Among the traditions transmitted in Ethiopian hagiographic works, those referring to the encounters between Täklä Haymanot¹ and Iyäsus Mo’a² — two late 13th-/early 14th-cent. monastic leaders and great Ethiopian saints —

¹ There is no need to quote all existing scholarly literature on Täklä Haymanot’s activities, hagiography and cult, or all works on the history of his monastic foundation, Däbrä Libanos of Säwa. These topics have been discussed in a number of publications, ranging from brief entries in reference-books to chapters in monographs [for the list of abbreviations used in this article see p. 239]: s., e. g., BHO 247–248, nos. 1128–1134; CERULLI 1943:228–232; TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972:160–169; DEB 157–158; KRZ 92–93, no. 151; KRIS — KRIS HEINRICH 1975:30–41; among the recent publications, s., e. g., BÖLL in: LTK IX, 1244–1245; TESCHI in: EnSanti II, 1132–1138; DERAT 2003, passim. On the hagiographic legend of Täklä Haymanot, s. DERAT 1998, NOSNITZYN 2003 (concerning the hagiographic reports on the Saint’s translatio), NO- SNITSIN 2006, forthcoming (on the Synaxarion commemorative note about the Saint). Let us only recall that, according to the more or less commonly accepted chronology, Täklä Haymanot is thought to have lived in ca. 1214/15–1313; the Saint’s major annual feasts are celebrated on 24 Nähase (obitus) and 12 Gæbot (translatio).

² As is commonly known, abba Iyäsus Mo’a was one of the most prominent representatives of Däbrä Ḥayq Astifanos, which, like Däbrä Libanos of Säwa, is today one of the most venerated monasteries of Ethiopia. However, Iyäsus Mo’a appears to have been somewhat less popular than a number of other holy monks. The rather local character of his cult becomes evident when compared to the countrywide veneration of Täklä Haymanot, Gäbrä Mänfäs Qaddus, Samu’el of Waldobba, Zä-Mika’el Arägawi, as well as of several other Oriental saints. Iyäsus Mo’a’s commemoration is recorded in the Synaxarion, but only in a short notice (26 Ḥodar), not in a hagiobiographic account. His popularity could have been increased by hagiographies of other saints, where he is mentioned as a prominent monastic leader; yet, the considerable difference between the respective cults of Täklä Haymanot and Iyäsus Mo’a is demonstrated, e. g., by the number of manuscripts containing their hagiographies. Whereas Täklä Haymanot’s hagiographic tradition, represented by a substantial number of works, is attested by many dozens of manuscripts, the same cannot be said about the tradition of Iyäsus Mo’a (s. e. g., DEB 92; TADDESSE TAMRAT 1970:88–91; KRZ 78–79, no. 86; MARRASSINI 1986; TESCHI in: EnSanti II, 267–271; BAUM in: BKK XX, 804–806).
are considered central for the reconstruction of medieval Ethiopian church history. This is reflected in the well-known evaluation given by Tadesse Tamrat of one such episode: «His [sc. Täklä Haymanot’s] encounter with Ìyàsus-Mo’a on this second occasion is shrouded with uncertainties in the traditions, and has become one of the most controversial points in Ethiopian ecclesiastical history. The controversy basically evolves around the mutual claims of seniority later advanced by Däbrä Hayq and Däbrä Libanos». This «controversy» has been the subject of a number of studies; yet, the progress made in the understanding of Ethiopian history and the growing number of accessible sources offers an opportunity to assess the problem one more time, at the cross-roads of historical and philological studies. Today, a deeper analysis of the relevant hagiographies is possible, with the aim not only of coming closer to the reconstruction of the late 13th-cent. events, but also of tracing the development of the traditions within their original context, their sources and interrelations — thus correctly assessing their value. The present essay is an attempt at such analysis.4

Before embarking on the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the accounts I would like to summarize the most important points and acting characters of the story, according to its «classical» version as transmitted by the early-16th-cent. Vita of Täklä Haymanot in the recension of Däbrä Libanos.5

Obeying the Lord’s command,6 Täklä Haymanot, who had converted large numbers of pagans in the south of the Ethiopian kingdom and worked miracles, sought to take on the monastic habit and learn the «monastic rules».

---

3 TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972:164.
4 The essay is drawn from my Ph.D. thesis, «The Vita of Täklä Haymanot as a monument of Ethiopian medieval literature», completed under the supervision of the late Sevir B. Chernetsov and defended at the Oriental Faculty of St. Petersburg State University on 20 December 2002.
5 From here on, the text of the Vita of Täklä Haymanot in the Däbrä Libanos recension is quoted after the editio princeps, BUDGE 1906; however, one should note that this text represents not the original but a slightly reworked variant of that recension (a problem I have addressed on several occasions: e. g., Nosnitsin 2006, forthcoming, cp. also n. 34, below). The translation provided in BUDGE 1906 is often erroneous; when referring to it, I will attempt, therefore, to rectify it (and simplify the transcription of proper names).
6 The summary follows BUDGE 1906, chs. 68–88 (particularly relevant are chs. 68–75, 77–81, 85–88). In the Däbrä Libanos recension of his Vita, Täklä Haymanot’s monastic career does not appear as detailed and lengthy as one would expect considering the time (more than 30 years) Täklä Haymanot spent in different monasteries (s. the synopsis in BUDGE 1906, ch. 113; 10 years in the community of Bäšälotä