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Memory and Oblivion in the History of Gong Monastery (1670–1750): The Paradoxes of *Qəbat* Historiography*

ANAÏS WION

Abstract

At the end of the seventeenth century, the history of Gong monastery, in Goḡgam, was complex and traumatic because its abbot, Ṭäbdän Dəngəl, head of the *Qəbat* movement during Yoḡannəs' reign (r 1667–1682), rebelled against King Iyasu (r 1682–1706), who favoured the Däbrä Libanos monastic network and declared *Qəbat* a heresy. The civil war lasted until Ṭäbdän and his followers were excommunicated and banished, in 1687. Nonetheless, a few decades later, Gong was richly endowed by the royal power and its violent and rebellious past seemed to be forgotten. How did a rebellious institution come back to the foreground of the political and religious scene a few decades later? What had to be altered or forgotten in this violent history? How did written documents, oral history and iconographic sources, not forgetting the rites and the physical features of the landscape, enter into this reimagining of the past? The memory has been lost of Ṭäbdän Dəngəl, the abbot of Gong who sowed dissension within the *Qəbat* movement, opposed his own monks, and led an uprising against the king. New narratives, such as a dying bishop travelling miraculously to Gong and the 'late' invention of a neutral founding father, helped to attract the faithful and pilgrims, and recalled the institution's long history and close relationships with major political and religious authorities. In this case study, oral history will be shown to forge stories and portray characters in ways that obstruct access to the 'historical truth'.

Introduction

Gong, a monastery in Goḡgam, assumed leadership of the *Qəbat* movement as early as 1620, the very beginning of the theological and political controversy between *Qəbat* (Uunctionism) and *Täwəḡədo* (Unionism). In another article,¹ I discuss the case of Ləbsä Krəstos, abbot of Gong during King Susənyos's reign (r 1607–1632). This powerful man is now remembered in Gong only through the presence of a giant sycamore bearing his name. This '*Abba* Ləbso' tree

* I wish to thank Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie (Addis Ababa University) for his challenging comments during the preparation of this contribution, and Noal Mellott for revising the English.

¹ Wion 2017.

stands where the first church in Gongǎ was supposedly founded, on the edge of the cliff, while the present-day church is located a few hundred meters below. Of the glorious, or inglorious, past of *Abba Ləbsä Krəstos*, nothing remains in the memory of the Gongǎ monastic community. That he was a fiery leader of the *Qəbat* movement at the first major council held in 1621, that the Jesuits called him their best Catholic convert, that the patriarch of Alexandria wrote to him after his return to the Alexandrian faith in 1632, that King Fasilädäs sentenced him to death, and that he died in jail years after the sentence was passed... Nothing of all this has been retained in Gongǎ's memory.

But this is not the only case of oblivion. At the end of the seventeenth century, Gongǎ's history was complex and traumatic, mainly because one of its abbots, *Ṭäbdän Dəngəl*, head of the *Qəbat* movement during *Yohānnəs'* reign (r 1667–1682), started a rebellion against King *Iyasu* (r 1682–1706), who favoured the *Däbrä Libanos* monastic network and declared *Qəbat* a heresy. This civil war lasted until *Ṭäbdän* and his followers were excommunicated and banished, in 1687.

The present study examines the political and religious history of Gongǎ monastery, in order to investigate the process whereby this community reinvented its history in the mid-eighteenth century.² At that time, King *Iyasu II* (r 1730–1755) co-opted the *Qəbat* movement, successfully carrying out the policy conducted by his predecessors since King *Tewoflos* (r 1708–1711). The court had richly endowed *Qəbat* and *Ewosṭatean* institutions. How did a rebellious institution—rebellious not for being *Qəbat* but for having led an uprising against the king—come back into the foreground of the political and religious scene a few decades later? What had to be altered or forgotten in this violent history? How did written documents, oral history and iconographic sources, not forgetting rites and the physical features of the landscape, enter into this reimagining of the past? Approaching chronology in retrospect, let us start by describing Gongǎ's mid-eighteenth-century 'heroes' to then take a look at how they were used to 'clean the past' of scandalous references.

Inventing a Founding Father: A Necessity in the Mid-Eighteenth Century

When asked about its history today, the Gongǎ community, lay and cleric, start by referring to *Gərma Šəllus*. The memory of this history, voiced through oral tradition, is very vivid.³ *Gərma Šəllus* had a vision of the Vir-

2 For a general account of the history of Gongǎ, see 'Gongǎ Tewodros', *EAE*, II (2005), 848a–b (A. Wion).

3 My informants were *Afä məmbər* *Bərhanu Šəfärraw*, *Ato Kasahun Mängəstu* and *Mərigeta Haymanot*, recorded in Gongǎ in 2004 by Anaïs Wion, Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie, and Claire Bosc-Tiessé.

gin *Mary* who asked him to move the church down from its location up on the cliff. He prayed for forty days (or forty years). A few boulders talked, saying '*qəddus, qəddus*' ('holy, holy'). He followed them to the place and built the church that still stands there, its *tabot* dedicated to the Pact of the Covenant. These huge, round boulders can still be seen at the site and at a nearby place called *dəmsä dəngay* ('the sound of stones') in remembrance of this story. The lower part of a nineteenth-century banner dedicated to Saint *Tewodros* depicts *Abunä Ewosṭatewos* preaching to his disciples and *Abunä Gərma Šəllus* with one of these stones. A nearby source of water with healing powers is named *qəddusan* ('holy men') because *Gərma Šəllus* and his disciples are said to have stopped and prayed there, making the water holy. It is still used as *šəbäl* (holy water). The landscape thus serves as evidence and a reminder of the history of the church's refoundation.

Oral tradition, which has not erased the past, definitely places the first church on top of the cliff, where the giant sycamore called '*Abba Ləbso*' now stands. As shown in my previous article, this church was linked with *Abba Ləbsä Krəstos*, the powerful abbot of Gongǎ sentenced to death by King *Fasilädäs*, whose *damnatio memoriae* has left nothing but this tree in Gongǎ's collective memory. The present-day church below the cliff is the one founded by *Abunä Gərma Šəllus*, who is identified as the 'first' founder of Gongǎ. How to resolve this apparent contradiction? The *afä məmbər* told us that the first church was built during the era of the Old Testament, at the time of *Liqä kabənat Azaryas*,⁴ whereas the new church was built during the era of the New Testament, under the reign of *Yəkunno Amlak*, the founder of the so-called *Solomonid* dynasty in 1270. This clever usage of the 'double alliance', a fundamental theological tenet of the Ethiopian Church,⁵ can convince only those who are already persuaded.⁶

4 According to the *Kəbrä nəgəst*, *Liqä kabənat Azaryas* was the high priest of the Temple in Jerusalem who came to Ethiopia with the son of the Queen *Makədda* and King *Solomon*, along with the Ark of the Covenant.

5 On the 'double alliance', see *Rodinson 1964*; *Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar 2001*; *Fritsch 2014*.

6 A list written in the last blank folia of a psalter in Gongǎ (*Goḡgam*, *Gongǎ Tewodros*, Authority for Research and Conservation of the Cultural Heritage (= ARCCCH), G-IV-330) might have inspired this oral tradition, or the reverse, since feedback passes in both directions. This chronology lists Ethiopian kings from *Arwe*, the mythical serpent-king, up to *Minas* (r 1559–1563). It is a type A list of kings according to *Conti Rossini's* classification (*Conti Rossini 1909*). The palaeography is modern (very likely from the twentieth century), even though the psalter is a beautiful early *Gondarine* work. The peculiarity of this copy is that *Ellä Abrəha* is credited with the construction of both *Aksum* and '*Galila Dəbrä Ṭəbāb* which is in the land (*madr*) of *Qolala*'. *Galila Dəbrä Ṭəbāb* is one of the names of Gongǎ monastery. Further down



Fig. 1 ‘How the stone followed *Abunä Gərma Šəllus, mämbər* of faith’ (banner, reference number ARCCH G-III-39). Photo Anais Wion (2004).

Should we simply accept the fact that *Abunä Gərma Šəllus* is considered to be the founding father of the monastery since time immemorial? No. Not even the clergy and scholars in Gongḡ are persuaded of this. There is clear evidence that the ‘construction’ of the memory of this *abunä* is of rather recent date.

Gəʿəz Literacy Meets Amharic Orality: The Commemoration of Gərma Šəllus in the *Sənkəssar*

A commemoration of the death of Gərma Šəllus on 10 Mäskäräm is found in the *Sənkəssar*.⁷ In the upper margin of this seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manuscript, we read

ወበዛቲ፡ ዕለት፡ አዕረፈ፡ አቡነ፡ ግርማ፡ ሥሉስ፡ መምህረ፡ አንቱ [sic]፡ ምኒት፡ ዘውእቱ፡ ጎንጅ፡ ወስርወ፡ ልደቱሂ፡ ናይድእክሙ፡ ወሀሎ፡ ጅ፡ ብእሲ፡ ሥዩመ፡ ወለቃ፡ ዘስሙ፡ አብራክ፡ ድንግል፡ ወወለደ፡ ወልደ፡ ወሰመ

the list, where King Yəkunno Amlak is mentioned, the scribe added ‘and this when Däbrä Ṭəbäb became a monastery (*gädäm*)’.

⁷ Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMLL), 8523; ARCCH G-IV-334, fols 15v–16r.

ዮ፡ ነገደ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወሠናይ፡ አርአያሁ፡ ወኩሉ፡ ዘርእዮ፡ ያፈቅሮ፡ ወአስተዋደይዎ፡ ሰብእ፡ ቀናዕያን፡ ኅበ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ሰይፈ፡ አርአድ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብሉ፡ ናሁ፡ ተፍህሮ [sic]፡ መንግሥት፡ ለነገደ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወውእቱኒ፡ የኃሥሳ፡ ወበእንተዝ፡ ጸልአ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ወአጥፍአ፡ ክልኤሆን፡ አዕይንቲሁ፡ ወአሜሃ፡ ጸልመ፡ ዓለም፡ ጀዕለታተ፡ ወጠየቀ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ምክንያቶ፡ ለጸልመት፡ ወይቤልዎ፡ ሰብእ፡ ማእምራን፡ በእንተ፡ ዘአጥፋዕክ፡ አዕይንቲሁ፡ ለነገደ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወጸውአ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ ኅድግ፡ ሊተ፡ አበሳየ፡ አነሂ፡ ወሀብኩክ፡ ወለተየ፡ ዘስማ፡ ትኩና፡ ለጸዮን፡ ወአውሰባ፡ ወመመያ፡ ተኩልኝ፡ በእንተ፡ ጥፍአተ፡ አዕይንቲሁ፡ ወወለደሙ፡ እምኔሃ፡ ለአቡነ፡ ግርማ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ወአስበ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ወለጸጌ፡ ማርያም፡ ወለማዕድት፡ ወቦ፡ ካልአን፡ ወአመ፡ ተወልደ፡ ሕጻን፡ ግርማ፡ ሥሉስ፡ ኮነ፡ ግዙረ፡ ወመስቀል፡ ውስተ፡ እዴሁ፡ ወማዕተብ፡ ውስተ፡ ክሳዴ፡ ወልህቀ፡ በጥበብ፡ ወምክር፡ ወተምህረ፡ ሕገ፡ ቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ወተሠይመ፡ መምህረ፡ እንዘ፡ ሀሎ፡ ጎንጅ፡ በምድረ፡ ቅንክት፡⁸ ፲ዓመተ፡ ወእምድኅረዝ፡ ኮነ፡ ስደት፡ ወመጽአ፡ ምስለ፡ ህዝቡ፡ ወካህናቲሁ፡ ወሐነጸ፡ ለዛቲ፡ ደብረ፡ ሰማዕት፡ በጸም፡ ወበጸሎት፡ ወሐነጸ፡ ብዙኅነ፡ አብያተ፡ ክርስቲያናት፡ ወነበረ፡ ጅዓመተ፡ በዛቲ፡ ምኔት፡ ወአቀቦሙ፡ ለአባግአ፡ መርዔቱ፡ በፍቅር፡ ወበሰላም፡ ወአዕረፈ፡ በከመ፡ ዛቲ፡ ዕለት፡ ጸሎቱ፡ ወበረከቱ፡ የሃሎ፡ ምስለ፡ ፍቁሩ፡ ኪዳነ፡ ማርያም፡ ወምስለ፡ ፍቅርቱ፡ ወለተ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወምስለ፡ ኩሎ፡ ውሉዱ፡ ለዓለመ፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን ።⁹

(And on this day [10 Mäskäräm] died *Abunä Gərma Šəllus, mämbər* of this monastery (*mānet*) [in] Gongḡ. And we shall let you know the origin of his birth. There was a man, *šəyyum* of Wäläqqa, whose name was Abrakä Dəngəl. He had a son named Nägädä Iyäsus of handsome appearance. All those who saw him loved him. But some jealous people accused him in front of King Sayfä Arʿad, saying: ‘This Nägädä Iyäsus is a threat to the kingdom. He must be interrogated because of his hatred of the king.’ His two eyes were removed, and the world was dark for 100 days. The king asked for the reason for this darkness. And the learned ones answered him that it was because Nägädä Iyäsus had had his eyes removed. So the king made him come and said ‘Forgive my crime, and I will give you my daughter whose name is Təkunna lä-Şəyon.’ He married her and called her Täkullä nñä [‘compensate me’] because of the loss of his eyes. And thereafter they had children: *Abunä Gərma Šəllus*, *Asbä Krəstos* and *Şəge Maryam* and *Maʿədöt*, and others. And when Gərma Šəllus was born, he was [already] circumcised and had a cross in his hand and a baptismal

⁸ The original word was erased and ‘*qənkət*’ added in the margin.
⁹ The text is followed by a poem with five verses praising Mary and Gərma Šəllus, and perhaps alluding to Ləbsä Krəstos.

lace around his neck. And he grew in wisdom, the spirit of deliberation and the teaching of Church law. He was appointed *māmbər* when G^wäng was in the land of Qənkət [for] ten years and then he was exiled. He arrived with his people and his clergy, and he built this church of the martyrs fasting and praying. And he built several churches. And he stayed twenty years in this monastery and was the keeper of his flock with love and peace. He died this day. May his prayer and benediction be with his beloved Kidanä Maryam and his beloved Wälättä Iyäsus and with their children,¹⁰ forever and ever, amen.)¹¹

The local community is familiar with this text since it is read every year during the commemoration for Gərma Šəllus. It is written in Gəʿəz, a liturgical language not mastered by those who have not attended a religious school. The oral tradition has retained only the most marvellous events. In common with the text, it mentions the birth with miraculous signs: the newborn child, already circumcised, with a baptismal lace around his neck and a cross in his hand. But the oral tradition has kept none of the information about Gərma Šəllus's regional and social background, perhaps because it is too specific and not directly comprehensible. As we shall see, the significance of these details was not at all clear to the scribe and/or bistoriographer who wrote the text.

This text was intended to provide information on Gərma Šəllus's family origins. He came from an aristocratic family, being the son of the 'šəyyum of Wäläqä, whose name was Abrakä Dəngəl'. Abrakä Dəngəl, known from other sources, ruled over Wäläqä (an area bordering Goğğam on the south-eastern shore of the Abbay) during the seventeenth century. The *Chronicle of Iyasu II* mentions him for his loyalty to Fašilädäs (r 1632–1667),¹² and numerous genealogies of Wäläqä cite him.¹³ Upon comparing these genealogies with the small text in the Gongǧ *Sənkəssar*, several contradictions and chronological aberrations appear. Firstly, Nəgädä Iyäsus, the famous 'aqqabe sä'at at the start of the sixteenth century, was probably a forefather of Abrakä Dəngəl but not his son. He had, indeed, links with Wäläqä since one of his sons was *nəgəs* there.¹⁴ Another anomaly: none of the persons

10 They were not the initial sponsors of the manuscript. Their names were copied over erasures everywhere in the main part of the manuscript, which very likely dates back to the early Gondarine period.

11 Translation my own.

12 Guidi 1910, 76; Guidi 1912, 81.

13 See Kropp 1989 and Wion 2012.

14 According to the autobiography of Ras Səməʿon, his brother and himself were sons of Nəgädä Iyäsus, see Getatchew Haile 2005.

mentioned in the text were contemporaneous with the fourteenth-century king, Säyfä Arʿad. The genealogy of Wäläqä mentions that the daughter of *Wäläqä nəgəs* Abrako gave birth to a girl named Takula, whereas another daughter of Abrako gave birth to Tānayto who gave birth to *Abeto* Gərma Iyäsus.¹⁵ This Gərma Iyäsus would have lived at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

The commemoration of Gərma Šəllus is based on a vague knowledge of the Wäläqä genealogies. What was probably important for Gongǧ monastery was not the accuracy of the text but the writing of a hagiography, wherein the monk recalls the proximity to royal and regional power-holders. This short commemorative text is a case of what we might describe as 'name-dropping'—mentioning important persons in order to legitimate what is being said.

This text contains an interesting piece of information: Gongǧ church was first founded in a place named Qənkət, which might be in Wäläqä, and then migrated toward the present-day location in Goğğam. The name Qənkət crops up in other accounts too.

Gərma Šəllus's Place in an Ewošətean Monastic Genealogy: An Invention in a Formalistic Tradition

Extended genealogies of the Ewošətean monastic house trace the spiritual filiation from Saint Antonios to Ewošətewos and his disciples, and then on to their disciples. The two main lines run from Absadi and from Gäbrä Iyäsus, whose spiritual sons extended the house and/or evangelized, mainly in Wäläqä, Šäwa, Dämbəya and Goğğam. Minor lines run through Märqorewos and Bäkimos, whose disciples stayed in northern areas (Təgray and Eritrea). G. Lusini has edited and translated three of these extended genealogies.¹⁶ Similarities between these different versions prove that these documents are highly formalistic. Since all known genealogies stop with seventeenth-century monks at the latest, we can guess that they might have been written as early as the second half of the seventeenth century, but more probably that they accompany the return to favour of the *Qəbat* party after 1708.

As an important Ewošətean church, Gongǧ has such a genealogy.¹⁷ Despite its lacunae, what remains is similar to the genealogy published by Lusini and preserved in manuscript Conti Rossini 88.¹⁸ But there is a striking

15 Kropp 1989, 194.

16 Lusini 2004.

17 This folium is now bound in *Gädlä Ewošətewos* (EMML 8577, ARCCCH G-IV-364), fol. 121rv. The palaeography of the genealogy is rough and hard to date.

18 Ms Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Fondo Conti Rossini, 88.

ing difference. After the genealogical line of Absadi, and before that of Gäbrä Iyäsus, an independent line has been added: 'Abba Täklä Šällase of Däbäb is the spiritual father (literally *wälädo*) of Sənä Dəngəl of Qənk^wat; and Sənä Dəngəl is the spiritual father of Gərma Šəllus'. Given the lacunae in this genealogy (in particular the beginning is missing), we cannot know whether Täklä Šällase might also have been added as one of Ewostatewos' first disciples. It would have been a bold act to 'invent' an unknown disciple, but it would also be the only way to attach this orphan line to the main father. What is striking is that this anomalous 'invention' also crops up in a different form in a genealogy from *Abba* 'Ašrat's monastery, another important Ewostatean center in Goğgam. This genealogy also adds a line for *Abba* Täklä Šällase, in between the end of the Absadi line and the beginning of the Gäbrä Iyäsus one: 'Abba Täklä Šällase gave birth to *Abba* Näftalem of Qəng^wat where Goğ [sic] is'. This addition is followed by seven other unknown disciples of Täklä Šällase.¹⁹ There are no other developments of this genealogical line. Although the names differ, we recognize a common pattern with the addenda in Gong's genealogy, but the narrative links with this pattern might have differed slightly. What is important is that it confirms that a place named Qəng^wat (Qənk^wat) was associated with Gong at some point.

The mention of Qənk^wat as the monastery of Gərma Šəllus' spiritual father brings to mind that of Qənkət in the *Sənkəssar* as the place from which Gərma Šəllus came. Since Qənkət was added over an erasure with a different spelling, we cannot be sure that Qənkət and Qənk^wat come from independent sources. One might be the source of the other, the genealogy probably being the source of the *Sənkəssar* note. Whatever the case, Däbäb and Qənk^wat have not yet been identified.²⁰

Gərma Šəllus as the Grantor of Land to Gong: A Retrospective Account in a Late Amharic Document

An Amharic land document starts with the following words: 'Here is the letter (*däbdäbe*) of *Abunä* Gərma Šəllus by which he gave to Däbrä Tewodros of Gong the *säbäka* of Wäläqe Giyorgis, Abälä Maryam Abbo and the *tabot* of Šällase.'²¹ The document lists the taxes to be contributed by

19 I wish to thank Margaux Herman for sharing this unpublished, very original genealogy with me.

20 As I observed during a recent field-trip to Wäläqa, the Christian community has forgotten about these two places. I have conducted systematic enquiries in order to locate these places in the area of Wägäde but informants could not recall them.

21 In the *Senodos*, MS EMMI 8537, accessed through the D. Crummey collection, photos no. 89.V.12–13. This collection is accessible at the University Library of the Uni-

each of these parishes to Gong. It should be mentioned that the main tributary church of Gong is called Wäläqe, after the province of Wäläqa—yet another reminder of the link between the church and that province. Since Gong was dedicated to Saint Tewodros after King Tewodros (r 1855–1868) looted the monastery, this document obviously dates from the second half of the nineteenth century at the earliest. It provides evidence of the abiding importance of this tradition to the monastery. Since Gərma Šəllus is identified as the founding father, he must have granted land to the monastery.

None of the three sources mentioned is very old. Since *Abunä* Gərma Šəllus is unattested in Ethiopian sources in general and in Ewostatean sources in particular, when was this tradition created or, at least, set down in writing? And why? What were the reasons for 'inventing' an ancient and obscure—if not imaginary—founding father?

A First Clue: Gərma Šəllus, a Protective Aura after 1730 for the Real Abbot of Gong

Gərma Šəllus is associated with *Abba* Šewa Dəngəl in two other sources created by and for Gong. The two men are depicted together inside the church, on the beautiful painting on the western wall of the *mäqdäs* (Fig. 2). Furthermore, a long series of poems (two distinct collections each with twenty-seven *sälam*) is dedicated to both of them.²² Obviously, Šewa Dəngəl, abbot of Gong during or just before the reign of Iyasu II, wanted to be associated with the memory of Gərma Šəllus, and was willing to invest in playing up this association. He was very likely a principal sponsor of the paintings that, in pure Second Gondarine style, adorned the *mäqdäs*, of which only those on the western wall have survived.²³ Šewa Dəngəl and Gərma Šəllus are depicted together on the left part of the wall, under a depiction of Saint Tewodros riding a horse, armed with the divine *dextra* and slaying enemies. The name of the lay do-

versity of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (see Urbana, IL, University of Illinois Archives, DCC Masters 2006–, Sub-Series 3: Ethiopian Land Records (Prof. Don Crummey), 2009) and at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Abäba.

22 MS ARCCG G-IV-346. These poems contain no historical information.

23 The upper part of the western wall depicts the life of Christ from the Annunciation to the Passion. The middle part depicts, on the left side, Saints Tewodros and George riding horses and, on the right side of the door, the Virgin with Child (to whom Ya'əqob Trəngo is praying) and the Crucifixion. The lower part portrays *Blatta* Wäsän, Šewa Dəngəl, Gərma Šəllus and a male donor, the Pact of the Covenant with a female donor, and a monk. On the right are seven figures, among them *Mämbər* Gäbrä Yoħannəs, *Fitawwari* Gäbrä Mika'el, and *Abunä* Ewostatewos teaching his disciples while in exile. The door-frame is adorned with small figurative scenes in white and dark blue in imitation of the Dutch tiles decorating the royal foundations of Narga and Q^wəsq^wam (see Bosc-Tiessé and Wion 2005, 101–105).

nor prostrate at their feet is not easily deciphered (Gäbrä Giyorgis?). Despite the white stroke separating the scene, Gərma Šəllus and Šewa Dəngəl are part of the iconographic narrative of the Pact of the Covenant. They face the Virgin Mary and Jesus. The woman prostrate at the feet of Mother and Child was probably the wife of the high-ranking person prostrate before Šewa Dəngəl. Another figure, *Blatta Wäsän*, is depicted on the left of the wall, above Gərma Šəllus and Šewa Dəngəl.



Fig. 2 Wall-painting portraying *Abba Gərma Šəllus* and *Abba Šewa Dəngəl*, abbot of Gong c.1730 (western wall, church of Gong Tewodros, Goğgam). Photo Anaïs Wion (2004).

Šewa Dəngəl is not unknown. He is mentioned at the beginning of the *Chronicle of Iyasu II*, in the genealogy of eminent *Qəbat* scholars and monastic leaders. This chronicle clearly indicates that the reign of the new king and of his mother, Məntəwwabb, was placed under the patronage of the Ewostəatean monastic house and the *Qəbat* movement.

The people of Goğgam and Q^wara take part in this faith, because they were taught by the sons of *Abunä Ewostəatewos*. [...] *Abba Tətamqä Mädhən* from the convent of Gašola, Gažege and Wagada;²⁴ *Abba*

²⁴ Tətamqä Mädhən was a major monastic leader during Yoħannəs' reign. Taddesse Tamrat, while working on the Agäw, discovered a hagiography of Tətamqä Mädhən in Mätakkäl. According to this still unpublished *gädl*, Tətamqä Mädhən was sent by

Yoħannəs of Däbrä Šəlalo,²⁵ *Abba Šewa Dəngəl*, abbot of Däbrä Gong. These are the persons who taught this Orthodox faith to the inhabitants of Goğgam and Q^wara.²⁶

At the beginning of Məntəwwab's regency, Šewa Dəngəl of Gong was considered to be a major *Qəbat* leader. It is hard to establish the exact dates of his activities, but we might assume that he was in charge of the monastery during the reign of Iyasu II. During the reign of Məntəwwab and Iyasu II, Gong was, once again, closely associated with royal power, and profited from the royal family's endowments. When Məntəwwab founded Narga Šəllase, Gong was the monastery that benefitted the most from the newly opened positions and lands: eighteen of its clergy received tenure from Narga,²⁷ followed by Šəlalo with eight. Nor should we forget to mention the outstanding career of *Abba Tewodros* of Šəlalo, sent in 1744 to Egypt to ask the Alexandrian patriarch for a new metropolitan. Tewodros was, in 1745, *səhəfe tə'əzaz* (royal chronicler) and *aläqa* of the Gondärine church of Ĥamärä Noħ.²⁸ As chronicler, he might have been the person who added the reference to the abbots of Šəlalo and Gong! In 1750, he was appointed to head a newly founded church in Q^wəsq^wam, a very significant position.²⁹

Given all this, we can formulate the hypothesis that the creation of the 'history' or 'commemoration' of *Abunä Gərma Šəllus* as founding father of Gong could date back to the time of Šewa Dəngəl. A new historiographical

the king to areas west of Goğgam and Tana to evangelize the Gumuz and the Agäw, and he died in 1678 (Taddesse Tamrat 1988, 14–17). He was also mentioned, but indirectly, in the *Chronicle of Yoħannəs* as '*Abba Tətamqə mənet* of Gažige *məmhər* of numerous brothers' (Guidi 1903a, 37; Guidi 1903b, 38). Entrusted by the king to promote the Orthodox faith, he was sent to evangelize a region where the king fought several battles. According to one genealogy of the Ewostəatean house, he was the spiritual son of Arsanyos of Qoma. Arsanyos was the father confessor of Queen Wäld Šä'ala, the wife of King Susanyos who founded the monastery of Qoma Fasilädäs in Bägemdär (Lusini 2004, 267; Wion 2012). Even if associated with Qoma in the genealogies, Arsanyos was not the first abbot of this monastery, since Färe Mäsqäl is clearly identified as the first.

²⁵ Šəlalo and Gong have been closely associated, sometimes even considered to be a single institution. *Abba Yoħannəs* is depicted along with Ləbsä Krəstos on a visual spiritual genealogy of the Ewostəatean monastic house (cf. Wion 2017). The icon is posted on the website of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, which owns it: <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2006.98> (consulted on 19 June 2014). *Abba Yoħannəs* of Šəlalo would have had his own *gädl* written, according to the list established by Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1975, 98.

²⁶ Guidi 1910, 17; Guidi 1912, 16.

²⁷ Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 242–243.

²⁸ Guidi 1910, 117; Guidi 1912, 127.

²⁹ Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 242–243.

moment in the life of Gongḡ monastery was contrived during the first half of the eighteenth century.

But does this imply that Gərma Šəllus was not, even earlier, considered to be Gongḡ's founding father? The *forma vulgata* of Ewostatean genealogies only mentions Aron, a disciple in the Absadi line, as abbot of Gongḡ six or seven generations after Ewostatewos.³⁰ Each monastery is mentioned once in association with the man who must have been the founder, or the first abbot. Accordingly, Aron would have founded Gongḡ in the mid-fifteenth or early sixteenth century. In this *forma vulgata*, as previously pointed out, a line has been added in Gongḡ for Gərma Šəllus,³¹ not originally associated with Gongḡ. In other words, it was, at some point, necessary to invent a new past for Gongḡ monastery but without erasing the old. Did something have to be hidden or forgotten? What happened prior to this period? Let us examine the previous generation of leaders in Gongḡ.

Abba Tābdän Dəngəl (1680s): From Failure to Oblivion

Though no longer remembered in Gongḡ, the name of a very famous abbot crops up in several official written sources. *Abba Tābdän Dəngəl* was a leader of the *Qəbat* party at the end of King Yoḥannəs's reign (r 1667–1682),³² a king who tried, at least until the last year of his rule, to maintain a balance between *Qəbat* and *Təwəhədo*. A synod was held in 1679 with the people of Lasta, a third party to this religious, political, and regional game of power, as shown by Kindeneh Endeg's interpretation of a new source (*Gädlä Estənfəsä Krəstos*) and his fresh analysis of the *Royal Chronicles* and of the *Gädlä Iyasu*.³³ Striking a balance of power between the pro-Ewostatean and pro-Däbrä Libanos monastic movements has been considered to be typical of politics during the Gondärine period. Kindeneh Endeg's research tends to prove that such was not the case: a third party challenged this balance of power; and persecutions, oppression and violence were rife. The Däbrä Libanos house defended the unionist interpretation, in line with the *yäsägga ləgḡ* doctrine, while the Lasta and Təgray people adhered to the *karra* doctrine.

The account of the 1679 synod in the *Royal Chronicles* starts with the credo of the clergy of Lasta, who sent a letter to King Yoḥannəs stating, 'If

30 Six generations reported in MS Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Fondo Conti Rossini, 125 in Lusini 2004; and MS EMMML 8577 of Gongḡ. Seven generations reported in MS Rome, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Fondo Conti Rossini, 88, in Lusini 2004.

31 Ms EMMML 8577 of Gongḡ.

32 Guidi 1903a, 41–42; Guidi 1903b, 41–43.

33 Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie 2013.

you reject the people of your kingdom who say that Christ was glorified by the Holy Spirit, be our king; and we will be your slaves and servants.'³⁴ The clergy, both *Qəbat* and *Təwəhədo*, opposed this call, replying, 'The Father glorified the Son, Christ, by the glory of his essence though the anointment with the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary.'³⁵ The main speaker at this council was 'Aqqabe sä'at Q^wästantinos. Monks were allowed to speak only at the end of the synod. The ones who took the floor were 'Abba Tābdän, *māmhər* of Gongḡ, *Abba* Atnatewos who brought the metropolitan from Egypt, and *Abba* Ədä Krəstos, *liqä mänəkəsat zä-əččäge*'.³⁶ There was strong agreement at the court among prominent prelates, whether from the Ewostatewos or the Däbrä Libanos houses, about what constituted the Orthodox faith. They all stood together against the *karra* doctrine.

One year later, the unionist question was debated under the spiritual and theological control of *Qəbat* clerics such as Qozmos, Giyorgis (the spiritual son of Yoḥannəs from Däbrä Šəmmuna), and Akalä Məsqäl from Gongḡ. A dispute between *Abba* Tābdä Krəstos (*sic*), *māmhər* of Gongḡ, and *Əččäge* Sägga Krəstos would have turned into a fight had the king not risen from his throne to separate the two. Zä'iyäsus, another *Qəbat* leader, tried to relieve tension by quoting from the Gospel (Matt. 18:16). This synod was the last one in Yoḥannəs' reign that demonstrated the power, if not supremacy, of the *Qəbat* party. The next synod, in 1682, seems to have concluded in favour of Däbrä Libanos, but the *Chronicle of Yoḥannəs* ends abruptly. Meanwhile, the kingdom was endangered by the hostility between Yoḥannəs and his son, the future King Iyasu. The end of the *Chronicle of Yoḥannəs* was probably written under the control of the scriptorium of Iyasu after the latter had taken the throne.³⁷

Once on the throne, Iyasu conducted a policy favourable to the Däbrä Libanos party and against the two other religious factions. The *Qəbat* party was losing its pre-eminence. One of its leaders, Zä'iyäsus, was imprisoned. Whenever a synod was convened, *Qəbat* monks were excommunicated: in 1682, immediately after Iyasu took the throne, as well as in 1684, when monks from Gažge, the community founded by Tātəmqa Mädhən, called for the release of Zä'iyäsus.³⁸ The *Chronicle of Iyasu I* goes on to describe

34 ዝሂሊ ፡ አንቲታ ፡ እመ ፡ አገደገመ ፡ ለሕዝብ ፡ መንግሥትክ ፡ ብሂሎቶሙ ፡ ከብረ ፡ በመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ከኅኅ ፡ አንተ ፡ ንጉሠ ፡ ወንጌላ ፡ ንከውኅክ ፡ አግብርተ ፡ ወንትቀንደ ፡ ለክ ። (Guidi 1903a, 40, Guidi 1903b, 41.)

35 Guidi 1903a, 40, Guidi 1903b, 41.

36 Guidi 1903a, 40–41; Guidi 1903b, 41–42.

37 From 1680 to 1700, Ḥawarya Krəstos was the *šəhəfe tə'əzaz*. Hence there was continuity in the person of the historiographer even if the religious policies conducted by the two kings were radically different. See Toubkis 2005, 137.

38 Guidi 1910, 81; Guidi 1912, 81.

the synods during which monks from the house of Ewoṣtatewos were excluded. There is a certain irony in the fact that, at the beginning of the synod in Gondär in 1685, the king swore upon 'the book of *Abunä Täklä Haymanot*' that he would remain impartial when judging matters of faith.³⁹ The issue was clearly put: anybody refusing the unionist doctrine of Däbrä Libanos and refusing to submit to the king's authority would be punished.⁴⁰

At this time, *Dägğazmač Wäle* and *Ṭäbdän Dəngəl* rose up against the king. Wäle, old at the time but probably rich, was a *Mäčča Oromo*.⁴¹ His companions in revolt were the abbots of Gong and of Enäčelalo, whom we can identify as *Ṭäbdän* and *Qozmos*. Six months later, *Ṭäbdän*, *Wäle*, and their followers were accused of having proclaimed another king and of having appointed all major dignitaries: *əččäge*, *‘aqqabe sä’at*, *bitwäddäd*, *blatten geta*, *grazmač* and *qänñazmač*, *fitawrari*, *šəhəfe tə’əzaz*, *nəgaš* of *Goğgam*, *šəhəfe lam* of *Damot*, and so on. Whether true or not, this accusation—one of the most serious under the pen of the official historiographer—exposes the political dimension of this crisis. They were also accused of invading and taking over *Goğgam*.⁴² In the month of *Ḥədar* 1686, the southern part of *Goğgam* was a battleground where *Ṭäbdän* and *Wäle* were allied with the powerful *G^wudru* and *Ġawi*. According to the *Chronicle of Iyasu I*, the royal armies were victorious. Nonetheless, the king stayed in south *Goğgam* until the month of *Ḥamle* during the rainy season. After his departure, he left behind forces to keep the country under control.⁴³

In *Mäggabit*, *Ṭäbdän*, along with his followers and, somewhat later, *Wäle*, were summoned to the royal camp by envoys bearing the seals of the king and the metropolitan. The king's strategy was to negotiate. The *G^wudru* and *Ġawi* were awarded their original possessions so that they returned in peace to their lands.⁴⁴ *Ṭäbdän*, *Qozmos*, and their followers were summoned to surrender to Orthodoxy, and their goods remained confiscated.⁴⁵ They were asked to come back from the land of the *Oromo*, on the other side of the Ab-

39 Guidi 1910, 90; Guidi 1912, 91.

40 Guidi 1912, 98.

41 'Wale of the race of the *Mäčča* revolted and entered the land of the *Galla*, in his old age abandoning his Christian name, since pride had excited him because of the many fiefs (*g^walt*) he owned' (Guidi 1912, 99).

42 Guidi 1910, 101; Guidi 1912, 104.

43 Guidi added twice 'in Gondär' (Guidi 1912, 105, 108) to make it clear that the king was in Gondär. He translated '*kätäma*' as 'town', but *kätäma* could also refer to the royal camp. I tend to think that the king was in his camp in southern *Goğgam*.

44 ወግጠ፡ ሎሎ፡ ከሎ፡ ዘነበረ፡ ወሰተ፡ እዲሆሎ፡ ወአሰርገወ፡ ከሎ፡ ነገደ፡ ጉድፍ፡ ወጃዊ፡ እለ፡ መጽኑ፡ ምስሌሆሎ፡ ወአስተፋነዎሎ፡ በሰላም፡ ብሔረሎ፡ ። (Guidi 1910, 104; Guidi 1912, 107).

45 Guidi 1910, 107; Guidi 1912, 110.

bay. After Easter, the king went to *Däbrä Šəmmuna*, a nearby *Qəbat* monastery. This visit, though secret, created a stir in the royal camp and among the people of *Goğgam*.

What the *Chronicle of Iyasu I* describes is more than a religious quarrel: it is a civil war. Several conflicts set the various factions against each other. The main issue might have been the redistribution of charges, benefices, and land rights under *Iyasu*'s new policy in favour of the *Däbrä Libanos* house. The chronicle clearly states that the *Däbrä Libanos* clergy refused to share land rights with 'their brothers'.⁴⁶ The 'house of *Abba Ewoṣtatewos*'—represented by *Abba Ṭäbdän*, *Abba Šəlṭanä Krəstos*, *Sawriros (sic)* and *Abba Atnatewos*—claimed that nothing other than theological dogma and the faith were reasons for the conflict. The *Qəbat* party was reacting against the scale of their spoliation.

At the beginning of 1687, *Ṭäbdän* and his followers appear before the king in *Gondär*. The accusation against them was odd: they were charged with the excommunication of *Akalä Krəstos* of *Gong* and *Zä'iyäsus* (the revered *Qəbat* leader) during the last synod in *Yohannəs*' reign, in 1682. This tricky paragraph is not easy to understand.⁴⁷ Does it mean that, in 1682, when the *Däbrä Libanos* unionist views won over the synod, *Ṭäbdän* and *Qozmos* chose to ally with their former adversaries rather than support *Zä'iyäsus* and *Akalä Krəstos*? The 1682 synod would thus have led to a schism within the *Qəbat* movement. Indeed, during a synod in 1684 and contrary to other monks, the monks from *Gažge* requested the liberation of *Zä'iyäsus*. In 1687, *Ṭäbdän* and *Qozmos* declared that they had not attended the 1682 synod, as if they wanted to deny their implication in an internal quarrel. A few months later, at the end of *Gənbət* 1687, the last synod on this issue was held. Once again, a schism was reported between *Ṭäbdän*, *Qozmos* and their followers. A few days later, the highest authorities of the *Däbrä Libanos* network judged the *Qəbat* monks in *Gondär*. They excommunicated and banished them.⁴⁸ The royal chronicles provide no further explanation about these disputes.

Given the lengthy treatment of this event in the *Chronicle of Iyasu I*, we can conclude that this rebellion represented a serious threat to king and kingdom. *Ṭäbdän* from *Gong* was targeted as the arch-enemy during the first five years of the reign of *Iyasu I*. After his excommunication and banishment, the surviving monastic community had to come to terms with his inglorious fate. If the accusation were true that *Ṭäbdän* was responsible for

46 Guidi 1910, 82; Guidi 1912, 82.

47 Guidi 1910, 111–112; Guidi 1912, 115.

48 Guidi 1910, 122; Guidi 1912, 126.

the excommunication of Akalä Krastos of Gongǧ, it would mean that there was strong dissension inside Gongǧ monastery.

Soon after the tragic death of Iyasu I in 1706, most probably at the hands of the Lasta-Təgray *karra* sect,⁴⁹ the *Qəbat* movement and the house of Ewostatewos were in favour with King Tewoflos (r 1708–1711). Monks from Gongǧ received their share of lands and charges in Ḥamärä Noḥ, a newly founded royal church.⁵⁰ Gongǧ monastery did not vanish after the turmoil of 1687; it was still part of the Ewostatean network. But never again would it assume leadership of the *Qəbat* movement, at least not during synods. The *Qəbat* party was no longer headed by monks from Gongǧ: it would be led henceforth by Däbrä Šəmmuna.

Gongǧ lost its leadership of the *Qəbat* movement and eradicated the memory of Ṭäbdän. Nothing remains today of this man whom history has labelled as a rebel.⁵¹ Nothing? Perhaps not. Let us take a second step back in time.

Claiming the Body of *Abunä* Krastodolu (d.1676/1677): A Warranty of Orthodoxy since the Time of Ṭäbdän

Abunä Krastodolu's grave is located in Gongǧ church, in the northern part of the *qəddəst*. It is said to perform miracles and have healing power.⁵² To the best of our knowledge, it is very unusual for a church in Ethiopia to venerate the grave of a Coptic bishop. According to the oral tradition, when Krastodolu felt his death approaching, he asked to be carried to Gongǧ to be buried there, 'where praising God will not cease until the coming of Christ'.⁵³ Night was falling when he made his request; dawn paused between day and night, suspending time, and he travelled from Sarka to Gongǧ where he died.

In a short note, *Ato* Kasahun, a lay scholar from Gongǧ, wrote an interesting presentation of the oral account:

ከ309 ጀምሮ እስከ 1943 ዓ ፡ም በዚቁጥር 73 ከ110 ወጳጳሳት [sic] ውሥጥ ክር ስቶስዶሉ 1ኛ ጀንበርን ገዝተው ከሚጫ ሣርካ ግንብ እሥከ ምፅዕት መጨረሻ ድረሥ ሥብሀት እግዚአብሔር የማይቋረጥበት ጎንጅ ወሥዳችሁ ቅበሩኝ ብለ

49 Kindeneb Endeg Mihretie 2013.

50 Guidi 1906.

51 In Däbrä Wärg, Ṭäbdän was celebrated as a martyr, according to Kindeneb Endeg Mihretie. However, I do not have access to the text reconstructing the history of Ṭäbdän as a martyr. It is far too late at this stage of writing to introduce a new source.

52 See the list of the miraculous objects of Gongǧ in its *Fəṭṭa nägäšt*. According to this list, Krastodolu's grave was marked with a golden cross; it is marked nowadays by a step.

53 Interviews in 2004 with the clergy of Gongǧ.

ው ተቀበረው [sic] መቃብራቸው የሚገኝ ሲሆንና መቃብራቸውም ታደረ ህፃና ት በሚያማቸውና በሚያለቅሙ ጊዜ ከመቃብራቸው ላይ ቂው /ዲያቆኑ/ ወስዶ ሲያንከባልላቸው መፈውሥ ሆኖ ማዳኑን የሚያረጋግጥ ይሆናል ፡

(Among the 110 bishops [appointed] between 309 and 1943 of the Era of Mercy, the 73rd [was] Krastodolu the First. 'The sun [will stop]'.⁵⁴ He uttered this excommunication from Mečča Sarka *gamb*. The celebration of God will be done in Gongǧ without interruption until the coming of Christ, and he said that he should be buried there. Therefore, his grave is here. If children are sick or do not stop crying, priests and deacons take them to the grave; and when they touch it, they are cured.)

The Coptic bishop *Abunä* Krastodolu arrived in Ethiopia in the thirty-second year of the reign of *Aše* Fasilädäs.⁵⁵ As a bishop, he took part in three synods: in 1666/1667, during the last year of Fasilädäs's reign; in 1669 during the reign of King Yoḥannəs, when the decision was made to expel the last Portuguese Catholics; and in 1670. Soon afterwards, *Aše* Yoḥannəs put him in jail in an attempt to have him replaced, as is clearly stated in the *forma vulgata* of the *Short Chronicles*.⁵⁶ The *Chronicle of Yoḥannəs* prudently presents this event without mentioning the imprisonment: on 15 October 1671, a letter from Patriarch Matewos was read to announce the consecration of a new metropolitan, Sinoda, just before his arrival in Gondär two days later. In the same letter however, the patriarch confirmed Krastodolu as metropolitan.⁵⁷ A version of the *Short Chronicles* derived from notes states that Krastodolu died in 1676/77.⁵⁸ The reasons for the imprisonment are unknown. Did the Ethiopian clergy and/or the metropolitan disapprove of the king's marriage with Säblä Wängel? In any case, the first decision put to Krastodolu's successor, *Abunä* Sinoda, was to recognize this marriage.

Gongǧ's oral tradition has retained the information that Krastodolu died in Sarka, without explaining why he would have been there. Sarka had been built during the Jesuit period, in 1624–1625, on order of *Ras* Sə'älä Krastos, governor of the province and brother of the king. A church and a big residence were built of stone and mortar.⁵⁹ The building had a large under-

54 Very likely an allusion to Josh. 10:12, when Joshua asked God to make the sun and moon stand still.

55 Basset 1882, 291; Béguinot 1901, 3; Dombrowski 1983, 204.

56 Basset 1882, 292; Perruchon 1899, 173; Béguinot 1901, 54; Dombrowski 1983, 207.

57 Guidi 1903a, 14; Guidi 1903b, 13.

58 Ms Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (= BnF), Éthiopien d'Abbadie 136 in Kropp 1990, 107. Born in 1688, the author of these notes was writing one generation after the events.

59 See the photos in Anfray 1980–1981.

ground basement, which served as a prison.⁶⁰ *Abunä Yoḥannäs*, a Coptic bishop called to Ethiopia in 1649 by *Abeto Gälawdewos*, the brother of King Fasilädäs, was imprisoned there.⁶¹ Sarka was the main prison for religious opponents till the first part of the eighteenth century. Zä'iyäsus was jailed there during the reign of Iyasu I.⁶² Since the written sources do not state that Krästodolu was detained in Sarka, the oral tradition apparently draws on sources other than the official ones we know of. Since most of the king's religious opponents were imprisoned in Sarka, this mention in the oral tradition is significant.

How long has Krästodolu's grave been said to be in Gongḡ? In 1686, ten years after Krästodolu's death and at the peak of Ṭäbdän's rebellion, the inhabitants of Däbrä Wärq, another powerful *Qəbat* town and church in Goḡḡam, threw stones at the metropolitan Sinoda, who, willingly or not, was backing King Iyasu's religious policy. Even after Ṭäbdän's excommunication, *Qəbat* supporters and the people of Goḡḡam were resisting royal authority. In 1692, they asked to be judged by the king instead of Sinoda, a clear manifestation of their denial of the authority of the Coptic bishop.⁶³ Laying claim to the body and religious authority of the dead metropolitan, Krästodolu (who had been arbitrarily dismissed and replaced with Sinoda), amounted to an attempt to legitimate Gongḡ and the *Qəbat* movement during this period of controversy. Recognizing the legitimacy of the previous metropolitan would have served to deny the legitimacy of the new one; and it could have signalled an attempt to create an autonomous 'state', the *Chronicle of Iyasu I's* accusation against Ṭäbdän and Wäle. Laying claim to *Abunä Krästodolu's* grave could have been part of the strategy of Ṭäbdän and Wäle to legitimate an autonomous, Orthodox power. And that is all that has been passed down in Gongḡ's memory of this historical moment.

Conclusion

Oral history forges stories and portrays characters in ways that obstruct the exposal of the 'historical truth'. What has been lost is the memory of Ṭäbdän Dəngəl, the abbot of Gongḡ who sowed dissension within the *Qəbat* movement, opposed his own monks, and led an uprising against the king. Since new narrative strands are often sewn into familiar mythological or biblical patterns, they cannot be accepted outright as history, not even by their narrators. They are symbolically sealed, however, owing to their social function.

60 See Fernández 2013.

61 Basset 1882, 288; Béguinot 1901, 51; Perruchon 1898, 88. For an analysis of this other act of rebellion against royal authority, see Wion 2012, 234–235.

62 Guidi 1903a, 82; Guidi 1903b, 82.

63 Guidi 1903a, 155; Guidi 1903b, 163.

The story of the dying bishop's miraculous travel brings credit to Gongḡ monastery, attracts the faithful and pilgrims, and recalls the institution's long history and close relations with major political and religious authorities.

Might oral history not be the only way to preserve the memory of violent events that were not allowed to be narrated as such? The 'late' invention of Gərma Šəllus as founding father of Gongḡ is clear evidence that the story has been contrived. This story is still told today; everyone knows that there used to be a church up on the cliff where the tree named after *Abba Ləbsä Krəstos* now stands. This local memory of past events is not afflicted with total amnesia. The story of Gərma Šəllus, a secondary character, fails to cover a hole in the history of the monastery, a past that could not be put into words and had to be forgotten.

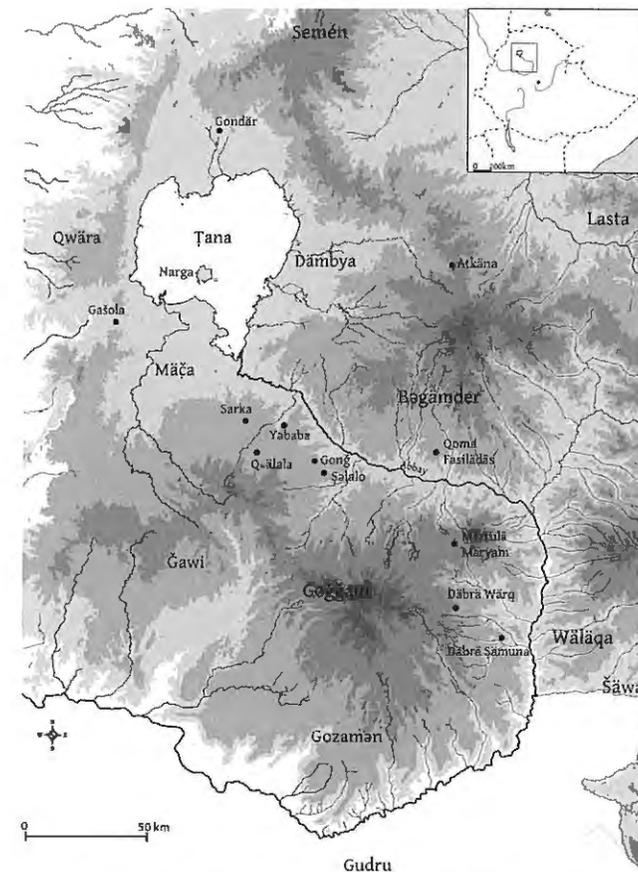


Fig. 3 Some elements of the Ewostatean network during the Gondarine period. Base maps: 1/250,000 maps of the Ethiopian Mapping Agency. Conception and realization: Anne Bolay and Anaïs Wion.

Oral Sources

Afä mämbär Bərhanu Šəfärraw, Ato Kasahun Mängəstu, and *Märigeta* Haymanot, recorded in Gongǵ in 2004 by Anaïs Wion, Kindeneh Endeg Mihretie, and Claire Bosc-Tiessé.

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