A Royal Correspondance in the XVth and XVIth centuries: the Documents of the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe (Zana)

Marie-Laure Derat

To cite this version:

HAL Id: halshs-02545838
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02545838
Submitted on 17 Apr 2020

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers. L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire HAL, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.
Aethiopica 09 (2006)
International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies

MARIE-LAURE DERAT, Centre d’Étude des Mondes Africains,
Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

Article
A Royal Correspondence in the XVth and XVIth Centuries: the Documents of
the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe (Zana)
Aethiopica 09 (2006), 64–79
ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by
Universität Hamburg
Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
A Royal Correspondence in the XVth and XVIth Centuries: the Documents of the Gospel of Dâbrâ Kârbe (Zana)

MARIE-LAURE DERAT, Centre d’Étude des Mondes Africains, Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris

In the beginning of the XXth century, Carlo Conti Rossini visited monastic communities in Ethiopia, especially in Tigre, where he was able to consult some manuscripts in monastic libraries and made copies of some of them. These copies are now stored in the Accademia dei Lincei at Rome, and Stefan Strelcyn described them for the catalogue of the library1. One manuscript from the Carlo Conti Rossini collection (manuscript no 91 entitled “chronique royale, documents divers” by S. Strelcyn)2 is a copy of some documents registered in a Gospel which came from Dâbrâ Kârbe of Zana in Tigre3.

This type of text raises many problems. As we know only the copy, not the original, we cannot estimate the date of the manuscript4. Moreover, even if Carlo Conti Rossini had given any information concerning the position in the Gospel manuscript of the different documents copied for him5, we could not tell exactly where they were located and we cannot examine

---

1 S. STRELCYN, 1976.  
3 The location of Zana in Tigre can be deduced from two different sources. First, in the Liber Axumae, Zana appears in two acts. In these documents, the other place names are located in Tigre (C. CONTI ROSSIINI, 1910, 34–35, 58). Secondly, in the History of Lûbnà Dûngl, there is a short reference to Dâbrâ Kârbe of Zana which was destroyed by the armies of Grañ on January 1540, after Grañ had burnt Aksum (M. KROPP, 1988, 18; F.A. DOMBROWSKI, 1983, 166). F. A. Dombrowski proposes a geographical location (East of Ferfera, south of the Takkaze river and west of Gumalo, ibid. 344). Finally, we must point out that G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD (1965, 98) located Dâbrâ Kârbe 20 miles southwest from Aksum, which seems to be quite reliable according to the maps.  
4 Carlo Conti Rossini only says that the copy was made from an old Gospel (Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 2).  
5 See for instance Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 76.

---

Aethiopica 9 (2006)
the handwriting. These reasons make the different texts more difficult to understand and so we can only submit some hypotheses here.

Four types of document were registered in the Gospel of Dâbrà Kârbe:

- two letters written in the name of the king and the ‘âqqabe sâat of Ḥayq: the first one dates from the reign of Zâr’a Yâ’aqob, the second letter from the reign of Lâbnà Dongal.
- the rules concerning the dâbtâra (Ṣrs’atâ Dâbtâra) i.e. a re-partition of the dâbtâra in three groups for the service of qaná.
- the donations of land to the monastery, with the assignment of their incomes for the celebration of the tâzkar of the kings or the feast of Mary8.
- and finally, a text presented by Carlo Conti Rossini as a short history of Zâr’a Yâ’aqob, without either beginning or end9. This text seemed to be meaningless because, in Carlo Conti Rossini’s copy, words were cut and the paragraphs were not linked together. However, the document is actually an extract from the Mâşhâfâ Milad, more precisely the lecture for taḥṣâs 29, which is a celebration of king Zâr’a Yâ’aqob’s victory over Badlay at the battle of Gomit10. But this was not recognised at first, because the page sequence is arranged backward11. It is not known if this was already the case in the original Dâbrà Kârbe Gospel or if the mistake was made by the copyist of Carlo Conti Rossini. The presence of this extract from the Mâşhâfâ Milad in the Dâbrà Kârbe Gospel is very important because, according to Kurt Wendt, there is only one other copy of this text. It can be found in a manuscript preserved in the National Library in Paris, belonging to the d’Abbadie collection, coming from Daga Ǝştîfanos, and dating from the XVIth century12. No other copy of this text has been discovered since then.

6 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 76–78, 96–99.
7 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 100–107.
9 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 79–93.
10 About this battle, see M.-L. DERAT, 2002, 87–102.
11 The text copied in the Dâbrà Kârbe’s Gospel corresponds to pages 13 to 20 of Kurt Wendt’s edition (K. WENDT, 1962, 13–20). But in manuscript 91 of Conti Rossini’s collection, the beginning of the text is on page 93, and the end on page 81. For this reason, we can guess that the text was copied upside down. It is interesting to note that part of this text is very similar to a miracle of Mary published by E. CERULLI, 1933, 57–112. See also K. WENDT, 1962, IV note 15.
12 K. WENDT, 1962, II–III. There is another extract from the Mâşhâfâ Milad in a manuscript of Dâbrà Hayq (EMML 1835, cf. GETATCHEW HAILE & W. F. MACOMBER,
Of course, these different categories of documents are not clearly distinguishable in the manuscript. For example, assignments of land incomes are included with the ለስራት ሀዳትራ.

Moreover, as has already been noted, since palaeographical observations are impossible, these texts can only be dated through internal criteria. The first letter written in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe is attributed to እናቸወ ሀዳት ከሆኔ. According to Taddesse Tamrat, ከሆኔ ከሆኔ was in charge of the monastery in 1444/1445 and in 1480/1481. Later on, another text seems to have been added in the Gospel. It refers not only to ከሆኔ ከሆኔ but also to the king Zär’a Ya’aqob (1434–1468) and to Gäbrä Krástos. Gäbrä Krástos was the second እናቸወ ሀዳት in charge in ርላንን monastery during the reign of king Zär’a Ya’aqob. He held this office when ከሆኔ ከሆኔ was living at the royal court in Däbrä Barhan. These historical references are very compelling. The allusion to the sharing of the office of እናቸወ ሀዳት between ከሆኔ ከሆኔ and Gäbrä Krástos is so rare that we can assume that those texts are authentic and date from the mid-XVth century.

The relationship between Däbrä Kärbe and the royal court continues throughout the XVth century and the beginning of the XVIth century. Some documents actually refer to እናቸወ ሀዳት Nągądà Iyус, who was in charge during the reign of Lòbnà Dąngòl (1508–1540), killed in 1534, and one of these texts contains the date of the 180th year of mercy, equivalent to our 1525/26.

The Däbrä Kärbe Gospel was no doubt included in the archives of the monastery from the reign of Zär’a Ya’aqob until the reign of Lòbnà Dąngòl. But we do not know whether the texts copied for Carlo Conti Rossini were the originals, or a secondary copy, as in the case of the production of a new manuscript of the Gospel. The only clue is given by Carlo Conti Rossini himself who occasionally mentions that some documents are written by the same hand, which probably means that the others are from different hands.

The documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel are very interesting since they show a correspondence between the royal court and this Tigre monastery. But the danger with this kind of document is to exaggerate their

1981, 322–323), which is a homily on the importance of the feasts in honour of the angels and Mary (K. Wendt, 1962, 20–21).

14 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.
16 Mss. Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.
17 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 100.
historical importance. We can classify these texts in two different categories. On one hand, they could be seen as very ordinary acts and letters, issued from the royal court to the monasteries and that it was only through a fortunate preservation that this particular manuscript acquired its position, which might reflect something from the reality of the XVth century. On the other hand, we can assume that Dabrà Kárbe had close relations with the royal court, and that these documents have an exceptional status. In fact, I will try to show that the different texts of the Dabrà Kárbe Gospel are relevant to these two categories.

The correspondence between Dabrà Kárbe and the ‘aqqabe sā‘at

Some of the documents preserved in the Dabrà Kárbe Gospel can be described as letters sent from the royal court to the monastery, and copied as a testimony in the most sacred book of the community, the Gospel. This description is based on the text of the first document where ‘aqqabe sā‘at Amhá Láșyón, upon hearing that some monks of the community of Dabrà Kárbe had broken their monastic vows of obedience, reminds them about the rules, and finishes his text with these words:

May this message be written in the Gospel, so that it will be a testimony before God, between me and you.

Moreover, it seems that this letter came from the royal court. As was mentioned before, Amhá Láșyón spent many years at the court of king Zár’a Ya‘qób at Dabrà Barhan. In one of the documents of the Gospel, he is clearly linked with Zár’a Ya‘qób. Above all, the copy of an extract of the Mâshafât Milad in the Dabrà Kárbe Gospel offers a clue as to the origin of the letter. The Mâshafât Milad was produced in the scriptorium of Zár’a Ya‘qób’s court, especially the text copied in the Dabrà Kárbe Gospel, which celebrates the glorious victory of the king against Badlay in 1445. Thus there is a probability that the first letter and the extract of the

---

19 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 77.
21 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.
Marie-Laure Derat

*Māṣḥafā Milad* were sent together to Dābrā Kārbe from the royal court, and more precisely from the royal *scriptorium*23.

The reason why Amḥa Lāṣṣyon sent a message to the community of Dābrā Kārbe is clearly exposed in the letter:

I have heard that some of you do not follow the rule of the monks. Instead you are calling yourselves my children, you are living in the (secular) world, building houses near the residence of the women. Then you come back in the monastery.

Later on the basis of the first letter of Amḥa Lāṣṣyon, 'aqqabe sāʾat Nāgādā Iyāsūs repeated the warning to the monks25. This implies both that a copy of this letter probably existed in the archives of the 'aqqabe sāʾat, and that, despite the threat of Amḥa Lāṣṣyon, the monks of Dābrā Kārbe continued breaking the rules of their monastery, which are manifested through these letters and in the Šrʿatā Dābtāra. As we have seen before, the monks must retire from the secular world, and live apart from women. The Šrʿatā Dābtāra shows also that Dābrā Kārbe followed the ritual of the *Horologium*, as we can read that 47 priests are enumerated “for the prayer of the day and night hours”26. But according to the text, the Šrʿatā Dābtāra of Dābrā Kārbe was established by king Zāṃa Yaʾsqōb and 'aqqabe sāʾat Amḥa Lāṣṣyon27. Is this rule a sign of the court’s attempt to impose the *Horologium* of Giyorgis of Sāгла on the community of Dābrā Kārbe?28

Finally, these documents reveal how the 'aqqabe sāʾat of Ḥayq exercised control and authority over the monasteries of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia. It seems that, with the support of the king, he sent messages

---

23 This hypothesis is reinforced by a reference in the chronicle of Zāṃa Yaʾsqōb, where we find: “Lorsqu’une affaire se présentait à lui, il appelait quelqu’un digne de confiance parmi ses moines, et l’envoyait là où il voulait, près ou loint” (cf. J. Perruchon, 1893, 7 and the revised translation of the chronicle by the late R. Schneider, 1990, 126).

24 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 77.

25 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.


27 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 101.

promptly to errant communities. But also, he was able to lay down rules to the monks, as in the case of the Horologium, according to the religious policy of the king. This was probably the main task of the ˁaqqabe sˁat. So, we can assume that the letters sent to Dabrā Kärbe and the Šorˁatā Dábtāra were not unique (though conservation has made them exceptional), but were representative of the way the ˁaqqabe sˁat was leading the monastic world.

Privileged relations between Dabrā Kärbe and the royal court

However, these documents referred to a monastic community of Tigré, with whom the religious and secular powers had a special relationship. Two elements in the texts of the Dabrā Kärbe Gospel raise problems of interpretation. One of the letters alludes to the rules of Dabrā Nāgʷädgʷad which inspired king Zârˁā Yâq-routing and ˁaqqabe sˁat Amḥa Lâṣayon to draw up the Dabrā Kärbe’s rules, and, according to the land donations, it seems that the kings had a specific policy towards Dabrā Kärbe. In this section, we will try to solve these problems by answering two different questions. Was the monastery of Dabrā Kärbe a royal foundation? Was the royal power trying to control the Ewosṭahian movement through Dabrā Kärbe?

A royal foundation?

According to G. Villari30, Dabrā Kärbe was founded by king Zârˁā Yâq-routing himself. This reference, probably based on oral tradition, is not enough to explain the particular interest the kings showed towards the community. But a second point has to be underlined. One of the letters asserts that the rules of Dabrā Kärbe were copied from the rules of Dabrā Nāgʷädgʷad:

30 G. VILLARI, 1938, 1442–1443.

Unfortunately we do not know how the ˁaqqabe sˁat became aware of the situation in the monasteries. The information could have come from those high clergy who exercised regional authority, as Giyorgis of Sagla did in the XIVth century as nḵburaˁd of Dammo (G. COLIN, 1987, 17 and kâñnatā dâbtâra (priest of the court, ibid. 13, 23). But there are many different possibilities, including the stay of Zârˁā Yâq-routing in Aksum in the beginning of his reign (J. PERRUCHON, 1893, 49–50, 83; M.-L. DERAT, 2004, 211–212).

31 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 97.
I have written and I have threatened of excommunication, I, Nāgādā Iyāsus, ‘aqqabe sāʾat, learning how our king Zārāʾ Yaʿqūb and ‘aqqabe sāʾat ‘Amḥa Lāṣyôn, made the rules for the priests of Dābrā Kārbe like (those) of Dābrā Nāgādād.

The identification of this Dābrā Nāgādād is not obvious. There are two possibilities. It could be Dābrā Nāgādād in Amhāra founded by Zārāʾ Yaʿqūb as his future necropolis32. It could also be Ḥayq Ḫistfānos, which is also called Dābrā Nāgādād33. The two choices are interesting, but the first is probably better. In one of the documents of the Dābrā Kārbe Gospel, the destination of the land incomes is actually mentioned. They are specifically assigned to the celebrations of the tāzkar memory of the kings (Dawit, Yāṣḥaq, Zārāʾ Yaʿqūb, Bāʾādā Maryam, Ḫiskōndar, Naʿōd).

And also, he ordered that 37 (feasts) would be celebrated for the tāzkar (memory) of Our Lady Mary, from year to year, and for the tāzkar of the kings and for the tāzkar of ‘aqqabe sāʾat and for the feasts of the Son. ‘Ad Zārāʾ Dawit for ḫaste Zārāʾ Yaʿqūb. They will celebrate the tāzkar. Wāḥabit for ḫaste Bāʾādā Maryam; ‘Ad Kādānī for ḫaste Ḫiskōndar; Pār for ḫaste Naʿōd35; Šāryā for ḫaste Dawit; ‘Ad Nāgūš Ḫāz “ā for ḫaste Yāṣḥaq.

We can assume that Dābrā Kārbe had a particular status in Tigre concerning the royal power. Its function was to celebrate the dynastic memory through the tāzkar of the kings. For this reason, the link between Dābrā Nāgādād, the royal necropolis of Amhāra, and Dābrā Kārbe, the place of commemoration of the kings, is logical. The copy of the Māḥafā Milād, dedicated to the victory of Zārāʾ Yaʿqūb over Badlay in 1445, in the Gospel of Dābrā Kārbe is another indication that one of the tasks of this com-

33 S. KUR, 1965, 16.
34 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei, 101.
35 Here, we follow the way Naʿōd is written in the Conti Rossini’s manuscript, however it is not the usual transcription.
munity was to celebrate the memory of the kings. Even if Däbrä Kärbe was not a royal foundation, the monastery had a close relationship with the royal power since the reign of Zär’a Ya’aqob. Indeed the particular position of Däbrä Kärbe in the policy of Zär’a Ya’aqob could have been the beginning of the tradition that the monastery was a royal foundation.

The control of the Ewostathian movement through Däbrä Kärbe

The second question I would like to focus on is the link between Däbrä Kärbe and the Ewostathian movement. According to the Liber Axumae, the Zana region was given by king Lšbnà Dŋngl to Pawlos, the successor of abba Yonas36. In the gãdl of abba Yonas, we learn that this saint took part in the Däbrä Mṯmaq council in 145037, where the observance of the Sabbath was recognized as an orthodox practice, imposed on all the communities38. So, the community of Yonas (_CONDÌNDWDA Abba Yonas) was a member of the Ewostathian movement, and in the beginning of the XVIth century, the region of Zana, where Däbrä Kärbe was located, was under control of this community.

Moreover, recent documents published by Gianfrancesco Lusini show that this dependence of Zana upon Ìnda Abba Yonas (Däbrä Şâge) had already begun during the reign of Zär’a Ya’aqob (1434–1468). According to a text preserved in the Gãdlà abba Yonas in Däbrä Şâge, the king gave lands to the new monastery founded in 1455 and among these lands we find Debà Zana, which could partially identify with Zana39. So, it is clear that immediately after the council of Däbrä Mṯmaq, Zär’a Ya’aqob tried to control the communities of Tigre, through donations of lands. Zana was linked with the Ewostathian communities, which probably means that Däbrä Kärbe played a role in the controversy about the Sabbath. Däbrä Kärbe also received lands from the king Zär’a Ya’aqob. We can underline the similarity between Däbrä Şâge of abba Yonas and Däbrä Kärbe. Both of them were granted lands by the kings, and one of the communities (Däbrä Şâge) was clearly linked with the Ewostathian movement.

This idea of an attempt to control the monastic communities of Tigre, and especially Däbrä Kärbe, is reinforced by the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel. The ‘aggabe sā’at asks the monks to observe the rule set by the king and these texts show how the monks pledged their allegiance to the king through the celebration of the täzkar.

36 C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1910, 34.
37 C. CONTI ROSSINI, 1903, 180, 256; G. LUSINI, 1993, 199.
Even if the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel seem to be purely practical documents, often sent to the monastic communities by the ḍaqqabe sāʾat, they attest also to a specific interest taken by the royal power in this monastery. The king tried to exercise control over the Ewostathian movement, after the appeasement of the controversy on the Sabbath. The letters sent to Däbrä Kärbe show this control. Both ḍaqqabe sāʾat and kings remind the monks of the monastic rules, they grant them lands, and they want them to pray for the memory of the royal dynasty.

This paper is a first study of the documents of the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel. Of course, because the story of the community of Däbrä Kärbe is still unknown, there are a lot of questions with no answers. The study of such texts is probably the most interesting way to find information about how the ḍaqqabe sāʾat of Ḥayq exercised their authority over the monastic communities and the way in which the kings of Ethiopia, especially since the reign of Zär’a Yaʾqob, used the ḍaqqabe sāʾat as intermediaries for their religious policy.

The monastery of Däbrä Kärbe was destroyed by the armies of Grañ in 154040, but, according to the Liber Axumae, it was rebuilt later. In the Däbrä Kärbe Gospel, there is a land donation at the beginning of the XIXth century in which Däbrä Kärbe and the region of Zana are mentioned41, so this community was still in existence then. The main task now is to check the Gospel of the monastery.

Goʾaz text and translation

I will now summarize the content of the documents in the Gospel of Däbrä Kärbe from the notes of Carlo Conti Rossini, give the goʾaz text and its translation. The text, as an historical document, is copied from the Conti Rossini manuscript with its faults42. This translation is a working document. Some passages are still obscure, particularly the one referring to the lands for the ṭāzkar of the kings.

Placed after the Gospel of Matthew and at the beginning of Mark, this letter is written on one damaged folio, but the writing is well preserved. No date or seal43.

40 M. Kropp, 1988, 18.
41 C. Conti Rossini, 1910, 70–71.
42 As it is a secondary copy, a correction of the text would add a new version to it without solving the problem of the original. Secondly, it is an historical study and as such, the language of the author, his faults, could be of more interest than a correction.
43 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 76.
I, 'aqqabe saï'at Amha Läshayon, greet you. Peace be with you all the community of holy monks who are living in Däbrä Kärbe. May the peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you, each day and at all times.

The Lord has appointed you to travel on the way of the Gospel, the road of life. He turns you away from the path of sin, that leads to the fires of hell, and Jesus, the great High Priest, will lead you into His kingdom of Heaven, for ever and ever, Amen.

I have heard that some of you do not follow the monastic rule. Instead you are calling yourselves my children, you are living in the (secular) world, building houses near the residence of the women. Then you return to the monastery of monks, and again you go back into the (secular) world.

He who behaves like this, may he renounce this bad habit, may he repent of his previous sin with great penitence and may he do as the priest ordered. If he does not renounce this habit, may he never return to the monastery.

May this message be written in the Gospel, so that it will be a testimony before God, between me and you. And all of you, monks who love the Lord and who go on His way, He will bless you and will let you enter into His kingdom, for ever, Amen.

44 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 77.
After the Gospel of Matthew and before Mark, there is the following document, which is a notification of ‘aqqabe säät at Nágâdâ Iyâsûs. Five lines follow the erasure of the main part, which gives a list of lands attributed to the convent⁴⁵:

I, Nágâdâ Iyâsûs, ‘aqqabe säät, have written and I have threatened excommunication, learning how our king Zârâ Ya’àqob and ‘aqqabe säät Amûa Lâsyon set the rules for the priests of Dâbrâ Kärbe like (those) of Dâbrâ Nâgâdgwad, that no other charge except the service of the church, incense, sacrifice and prayer should fall to them. May the spirit renounce the sin, as has been prescribed before. Let no one enter, be he šayûm or awâfâri or qâlâ nâgâsî, and whoso violates this, may he be cursed by the mouth of the prophets and the apostles, by the mouth of the righteous and the martyrs, by the mouth of the vigilant angels, by the mouth of Our Lady Mary, by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. May they be cursed in the sky and in the land, for ever and ever, amen.

This is the land of the church of Dâbrâ Kärbe: Mâsûrsi, Sâgl, Sâlîbûya, Hafâq, Šâgofâ, Šûra, Lâgâmâd, Ašom, Sârâb … (illegible text) With our king Zârâ Ya’àqob, for the ‘aqqabe säät Amûa Lâsyon and with the ‘aqqabe säät Gâbrî Krastos, this book was written in the 180th year of the grace (1528), saying: be he awâfâri or hâdug, (may he be cursed) by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

---

⁴⁵ Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 96.
⁴⁶ Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 97.
The Šərətā Dābtāra is written on the verso of a folio which is a piece of the index of the Gospel of Matthew. The folio is damaged. In the last six lines of this folio and the second folio, less wide than the others, there is an assignment of lands for different feasts. The last ten lines of the document are by another hand. On the verso of this folio, Nāgādā Iyāsus and Amba Lāsøyon assign lands for Dābrā Kārbe⁴⁷.

⁴⁷ Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 100.
⁴⁸ Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 101–103.
Rule for the ḏābtāra [Ṣ̱ṟʿatā Dābtāra] established by our king Zāʾr’a Yaʾqอบ, the orthodox, and by our father Amḥa Lāṣayon, ‘aqqaɓe sāʾat. Rule for the ḏābtāra of Dābrā Kārbe.

Enumeration of the 47 priests for the service of the qone, around three guides, for the prayer and the hours of the night and of the day, for the salvation of their soul. Around Gābrā Krostos: Sārāqâ Bārhan, Gābrā Māṃfās Qoddus, Gābrā Nazrawi, Tānṣə’a Krostos, Kiros, Natna’el, on the left. Abraham Nolawi, Filpos, Pawlos, Zāʾr’a Krostos, Tāklä Maryam, Zā’amanu’el, on the right. Around Gābrā Mādḥān: Matewos, Tānṣə’a Krostos, Sobḥat Lā’ab, Sāwiro, Īṣṭifanos, Iyu’el, on the right. Gābrā Māsqāl, ʻiṣṭoniṣ, Tāwāldā Mādḥān, Bsk’arā Șayon, Isayyas, ʻEṭṭros, Īndrayaṣ, on the left. Around abba Yohānnos, Tāsābkā Mādḥān, Tāṣfa Mika’el, Zāʾr’a Tomas, Mākāṣeḍeq, Yohānnos, Milkīyas, Natna’el, on the right. Šewa Șollus, Marqoryos, Īṣṭifanos, Gābrā Maryam, Īṣṭifanos, Tānṣə’a Krostos, Sārāqâ Bārhan, on the left.

And also, he [the king] ordered that 37 (feasts) shall be celebrated for the ṭāzkar of Our Lady Mary, from year to year, and for the ṭāzkar of the kings and for the ṭāzkar of the ʻaqqaɓe sāʾat and for the feasts of the Son.

‘Aḏ Zāʾr’a Dawit for ḏāse Zāʾr’a Yaʾqอบ. They will celebrate the ṭāzkar. Wāḥabit for ḏāse Bāʾədā Maryam; ‘Aḏ Kādānī for ḏāse Šskondeɾ; Pər for ḏāse Na’od; Šairyə for ḏāse Dawit; ‘Aḏ Nāguš Əzgwa for ḏāse Ŷaʃhaq.

Whose violates or infringes this all, may he be cursed by the mouth of the prophets and the apostles, by the mouth of the righteous and the martyrs and by the mouth of our Lady Mary, the pure Virgin. Be you șeyum or ḏābtāra or saint fathers, great (men) or little, you will be imprisoned.

Those who established this rule, abba Tewoglos of Ḥayq, gave 59 breads, 41 (measures) of mead and 60 (measures) of beer, in order to celebrate the ṭāzkar of the apparition of Our Lady Mary. If they neglect this ṭāzkar, may they be cursed by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and by the mouth of Our Lady Mary.

I Nāgādā Iyāṣus, and Amḥa Lāṣayon, ‘aqqaɓe sāʾat, have written, knowing what our king Zāʾr’a Yaʾqอบ, the orthodox, had ordered, in order that they do not alter anything and do not quarrel concerning the building of the church of Dābrā Kārbe. (The lands): ʻIṁba with G’onayā, ʻIṁba Šārīb, Čela _CONV19 Čaqqan, Helo with Gāmād, Kabartō, Šimāl, Walka Saʾar, Wāndaq from Ša’ada Robe to Ƿār, Ǹar which is ʻAdā Amhara, ʻAd Zāʾr’a Dawit with ʻIṁba Yādaqa Bahara and ʻAd Țafanot.
A Royal Correspondence in the XVth and XVIth Centuries

On the third folio following the index of the Gospel of Matthew, there is a representation of Mark on the verso, and on the recto, twelve lines referring to the Strebathara. The last part of the folio institutes the “tribute” due to Dabrah Karbe’s community by different lands, but the writing is illegible.

Rule for the dábthara established by our king Zar’a Ya’àqob and our father Amha Lasayon. The priests for the service of the qone around Dabrà Króstos are on the left, Sàràqà Borhan, Gàbrà Mànfàs Qàddus, Gàbrà Nazrawi, Tànšt’a Króstos, Kiros, Natna’el, on the left. Abrahàm Nolawi, Filpos, Pavlos, Zar’a Króstos, Tàklà Maryam, Zàmanu’el, on the right. Around Gàbrà Madhàn: Matewos, Tànšt’a Króstos, Sabhat Là’ab, Sàwiros, Ístìfanos, Iyu’el, on the right. Gàbrà Mâsqàl, Ístònís, Tàwàldà Mâdhàn, Bakarà Sàyo’n, Isayyas, Pétron, Tàdewos, on the left. Around abba Yohannas, Tâsàbkà Màdhàn, Tàsà Mika’el, Zànà’y, Málkàsèdegq, Yohannas, Mîlkàyàs, Natna’el, on the right. Sewà Sóllus, Marqoryos, Ístìfanos, Gàbrà Maryam, Ístìfanos, Tànšt’a Króstos, on the left.

Summary

One of the numerous manuscripts seen by C. Conti Rossini and copied for him deals with the monastery of Dabrà Kàrbé, a religious community of Tigre. Some documents included in the Gospel of Dabrà Kàrbé preserved traces of a correspondence between this community and the ‘aggabe sat of Hayq.

This correspondence is very interesting from a historical point of view. It is accepted that the community of Hayq headed the monastic clergy in Ethiopia approximately

49 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 100.
50 Most probably as written in the third document.
51 Mss Conti Rossini 91, Accademia dei Lincei 103.
until the XVIth century. But, it was not known how the ‘aqqabe sā’at exercised control and authority over the monasteries, and what was his area of competence. These documents of Dibrä Kärbe give us a first answer to these questions.

Bibliography

CERULLI, ENRICO, L’Etiopia del secolo XV in nuovi documenti storici = Africa Italiana 2 (1933) 57–112.
CERULLI, ENRICO, Il libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del Medio Evo latino (Rome 1943).
COLIN, GERARD, Vie de Georges de Saglā = CSCO Aeth. 81–82 (Louvain 1987).
CONTI ROSSINI, CARLO, Gli atti di abba Yonas = Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei 5/12 (1903) 177–201, 239–262.
CONTI ROSSINI, CARLO, Documenta ad illustrandam historiam I. Liber Axumae = CSCO Aeth. 8 (Louvain 1909–1910).
A Royal Correspondence in the XVth and XVIth Centuries

KROPP, MANFRED, Die Geschichte des Lebna Dengel, Claudius und Minäs = CSCO Aeth. 83–84 (Louvain 1988).


KUR, STANISLAS, Actes de Iyasus Mo’a, abbé du couvent de St-Étienne de Hayq = CSCO Aeth. 49–50 (Louvain 1965).


Abbreviations

CSCO Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium