



The Golden Gospels and Chronicle of Aksum at Aksum Seyon's Church: The photographs taken by Theodor v. Lüpke (1906)

Anaïs Wion

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The *Golden Gospels* and *Chronicle of Aksum* at Aksum Šeyon's Church: The photographs taken by Theodor v. Lüpke (1906)*

Enno Littmann had a great interest in Ethiopian literature, both written and oral: while in Ethiopia, he collected 149 codices and 167 scrolls and he also transcribed and translated numerous oral traditions.¹ In parallel, members of the DAE – especially Theodor v. Lüpke – photographed extensively archaeological sites and architectural elements, events, landscapes, churches, paintings, and took portraits of both important and ordinary people. However, only three manuscripts have been photographed. First, Littmann and v. Lüpke photographed two *Golden Gospels* manuscripts carried along during an important religious ceremony at Aksum Šeyon. Second, they photographed exhaustively a compilation of documents which I will call the *Chronicle of Aksum*. The fact that they did not acquire it nor succeeded to make a copy, unlike they did for others, shows how important it was for the clergy of Aksum.

SACRED TEXTS ON STAGE: AKSUM ŠEYON GOLDEN GOSPELS DURING THE CELEBRATION OF THE CROSS

During the annual celebration of the vigil of the Feast of the Cross on year 1898 E. C. Mägabıt 9 [Sunday, 18 March 1906]² Theodor v. Lüpke extensively photographed the religious ceremony taking place in the compound of Aksum Šeyon Maryam church. Civil authorities, the senior one being *däggazmač* Gäbrä Šellase, were present. In their photographs, Littmann and v. Lüpke focused on precious liturgical objects, including two big manuscripts bound with luxurious covers in metal. These manuscripts were carried in front of the procession, one of them protected by a ceremonial umbrella and facing the altar tablets being carried by the priests (*tabotāt*) (Fig. 1)³. After the ceremony,

the DAE took photographs closer up of *regalia* from the church, including the codices (Figs. 2 and 3).⁴ The next day, Littmann and v. Lüpke returned to the church and asked for permission to take pictures of the two *Golden Gospels* and the most beautiful crosses. This extraordinary session was reported in length in their daily notes.⁵ Thus, according to Enno Littmann, the two precious codices from the church used in the procession were called “goldene Evangelien” or “Golden Gospels” (*Wängel zä-Wärq*).⁶ This

* I do thank François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar and Emmanuel Fritsch for their reading of this article and for their valuable comments, as well as Orin Gensler for the revision and editing of the English text.

¹ See Wion 2011: 356.

² Sunday, 18 March was the 9th of Mägabıt, and as it is clearly mentioned in Enno Littmann's diary, this is the day when these photos were taken: “Sonntag, den 18. März war grosse Feier in der Kirche, zwecks Überreichung von Geschenken und zwecks photographischer Aufnahmen.”, see Voigt 2006: 194. The annual celebration for the Finding of the True Cross is on Mägabıt 10, the ceremony being celebrated the day before (*wazéma*).

³ Photograph (DAE 774) published in DAE 3: Tafel IX.

⁴ Photos DAE 776 and 777. These two photos are the only ones that help us to identify the front and the back covers.

⁵ See Voigt 2006: 194 and Koppe 2006: 222.

⁶ «Dann kamen endlich auf Verwenden des inzwischen eingetroffenen Ləğ Ašbəhā die beiden ‚goldenen Evangelien‘ heraus und wurden aufgenommen. Das Gold bezieht sich nur auf den Einband: ein Ev. mit bildlichen Darstellungen auf dem Deckel ist von der Tochter des Räs Mikā’el (aus dem vorh. Jahrh.) geschenkt; ein anderes, mit geometrischen Figuren, von einem ägypt. Abuna, dessen Name man mir nicht nennen konnte. Ich sehe in beide Hss. hinein und konstatierte, dass keines von den beiden als uralt angesehenen Büchern älter als das 16. Jahrh. ist. (überall **ⲁ** und späterer Schriftcharacter als 1500). Wahrscheinlich stammen sie aus der Zeit des Sarša Dengel. Alles in Aksum scheint zur Zeit des Grañ verloren gegangen oder verbrannt zu sein» in Voigt 2006: 194.

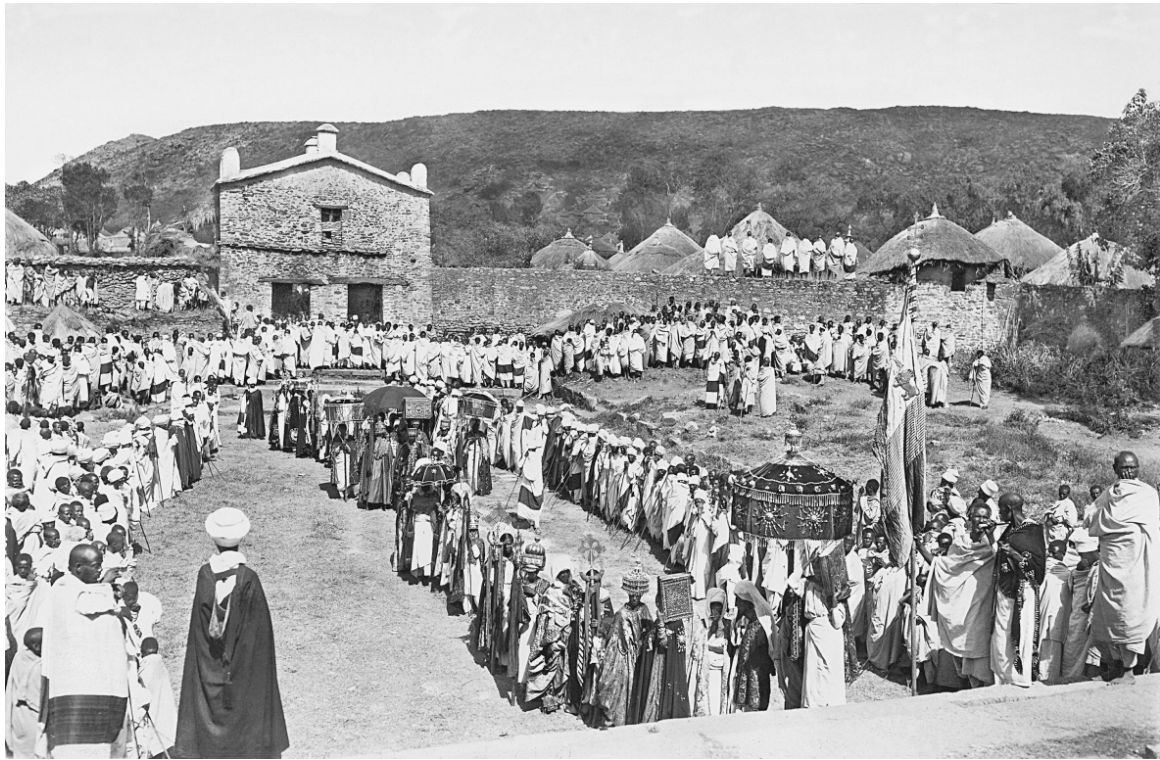


Fig. 1 Celebration of the True Cross in Aksum Şeyon, 1906 G.C. (photo: DAE 774 = MBA 2248.05).

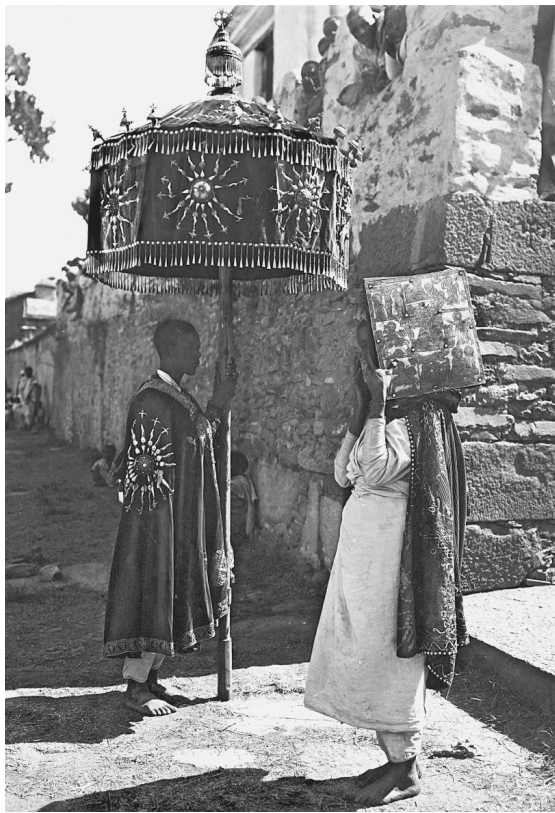


Fig. 2 The Golden Gospels of Aksum Şeyon are paraded for the Celebration of the True Cross (photo: DAE 776 = MBA 2248.07).

name refers to the binding and decorations used for the manuscripts, enhanced with plaques of metalwork, sometimes in gold leaf. But these precious manuscripts do not always contain the Gospels alone. Because of their spiritual value as sacred objects, they also preserve the most important historical and legal documents of the church or monastery to which they belong. These documents are recorded in the blank spaces before, between and after the Gospels. In other words, the *Golden Gospels* are most of the time codices, originally whose bindings were adorned with metallic decorations, containing the text of the Gospels along with archival documents. Is it the case here? Did the books carried in front of the procession contain the archives of Aksum Şeyon? Thanks to the copy made in the 1840ies by Antoine d'Abbadie while he was in Aksum, we can partially answer that at least one *Golden Gospel* of Aksum contained a large amount of archival documents. This copy is today kept in Paris, in the French National Library (ms. BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 152). It contains more than seventy legal and administrative documents, mainly land grants (*gult*) given to churches in Tigray by kings and princes of the beginning of the 19th century. This *Golden Gospel* is therefore a regional collection of land archives,

and Aksum Şeyon has been playing a role of intermediary between the royal administration and the Tigrean monasteries in recording and keeping these archives.⁷ At least one of the two manuscripts carried around during the celebration of the Finding of the True Cross in March 1906 might have been this one.

One of the two *Golden Gospels* photographed by the DAE was donated to the church of Aksum Şeyon by the daughter of *ras* Mika'él Sehul,⁸ the governor of Tigray who brought the Gondarine monarchy to an end by ordering the assassination of King Iyo'as in 1769. She is probably the same woman as the lady depicted on the back cover (Fig. 4) prostrated under the Virgin with Child, as on a devotional icon. This central image is set off in a frame with metallic bosses. The decoration of the covers follows the conventions of devotional paintings at the time, the life and passion of Jesus Christ being the major theme. Each cover is divided into three rows with columns, thus creating compartments to frame



Fig. 3 The *Golden Gospels* of Aksum Şeyon are paraded for the Celebration of the True Cross (photo: DAE 777 = MBA 2248.08).



Fig. 4 The *Golden Gospels* of Aksum Şeyon. Credit: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Nachlass Littmann 245, Kiste 99, (photo: DAE 789).

⁷ See the analysis of part of this manuscript in Wion 2011b.

⁸ According to what the clergy told Littmann. See his diary published by Voigt 2006: 194.



Fig. 5 Front cover of the *Golden Gospels* given by king Yohannes IV (1872–89) to Endaba Hadara in Tāmbén. Credit: *Māzgäbä Se'elat*, n°2002–073–26 to 37 (photo: Michael Gervers).

images. On the front cover⁹ in the upper row, the three identical figures of the Trinity sitting among the twenty-four Priests of Heaven; in the middle row, three scenes of the childhood and life of Christ (the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary reading, Nativity and Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River); in the bottom row, three scenes from the Passion (the *K^weratä Re'esu* with a prostrate male donor followed by the flogging and the mocking of Christ). On the back cover: in the top row, the Crucifixion, Entombment and the Harrowing of Sheol and the raising of the souls of Adam and Eve; in the middle row, Saint Georges slaying the dragon, the Virgin and Child (Mary is holding a book along with a female donor) and Christ preaching; in the bottom row: an equestrian saint, probably Saint Tewodros killing the king of Quz, and then two male donors prostrate before five monks or saints. The colour of the engravings is gold or copper on a silver background. The codex is of a standard medium size (30 × 40 cm).¹⁰

The second, slightly larger, *Golden Gospels* photographed in Aksum Şeyon by the DAE¹¹ has two identical covers decorated with geometric patterns around a protruding central cross embellished with tinted-glass. A Coptic metropolitan, whose name the clergy had forgotten, apparently donated it to the church of Aksum¹². Whereas the cover of the codex donated by the daughter of Mika'él Sehul clearly has Ethiopian origins, as can be seen by the style of the engravings, it is harder to identify the origin of this second binding. Comparison with known Coptic metal-plaque bindings or ornamented Gospel-case show some similarities, such as the geometrical patterns and the protruding central cross, as well as differences, such as the lack of Coptic inscription and the

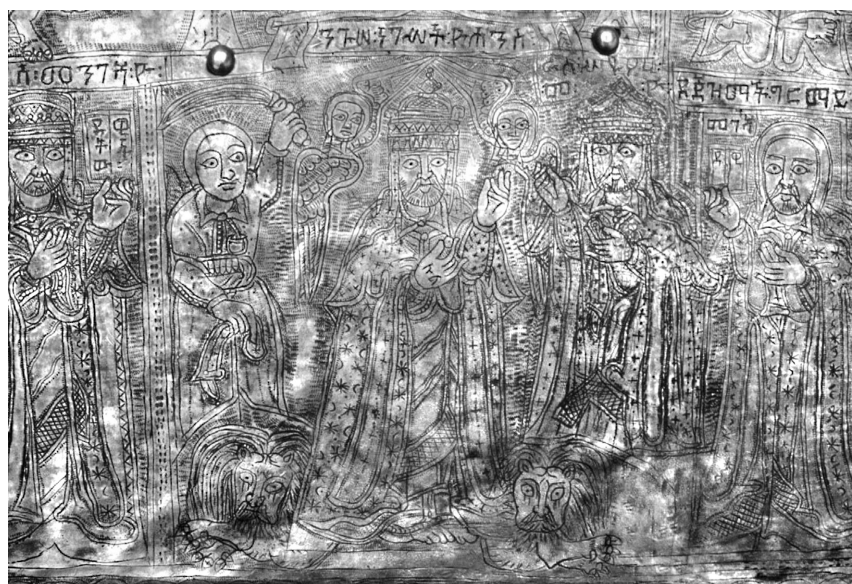
⁹ DAE 3, 99: Abb. 278; photos DAE 789 (front) and 790 (back).

¹⁰ DAE 3, 99.

¹¹ DAE 3, 99, Abb. 277.

¹² According to Littmann's diary, see Voigt 2006: 194.

Fig. 6 Detail of the back cover of the *Golden Gospel* given by king Yohannes IV (1872–89) to Endaba Hadara in Tämbén. The king of kings Yohannes IV is shown holding the *lul*, and accompanied by Ras Mängäša Yohannes, Ras Şeyum Mängäša Yohannes and Däğazmač Germal Mängäša. Credit: Mäzgäbä Se'elat, n°2002–073–26 to 37 (photo: Michael Gervers).



greater simplicity of the Aksum binding.¹³ It is today shown in Aksum Şeyon church's museum and the visitor can see that the metal plaques are golden in colour, and that the quires have been rebound quite recently.

Codices bound with full plaques of metal are quite rare in Ethiopia. One is preserved in the British Library. It is an illuminated 18th century *Life of Saint Täklä Haymanot* with covers of gilded copper (ms. BL Or. 728).¹⁴ In Tigray, Michael Gervers photographed¹⁵ six full-bindings with metal covers: the two *Gospels of Abba Garima* (usually referred to as I and II), which might be the model for the *Golden Gospels*; a *Gospel* from Yohannes Kama in Samre-Säharti; a *Gospel* from the Qaqa Maryam Monastery in Tämbén; a *Gospel* from Şellasé Čäläqot in Hentalo Wäğarat. The most precious one is a *Gospel* given by King Yohannes IV (1872–1889) to Endaba Hadara in Tämbén (Figs. 5–6)¹⁶, which might draw on the example of the Aksum *Golden Gospels*. Denis Nosnitsin has photographed one modern *Golden Gospel* in Addäqäharsä Paraqlitōs, from the time of Menelik.¹⁷

THE CHRONICLE OF AKSUM: A COMPILATION OF HISTORIOGRAPHICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS RELATED TO THE ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIAN KINGDOM AND AKSUM

In addition to these two extraordinary covers, the DAE photographed one compilation of documents¹⁸. It comes from a manuscript of the library of Aksum Şeyon: a *Glory of the*

King (Kebrä Nägäşt), followed by this *Chronicle of Aksum*.¹⁹ Given the absence of any information about why this only compilation was photographed by the DAE whereas Littmann had other manuscripts copied or bought, we suppose that Littmann, already familiar with the Aksum Şeyon library – in which he has been working with his informants under lock in January 1906²⁰ –, had no other means to get

¹³ See the Gospel-case preserved in the Coptic Museum in Cairo (Reg. N° 1565), dating from 1424, for instance, or the very similar but younger Gospel-casket of Saint-Barbara, Old Cairo, from the 18th c.

¹⁴ Pankhurst 1983–84: 249; Wright 1877: 196.

¹⁵ All photos available via the Mäzgäbä Se'elat database.

¹⁶ Mäzgäbä Se'elat, n°2002–073–26 to 37.

¹⁷ Nosnitsin 2013: 14.

¹⁸ N°232.01 to 232.27. For all the photos taken by the DAE see Wenig, "Die Fotos der DAE", and Wenig/Mucha, both in this volume.

¹⁹ "Diese Handschrift enthält das Buch von der ‚Herrlichkeit der Könige‘, das Buch, das bei den Abessinern im höchsten Ansehen steht, und in dem die Abstammung des abessinischen Königshauses von Salomo und der Königin von Saba berichtet wird. In den meisten Handschriften dieses Werkes stehen am Schlusse verschiedenartige Dokumente zur Geschichte Aksums und seiner Kirche, echte und unechte Urkunden über Schenkungen der Könige an die Kirche, Listen der Könige und Patriarchen u.a.m. Und in jener Handschrift, die der Kirche von Aksum gehört, beginnt die Sammlung dieser Dokumente mit der Beschreibung der Königsweihe, nachdem mit wenigen Worten die Masse der Zionskirche angegeben sind. Nach der Photographie, die Th. v. Lüpke von dieser Urkundensammlung gemacht hat, habe ich übersetzt." (DAE 1: 38).

²⁰ See Littmann's diary in Voigt 2006: 181, 185.

access to this text. It was quicker than to have it copied and it also provided a better copy.

As already said elsewhere,²¹ this compilation is known through the rather confusing textual tradition settled in 1909–10 by Conti Rossini's edition and translation. He selected documents related to Aksum in different corpora and re-ordered them according to three "intellectual" categories (1. "about the town and the church of Aksum"; 2. "feudal documents"; 3. "historical and legal documents"). We will describe here the manuscript photographed in Aksum, document after document, in order to show how this assemblage of texts could make sense.

Many copies of this compilation related to Aksum are known.²² In a previous article I analysed the copy given by *Ras* Mika'él Sehul to James Bruce (ms. Bodleian Bruce 93), which also follows a *Kebrä Nägäšt*.²³ The manuscripts closest from the one photographed by the DAE are – in terms of number of documents and order of copy – ms. BnF Éthiopien Abbadie 225 (copied by Antoine d'Abbadie in Aksum)²⁴ and ms. EML 50. The latter is also a *Kebrä Nägäšt* followed by the *Chronicle of Aksum*, it was returned by the British royal court to King Yohannes IV after it has been taken with others items from Magdala to London. Ms. EML 50 might be the oldest known copy²⁵ of the *Chronicle of Aksum* and would date back to the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706).²⁶

Descriptive notice:²⁷

The text is written in two columns with twenty-six lines (Fig. 7). The quires are made of five bifolios (quinion) and the compilation photographed by v. Lüpke is copied on three quires but the last two folios were not photographed although, as we shall see, the text continues. The palaeography is ordinary handwriting from the late Gondarine period. These texts are copied one after the other. Breaks are sometimes rendered with a line, or the first sentence of a new document is written in red ink.

I have divided the compilation in chapters in order to highlight the homogeneity of the narrative sequences of the text.

First movement: Aksum as a setting for the royal power

Fol. 1: Description of the church of Aksum Şeyon and of its buildings, probably before the destruction of the town and the church by

Imam Ahmed "Grañ" in the early 16th century. This very first document grounds the compilation in an evocation of the materiality and the grandeur of the church.

Incipit: ከመዝ: ኑባሬ: ሥርዓታ: ለአምነ: ጽዮን: ገበዝ: አክሱም:

Ed. Tr.: CRLibAks I.2²⁸

Tr.: Monneret 1938: 52

Fol. 1–2v: *Şer'atä Q^werhät* or literally «Rule for the Tonsure» of the king during the consecration and anointing in Aksum. This document relates the ceremonial of the consecration of the kings in Aksum to the time of king Solomon, then to the Ethiopian Kings Gäbrä Mäsqäl, Zär'a Ya'eqob and Šäršä Dengel.

²¹ Wion 2006 and 2009.

²² BnF Ethiopien Abbadie 97; BnF Ethiopien Abbadie 225; Bodleian Bruce 93; EML 50; Pistoia Martini etiop. 1; Tanasee 34 (Keban 34); Linceie 44; Linceie 27; BL Or. 817; Vatican Cerulli etiopico 251; Vatican Cerulli etiopico 318; *Tarikä Nägäšt* of Yohannes Kama's church in Tigray (C4-IV-327); Aksum Şeyon C2-IV-207 by *qés gabaz* Täklä Haymanot, etc.

²³ Wion 2009.

²⁴ Abbadie 1859: 219; Conti Rossini 1914: n°204.

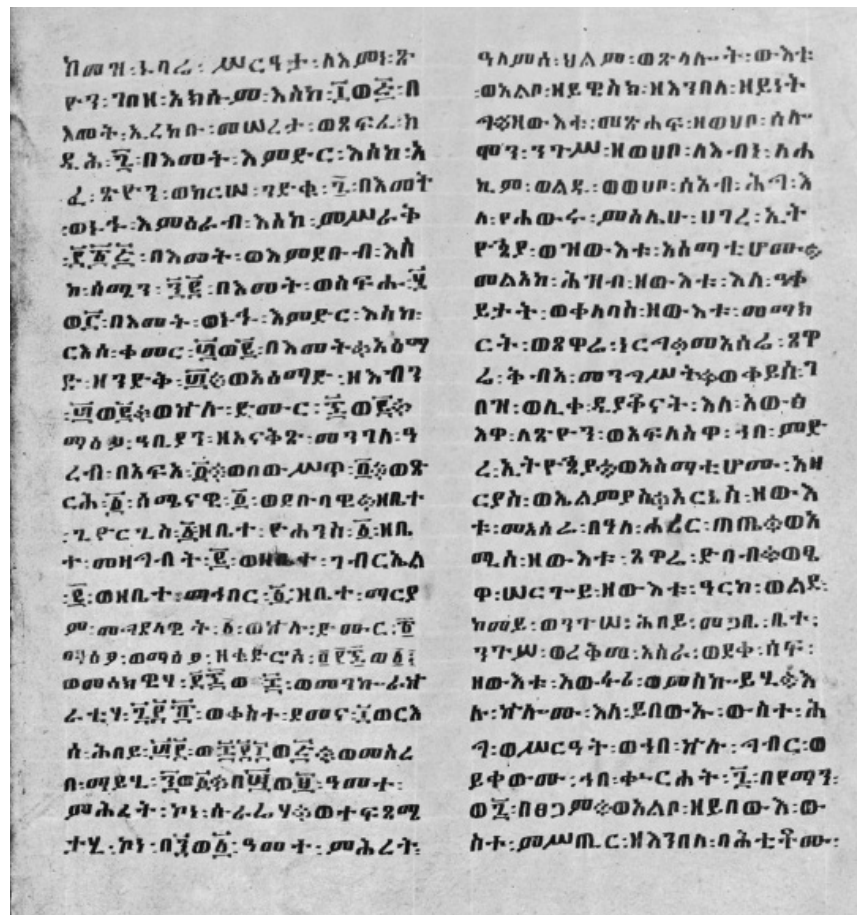
²⁵ I thank Marylin Heldman for pointing this to me. See her article on the diagrams opening this manuscript: Heldman 2011.

²⁶ Indeed, it has a chronographic list of kings that goes down until Iyasu I (fol. 137v–138) when this list is usually extended up to the end of the 18th century and even later in other copies. Also, a list of Coptic patriarchs goes, in EML 50 (fol. 147–149v), down to *abba* Yohannes the 82nd patriarch. The list was eventually completed by another hand to end up with *abba* Benyam, the 97th patriarch, as in all other known manuscripts. Furthermore, no document posterior to the reign of this king is copied in the compilation which ends with land grants and court cases given and settled by Iyasu I, in Aksum as well as in Gondär.

²⁷ The twenty-seven clichés have to be arranged accordingly: Fol. 1 = Sep. 232.20; fol. 1v–2 = Sep. 232.01; fol. 2v–3 = Sep. 232.16; fol. 3v–4 = Sep. 232.02; fol. 4v–5 = Sep. 232.10; fol. 5v–6 = Sep. 232.07; fol. 6v–7 = Sep. 232.11; fol. 7v–8 = Sep. 232.24; fol. 8v–9 = Sep. 232.03; fol. 9v–10 = Sep. 232.23; fol. 10v–11 = Sep. 232.13; fol. 11v–12 = Sep. 232.06; fol. 12v–13 = Sep. 232.08; fol. 13v–14 = Sep. 232. 22; fol. 14v–15 = Sep. 232.04; fol. 15v–16 = Sep. 232.15; fol. 16v–17 = Sep. 232.27; fol. 17v–18 = Sep. 232.12; fol. 18v–19 = Sep. 232.09 ; fol. 19v–20 = Sep. 232.26; fol. 20v–21 = Sep. 232.17; fol. 21v–22 = Sep. 232.14; fol. 22v–23 = Sep. 232.21; fol. 23v–24 = Sep. 232.18; fol. 24v–25 = Sep. 232.05; fol. 25v–26 = Sep. 232.25; fol. 26v–27 = Sep. 232.19. The manuscript might not begin with this text, and the *Kebrä Nägäšt* is most probably the first text of the codex. So this foliotation is somewhat arbitrary.

²⁸ Roman numerals refer to the first, second or third part of Conti Rossini's version; Arabic numerals refer to the source document.

Fig. 7 Beginning of the compilation at Aksum Seyon (photo: DAE 547 = MBA Sep. 232.20).



Incipit: ዘውሐቱ፡ መጽሐፍ፡ ዘወሀቦ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ ንጉሥ፡ ዘወሀቦ፡ ለእብነ፡ ለሐኪም፡ ወልዱ፡ ወወሀቦ፡ ሰሐብ፡ (sic) ሕግ፡ አለ፡ የሐውሩ፡ ምስሌህ፡ ሀገረ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ወዘውሐቱ፡ አስማቲያው።

Ed. Tr.: Dillmann 1884, Ge'ez text: 18–20, German transl.: 74–76.

Tr.: Portuguese transl. in Paez 2011, vol. 1: 123–126; German transl. in E. Littmann, “Die Königsweihe und die einheimische Überlieferung”, DAE 1: 37sq; French transl. in Sciarrino 1994: 150sq who proposes the title *Ser'atä Q'werhät*.

Stud.: Sciarrino 1994; Toubkis 2005: 422sq; Wion 2009: 150–153.

Fol. 2v: Two lists of the twelve houses of Israel who arrived in Ethiopia with Ebn El-Hakim and from whom are descended the dignitaries in charge of the royal house (*bétä mängest*).

Incipit: ሥርዓተ፡ ቤተ፡ መንግሥት፡

Ed.: Dillmann 1884, Ge'ez text: 77.

Stud.: Wion 2009: 153–54; Kropp 2011: 119.

Fol. 2v–3v: List of the kings of Aksum, from Arwé to Gäbrä Mäsqäl, with the number

of years that each reigned. This list follows Conti-Rossini's type C.

Incipit: ዓመታተ፡ ነገሥታተ፡ አክሱም፡ ዘአርዌ፡ ፬፻፡ ዓመት፡ ዘበአሲ፡ አገጋቢ፡ ሰሰደዶ፡ ለአርዌ፡ ወቀተሎ፡ ፪፻፡ ዓመት፡

Tr.: Conti Rossini 1909: 283–95.

Fol. 3v–4v: List of kings of Ethiopia from Arwé up to Ya'eqob (1596–1603, 1604–07) with the number of years they reigned. This list mentions that Abreha and Aṣbehä, legendary kings of the Aksumite period, built the Aksum church. According to it, Princess Terda'e Gäbäz gave the throne to the Zag'wé. The only king mentioned with his regnal name is Säršä Dengel Mäläk Säḡäd. The number of years reigned by his follower, Ya'eqob, is not given. This is Conti Rossini's type A list; his edition did not reach farther than Terda'e Gäbäz. The list is found in other manuscripts, sometimes ending with King Täklä Häymanot (1769–77).²⁹ Here it was most probably copied before the end of the first reign of Ya'eqob in 1603.

²⁹ For instance in ms. Oxford Bruce 93.

Incipit: ወዘውሐቱ፡ ዓመታት፡ ነገሥት፡ ነገሥት፡
አክሱም፡ አምኦርዌ፡ አስከ፡ ናልኩ፡ ጊወጁ፡ ነገሥት፡
ወዓመታቲሆሙ፡

Tr.: Conti Rossini 1909: 266–74

Fol. 4v: List of the «kings of Israël» who reigned over Ethiopia, from Ebn El-Hakim until the «son of king Iyasu II» (Iyo'as whose name is not mentioned). We recognise Conti Rossini's type H^{bis} list. These are the same names as on list H, but interestingly, the names of the Gondarine kings from Susenyos to Téwoflos are mixed with names of the kings of the pre-Zagwé period. Also, after Šärsä Dengel Mäläk Säḡäd (1563–96), the list jumps to King Yostos (1711–16).

Incipit: አሉ፡ ነገሡ፡ አስራኤል፡ በኢትዮጵያ፡
ወዘውሐቱ፡ አስማቲሆሙ፡ ጁ፡ አብነ፡ አልሐኪም፡
ያዕቆብ፡ ወዘድንግል፡ ነገሡ፡ ጁ፡ ቶማይ፡ ነገሡ፡
ጊ፡ ዓመት፡ ሱስንዮስ፡

Tr.: Conti Rossini 1909: 303.

Fol. 4v–5: Restoration of the royal consecration in Aksum by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob and again by King Šärsä Dengel, with a chronographic list of the kings in between these two. The *Chronicle of Šärsä Dengel* depicts the consecration of this king in Aksum, mentioning that lists of kings were read aloud during the ceremony. In line with this document, the royal chronicle makes it clear that no kings have been enthroned in Aksum since Zär'ä Ya'eqob and that Šärsä Dengel have re-instituted this medieval tradition³⁰.

Incipit: አምሐመ፡ ተጋድገ፡ መንበረ፡ ነገሥት፡
አክሱም፡ ተሐደሰ፡ በጀጅቢወጁ፡ ዓመተ፡ ምህረት፡
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.1.
St.: Wion 2009: 156–57

Fol. 5v: Genealogy from Adam until King Solomon followed by a genealogical list from Ebn El-Hakim until Šärsä Dengel (type F).

Incipit: ልደተ፡ አበው፡ አዳም፡ ወለደ፡ ለሴት፡
Tr.: Conti Rossini 1909: 300–01

Fol. 5v: Periods of time with the number of years, respectively: from the birth of Christ up to the reign of Abreha and Ašbehä³¹; from the latter up to Gäbrä Mäsqäl; from Gäbrä Mäsqäl to the Zagwé; from the Zagwé to Yekunno Amlak; from Yekunno Amlak to Säyfä Ar'ad; from Säyfä Ar'ad to Yeshaq; from Yeshaq to Zär'ä Ya'eqob; from Zär'ä Ya'eqob to Lebnä Dengel; and from Lebnä Dengel to Minas. The list ends with a count of 92 Coptic patriarchs of Ethiopia from *abba* Salama

Käsaté Berhan to *abuna* Krestodolu. The latter is *abuna* Krestodolu I, active during Šärsä Dengel's reign.³²

Incipit: አምልደተ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ አመንገሥተ፡ ባዜን፡
አስከ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ ጀጅቢወጁ፡

This first chain of documents, from the *Ser'atä Qwerbät* to this one, are then to be considered as a meaningful corpus of documents. Constituted by King Šärsä Dengel's scriptorium, it aimed at assessing his legitimacy and the legitimacy of the royal power upon Aksum and Ethiopia. Some documents were existing prior to this king, and the impact of King Zär'ä Ya'eqob policy in order to rebuilt Aksum as a fully active centre of power is of course highlighted in most of the documents. But the making of this sequence of texts can be attributed to Šärsä Dengel's scriptorium with some confidence. Only two of them (list A, fol. 3v–4v and list H, fol. 4v) have been extended after Šärsä Dengel's death, but in a rather clumsy way. We can therefore make a first section up to here.

Second movement: royal land grants to Aksum

The second section associates the royal authority with land tenure at Aksum.

Fol. 5v–6: *Gult* donation of 19 lands by Kings Abreha and Ašbehä to the church of Aksum, amongst which are the fertile lands of Häwästa, Hämbära, Madogwé and Ad Aqayt as well as Säglamen. The kings are identified as the builders of the church (*gäbäzä Aksum*, literally “protectress of Aksum”), as already stated in list A, and their heirs are expected to seat “on the throne of David”. We recognise here the classical phraseology of the Solomonid political ideology, but directly linked to the semi-legendary Aksumite kings. Abreha and Ašbehä would be an amalgam of three kings of Antiquity: Abraha, Aksumite king of Yemen; King Kaléb, whose regnal name was Ella Ašbehä; and the king of Aksum Ezana

³⁰ Conti Rossini : 1907: 91 (tr), 79–80 (txt).

³¹ This chronology that includes Abreha and Ašbehä but omits Saint Täklä Haymanot, is apparently typical of the tradition of Aksum. See Neugebauer 1989: 55–67, 111–129.

³² He is not mentioned in the royal chronicle, but two land-charters promulgated by Šärsä Dengel and preserved in the *Golden Gospel* of Aksum (ms. BnF Eth. Abb. 152) mentioned his name (see CRLibAks II–57 and 59).

who reigned in the 4th c. and converted to Christianity. His brother was named Še'ezana³³.

Incipit: በአኩቲተ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ንሕነ፡ አብ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ ነገሥተ፡ አክሱም፡ ጉለትነ፡ ጉልተ፡ ለገበዘ፡ አክሱም።

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 4–5 ; CRLibAks II.1

Tr.: DAE 1: 58; Huntingford 1965, n°1.

Fol.6: *Gult* and the renewal of the donation to the church of Aksum by King Anbäsa Wedem, who most probably reigned during the second half of the 12th c.³⁴. In list type A, this king reigned after Queen Gudit who destroyed churches in Tigray. Following this implicit logic, he is the one who restores the land wealth of Aksum. The next *gult* to Aksum Seyon, given by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob, renews most of the lands mentioned in this charter. Two hypotheses are therefore possible. The more skeptical view about the authenticity of the document would favour a late writing intended as a historical and legal basis for territorial claims by the church of Aksum. But the hypothesis of a early medieval document at least partially true should not be overlooked and would mean a lot about the relationship between Aksum and kingship through time.

Incipit: በአኩቲተ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አነ፡ አንበሳ፡ ውድም፡ ሐደስኩ፡ ጉልታ፡ ለገበዘ፡ አክሱም፡ ዘወሀቡ፡ አበውየ፡ ቀደምት፡ ወከሰበ፡ አነ፡ ጉለትነ፡ ጉልተ፡ ለገበዘ፡ አክሱም።

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 5; CRLibAks II.5 (version 1)

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°5.

Fol.6: *Gult* donation to the church of Aksum by Wälättä Maryam. The identification of this woman, named “Daughter of Mary” and mentioned without title is difficult.

Incipit: በአኩቲተ፡ [...] ጉለትነ፡ አነ፡ ወለተ፡ ማርያም፡ ፍንቅሊት፡ በዘፈራ፡ ለተዘካረ፡ አግዝአትየ፡ ማርያም፡

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 5; CRLibAks II.24 (version 1)

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°23.

Fol.6: *Gult* donation to the church of Aksum by King Säyfa Ar'ad (1344–71).

Incipit: በአኩቲተ፡ [...] ጉለትነ፡ አነ፡ ሰይፈ፡ አርዳድ፡ ጉልተ፡ ለገበዘ፡ አክሱም፡ ከመ፡ ይኩን፡ ለተዘካረ፡ አግዝአትየ፡ ማርያም፡

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 5; CRLibAks II.7 (version 1)

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°7.

Then come five documents promulgated by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob (1434–68). They grant land in order to sustain the church of Aksum and to settle the liturgical reform of the *sä'atat* (service of Hours), implemented by the king, and to sustain the new body of clerics in charge of this new liturgy, the *žan šegé*, headed by a chief called *liqa Aksum*. This bulk of documents shows that Zär'ä Ya'eqob has been very much concerned by legislating and controlling the church of Aksum.³⁵ But, according to these documents, he did not grant new lands to the church; he only renewed and redistributed *gult* land already mentioned in the previous *gult* documents.

Fol.6: *Gult* by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob for his own *täzkar* and the service of incense.

Incipit: ወካዕበ፡ ጉለትነ፡ አነ፡ ዘርአ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ መደጌ፡ ወአድ፡ አቀይት፡

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 6 ; CRLibAks II.14 (first part);

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°14.

Fol.6v: Renewal of the main *gult* territories to the church of Aksum by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob.

Incipit: ወካዕበ፡ ሐደስኩ፡ አነ፡ ዘርአ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ጉልታ፡ ለገበዘ፡ አክሱም፡ ደብረ፡ ሰላም፡

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 6 ; CRLibAks II.14 (second part);

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°14.

Fol.6v: *Gult* donation of the land of Na'edér to Aksum church by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob in order to support his liturgical reform of the *Sä'atat*.

Incipit: በአኩቲተ፡ [...] ጉለትነ፡ አነ፡ ዘርአ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ወልዳዊት፡ (sic) ጉልተ፡ ለአምነ፡ ጽዮን፡ ገበዘ፡ አክሱም፡ ምድረ፡ ነሐዴር፡

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 6; CRLibAks II.13;

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°13.

Fol.6v: *Gult* donation to Aksum church by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob for the *täzkar* of Mary and the church oblation.

³³ See Munro-Hay 2003.

³⁴ A Ge'ez document, dated mid-twelfth century, is attributed to the Coptic bishop Mika'él, contemporary of King Anbäsa Wedem. This document includes exaggerations but still might be authentic. It is kept at the monastery of Amba Mika'él in Wämbarta (see Sergew Hable Selassie 1972: 203). For another unpublished document, dated 1194 during the 20th year of the reign of Anbäsa Wedem, see Brita 2010: 447. The forthcoming publications of Marie-Laure Derat will also document this period.

Incipit: ወካዕበ: ጉለትኩ: አነ: ዘርአ: ያዕቆብ:
ምድረ: አውልዶ:

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 6; CRLibAks II.15;

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°15.

Fol. 6v: Renewal of the immunity of the compound of Aksum Şeyon's church by King Zär'ä Ya'eqob.

Incipit: ሠራዕኩ: ወአውገዝኩ: አነ: ዘርአ:
ያዕቆብ: ወልደ: ዳዊት: ከመ: ኢይባአ: ኅበ:
አምነ: ጽዮን:

Ed., Tr.: Conti Rossini 1895: 6; CRLibAks II.16;

Tr.: Huntingford 1965, n°16.

Fol. 6v–7v: Taxes in cereals, honey, cattle and butter from the different districts in Häwästa and Hämbära, followed by an appendix detailing the contributions of the main *gult* of Aksum for the feasts. Most of the place-names are found in the five aforementioned *gult* donations, therefore this very long and precise list of contribution explains pragmatically how the royal *gult* of Aksum should supply to the church.

Incipit: ግብረ: ሀገር: ዘቤተ: ገዢ:

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.3.

Stud.: Wion 2016a

Fol. 7v–8: Labor imposed to specified groups of clerics, to the inhabitants of the lands held by Aksum Şeyon as well as to some remote provinces (such as Gär'alta or Anba Säṇayt). This type of document is close to what was called a *šerit* during the Gondarine period. It differs by the extraordinary character of the tasks that are due by the tributaries, whether it was for the building of the church, or for its maintenance.

Incipit: ከመዘ: ጥገተ: ግብረመ: ለኮሎመ:
አህጉር: አለ: ይሰርሱ: ገበዘ: አክሱም:

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.5.

Here ends this section devoted exclusively to land tenure, its legitimacy (*gult*) – going down to Zär'ä Ya'eqob's time only – and the rules for the distribution of its products (*gäbr*, *täzkar* and feasts).

Third movement: duties and memories of Aksum territory

The next and third body of documents can again be attributed to the time of Śārṣä Dengel. It consists mainly of lists, whether chrono-

graphic or not, as well as a depiction of the characteristic and historical places of the town. These documents seem to introduce the main piece of text: the renewal of the laws (*hegg*) of Aksum, dealing mainly with protocolar issues and the rank of the *nebura* 'ed. King Śārṣä Dengel did not really promulgate *gult* donations to Aksum Şeyon but he renewed the main *gult* of Zär'ä Ya'eqob and stated precisely how the product of the lands should be distributed.

Fol. 8–8v: A chronological list from *Abba Sälama* (year 4) to the victory of Śārṣä Dengel over the Turks in the year 232 (1579 G. C.), with special attention paid to the 16th century wars against Muslims and the re-foundation of Aksum by Śārṣä Dengel. In this document, Aksum is presented in the broader framework of the national and regional history, even if mentioned only twice: when Zär'ä Ya'eqob came and when Śārṣä Dengel restored the church buildings.

Incipit: በ፬: ዓመተ: ምሕረት: ወፅአ: አባ: ሰላማ:

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.2.

Fol. 8v–10: A legendary history of the foundation of Aksum Şeyon and description of the specific elements of the site, including the ancient ruins.

Incipit: ከመዘአ (sic) : ጥገተ: ሠራራሃ: ለአምነ:
ጽዮን: ገበዘ: አክሱም:

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.1; DAE I: 32–33 ; Hirsch-Fauvelle, 2001: 103–05.

Stud.: Monneret 1938: 49–52; Hirsch-Fauvelle 2001: 71–91; Wion 2009: 162–163.

Fol. 10–10v: A list of kings who will come at the end of the world according to the *Qälémentos*.³⁶

Incipit: አመጽሐፈ: ቀሌምንጦስ:

Fol. 10v–11v: Chronology of the rulers of Islam, beginning with Muhammed and followed by the caliphs of the Ummayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid and Ayyubi dynasties, until Al-Adil Sayf al Din (beg. 13th c.).³⁷

³⁵ See Wion 2009: 159–161 for an analysis of this reform and of these five documents. See the *Chronicle of Zär'ä Ya'eqob* on the institution of the liturgical reform and the creation of this new body of monks in Aksum, Perruchon 1893: 51–52.

³⁶ Cf. Lusini 2002: 160 who refers to *Qälémentos* (III, 9, 20) quoting Grébaut 1913 and Bausi 1992.

³⁷ About the sources of Muslim history in Ethiopian historiography, see Witakowski 2006: 290–91, 295–97; Kropp 1986: 314–46; Kropp 2006: 307–15.

Incipit: ጥያቄ፡ ጥንተ፡ ዕለተ፡ ዘመኖሙ፡ ለተንባላት፡

Fol. 11v–13v: Chronographic and numbered list of the patriarchs of Alexandria. A first list goes from saint Mark till Yohannes (John IX, 1320–27).³⁸ Then a second one, with a different layout, goes until the 97th patriarch, “Gabr’él zä-Halo Ye’ezé” (1590–1610).

Incipit: ዘውሐቱ፡ ዜና፡ ሰሞሙ፡ ለአበዊነ፡ ሊቃነ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ ዘአለ፡ አስክንድርያ፡

Fol. 13v: List of the Zag^{wé} kings since Terda’e Gäbäz.

Text: አምድጎረ፡ አፍለሰት፡ መንግሥተ፡ አሰራኤል፡ ትርጳክ፡ ገበዝ፡ ብኢሲተ፡ መራራ፡ ኀበ፡ አለዛን፡ ወሰሞሙ፡ ሙንጊቶ፡ ዘውሐቱ፡ መራራ፡ ተጠጠውድም፡ ይምራጎ፡ ሰቡሐይ፡ ላሊበላ፡ ነክኩቶ፡ ለኡብ፡ ሀርበይ፡ ኃረዮነ፡ መስቀል፡ በአምነት፡ ይሰቀብክ፡ መንግሥተ፡ ዚኣነ፡ አኩቲት፡ [] ድል፡ ነኦድ፡ ፀር፡ አስገድ፡ ዜና፡ ጴጥርስ፡ ባሕር፡ ሳፍ፡ ወዓመታቲሆሙ፡ የሸወ፤ ተብህሉ፡ ሸወ፤ ወአምኔሆሙ፡ ፱፡ ዓቢያን፡

Fol. 13v–14: Inventory of objects belonging to Aksum and given for preservation by King Lebnä Dengel to the governors (*seyum*, *šum*) of Tämbén, Sähärt, Säläwa, Agame, Abärgälé and Tegré. A very different version of this list is copied in ms. EMMML 50.

Incipit: አንዘ፡ ሀለው፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ልብነ፡ ድንግል፡ በምድረ፡ ዘብል፡ ዘወሀቡ፡ ምዕትና፡ ለሠዩምት፡ አቅሉ፡ ዘአክሱም።

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.4.

Fol. 14–15: Renewing of the laws (*hegg*) of Aksum by King Šäršä Dengel, specifically of the privilege of its *liqä kahnat* and his preeminence. The renewal recalls Zär’a Ya’eqob’s decision of making the *liqä Aksum* equal to the *neburä ‘ed*, the first one heading the *žan segé*, the second the *däbtära*. Then, a narrative illustrates how Šäršä Dengel fought against Yeshaq, was anointed king in Aksum and reestablished the benefices and the autonomy of Aksum Şeyon. This is followed by the proclamation of three new rules by Šäršä Dengel: the prohibition for soldiers from the Edda Dégäna to spend the night in the lands belonging to Aksum; the privilege of the *liqä Aksum* and the *neburä ‘ed* during banquets; and the protocolar restriction imposed on the tax collectors about levies on cattle in Aksum Şeyon.

Incipit: በአኩቲት፡ [...] ሐደሰነ፡ ወሠራዕነ፡ ንሕነ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ሠርፀ፡ ድንግል፡ ወስመ፡ መንግሥትነ፡ መለክነ፡ ሰገድ፡ ወልደ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ አድማስ፡ ሰገድ፡ አምብዙጎ፡ ወፍድ፡ ትሩፋተ፡ ሕግ፡ ዘሠርዑ፡ አበዊነ፡ ቀዳማውያን፡ ነገሥት፡ ለአምነ፡ ጽዮን፡

ገበዝ፡ አክሱም፡ እንተ፡ ይአቲ፡ ጥንተ፡ መንግሥት፡ ወክህነት፡ ወጥንተ፡ ክርስትና፡ አምኩሎን፡ አህጉራተ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ አለ፡ ይደልዎን፡ ዕበይ፡ ወክብር፡ ወስም፡ ወይአቲ፡ ዳግጣት፡ ኢየሩሳሌም፡

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.6.

Fol. 15: What different lands must give for the feasts and *täzkar* celebrated in Aksum Şeyon. A more formal copy of this document is written as a *gult* and copied in the *Golden Gospel* of Aksum.³⁹ It adds how much the community of the *däbtära* must contribute for the royal commemorations of Dawit, Sayfä Ar’ad, Bä’edä Maryam and Eskender. But this document is also to be found in the *Chronicle of Aksum*, although without mentioning Šäršä Dengel, see fol. 15.

Incipit: አምነ፡ ደጉዓ፡ መዙተይ፡ ሸ አንተላም፡ ሸ ጣድጋ፡ መዓር፡

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.4.

Fol. 15: Contribution of the *neburä ‘ed* for the nine big feasts (seven cows for each one). This document fills a gap left by the previous one in which it is said that “Däbrä Sälām *betä neguš zä-neburä ‘ed*” gives whatever it wishes.

Incipit: ጣእድ፡ ዘይሁብ፡ ኀቡረ (sic) ፡ እድ፡

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.8.

These three last documents are clearly putting a high pressure on the *neburä ‘ed* and his community of *däbtära*: they abolish their free-will contributing to the church of Aksum Şeyon and renew the prestige of the *liqä Aksum*.

Then, the compilation is entering the post-Šäršä Dengel period and goes from Susenyos time and the flight of the Ark of the Covenant up to Iyo’as (1755–70). But still, two documents date back to the beginning of the 16th century.

Fol. 15–15v: At the time of Fasilädas and the queen mother Wäld Sä’ala, in 1655, inauguration of the new church of Aksum Şeyon by Yodit, ‘their daughter’, a dubious character who is not mentioned in any other source. The document focuses mainly on the glory of Wäld Sä’ala and gives her all the credit for the rebuilding of the church. It fits with

³⁸ This list could have the *Abušaker* as its source for it contains a list of the patriarchs going until the 14th century. The *Abušaker* was introduced in Ethiopia and translated in Ge’ez during the 16th century.

³⁹ Ms. BnF Eth. Abb. 152, fol. 64rb, see also CRLibAks II–54, which concatenate three heterogeneous documents.

a document preserved in Qoma Fasilädäs, the church founded by Wäld Sä'ala, that testifies that the queen gave 244 gold *waqét* and 300 cows upon which taxes could be levied by Aksum for its reconstruction.

Incipit: በአኩቱት [...] ገጽሐፍ፡ ዝክረ፡ ሠናቲሆሙ፡ ብዙ፡ ሠራውናሆሙ፡ ፍድፋድ፡ ለገጥሥነ፡ ወልደ፡ ዳዊት፡ ወልደ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ወልደ፡ ይስሐቅ፡ ወልደ፡ አብርሃም፡ ላዕሌሁ፡ ሰላም፡ ወለአሙ፡ ገጥሥትነ፡ ወልደ፡ ሠዓለ፡ ቡርክት፡ አሌኒ፡ ዳግሚት፡ ሥርጉተ፡ ኩላንታ፡ በትርሢት፡ ምግባር፡ ውዱስ፡ ገጥሠ፡ ነገሥታት።

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.9.

St.: Wion 2012: 131.

Fol.15v–16: Renewal of the laws (*hegg*), the rules (*šer'at*), the *gult* and the *neburä* 'ed's position by King Iyasu I in 1687, after their abrogation by Susenyos in 1615. This document was written a few months before the -aborted- trip to Aksum planned by the king in order to receive the anointment there. As already noticed by Conti Rossini, it was most probably in order to gain the good grace of the clergy that the king sent these document prior to his arrival.⁴⁰ Strangely enough, this document does not seem to take into consideration the fact that the church was rebuild in 1655 and therefore that its laws should have already been renewed at least once since Susenyos reign. We can see here the political changes initiated by Iyasu against the choices of his predecessors, Fasilädäs and Yohannes.

The ceremony of the anointment of the Ethiopian kings at Aksum is called *heggä māngešt* ("law of the kingdom", "of the government") in the *Chronicle* of Iyasu I (1682–1706), because Aksum is the tabernacle of Šeyon, the Ark of the Covenant, from which the law (*hegg*) is issued. From the 15th century up to the end of the 17th century, the assimilation between the divine law and the earthly law is progressively constructed and accepted, the first one legitimating the second one.

Incipit: በአኩቱት [...] ሐደሰነ፡ ወሠራዕነ፡ ገሕነ፡ ገጥሥ፡ ኢ[ያሱ]፡⁴¹ ወሰመ፡ መገጥሥትነ፡ አድያም፡ ሰገድ፡ ወልደ፡ ገጥሥ፡ አአላፍ፡ ሰገድ።

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks II.63; HuntLdChart 63.

St.: Toubkis 2005: 446–48.

Stud.: Wion, 2016b

Fol.16: Renewal of the *gult* donation to Aksum Šeyon by Iyasu I, with a list of eight lands to be restituted. Amongst them, four had been attributed by *gult* of Anbäsa Wedem, two by *gult* of Zär'ä Ya'eqob and one by Šäršä Dengel's.

Incipit: በአኩቱት [...] ሐደሱ፡ ወሠርዑ፡ ገጥሥነ፡ ኢያሱ፡ እንዘ፡ ቢትወደድ፡ እንግሰኖሱ፡ ወእንዘ፡ መሰፍነ፡ መፍቀሪ፡ እንዚአብሔር፡ ደጅ፡ አዝማች፡ ዘማርያም።

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks II.64; HuntLdChart 64.

St.: Toubkis 2005: 446–48.

Stud.: Wion, 2016b

Fol.16–16v: Chronographical list of periods of the Old Testament followed by periods marked by: the birth of Christ; the birth of Ityopya; Diocletian's reign; the Council of Nicea; the reign of Gäbrä Mäsqäl, son of Kaléb, king of Ityopya; Zag'wé kings. Thereafter the chronological markers are the reigns of Yekunno Amlak, Säyfä Ar'ad, Yeshaq, Zär'ä Ya'eqob and Eskender.

Incipit: በዘተአምር፡ ዓመታተ፡ ዓለም፡ እምአዳም፡ እስከ፡ ልደተ፡ ኖህ፡ ፲፪ወ፲፪፻ወ፯፡ ዓመት፡

Fol.16v–17v: *Ma'eṭäntä*⁴² *gäza* for four categories of clergy (namely "monks", "priests", "*däge sälam*" and "*ṭäfänot*"). This document displays a share of lands to which access is granted on a genealogical basis.⁴³ It was most probably established at the time of Lebnä Dengel (1508–40) since one can recognise in this document some dignitaries in charge during his reign.

Incipit: ማዕጠንተ፡ ገዛ፡ መነኩሴ፡

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.10.

Fol.17v: Story of the exile of the Ark of the Covenant during Susenyos' reign: it was moved to Degsa, in Bur, under the custody of the Daqq Degna during twelve years, and then was returned to Aksum during the first year of Fasilädäs reign.

Incipit: ገጽሐፍ፡ ተዝክረ፡ ነገር፡ ጥፍቅ፡ ወዜና፡ ጽድቅ፡ በአንተ፡ ዘኮነ፡ ሰዶት፡ ዓቢይ፡ ላዕለ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ያዕቆባውን፡ አለ፡ ብሔር፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ሀገር፡ እንዚአብሔር፡

Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.8 (short version).

Fol.17v–18: Inventory of the treasure [of Aksum Šeyon]. As this document is following the one

⁴⁰ Guidi 1905: 113–14 (tr.), 110 (txt).

⁴¹ Blank space for rubrication.

⁴² Dillmann 1865: 1018 and Leslau 1991: 76 have 'thurible', 'censer', 'incense burner'.

⁴³ According to an interview done by the author in January 2009 with *Afä Neburä* 'Ed Abbay. The land around Aksum Šeyon was given in exchange of services to the church to dignitaries called *täsari*. Thereafter, the right to rent these lands was given according to genealogical rights: anybody descending from the *täsariwoč* could rent the land.

exposing the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Aksum, it is possible that it describes the treasure of the church at the beginning of the reign of Fasilädäs. Amongst the numerous objects enumerated here, some were once given by dignitaries, mostly *däggazmač* and *abéto*. Some of them are mentioned in documents issued by Lebnä Dengel,⁴⁴ Šäršä Dengel,⁴⁵ Susenyos⁴⁶ and Fasilädäs.⁴⁷ These objects were still, in the first half of the 17th century, linked with the memory of their donors.

Incipit: ጉልቶ፡ አቅሐ፡ ፫፡ ሰሌዳ፡ ሥዕል፡ ጃ፡
ሥዕል፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ አብ፡
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.9.

Fol. 18–18v: List of the donations (*mäba'e*) from the Na'edér and Dagenä lands to the church [of Aksum Šeyon].

Incipit: ጉልቱ፡ መባሕ፡ ዘናክደር፡ ላዕሊይ፡
ጉልት፡ ደረቃ፡
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.7.

Fol. 18v: The same lands as the aforementioned had to contribute to the *žan šegé*, the “Roses of the King”. They were clerics instituted to the Service of the Hours (the *Sä'atat* instituted by Zär'ä Ya'eqob and for the sake of which he gave the land of Na'edér).

Incipit: ሥርዓተ፡ ዠን፡ ጽጌ፡ ደረቃ፡ ፫፡ አድ፡
ላዕሊይ፡ ጉልት፡ ዘናክደር፡
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.11 (text slightly different).

Fol. 18v: Sending of seven groups of *žan šegé* monks in seven religious institutions around Aksum and the amount of cereals, cotton, cows that should be provided to them during the feasts, according to the rule defined by Zär'ä Ya'eqob.

Incipit: ሥርዓተ፡ ዠን፡ ጽጌ፡ ዘሠርሁ፡ ሐፂጌ፡
ዘርክያዕቆብ፡ ጌ፡ አድባራት፡ በበጌ፡ መነኮሳት፡
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks I.22.

Here finishes the *Chronicle of Aksum* as such. The last documents regulate the contribution of the *žan šegé*, just like the previous section was finishing with the contribution of the competing/complementary body of the *däbtara*.

Fourth movement: the Ethiopian Christian history

The next documents are part of the corpus known as the *Short* or *Abridged Chronicles*. The critical edition of this version remains to be done, but numerous readings are close to

the manuscript copied by Kāflä Giyorgis for Ignazio Guidi in Akrur⁴⁸. Only one passage was incorporated by Conti Rossini in his edition of the *Liber Aksumae*. Except for the last list of kings that goes until the last king of Gondär, Iyo'as (1755–69), the *Short Chronicles* ends with the 4th year of Fasilädäs reign and the creation of Gondär.

Fol. 19–20: Genealogy from Adam till Solomon, then from Ebnä Hakim followed by the Aksumite kings until Särgway. It is a type B list according to Conti Rossini (1909: 274 ff). Beginning with Yekunno Amlak's reign, the genealogy includes chronologic data and mentions Saint Täklä Haymanot.

Incipit: ዜና፡ ልደቶሙ፡ ለአበው፡ አዳም፡ ወለዶ፡
ለሴት፡

Fol. 20–23v: In continuity of the previous list, the text enters in a more narrative style with the reigns of Zär'ä Ya'eqob, Bä'edä Maryam, Eskender, Lebnä Dengel including the *mäšhäfä Sedätomu*, and Gälawdéwos' reign till the death of “Grañ”.

Incipit: ዘርክ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ሆወ፬፡ ዓመት፡ ወ፪፡
ወርጉ፡ ነግሠ፡ ወበመንግሥቱ፡ ኮነ፡ ተቃሕዎ፡
በአንተ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ወተዋሥኦ፡ አባ፡ ጊዮርጊስ፡
ምስለ፡ አፍርንጅ፡

Fol. 23v–24v: On the royal camps of King Na'od (1494–1508) and the itineraries of Lebnä Dengel's court (with the same *lacuna* as in CRLibAks III.3); information about Gälawdéwos' reign, his policy toward Europeans and his death while fighting against Nur.

Incipit: ወአምዝ፡ ንጽሕፍ፡ ታሪኮሙ፡ ለነገሥነ፡
ናዖድ፡ መቅድሙ፡ ከተማሆሙ።
Ed., Tr.: CRLibAks III.3.

Fol. 24v–25v: History of Minas and Šäršä Dengel in line with the pattern established in the *Short Chronicles*.

⁴⁴ CrLibAks II–45, mentioned a *Gragéta* Keflä Waḥd.

⁴⁵ CrLibAks II–53 and II–58 are land grants from Šäršä Dengel to *Nebura*, *Ed Azmač* Täklä Šellus.

⁴⁶ CrLibAks III–7 reports a very interesting litigation on taxes that was settled during the tenth year of Susenyos' reign. The document recalls the good old time of *Azmač* Täklä Šellus and *Abétobun* Mäzra'etä Krestos. Both are named in this document too, and were active at the end of the 16th c. or the very beginning of the 17th c.

⁴⁷ CrLibAks II–62 is a donation of lands from King Fasil to 'his father' Mäzra'etä Krestos.

⁴⁸ Guidi 1893.

Incipit: ወነግሡ ንጉሥ አድማስ ሰገድ አምዘ፡
ነግሡ በ፩ ዓመት ሐረ፡ ምድረ፡ ሰሜን፡

Fol.25v: Brief chronographical information about the reigns of Ya'eqob and Zä-Dengel

Text: ወነግሡ ወልዱ ያዕቆብ፡ ወነበረ፡ በመንበረ፡
አቡሁ፡ መለክ፡ ሰገድ፡ ወነግሡ ጌ፡ ዓመተ፡
ወበጌ፡ ዓመት፡ ሠዓርዎ፡ አመንግሥቱ፡ ወአንገሠዎ፡
ለንጉሥ፡ ዘድንግል፡ ወዓመተ፡ መንግሥቱ፡ ፩፡
ወሜጥዎ፡ ለንጉሥ፡ ያዕቆብ፡ ወአንገሥዎ፡ ዳግመ፡
፪፡ ዓመተ፡

Fol.25v–26: History of Susenyos.

Incipit: ወነግሡ ሥልጣን ሰገድ ወልደ አጉሁ፡
ለመለክ፡ ሰገድ፡ አምድሃረ፡ ነግሡ በ፩ ዓመት፡
ወከረመ፡ ቀጋ፡

Fol.26–26v: History of Fasilädäs up to his fourth year of reign (1636–37).

Incipit: ወድሃራሁ ነግሡ ፋሲለደስ በይአት፡
መደና፡ ወተሰምየ፡ ዓለም፡ ሰገድ፡ አምዘ፡ ነግሡ፡
በ፩ ዓመት፡ ነበረ፡ ሊቦ፡ ወከረመ፡ በደንቀዘ፡

Fol.26v: List of the 12 houses of Israel who came in Ethiopia with Menelik and from which are descended the dignitaries serving at the royal court.

Text: ዝንቱ ታሪክ፡ ነገረ፡ ፀአቶው፡ ለደቂቀ፡
አቡራኤል ምስለ፡ ሚንልክ፡ ንጉሠው፡ አምቤተ፡
ሮቤል፡ ሊቀ፡ መባኒ፡ አምቤተ፡ ሰምዖን፡ ጽራግ፡
ማሰራ፡ አምቤተ፡ ሌዊ፡ ቄስ፡ ሐጼ፡ አምቤተ፡
ይሁዳ፡ ንጉሥ፡ አምቤተ፡ ዘብሎን፡ ገሮን፡ ተክል፡
አምቤተ፡ ይሳኮር፡ ጸሐርጌ፡ አምቤተ፡ ጋድ፡ ገሮን፡
አቡራሪ፡ አምቤተ፡ ዮሴፍ፡ ባልተ፡ ጐዛጉዛ፡ አምቤተ፡
ብንያም፡ ጥቃቅኖች፡ አምቤተ፡ አሴር፡ ቤት፡
አንሰት፡ አምቤተ፡ ዳን፡ ቤተ፡ ሐይጽ፡ አምቤተ፡
ንፍታሌም፡ ቋሚ፡ ፀርቅ፡ አሉ፡ አሙንቱ፡ ዘኔቄት፡
ገሮ፡ ይትበህሉ፡

Fol.26v–27: Chronographic list of kings from Adam until Iyo'as (1755–69).

Incipit: ወግ፡ ዘነገሥታት፡ አምአዳም፡ አስከ፡
ልደተ፡ ኖሃ፡

CONCLUSION

The photographs of the DAE taken in 1906 show two complementary aspects of the written history of Aksum. The *Golden Gospels*, luxurious manuscripts keeping the archives of the church together with the sacred text and linked with the memories – true or reconstructed – of their donors, are carried in front of the religious procession, showing the power of the Gospel, of course, but also recalling the

prestigious history and political position of the church. Indeed, at least one of the two *Golden Gospels* of Aksum is a cartulary of the royal charters promulgated in favour of the northern religious institutions, via Aksum. Aksum has been, at least until Fasilädäs, a privileged political center who acted as an intermediary between northern institutions and the royal court. The governors, princes and kings of the 19th century have followed the same administrative policy, with more or less success. Whatever was the knowledge that the different persons attending the ceremonies in Aksum had of this peculiar symbolic and political dimension of the *Golden Gospels*, the manuscripts still bear the written charters that used to express the power of Aksum in regard to the royal court and to the northern regions.

Thereafter, a compilation narrates the glory of Aksum. We can call it *Chronicle of Aksum*, but *Glory of Aksum* would also be an appropriate name. If many copies are known, the one photographed by v. Lüpke has the advantage that it can be dated (*a.q.* 1906) and localised (Aksum Şeyon). It is copied after a *Kebrä Nägäšt* (*Glory of Kings*), as well as most of the other known copies of this compilation. And, as we have seen here, the first documents of the *Chronicle of Aksum* are directly linked with the mythology of Solomon and his son Ebn El-Hakim, with the coming of the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia and with the coronation and anointment of the king of Israel in Ethiopia.

This compilation is made of heterogeneous texts, with no clear chronological order, and the heterogeneity of the information produces contradictions. Nonetheless, this long sequence of documents is the result of choices and shall be understood as a single – or at least a cumulative – historiographical project.

Some sequences can be deciphered, leading to an understanding of the narrative intent that links those documents. The first movement (fol.1–5v) focuses on the consecration and anointment of the kings in Aksum, which finds its legitimacy in the narrative of the *Kebrä Nägäšt*, when King Solomon anoints his son Ebn El-Hakim in Jerusalem and transfers to him the kingship over Israel. Going along with this biblical filiation, various lists of kings connect the Ethiopian kings to their biblical background and establish a periodisation of the Ethiopian past: from the Bible to the Aksumite kingdom, then to the Zagwé period followed by the restoration of the house of

David thanks to the reign of Yekuno Amlak (1270–85). These lists give the symbolic setting of the main historical event of this first section of the compilation: the re-establishment of the consecration and anointment ceremony in Aksum by Zār'ä Ya'eqob (1434–68) and its reestablishment by King Šāršä Dengel (1560–97).

A second sequence (fol. 5v–8) deals with land tenure as attributed to the church of Aksum Šeyon by royal donations. The legendary anchor of the first and main *gult*, instituting Abreha and Ašbehä as the first royal grantors of the land tenure of the church, shows that it has been a necessity to link the obvious remnants of the past and thus to ensure the preeminence of Aksum upon any other place in Ethiopia. Vestiges of the glorious past are speaking, they are the witnesses of a time when Aksum was a city of victorious kings. Nevertheless, this second section is also pragmatic and explains how the *gultat* of Aksum have to contribute to taxes, royal commemorations and religious feasts.

A third movement (fol. 8–15) returns to history and is clearly attributed to King Šāršä Dengel. It is composed of lists of kings – Christian as well as Muslims – and patriarchs, and inserts the history of Aksum in a broader framework. The opening of Ethiopian historiography to “Universal Histories” – translated from Arabic – as well as the confrontation of the Ethiopian Christian kingdoms to the Ottoman and the European worlds during the 16th century mark the opening up of Ethiopian historiography to the wider world and might have contributed to this new way of writing and formalising history. The compilation as the conventional and official way of writing history seems to have appeared during Šāršä Dengel's time, for his chronicle would be the first one to incorporate, and even to create, the history of his predecessors.⁴⁹ The main document of the third movement of this compilation is the renewal of the laws (*hegg*) of Aksum and of its protocolar rules, promulgated by Šāršä Dengel, whose main reference always remain the policy of King Zār'ä Ya'eqob.

A fourth movement (fol. 15v–18v) mentions the flight of the Ark of the Covenant from Aksum during the Roman catholic reign of Susenyos (ca. 1615), the rebuilding of the church during Fasilädäs' reign (1655) and the renewal of laws, rules, charges and *gult* donations by

King Iyasu (1687) before his failed attempt to be anointed in Aksum.

Ending the compilation, a version of the *Short Chronicles* (fol. 19–27) has been added. It goes until the 4th year of Fasilädäs reign and the building of Gondär, as if the birth of the new capital of the monarchy was the end of the Aksumite history.

Eventually, Aksum is the main character of this compilation. The historiographical project behind it is to place Aksum at the centre of a “national history”.

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CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium

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⁴⁹ Kropp 1988.

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