author further tells us that the ‘people of Aksum and the people of Gāmād’ came into conflict over this text during the reign of Emperor Yoḥannēs (r. 1872–1889), and that this conflict was at first resolved in favour of the opponents (‘people of Aksum’) who had

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87 I thank Steve Delamarter for this information.
88 This Sānkassār, which contains the commemorative notices for the months of Maskaram to Yakkātit, was the fifth of the manuscripts microfilmed at Dimā Giyorgis (thus UNESCO 10.5).
successfully shown that the *Gadla 'Abrāhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa* 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 Mǝnilǝk II arrived at a different decision only a few years later.

Hereafter, the author focuses on another text, namely the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*. 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 *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*. A short version of the text was edited by A. Caquot90 on the basis of one manuscript which was in the private possession of Sayyum Walda Giyorgis, Addis Ababa. A. Caquot assumes that the version in the form presented must have been completed during the reign of Mǝnilǝk II (r. 1889–1913).91

This work is ascribed to ‘Tewodoṭos, son of the archbishop of Bohonsā,’ discip- le 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 ʿAbrāhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa* – 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

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91 Ibid., p. 63: “On est ainsi amené à placer sous le règne de Ménélèk II la composition sous sa forme actuelle du dersāna Urā’ēl.”
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 *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*. One paper manuscript (dated 1951, and apparently different from the one edited by A. Caquot) housed in ’Ambasat Kidāna Maḥrát, Togrāy. This manuscript was digitized by the Ethio-SPaRe team headed by D. Nosnitsin, given the project’s shelf mark AKM-010 and catalogued by M. Villa (<http://mycms-vs03.rrz.uni-hamburg.de/domlib/receive/domlib_document_00002762>, last access on 6 May 2016). Furthermore EMML 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. 1: *Project Numbers 1–300* (1975), pp. 57, 83 and vol. v: *Project Numbers 1501–2000* (1981), pp. 440–447. The version included in EMML no. 1835, which dates back to the reign of King Zar’a Yāʾqob (r. 1434–1468), is different since it is based on ’I Ezra [Sutuʾēl], f. 166a, Jubilees [Kufālē], f. 174b, the Mašeḥafa 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. The archangel spread the blood over different places, churches and monasteries in Ethiopia. The storyline follows a north to south axis. Significantly, in the version edited by A. Caquot there is no explicit mention of any churches and monasteries from Lake Ṭānā, Amḥārā and Goǧǧām.

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 Ababa 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 (Gǝʿǝz 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 Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel which was written by ‘the people of Šawā and the people of Goǧǧām’ during the reign of Mǝnilǝk II was also shown to be false, written down ‘with malice, with envy, based on orality’. As a result, Emperor Mǝnilǝk 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 Lǝḥem was photographed by D. Crummey in 1980 and will be presented following the Dimā Document.

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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 ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa,” is mentioned at the end of the text (ibid., pp. 77 [ed.], 87–88 [tr.]).
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 ‘Goǧǧāmite’ pronunciation?). The name of ʿAbrǝḥā is, with one exception, constantly written as ʾ Arbǝḥa or ʾ Arbǝhā (አር ብሐ፡ or አር ብሃ፡), the name of ʾAṣbǝḥa once with Ṣǝbāḥ (ጽባሐ፡), the title of the work Dǝrsānaʿ Urǝel is always given as ElementsBy: 0·C,X:A: Dǝrsāna ʿUrʾel, the monastery Martula Mǝryǝm is also referred to as Maንtola Mǝryǝm (መን ጦለ፡ ማር ያም፡), the king’s name Mǝnilǝk is written as Mǝnilǝh, Mǝnilǝẖ or Mǝnyǝlǝh (ምኒ ልህ፡, ምኒ ልኽ፡, ምን ይ ልህ፡). Assimilations are found in e.g., በስክ ሳር፡ (once for በስን ዱር፡ ብቸ  ና፡ ሳሉ፡ ወአ ጽ ብ ሐ፡ ገድ ል፡ በሐ ሰ ት፡ ከጣ ና፡ ቂር ቆ ስ፡ አገ ኘ ን፡ ብለ ው፡ ጻፉ። ጸሐ ፊ ው፡ አገ ሩ፡ በለ ሳ፡ ነው፡ ቤቱ፡ የአ ር ብ ሐ፡ ወአ ጽ ብ ሐ፡ ጸጕ ራ ቸው፡ እያ ደገ፡ ይላ ጭ፡ ይቈ  ረ ጥ፡ ነበ ረ፡ እያ ለ፡ ይተ ር ካ ል። ጸሐ ፊ ው፡ አገ ሩ፡ በለ ሳ፡ ነው፡ ቤቱ፡ የአ ር ብ ሐ፡ ወአ ጽ ብ ሐ፡ ተከ ሉ፡ ብሎ፡ ይተ ር ካ ል። ጸሐ ፊ ው፡ አገ ራ፡ ሸዋ፡ ሳያ  ም ን፡ ሳይ ጠ መ ቅ፡ አማ ራ፡ ሸዋ፡ ሳያ  ም ን፡ ሳይ ጠ መ ቅ፡ በአ ማ ራ፡ ተድ ባ በ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ በጐ ዣ ም፡ መን ጦ ለ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ አር ብ ሐ፡ ወአ ጽ ብ ሐ፡ ተከ ሉ፡ ብሎ፡ ይተ ር ካ ል። ጸሐ ፊ ው፡ አገ ራ፡ ሸዋ፡ ሳያ  ም ን፡ ሳይ ጠ መ ቅ፡ በአ ማ ራ፡ ተድ ባ በ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ አፄ፡ ገላ ው ዴ ዎ ስ፡ እን ደ፡ ተከ ሉ፡ በታ ሪ ከ፡ ነገ ሥ ት፡ ድሬ ታ ል። በስ ን ክ ሳ ር፡ ይረ ታ ል። አማ ራ ም፡ የአ መ ነ ም፡ የተ ጠ መ ቀም፡ በአ ጽቅ፡ ሌዊ፡ እንደ፡ ይር ም፡ ን፡ ሳይ ጠ መ ቅ፡ በአ ማ ራ፡ ተድ ባ በ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ አፄ፡ ገላ ው ዴ ዎ ስ፡ እን ደ፡ ተከ ሉ፡ በታ ሪ ከ፡ ነገ ሥ ት፡ ድሬ ታ ል። ጸሐ ፊ ው፡ አገ ራ፡ ሸዋ፡ ሳያ  ም ን፡ ሳይ ጠ መ ቅ፡ በአ ማ ራ፡ ተድ ባ በ፡ ማር ያ ም፡ አፄ፡ ገላ ው ዴ ዎ ስ፡ እን ደ፡ ተከ ሉ፡ በታ ሪ ከ፡ ነገ ሥ ት፡ ድሬ ታ ል。

is written on an endleaf of a manuscript containing a collection of miracles of St Mary (Taʾāmra Mǝryǝm).
 Alberto Álvarez flirting with clarification:

99 Dittographical error: the author repeats ከመጋቢት፡ ዶንክሳር፡.

100 The text reads በገድለም፡.

The author erroneously adds hereafter ዓርጉም: (sic!).

The text reads ዳት፡.
During the time of Dağgāzmāč Ṭǝbe (b. c. 1799, d. 1867), when he ruled over Taγrāy, when RāsʾAli (b. 1818, d. 1866) was in Bǝčanā, they wrote the Gadla ᾳbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, falsely claiming that they found it in (the church of) Ṭānā Qirqos. Those who commissioned the writing were the people of Goǧǧām and of Taγrāy. The region of the scribe was Balasā, his (monastic?) house was at Dabra Mikāʾel. But having written it without text witness, it was based on orality. Falsely written, it had not been examined (in the sense of an evaluation) until the reign of ᾳde Yoḥannǝs (r. 1872–1889).

Its falsehood lies also in the narration that the hair of ᾳbrǝhā and ᾳṢbǝḥa was still growing and used to be cut after their death. (Furthermore), it narrates that ᾳbrǝhā and ᾳṢbǝḥa had founded Marṭula Māryām in Goǧǧām and Tadbāba Māryām in ᾳmḥārā when Goǧǧām had not yet believed and received baptism [as well as] when ᾳmḥārā and Šawā had not yet believed and received baptism. It is recognized by the Tārika Nagašt that Marṭula Māryām was founded by Queen ʾƎleni and Tadbāba Māryām by ᾳde Galawdewos (r. 1540–

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104 For RāsʾAli ʾAlulā, who was an important ruler of central Ethiopia in the years 1830–1853; see “ TableRow:Ali Alula,” EAE, vol. 1, pp. 199a–199b (S. Rubenson) and Girma Getahun, The Goğgam Chronicle, p. 291, n. 7 and index. Notably, RāsʾAli is “known to have been active as a peacemaker between quarrelling factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church” (EAE, vol. 1, p. 199a). RāsʾAli’s temporary residence in Bačanā is also reported in the Goğgam-Chronicle. According to this source, RāsʾAli came from Dabra Tābhor and stayed in Bačanā in around 1852, for the death of Dağgāzmāč Goššu Zawde is mentioned shortly afterwards (Girma Getahun, The Goğgam Chronicle, pp. 74–75). RāsʾAli had stayed in Bačanā between 1835–1837 as reported by E. Combes and M. Tamisier, Voyage en Abyssinie, dans le pays des Gallia, 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 Bačanā is a small town in Eastern Goğgam, capital of ’Innāmāy district.

106 The author is most probably referring to the church Dabra Mikāʾel in ’Abiy ’Addi in central Taγrāy (therefore the other name of the church: ’Abiy ’Addi Mikāʾel). See “ TableRow:Gärʾalta,” EAE, vol. 2, pp. 697b–698b (N. Finneran and eds), here p. 698a; “Gärʾalta churches,” EAE, vol. 2, pp. 699a–700b (E. Balicka-Witakowska), here p. 699a. For Balasā (where Dağgāzmāč Ṭǝbe was also active) see “ TableRow:Bālāsā,” EAE, vol. 1, pp. 454b–455a (W. Smidt).

107 For the translation of TableRow:መዝገብ፡ (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: TableRow:U – TableRow:I, Wiesbaden, 1990, p. 316b.

108 See above and the comment by Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha waAʃbɛḥa” (see n. 21), p. 178.
Moreover, it is recognized by the Sǝnkǝssār that Goǧǧām was baptized at the time of Takašta (f. 4v)Bǝrhān. Indeed, it is recognized by the Gadla Takla Häymānot that 'Amhārā believed and received baptism by 'Asq Lewi. Indeed, it is recognized by the Gadla Takla Häymānot that Šawā believed and received baptism through the preaching of 'Abbā Yadlā.

As this Life was falsely written, the people of Aksum and the people of Gamād came into conflict during the reign of 'Aḍe Yoḥannas and placed a bet with Dāññā 'Ač̣č̣age Tewoflos for fifty mules that it will be found to be falsely written, without Vorlage, 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 Marṭula Māryām was founded by Queen 'Ileni (Guidi, Annales Joannis I, 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 'Amhārā 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 Häymānot in the late-13th century), Goǧǧām 'continued to be a strong bastion of paganism until the first years of the fifteenth century' (Tadesse 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 Bǝrhān 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 Sǝnkǝssār in Gǝʿǝz) which includes a commemorative notice for Takašta Bǝrhān. The general version of the Synaxarion, authorized by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥǝdo Church, does not include an entry for this saint (as is the case for many local saints).


112 See the corresponding passages in the ከር፡ የክፋጠ፡ የክፋጠ፡ የክፋጠ፡ ከር፡ (Gadla Takla Häymānot) (1953), pp. 24–25, verses 40–49 (here named ‘Abbayâdāl). See also the reference in “ስጆስ,” EAE, vol. 2, pp. 446a–447b (J. Persoon).

113 ‘Ač̣č̣age Tewoflos was abbot of Dabra Libānos at the end of the 19th century, see “Tewoflos,” EAE, vol. 4, pp. 937b–938a (S. Dege).
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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, although sought in Ṭānā Qirqos, was not found. And his Majesty and the ‘ʾƎč̣č̣age 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 Goǧǧām wrote a false Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel during the reign of ʾAḍe Mǝnilǝk and brought it to the palace. The people of Šawā intended to supplant Dabra Libānos, the people of Goǧǧām (to supplant) Dimā, the people of Zur ʾAmbā (to supplant) Beta Lǝḥem; 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 ʾAḍe Mǝnilǝk, (f. 2v) arguing in front of ʾAbuna Mātewos at ʾƎnṭoṭṭo, discussing with the church scholars at ʾƎnṭoṭṭo. 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 Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel, housed in ʾƎmmagwā, 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 ʾAmbā (written here as ʾAnbā), 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).


118 ʾAbuna Mātewos was Metropolitan between 1889–1926, see “Matewos,” EAE, vol. 3, pp. 867a–868a (S. Kaplan).

It narrates that the Nine Saints came before Salāmā Kaśāte Bǝrhān and Christianity. However, it is recognized by three (books of the) Tārika Nagašt, two (books of the) Sǝnkǝssār and by the Gadla Takla Háymānot, that Salāmā Kaśāte Bǝrhān came before the reign of ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa, whereas the Nine Saints came after the reign of ʾĔlla ʿĀmidā. (f. 3r) Its falsehood is confirmed by the Maskaram Sǝnkǝssār of ʾAbbā Ṗanṭalewon and through the Maggābit Sǝnkǝssār of ʾAbbā Garimā. It was found to be deceptively written that ʾAḍe Ṭǝqǝmt 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 K.ʿ.tbl ʿO·L-nil (Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel) (1993), pp. 67–99, esp. p. 99. In this version, the Metropolitan ʾAbbā Salāmā, the Nine Saints and the kings ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 Háymānot, it is written that ʾAbbā Salāmā came to Ethiopia during the “days of the kings ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa” (Gadla Takla Háymānot (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 ʾĔlla ʿĀmidā (who is the early-4th-century king ʾĔlla ʿAmida, father of ʾEzānā), and returned from Alexandria as the first Metropolitan, now named ʾAbbā Salāmā, during the reign of ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa (26 Ḥamle, Guidi, Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, vol. II (see n. 3), pp. 427–429 [411–413]). The Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa also places the arrival of Frumentius together with his brother Edesius (Ms C: Sidrakos) during the reign of ‘King ʾAlʿāmidā’ (Marrassini, “Il Gadla Abreha waAṣbeḥa” (see n. 21), p. 162); Ms C reads ‘King Tāzer’, written over erasure (f. 29vb).

123 The name ʾĔlla ʿĀmidā refers to two Aksumite kings. Apart from the one just mentioned in note 122, the second ʾĔlla ʿĀmidā 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 “ʾĔlla ʿAmida,” EAE, vol. 2, pp. 259b–261a (G. Fiaccadori).

124 Both Ṗanṭalewon and Garimā are believed to belong to the Nine Saints and are commemorated on 6 Ṭǝqǝmt (Paṭalewon) and 17 Sane (Garimā). Their arrival during the reign of ʾĔlla ʿĀmidā is also reported in their commemorative notices edited by I. Guidi, Le Synaxaire Éthiopien, les Mois de Sanê, Hamlé et Nahasé, publiés et traduits (avec le concours de L. Desnoyers et A. Singlas), vol. 1: Mois de Sanê (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?
Hayq125 which, however, was inherited from Lewi to Azariah, from Azariah to ʿAbuna Takla Häymānot through physical birth. Moreover, it is found written in the Life (of Takla Häymānot) and in the Tārika Nagaṣṭ that the archpriesthood belonged to the children of Azariah, (thus) to ʿAbuna Takla Häymānot.126 Indeed, it is found written in the Ṣankassār of Dimā, one of Goğǧām’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 ʿAbuna Takla Häymānot.127 Indeed, it is found written in the Ṣankassār, that Takaštē Bǝrhān was one of the teachers of Goğǧām, who at first baptized and taught (the people of) Goğǧām. Without having written about these teachers, it is found written that ʿAḍe Dāwit (r. 1379/1380–1413) brought three icons of St Luke, and brought one to Ğǝbalā, one to Dabra Warq and one to Maṣrāḥā.128 Its false [reading] is recognized by the Tārika Nagaṣṭ, since only one icon, not three were brought during the reign of ʿAḍe Dāwit.129

125 The 1993 published version of the homily (Kǝbra Nagaṣṭ (Dǝrsāna ʿUrāel), pp. 275–276) recounts that King Yakunno ʿAmlāk went to the island of Lake Hayq to build a church for St ʾIyasus Moʾa. He named the church Dabra Nagwadgwad (“Mount of Thunder,” that is Dabra Ḥayq Ṣṭifānos) because Archangel Uriel appeared from heaven with thunder and lightning just when the construction of the church was completed. The king hereafter appointed ʾIyasus Moʾa archbishop over whole Ethiopia.

126 The consulted Gadla Takla Häymānot indeed briefly tells the story of Azariah, son of Zadok, who after having become a priest, accompanied Maniłak 1, son of Solomon and Makaddā (see above) and the Ark of Covenant on their way to Ethiopia (Kǝbra Nagaṣṭ (Gadla Takla Häymānot) (1953), pp. 20–21, verses 44, 1–8). As is well known, the main source of this story is the famous work Kǝbra Nagaṣṭ (“Glory of the Kings”). The Life also refers to the genealogy of the “Levite fathers” from Azariah via ʾƎnbaram to Takla Häymānot (Kǝbra Nagaṣṭ (Gadla Takla Häymānot) (1953), p. 29, verses 17–20).


128 The 1993 published version of the homily (Kǝbra Nagaṣṭ (Dǝrsāna ʿUrāel), pp. 283–284) includes exactly this passage. The names of the icons can be identified as follows: at Ğabala: Śǝʿla ʾOhobahālit, at Dabra Warq: Śǝʿla Waynut and on the Ṭānā island Maṣrāḥā: Śǝʿla Qiśāryā. 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 Kwǝrʿāta Rǝʾǝsu (percussio capitis), in mind. This icon belonged to the Ethiopian
It is found written in the *Gadla Takla Haymānot* that Goǧǧām\(^{130}\) had not yet believed and not received baptism during the reign of ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa, let alone that (in Goǧǧām) Maṛṭula Māryām was founded.\(^{131}\) (f. 4r) Moreover, it is written in the *Gadla Lālībalā* and in the *Gadla Naʾakkwēto LaʾAb* that a pagan ruler used to live in (Goǧǧām).\(^{132}\) Indeed, the books of the New Testament arrived, and even Tagray 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 *Sǝnkǝssār*, the *Gadla ʾAragāwi*, the *Tārika Nagaśt* and the *Gadla Yāred*, as it is not written there that they came to Zur ʾAmbā, whereas it is written in the book that ʾAde Gabra Masqal, ʾAbuna ʾAragāwī, St Yāred came to Zur ʾAmba.\(^{133}\) It was found to be false with the *Tārika Nagaśt* of the island monasteries and the *Gadla Qǝddusān* of the island monasteries, as it is not written there that ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 Nagaśt* – in which is written that it was Queen ʾĔleni, wife of ʾAde Baʾeda Māryām (r. 1468–1478), who built the building (of Maṛṭula Māryām)\(^{135}\) – that ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa constructed it as written in the book.

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\(^{130}\) The place name Gwazzāma (ጐዛመ፡) is referred to in the version edited by C. Conti Rossini, *Il ’Gadla Takla Haymānot*, secondo la redazione Waldebbana, Roma, 1896, pp. 109 (ed.), 135 (tr.). The saint baptized a magician who originated from ‘Gwazzāma’ which is most probably Goǧǧām (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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa* (see above).

\(^{131}\) As written in the *Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa*, the 1993 published version of the homily also lists Maṛṭula Māryām among those churches that were built by the brother kings, and even refers to it as ‘head of the monasteries of Ethiopia’ (*Gǝʿǝz*: 0׳ t ħ-library = *Dǝrsāna Urǝtel*), p. 254). The locations founded by ʾAbrǝhā and ʾAṣbǝḥa are listed in the following order: Aksum, Nāgrān, Ḥawzen, forty-four churches on the islands of Lake Ṭānā and Maṛṭula Māryām.

\(^{132}\) For a few names of ‘Kings of Goǧǧām’ with references to different Ethiopic texts see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia* (see n. 78), p. 202, n. 2.

\(^{133}\) Their journey is narrated in *Gǝʿǝz*: 0׳ t ħ-library = *Dǝrsāna Urǝtel* (1993), pp. 258–261. The name of the monastery is ʾṢǝrḥa ’Aryām’ (‘Palace of the Highest Heaven’) in the Gaʾaz text but ‘Zur ʾAbbā (Zur ʾAmbā)’ in the Amharic translation.

\(^{134}\) See n. 131.

\(^{135}\) See n. 109. The chronicle of King ʾIyāsu I refers to ʾĔleni as wife of King Baʾeda Māryām, as in other sources (see for example n. 80). As she was given in marriage to King Zarʾa Yāqōb...
Above all, for each and everything that is not found written in the old Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel but found written in the false book of this time, his Majesty ʾAḍe Maniłak said, everything not found in the old Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel 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 Śāhla Māryām (Mǝnilǝk’s baptismal name) be protected. After the Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel (f. 5r) had been erased, a letter of evidence was written: two (letters) were placed in Dabra Libānos, two in Zǝq walā, two in ʾAnkobar Madḥāne Ālam, two at Gašen, one in Beta Lǝḥem, and three are in Dimā.

A royal letter to Beta Lǝḥem

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

When the people of Dimā appealed to me, they claimed concerning the Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel, 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) Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel and other books to be read in an assembly in front of our father ʾAbuna Mātewos and also in front of other scholars at ʾƎnṭoṭṭo. 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.

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

When the people of Dimā appealed to me, they claimed concerning the Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel, 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) Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel and other books to be read in an assembly in front of our father ʾAbuna Mātewos and also in front of other scholars at ʾƎnṭoṭṭo. 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 Baʾada Māryām she was most probably a powerful Queen Mother.
As there exists [a version of] the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*, 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 Ḥntoṭto on 1 Ḍagʷəmen 1881 Ṭāmata Mḥrat (= 5 September 1889 CE).

Conclusion

The brothers ʿAbrǝhā and ʿAṣbǝḥa are remembered as the first Christian kings of Ethiopia and are venerated as saints in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥǝdo Church. Even though they are believed to have played a central role in the early Christianization of the Aksumite Kingdom, it seems that ʿAbrǝhā and ʿAṣbǝḥa 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 Ṭeqǝmt and only brief mentions of the brother kings are found in a few literary works.

It is only with the composition of the *Gadla ʿAbrǝhā wa-ʿAṣbǝḥa* (‘Life of ʿAbrǝhā and ʿAṣbǝḥa’) 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 Ṭaksum Ṣǝyon or Ṭānā Qirqos. Furthermore, I would argue that (the longer version of) the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel* (‘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 ʿAbrǝhā wa-ʿAṣbǝḥa* entirely lacks historical value, detailed information on place, date and specific circumstances of the writing of the *Life* (as well as of the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*) 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 ʿAbrǝhā wa-ʿAṣbǝḥa* and (the long version of) the *Dǝrsāna ʿUrāʾel*, 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 Dǝrsānā ‘Urā’el was based on several authoritative sources (of which the main ones are Tārika Nagaśt, Sǝnkǝssār, 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa, 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 Dǝrsānā ‘Urāʾel. 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 Marṭula Māryām in particular. He precisely refers to various passages from both texts. Those passages were most probably also examined by the church scholars at Ṣṇoṭṭo in front of the metropolitan. The author focuses in his report on the ‘false’ version of the Dǝrsānā ‘Urāʾel, since the conflict over the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa 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 Yoḥannǝs (r. 1872–1889). In the case of the Dǝrsānā ‘Urāʾel, 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 Mǝnilǝk II (r. 1889–1913) and to the metropolitan, claiming that this version of the Dǝrsānā ‘Urāʾel was false and lacked any authenticity.

We learn from the Dimā Document that the Gadla ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa was first written down in the mid-19th century and the ‘false’ version of the Dǝrsānā ‘Urāʾel during the early reign of Emperor Mǝnilǝk 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 ʾAbrǝhā wa-ʾAṣbǝḥa. This is
most probably true also for the version of the Dārsāna Ḫarēl discussed in the Dimā Document, since both texts attribute the foundation of some churches and monasteries to the Aksumite brother kings ʾAbrâhâ and ḤAššâhâ 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 ʾAbrâhâ wa-ʾAššâhâ, 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 ʾAbrâhâ and ḤAššâhâ, 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 ʾAbrâhâ wa-ʾAššâhâ, especially of its narrative structure and of the mentioned toponyms, may provide further evidence.

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