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# Māryām Nāzrēt (Ethiopia): The Twelfth-century Transformations of an Aksumite Site in Connection with an Egyptian Christian Community<sup>1</sup>

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## Māryām Nāzrēt (Ethiopia): The Twelfth-century Transformations of an Aksumite Site in Connection with an Egyptian Christian Community<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

The monument known as Māryām Nāzrēt in Ethiopia, near the city of Mekelle, has often been visited but has hitherto remained hermetic. A fresh investigation has identified the main monument as a massive cathedral erected atop a long-pre-existing Aksumite structure. This unique monument is surrounded by satellite hermitages, among which the one at Golegota shows remains of a small church sharing common architectural features with the cathedral. Cross-referencing these remains with information provided by a written document enables to ascribe the construction of this cathedral to the twelfth-century Metropolitan Mikā'ēl. Named by the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria among Egyptian monks, the Metropolitan was head of the Ethiopian Church. Māryām Nāzrēt was most certainly the episcopal seat in the twelfth and thirteenth century, during the reign of the Zāg<sup>wē</sup> dynasty, and hosted an Egyptian Christian community. At the crossroad of documented history and particular architectural trends, of contemporaneous developments in Ethiopian liturgy and church building, the paper deals with ecclesiastical and regal interaction in the region of Mekelle in the twelfth century.

Keywords: Māryām Nāzrēt, church architecture, Coptic Patriarchate, Ethiopian Metropolitan, Fatimid, Mikā'ēl, slave emancipation, Zāg<sup>wē</sup> dynasty

Māryām Nāzrēt (Éthiopie) : d'un site aksumite à l'installation d'une communauté égyptienne chrétienne au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle

### RESUME

Le monument connu sous le nom de Māryām Nāzrēt en Éthiopie, près de la ville de Mekelle, a été souvent visité mais est resté jusqu'à présent hermétique. De nouvelles investigations ont permis d'identifier le monument principal comme étant une cathédrale massive érigée au sommet d'une structure préexistante d'époque Aksumite. Ce site est entouré d'ermitages satellites, parmi lesquels celui de Golegota, qui présente les vestiges d'une petite église partageant des caractéristiques architecturales communes avec la cathédrale. Le recoupement de ces vestiges avec des informations tirées d'un document écrit permet d'attribuer la construction de cette cathédrale au métropolitain Mikā'ēl, en charge au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Nommé par

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the international conference organized by Iwona Gajda and Anne Benoist in April 2016 ("Cult places in ancient Ethiopia: Recent archaeological research"). It was also presented at the International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Mekelle in 2018.

le patriarche copte d'Alexandrie parmi les moines égyptiens, le Métropolitain était le chef de l'Église éthiopienne. Māryām Nāzrēt était ainsi très certainement le siège épiscopal aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, sous le règne de la dynastie Zāg<sup>wē</sup>, et accueillait une communauté chrétienne égyptienne. Au carrefour de l'histoire documentée par les textes et de courants architecturaux spécifiques, de développements contemporains de la liturgie et de la construction d'églises éthiopiennes, l'article traite de l'interaction ecclésiastique et royale dans la région de Mekelle au XII<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Mots-clés : Māryām Nāzrēt, affranchissement d'esclaves, architecture des églises, dynastie Fatimide, dynastie Zāg<sup>wē</sup>, métropolitain éthiopien, Mikā'el, patriarcat copte

Ever since the early 1940s, Māryām Nāzrēt has regularly been mentioned in the secondary literature as an important archaeological site presenting two levels of remains.<sup>2</sup> The older ones seem to suggest Aksumite architecture, while the more recent ones—quite misunderstood so far—present Islamic features (Henze 2007: 1159). Antonio Mordini (1944-1945: 150 n. 2), who visited the place in 1940 and 1942, reports conducting a survey involving digging in the surroundings of the church, from which he extracted Aksumite coins. Both Mordini and Henze also note the association of the site with the toponym of ‘Addi Abun (in reference to the Ethiopian title of the metropolitan bishop of Ethiopia, the *Abuna*). This toponym is not just a modern reference since it was mentioned in the sixteenth century by João Bermudes (2010: 81)<sup>3</sup> while he traveled through the region. Further, a list of metropolitans bears witness to the burial in Nāzrēt of Egyptian bishops appointed to Ethiopia as heads of the Church (Ms. BNF Éthiopien 160, fol. 90r; Zotenberg 1877: 263). Lastly, mention is made in the colophon of the *Kebra Nagaśt* (a text used to reinforce the Ethiopian royal ideology) of the translation of that work from Coptic into Arabic, again at Nāzrēt (Bezold 1909 [1905]: 172, 138).

Mekelle University undertook a few soundings on the site of Nāzrēt in 2014, following the villagers’ intention to construct a new church in the same compound.<sup>4</sup> The villagers had already dug a large pit, from which eight exploratory trenches were laid out. These tests brought to light a building, on one plane only, oriented northwest-southeast, at least ten metres wide, and surrounded by tombs. The excavations did not disturb assumed Aksumite levels lying some distance away.

We have recently resumed the study of a written document, namely a note preserved in a Gospel Book emanating from Metropolitan Mikā’ēl. The note tells of the construction of a church in Nāzrēt in the middle of the twelfth century. This discovery led us to return to Nāzrēt in order to make accurate records and study the feasibility of archaeological excavations. These activities are part of the wider research led by the authors’ team on the history of the Christianisation of the region of Lālibalā and East Tegray between the end of the kingdom of Aksum in the seventh century and the emergence of the Zāg<sup>w</sup>ē dynasty in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The aim is to understand the Christianisation from a spatial and cultural point of view, especially when interactions with other religions occur; with a study focused on the overlapping of places of worship, cases of rearrangements and reuses of places of worship, as well as the analysis of funerary practices and their evolution.

Given these objectives, the site of Nāzrēt is an ideal candidate to work with. Situated south of Mekelle, it is found in a region that lies in the southern part of the kingdom of Aksum, according to what is presently known about its territory. This area may, therefore, appear as a front line of Christianisation, where it is interesting to observe at what point in time the first churches appear and transformations of funerary practices occur. The research activities

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<sup>2</sup> The history of the mention of this site can be found through these references: MORDINI (1944-1945: 150 n. 2, figs. 3-4), ANFRAY (1970: 36-39), GODET (1977: 54), MUNRO-HAY (1997: 43-44), HENZE (2007: 1158-1159).

<sup>3</sup> Bermudes adds that Tēwodros (elder son of king Dāwīt, 1379/80-1412) would have given a district named Nāzrēt in Tigrāy as a fief to the Egyptian bishop. See also TADDESSE TAMRAT (1972: 220 n. 4).

<sup>4</sup> All our thanks go to Hailay Teklay, of the Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau in Mekelle, who informed us about these excavations and kindly let us have the report of the team (Manjil Hazarika, Tsehay Terefe, Gidey Gabra Egziabher, Tesfay Girmay, *Test Excavations at Mariam Nazrie Archaeological Site*, Mekelle, 2014, 5 p.).

conducted over the past years by Paul Yule and his team at Mifsas Bahri—near Lake Ashangē, farther south still—confirm how relevant it is to pay attention to this region in order to understand the timeframe that stretches from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is in this same region that the site of K<sup>w</sup>iḥa is found.<sup>6</sup> Islamic funerary stelae as well as a fragment of the foundation inscription of a mosque discovered there are witness to the presence of a Muslim community in these parts between the tenth and twelfth centuries.

The present article therefore offers a description of Māryām Nāzrēt as well as of the neighbouring site of Golegotā, together with their plans. This documentation has been cross-referenced with information obtained from Metropolitan Mikā'el's note, from which we conclude that the building constructed on the Aksumite ruins is a church of a Coptic type erected in the middle of the twelfth century. It bears witness to the presence at that time of a particularly dynamic Christian Egyptian community deeply embedded in collective memory as evidenced by the use of current toponyms.

### The Site of Māryām Nāzrēt: Two Architectural Phases

Māryām Nāzrēt is situated about 45 km south of Mekelle. When exiting the town, after the village of May Nebri, one takes a dirt road eastwards for about 10 km and enters the Waza Dahuna valley, the banks of which are watered by small channels that distribute the water of the river to the surrounding fields (fig. 1). The remains are found within the compound of the present church, at the edge of the village of Nāzrēt.

A round church with a corrugated iron roof stands to the north of the enclosure, while to the south lies a wide flat area dotted with many monolithic pillars, identical in their form but of varying heights. These pillars, some standing and some fallen, are found in front of a stone edifice, the uppermost visible portion of which is flared in several places matching the positions of the extrados of the vault and cupolas within. It is lined by a structure of thin concrete pillars supporting the metal protective sheet roof made by the Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau in Mekelle (Henze 2007: 1159). The eastern facade presents a dressed-stone basement (phase 1) that is of an altogether different style from the upper structure (phases 2 and 3) (fig. 2 and 3).

Viewed on a plan, this stepped podium has projections and recesses similar to wide pilasters. It is built with large dressed-limestone units precisely assembled in regular and perfectly horizontal courses. The joints are very thin, all vertical and apparently without mortar. Only a series of aligned and equidistant square slots, with circular recessing frames, contain fine mortar—with many black inclusions—most likely used in order to fasten (wooden?) cylindrical architectural elements.

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<sup>5</sup> Communication of M. Gaudiello at the 23th congress of the Society of Africanist Archaeologists, Toulouse, June 2016. See also GAUDIELLO & YULE (2017).

<sup>6</sup> On the site of Kwiḥa and its stelae, see CONTI ROSSINI (1938: 402), PANSERA (1945: 3-6), SCHNEIDER (1967: 107-118, 2009: 131-148), LUSINI (2001 [1993-1997]: 245-252), SMIDT (2009, 2011, 2012). Since March 2018, research on the stelae has been given a new impetus, with the discovery by the team led by Julien Loiseau of the Bilet cemetery and of many new epigraphic stelae (LOISEAU forthcoming); LOISEAU *ET AL.* forthcoming).

This structure is the “Aksumite” podium mentioned by Éric Godet (1977: 54). Its actual purpose is quite difficult to determine without carrying out an archaeological excavation. It is highly likely that the many monolithic pillars and capitals that lie on the flat area westwards are related to this ancient structure. Furthermore, these pillars—with quadrangular and chamfered section—are of similar execution to those found at other sites (Fritsch 2010: 103-111), some of which also include “Aksumite” remains.

A stone basin displaying an inscription of a non-vocalized Ge’ez also seems to be related to this ancient edifice (fig. 4). Abraham Drewes and Roger Schneider edited this inscription in 1991, stating it was an “écriture ancienne”. The inscription runs on three of the four sides of the basin and is engraved in two lines,<sup>7</sup> but the second line of face b was destroyed whenever the basin was damaged and face d is unreadable.

GE’EZ TEXT AND TRANSLATION OF THE BASIN INSCRIPTION  
FROM DREWES AND SCHNEIDER’S EDITION

<b>Face 1</b>	<p>ወቀ[ረ] cross</p> <p>ሰኅ</p>	<p>He carved this</p>
<b>Face 2</b>	<p>ተ: መቀለ[ደ]</p> <p>...</p>	<p>basin</p> <p>...</p>
<b>Face 3</b>	<p>ለተ: ወፈ</p> <p>ደመ</p>	<p>for me and he</p> <p>completed</p>
<b>Face 4</b>	<p>cross<sup>8</sup></p>	

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<sup>7</sup> RIEth 219 pl. 156 (BERNAND, DREWES & SCHNEIDER 1991). The pictures used by Bernand, Drewes and Schneider for the edition are from ANFRAY (1970: pl. IX). The basin’s face d in Anfray and in Bernand, Drewes and Schneider tables is presented with horizontal flipping (mirror effect). See also the recent French translation (DREWES 2019: 315-316).

<sup>8</sup> The cross on the basin’s face 1 is still legible but less refined than the letters. Concerning face 4, it is really difficult to observe the cross on the picture made by Anfray, reprinted by Bernand, Drewes and Schneider, as well as on the basin itself, due to poor preservation.

As Francis Anfray (1965: 7, pl. ivc)<sup>9</sup> pointed out, other basins of the same type—although less ornate—have been retrieved: one near the rock-church of Abbā Maṭṭā‘, south of Aksum, another in the church of Endā Māryām of Ham, and a third one in the church of Abbā Pānṭalēwon (Anfray 1970: 39 n. 6).<sup>10</sup> The association between churches and basins would lead one to think that such objects were designed and used for liturgical purposes. It is unlikely that they were used for baptisms because the Ge’ez term of *maqala/da* (“basin”) hardly evokes such connotations (one would expect something like *meṭmāq* in this context). They may have been meant for the ablutions performed before entering a church. Such basins have also been observed near the northern door of later Nubian monastic churches (like at the monastery of Kom H in Old Dongola and Al-Ghazali), whereby the monks used to enter the church when coming from their dormitories.<sup>11</sup> It could also be a water storage unit for various liturgical purposes such as washing ones’ hands, mixing water with wine, consuming water after receiving Holy Communion, or performing the ablutions of the sacred vessels at the end of the mass.

The excavations undertaken near the building by Antonio Mordini (1944-1945: 150 n. 2)<sup>12</sup> in the 1940s revealed Aksumite coins of Kings Hataz and Gersem, but no information was published on the exact whereabouts or the results obtained. Recent numismatic research places these kings among the last who minted money, likely in the 7<sup>th</sup> century (Piovanelli 2014: 339). Wolfgang Hahn (2010: 10) proposed that King Hataz (Hethasas) was the last monarch who minted money, placing Gersem as his predecessor, before Iyoēl. Instead, Pierluigi Piovanelli considered Hataz to be a predecessor of Gersem, with Israēl having reigned in between, and Armaḥ being the last of the kings who minted currency.<sup>13</sup> This is not the place to delve deeper into these chronological debates, for no matter what thesis is adopted, all point towards the end of the Aksumite kingdom between the sixth and seventh centuries.

In consideration of Antonio Mordini’s excavations, occupation phases of the “Aksumite” site correspond to the sixth and seventh centuries. However, this does not indicate when that occupation began. Only new excavations will allow resolution of this question. The present paper will leave this matter aside and dwell on a second phase of construction.

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<sup>9</sup> It too is inscribed with an unvocalised Ge’ez inscription (HΛΘ[Ḥ]).

<sup>10</sup> He tells of two other basins discovered during the excavations at the Dungur palace. If this concerns the object, which picture appears in the recently published monograph (ANFRAY 2012: pl. LV), described as a large stone vase with a gargoyle, the comparison would turn out to be very thin. The presence of a gargoyle, when the basins of Nāzrēt and Ham do not have it, tends to remove that item from the corpus.

<sup>11</sup> “Northern entrance to the Monastery Church with stone basin next to it; photo looking south from Room CB.2” (JAKOBIELSKI & MARTENS-CZARNECKA 2007: 339). These basins have been observed by C. Bosc-Tiessé, M.-L. Derat, E. Fritsch *et al.* during a field journey to Sudan organized by CFEE/SEFDAS in January 2011.

<sup>12</sup> A part of the coin collection from the excavations of A. Mordini is now in the care of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (it was joined to the Côte collection [MUNRO-HAY & JUEL-JENSEN 1995: 28; GIROLA 2006: 482]). But we are in the dark as to what happened to A. Mordini’s archives, from which it might have been possible to retrieve documentation and the plans of the excavations carried out in Nāzrēt.

<sup>13</sup> Idea already developed by GODET (2003: 50-53, 400-440). MUNRO-HAY and JUEL-JENSEN (1995: 51, 264-271) do not really decide as to the name of the last king having minted coins, even if Armaḥ appears in the last place of their inventory.

The “Aksumite” podium is surmounted by later structures:

- a first construction sequence (phase 2) displays very heterogeneous and roughly assembled stone modules, with very thick joints and mortar beds. It is difficult to discern coursing as it is irregular and not horizontal. Inside, a finishing coat covers all the walls. This first construction sequence is in the eastern part of a building that remains in the form of five rooms topped by cupolas with niches (the north room is missing its cupola along with its eastern wall). We shall return later to the description of the eastern part of this building. The mortar used in this construction phase is coarser than that found in the “Aksumite podium” slots, more heterogeneous and with a pinkish color due to the presence of crushed pottery shards. It was used for the entire construction of the five-room building and is sometimes used in modern reconstructions, with large pieces of mortar used as rubble fill.

- an even more recent, second construction sequence (phase 3) can be observed on the west side. These new walls close the space westwards as well as to the north and south in order to allow the structure to function as a church. The west wall of this phase 3 structure integrates two built pillars of phase 2 as well as part of a wall in the next north bay.

The phase 2 building includes no less than five rooms (the northernmost one being largely ruined), which are all paved with flat stones. A tall niche occupies the centre of the east wall of each room and a cupola serves as a ceiling to the side rooms (Measurements: ca. 3.50 m east-west; cupola height: 6.70 to 7.50 m) while the central area differs in that its whole ceiling comes down in the east to form a wide apse. This central area was originally without a western wall and completely open. Westwards and directly opposite the niche, each of the four other rooms open via a long west wall, which is most likely original—judging from the way it is built and the heavy stone vaults it must have supported. Further, narrow passages arranged through the lateral partition walls join the rooms with one another in north-south direction (fig. 5).

### A Church Belonging to the Coptic Architectural Tradition

The orientation of the structure, including the existence and type of niches which reinforce this orientation as well as the west doors of the side rooms in the axis of the niche contrasting with the pristine complete opening of the central area, in addition to the symmetry in the distribution of the cupolas, the connections between the rooms, the murals (see below), all combine to demonstrate that this structure was created as the five-fold sanctuary of an exceptionally important Coptic church, with the central area being the chief sanctuary<sup>14</sup> (fig. 6 and 7).

In accordance with this, it appears that the special T-shaped affronted piers identified in the phase 3 wall, more recently built towards the west, belong in fact to phase 2 and match the westward piers that support the vault of the central sanctuary. This should be what remains of the choir (Gk: χορός; Ar.: *khurus*) wall. The *khurus* was a place distinct from the sanctuaries

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<sup>14</sup> A first description of the church was published in FRITSCH (2016: 56-65). We are grateful to N. Warner, architect and architectural historian specialized in historic preservation (Cairo) who offered appropriate bibliographical orientation.



and separated from the nave where the clergy and cantors—and especially the monks—used to stand. In monastic churches, the doors could generally be locked (Grossmann 2002: 73) and the biblical lessons were read from there. The choir appeared in Egypt in the seventh century, built about a central triumphal arch across the central nave, with the addition of doors at a later period. The *khurus* started to decline in the wake of the multiplication of sanctuaries—a phenomenon observed from the tenth century on—until it disappeared during the fourteenth century (*ibid.*: 72-76). Māryām Nāzrēt developed side sanctuaries while still retaining the choir wall and its system of circulation. This arrangement is demonstrated by the remains of ancient piers matching the opening of the central sanctuary and the fact that the opening was originally as wide as the whole width of the sanctuary. When the *khurus* western partition was removed (the doors and chancels filling the space between the piers), its eastern side, which is at the same time the threshold of the sanctuary, was filled up with a kind of screen or iconostasis and double, lockable, doors in the centre. Thereafter, two main divisions formed the churches: the now closed sanctuary, and the nave. The former *khurus* area continued to serve in direct contact with the assembly while before this it was almost isolated from worshippers, but in direct contact with the sanctuary. The present arrangement reflects this latter, secondary stage.

In the eastern sanctuaries, traces of paint<sup>15</sup> are still visible on certain preserved plastered areas. In the main sanctuary, a horizontal red stroke can be observed high up on the cupola.<sup>16</sup> In the southeastern sanctuary, superimpositions that imply a diachrony can be seen on either side of the doorway that leads to the next sanctuary, and in the lower area of the wall, a thick earth mortar covered coating displays traces of yellow paint. When standing inside the sanctuary—to the right side of the door that opens northwards—one can observe beneath areas of loss, a fine, and therefore earlier coating, covered with a background of red paint that appears to form a band. To the right of the doorway that opens westwards, in the lower area of the wall, once again, strokes of vertical and horizontal yellow paint were applied on a clear sublayer. These observations bear witness to, at the very least, two phases of ornamental treatment of the walls with flat tints of colour. The strokes, simple as they may look, could in fact betray another project, perhaps figurative. In the current state of preservation, the strokes appear as separation lines; parts of bandeaux which separate the registers in Coptic or Ethiopian paintings. In addition, it is intriguing that it is in the lower sections of the walls that these flat tints of colour can be observed. This may not be without meaning—for one might infer that the coloured register would have been more appropriate to the lower parts of the walls, with figurative decoration only applied at body height and above.

### Golegotā Among Other Satellites of a Larger Nāzrēt

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<sup>15</sup> Insofar as our observations were almost made in the dark, it is likely that some traces of paint eluded us. In addition, that particular coating ought to be distinguished from the one which can be seen in the west room, which seems to be much more recent.

<sup>16</sup> It should be noticed that the cupolas of similar Egyptian buildings like St-Macarius, are not painted and have not been painted, at least as far as was observed until this day (LEROY 1982). However, Al-Mu‘allaqah in its present condition documents that it has sometimes been the case.

The toponym of ‘Addi Abun came to the attention of Antonio Mordini and his followers in connection with the site of Nāzrēt. The place would have received this name because it was supposedly the grave of several metropolitans of Ethiopia.<sup>17</sup> This toponym is still in use at Māryām Nāzrēt. A brief inquiry conducted while visiting during October 2014 points to other toponyms related with sites or places of scenic interest that echo the name of ‘Addi Abun. Among those, the following are particularly remarkable: Māy Ṣa‘adā, which reportedly received that name because Whites were living there, and ‘Addi Gebṣi because Egyptians were dwelling there. We were also informed of a rock or cave-church named Māryām Westē, higher to the east in the mountain, described as being divided into three sections. None of these three sites were visited by us, but each time we asked people about them they stated that the toponyms were associated with stone-cut remains. This line of inquiry bears fleshing out, in order to determine whether we are dealing with actual archaeological sites or a rather classic case of historical interpretations of natural scenery (e.g. as with basalt organs once seen as cut stones and archaeological remains).<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, this same expedition allowed us to visit a fourth site, that of Golegotā.

About half an hour’s walk into the heights above Māryām Nāzrēt, towards the northeast, a small modern church is built atop a hillock. All around it, the ground is raised in a square, following the line of ancient walls demolished at chest height. This parallelepiped structure, like the recent church above, is open only to the west, where one can observe piles of rubble covered with sediment. Three sectors can be identified, clearly organized along a west-east axis. They present the following features (fig. 8):

a) Two dividing walls spring from the eastern wall in a westerly direction, partitioning the overall width of this portion of the building into three areas lying side by side. Three niches built with flat stones in the middle of each of the three divisions of the east wall imitate the structure of the taller niches of Māryām Nāzrēt church.

b) Farther to the west (at *ca.* 3 m), both the northern and southern lateral walls of the structure, show the beginnings of a wall crossing this space in a north-south fashion. At about 2m to the south from the east, a *ca.* 1 m wall runs east-west until approximately 2 m away from the northernmost wall (in a westerly sense). This configuration presents a gamma shape that seems indicative of a passage between this area and the area adjoining it to the east. It may mark the placement of a doorway separating the sanctuary found to the east of it, from the area west of it.

c) Another 2 m to the west a wall runs parallel to both the easternmost wall and the second wall, covering the entire width of the structure, before the next, westernmost, wall. It seems to have an opening in its centre.

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<sup>17</sup> Another ‘Addi Abun exists in Tigray, north of Adwa, also referred to in traditions related to the residence of metropolitans (TECLEHAIMANOT GEBRESELASSIE 2003: 74-75). The eighteenth-century royal chronicle may refer to the latter (GUIDI 1912, II: 148).

<sup>18</sup> See the famous sites mentioned by P. Miquel describing the surroundings of Lālibalā and which, in actual fact, happened to be mere natural sites (BOSC-TIESSÉ *ET AL.* 2014: 149-150). More complex cases have been encountered in Manz (DERAT & DERESSE AYENACHEW 2012: 54-62).

d) Farther west still, the northern and southern lateral walls of the structure present an elbow shape. Thus begins the far western wall that closes the structure (9 m from the east, approx. dimensions taken within).

The details of this structure reveal a small church of the Coptic tradition, divided into three parts: the sanctuary in the east, then the choir (*khurus*) which serves as monastic *naos* (Gr.: *ναός*) or nave, and finally the narthex in the west.

A deeper examination could determine the way the western structure of the sanctuaries was arranged and indicate whether the three sanctuaries were connected with one another—which is likely—as at Māryām Nāzrēt. The *khurus* could have only one opening in the centre of its wall.

The type of church is in turn indicative of a monastic community of a rather modest size, but solidly established in its remote location. The *khurus* is wide enough to accommodate all the brotherhood and welcome a few male guests possibly made up of workers. Otherwise, an additional nave would have been planned to allow more laity in, especially women, which the closeness of the large church of Nāzrēt made unnecessary. In Coptic tradition, the centered, generally elongated niche points to the east and is related to the presence of an altar immediately west of it—with enough space in between to walk around the altar (an exception might be the case of certain prayer rooms in hermitages where the sill of the niche serves as the altar). This pattern identifies three sanctuaries lying side by side. In each sanctuary, the niche and the altar are in the axis of the structural area dedicated to them. Beside the northern and southernmost niches, another recess was constructed to store liturgical paraphernalia. The area west of it is expected to have two other east-west passages; the centre is anticipated to be as wide as the sanctuary itself, measured from one pier to the next. The area between “b” and “c” was most likely occupied by the cantors, its entrance centrally located in the western wall.

The church of the Martyrs (Dayr eš-Šohada near Akhmim) could serve as a useful model for visualizing the type of church Golegota may have been.<sup>19</sup> Irrespective of scale, the church of the monastery of St Antony the Great near the Red Sea (fig. 9), after rearrangement in the twelfth century,<sup>20</sup> also serves as a classic reference illustrating the structure of the churches of the Middle Ages. *Mutatis mutandis*, it presents a pattern fitting the church of Golegotā.

A series of excavations could allow one to understand the community better—at least if attendant buildings were as strongly built as the chapel—although this may not be the case. Nevertheless, there is hope that pottery or other characteristic artifacts could be identified.

These discoveries contribute to the hypothesis that Māryām Nāzrēt was likely immersed in an environment indicative of an exogenous community—and Egyptian at that—with a monastic satellite such as Golegotā, whose presence and time frame requires further inquiry.

#### A Note from Metropolitan Mikā’ēl: Text and Context

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<sup>19</sup> The dating of the building is unsure but it could be traced back to the eleventh century (GROSSMANN 1982, 2002: 98-99).

<sup>20</sup> The fact that it was painted in 1232-1233 provides one with a *terminus ante quem*.

A now well-known document, hitherto relatively neglected due to concerns of authenticity,<sup>21</sup> confirms the role of an Egyptian in the construction of a church at Māryām Nāzrēt. This document is a note from a Coptic metropolitan, Mikā'ēl, dated to the twelfth century. It is found in the Gospels of the church of Mikā'ēl Ambā, a monastery lying at about 100 km to the north. These Gospels are a rather late manuscript assigned by its typically *G<sup>w</sup>elh* script to between the mid-seventeenth and the eighteenth century. This dating is confirmed by the layout of the frontispieces of each of the four Gospels in which a few introductory lines are distributed between the two columns preceding the main text, a practice mainly observed in the manuscripts of that time, even if the paragraph signs in the margins witness the survival of a practice extinct elsewhere (Uhlig 1988: 450, 564, 828). The document related to Mikā'ēl was entered later still, and by another hand. This sequence raised many doubts, leading many to believe the document a forgery (Nosnitsin 2007: 953). In addition, doubts were raised by the facts stated in the text, in which the metropolitan claims to have arrived in Ethiopia at the time of the little known King Anbasā Wedem, constructing many churches—among them Mikā'ēl Ambā—, ordaining 27,000 priests and baptizing 50,000 persons.

However, critical analysis of this text leads one to think that it is indeed an authentic document, and more precisely a kind of last testament composed by a metropolitan who was contemplating his approaching death.

Cross-referencing the information this text provides with what we know of the Ethiopian context of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as well as with elements of Metropolitan Mikā'ēl's biography as found in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, reveals the importance of the site of Māryām Nāzrēt as part of an institutional scheme aimed at the Christianisation or re-Christianisation of the kingdom of Ethiopia at that time.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God. I Mikā'ēl the sinner, a son of saint Abbā Enṭonyos in the monastery of El'Arabeḥ which is on the shore of [the Sea] Eritrea, and Abbā Maqāryos the archbishop of Alexandria appointed me pope of Ethiopia at the time of King Anbasā Wedem. And by the good pleasure of God I have anointed seven kings and consecrated 1,009 churches, and I have consecrated this monastery by the name of Saint Michael the archangel so that he may listen to my sorrow. And this matter took place in the Era of the Martyrs 866.<sup>22</sup> And by the good pleasure of God I have ordained 27,000 priests and I have made monks [or nuns] 5,000 [persons]<sup>23</sup> and I have baptized 50,000 persons in the rivers and in the churches and I beg God that he may have compassion on me and hide my sins in his mercy and I have built 70 churches [as a whole, including] at Nāzrēt, 4 at Dōlā'et and 1 at Norā. Out of them, 1 by the name of Mary and another next to her by the name of Michael and Gabriel, and 3 [by the names of the] 4 Animals<sup>24</sup> and the 24 Heavenly Priests<sup>25</sup>, 4 for the Infants whom Herod killed<sup>26</sup> and 5 for the 12 Apostles. And with my means I have bought land for these churches, and let the one who steps on these churches and their lands be excommunicated from generation to generation, and let the altars condemn him before God, and all of you my male-slaves and my female-slaves, I have freed you from servitude for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Lady

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<sup>21</sup> A partial translation of this text, without edition, was published by SERGEW HABLE SELASSIE (1972: 203 n. 117). S. MUNRO-HAY (1997: 139-142, 161-162, 167-170) relies on it but encounters an insoluble problem when he considers that the Anbasā Wedem mentioned in Mikā'āl Ambā Gospels is the same as the one who reigned in the tenth century, just before Delnā'ād and just after Gudit.

<sup>22</sup> I.e. 1149/1150 AD. *Abbā* Mikā'ēl is likely to have consecrated the church either on Ḥedār 12 (November 21, 1149) or on Sanē 12 (June 19, 1150), respectively the second and first yearly feasts of the archangel.

<sup>23</sup> The verb *amank<sup>w</sup>asku* in the causative mode includes the persons being ushered into monastic life, the expressed complement being only the number of the persons made religious, whether men or women.

<sup>24</sup> The four Living creatures of Ezekiel. 1:4-26, Rev. 4:6-9 *etc.*, feast on Ḥedār 8 (November 17).

<sup>25</sup> The twenty-four Priests of heaven of Rev. 4:4-11, feast on Ḥedār 24 (December 3).

<sup>26</sup> Mt. 2:16-18, feast on Tāḥšās 30 (December 26).

Mary the Mother of God, I Abbā Mikā'ēl, who consecrated her [i.e. the church of Mikā'ēl Ambā]. Remember me in your [pl.] prayer ... [erasure of the last three lines].<sup>27</sup>

Mikā'ēl calls himself “a son of saint Abbā Antony in the monastery of El'Arabeḥ which is on the shore of [the Sea] Eritrea.” El'Arabeḥ is here directly transcribed from Arabic and refers to the region in which the monastery of Saint Antony lies, namely the Wādī 'Arābah. This is a clue that allows one to conclude that the metropolitan himself, an Arabic speaking Egyptian monk, contributed to the redaction of this note in Ge'ez language. He introduces himself as a contemporary of the patriarch of Alexandria, Maqāryos (Macarius). The latter held office between 1102 and 1129 and, according to the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, appointed a certain monk Mikā'ēl bishop for the Church of Ethiopia. This Mikā'ēl was at the time referred to by the name of Ḥabīb al-Itfiḥi (Khater & Burmester 1968: 90). The town of Itfiḥi is found in the south of Fustat, on the east bank of the Nile (Amélineau 1893: 326 ; Stewart 1991: 1313).

Mention of Mikā'ēl-Ḥabīb's activities in Ethiopia are found under the patriarchates of Gabriel II ibn Turayk (1131-1146) (Khater & Burmester 1968: 56-57) and John V (1146-1167) (*ibid.*: 90-91). It follows that this metropolitan ministered in Ethiopia during many years, at least—as the text he wrote states—until 1149/1150, thus making it credible, if not certain, that he may well have anointed seven kings. Mikā'ēl's long career even provoked some trouble in Ethiopia, with an Ethiopian monarch asking Patriarch John V (1146-1167) to appoint a new metropolitan, arguing that Mikā'ēl had by then become too old to perform his duties correctly. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian king's name is never mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. Still, it seems that communication between the Ethiopian sovereign, the patriarch and the sultan of Egypt did take place at that time, but no record of it is found in the Arabic sources from this period.

Mikā'ēl mentions an Ethiopian king, Anbasā Wedem, but we are not certain he was still in place at the time of the consecration of the church of Mikā'ēl Ambā in 1149/1150. The text only states that he was the sovereign of Ethiopia when Patriarch Macarius ordained Mikā'ēl metropolitan of Ethiopia between 1102 and 1129. It must be emphasized here that, while Mikā'ēl's commission applied to all Ethiopia, his see is not mentioned. Among the land charters compiled in the church of Aksum and known as the *Liber Aksumae*, there is a donation made by King Anbasā Wedem for this church (Conti Rossini 1909-1910, II: 5-6).<sup>28</sup> However, this document does not include any date in either of its two versions, or any list which would allow the reign of Anbasā Wedem to be dated. Antonella Brita has recently mentioned a manuscript found in a church of Takla Hāymānot in Tigrē, dating back to the nineteenth or twentieth century and dedicated to the Life of the Justs of Hawzēn, a group of missionary monks associated with the second Christianisation of Ethiopia starting from the sixth century. As it happens, this text places the arrival of these missionary monks in the twentieth year of Anbasā Wedem's reign, during the year of grace 910 (i.e. 1194), which in turn places the beginning of the reign of Anbasā Wedem in 1174 (Brita 2010: 4-5). Could this be the same king, despite Mikā'ēl's claim to have anointed seven sovereigns during his ministry? Such a claim suggests great monarchical instability. Or did two kings bear the same name? Or was the one and only Anbasā Wedem removed from the throne at one stage and reinstated later? These questions must be left aside for the moment, while keeping in mind that even though King Anbasā Wedem left very few solid traces from which to deduce his

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<sup>27</sup> Gospel of Mikā'ēl Ambā, fol. 102r-v. M.-L. DERAT (2018: 42-43) offers the text and a French translation and E. FRITSCH (2016: 57-58) gives an English translation.

<sup>28</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI (1909-1910, II: 317), who edited that land grant, judged that the document could be authentic.

reign, he did leave his mark on the kingdom. According to the lists of kings that were tampered with after the sixteenth century, he reigned just before Delna'ād, regarded as the last Aksumite king before the fall of the dynasty at the end of the tenth century, an event associated with the intervention of Queen Gudit.<sup>29</sup>

The text written by Mikā'ēl may be related to a testament (Fritsch 2016: 59-60), even though that word is not employed in the text and certain legal dispositions are missing from it, as compared to the better known will of another bishop, Gregory of Nazianus.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it seems that Bishop Mikā'ēl did in these few lines mean to state his last will, and in particular to release his slaves. In fact, a law promulgated by Constantine to the intention of Bishop Hosius about the manumission of slaves by the members of the clergy appears in the Theodosian code, compiled in 438. This law provides for the case of manumission in the testament of an ecclesiastic and states that any slaves must be freed at the time when the will is published shortly after the testator has died, without any need for witnesses or a law enforcing officer:

Emperor Constantine Augustus to Bishop Hosius. If any person with pious intention should grant deserved freedom to his favourite slaves in the bosom of the Church, he shall appear to give it with the same legal force as that with which Roman citizenship formerly was customarily bestowed under observance of the usual formalities. But it is our pleasure that such right to manumit in the churches shall be allowed only to those persons who give freedom under the eyes of the bishops. To clerics, moreover, We further grant that when they bestow freedom on their own household slaves, not only shall they be said to have given the complete enjoyment of such freedom when they have granted it in sight of the Church and the religious congregation, but also when they have conferred freedom in a last will or ordered it to be given by any words, so that the slaves shall receive their freedom directly on the day of the publication of the will, without the necessity of any witness or intermediary of the law.<sup>31</sup>

The manumission of slaves *in ecclesia* therefore included the possibility for a bishop to free his slaves without any procedure other than declaring so in his written will (Esders 2012: 58-59). How were these legal principles transmitted to the Coptic Church to which Bishop Mikā'ēl was accountable? Since the eleventh century, the Coptic Church has developed a particular jurisprudence under the form of patriarchal constitutions and, since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, collections of nomocanons (Aoun 2002: 190-195). The constitutions of the patriarchs of Alexandria, which Mikā'ēl may have known, were elaborated by Cyril II (1078-1092) and Gabriel II ibn Turayk (1131-1145). Neither mentions a bishop's right to bequeath. In contrast, all do mention the matter of the slaves. In the eleventh century, Cyril II forbade any lay people and presbyters to sell slaves to Muslims under the threat of excommunication if they did so (Burmester 1936). Gabriel II established that no bishop or monk could own a maid or a female-slave and that, if he happened to have inherited or owned one before becoming a monk or a bishop, he must either sell her or set her free (Burmester 1935). However, the way in which manumission was supposed to occur is not described. The least we can say regarding his female-slaves is that Bishop Mikā'ēl did not

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<sup>29</sup> These royal lists cannot be trusted for, as É. GODET (2003: XXXII) put it so well, “les querelles dynastiques du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle ont conduit à une telle relecture idéologique de l'Antiquité axoumite que les listes des rois compilées à partir du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle sont à peu près inutilisables.”

<sup>30</sup> Gregory of Nazianus' will was written in Greek in 381. The bishop bases himself on Roman law in order to bequeath his fortune in trust to the Church of Nazianus. He, therefore, gives a particular legal character to the document: “the text begins with the testator's name and the indication that the act he established is his will (l. 6-8). Then appears in lines 19-22 the declaration without which there could never be a Roman testament: “qu'un tel soit mon héritier,” à l'impératif (BEAUCAMP 1998: 31, 87).

<sup>31</sup> Book 4, Title 7, Constitution 1 (PHARR 1952). This reference and quote, like the rest of the information, were kindly communicated to E. Fritsch by M. K. Farag, a doctoral candidate in the department of Religious Studies at Yale University, whom we thank warmly for having volunteered precise information both in discussion and in referenced writing (14 July 2014).

abide by the constitution set out by the patriarch who ruled the Church during his lifetime. For the rest, these texts provide us with no indication as to the source of the jurisprudence referred to by Mikā'ēl in releasing his slaves although it seems he may be referencing Roman law as included in the collections of nomocanons. Legislation concerning slaves was eventually included in Chapter 32 of the nomocanon compiled in Arabic around 1240 by Al-Ṣafī abū l-Faḍā'il ibn al 'Assāl, who collected laws both from apostolic writings and Byzantine codes.<sup>32</sup> This collection of canons was then adopted as law by the Coptic Church despite its Chalcedonian character. Translated into Ge'ez almost four centuries after the facts which concern us here, this book brought to Ethiopia the same dispositions on manumission, thereby testifying to the continuity of tradition in this matter (Paulos Tzadua & Strauss 1968: 176).

Considering the document at hand as a kind of testament, Bishop Mikā'ēl's list of achievements definitely makes sense. He recalls the number of kings he anointed, the number of churches he consecrated, how many presbyters he ordained, how many monks and nuns he initiated and how many people he baptized. His intention is not to overstate the extent of his action but to give an account of it on the eve of his passing. He does not claim to have visited one thousand and nine churches but to have consecrated the altars for them (in fact an altar-tablet, the *tābot*) brought to him (Fritsch 2012: 447-453).<sup>33</sup> Similarly, priests were not ordained one by one but in groups, as witnessed by a sixteenth-century Portuguese who attended the ordination of more than two thousand presbyters streaming from all over the kingdom towards the Egyptian metropolitan, in one sole ceremony. It seems that five or six thousand priests could usually be ordained within a few days (Beckingham & Huntingford 1961: 350). Read in this contextual light, the numbers presented by Metropolitan Mikā'ēl appear far more reasonable than at first glance.

#### Māryām Nazrēt: A Foundation of Metropolitan Mikā'ēl, ca. 1149-1150

As it is reasonable to consider Mikā'ēl's last will a reliable statement based on the analysis above, the essential information obtained is that the Egyptian metropolitan built many churches (he counts seventy of them) and that in their number was the church of Nāzrēt. In fact, the construction described above, whose walls are in large part still standing and which is superimposed on an ancient basement, is a five-sanctuary church, constructed in order to celebrate a liturgy conforming to the Coptic norms of the time.

Architecturally, the four side sanctuaries are surmounted by cupolas atop strong walls in which timber boards have been horizontally inserted (the northernmost one is ruined but what remains shares common characteristics with the other three). They are decorated and sometimes lit by open or blind niches and squinches, that is, symmetrical combinations of flat niches and sections of vaults which seem to buttress each other. Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair's (2009: 229) description fits perfectly what is observed in the side sanctuaries of Māryām Nāzrēt:

An arch or similar structure built diagonally across the corner of a square building to support and act as a transition to a polygonal or round superstructure, normally a dome [...] [Domed monuments] are divided internally into three horizontal zones: base, zone of transition, and dome. The zone of transition [...] from the tenth century to the fourteenth [...] typically comprised four blind arches alternating with four.

Niches and squinches are all constructed with four-centered arches. Around them, characteristically, twin rows of voussoirs made of cut stones imitating bricks radiate

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<sup>32</sup> For easy reference, see HANNA (1996, chap. 32, § 9: 120).

<sup>33</sup> One example of this is found in eighteenth-century historical documents (GETATCHEW HAILE 1988: 11, 15).

outwards, with angles protruding to shape the eight niches placed at mid-height in each of the four side-sanctuaries they adorn, resting on horizontal timber boards. The wall surfaces were covered with coats of plaster supporting murals. Devised under the Abbasids (from 750 onwards), this type of wide arch, with a pointed low apex of Persian origin, the four-centered arch necessary for niches and squinches, was commonly exploited at the time of the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171) to enhance such famous buildings as Al-Azhar mosque, the Mosque of al-Hakim (r. 996–1013) (Creswell 1952, 1969; Blair & Bloom 1994; Blair 2010). The overall aspect calls to mind such mausoleums in the cemetery of Aswān.<sup>34</sup>

In ecclesiastical terms, the mode of construction of Māryām Nāzrēt is strikingly similar to the sanctuary of St Mark in both timeframe and construction style. St Mark's sanctuary was built north of the sanctuary of Benjamin in the main church of the monastery of St Macarius-the-Great (Wādī al-Natrun, Egypt) between the years 1010-1050, when the relic of the evangelist's head was entrusted to the monastery. Typically, it displays similar pointed arches and squinches upon which the cupola rests. In total, four sanctuaries were eventually constructed side by side, all linked by the choir (Leroy 1982: 11-12; 28ff.; plates 28-70)<sup>35</sup> (fig. 10).

In summary, it follows that all the elements, whether architectural, liturgical or textual, converge to suggest that the remains of the church of Māryām Nāzrēt may very well have been constructed by the Egyptian Coptic bishop Mikā'el who was sent to Ethiopia at the beginning of the twelfth century and served there until the middle of that century.

#### The Witness of Other Documents on the Coptic Community and Episcopal Residence at Māryām Nazrēt

That Māryām Nāzrēt was the seat of an Egyptian installation is confirmed by the colophon of one of the most well-known Ethiopian texts, the *Kebra Nagašt* (*The Glory of the Kings*). The colophon provides two essential pieces of information: the text of the *Kebra Nagašt* was discovered at Nāzrēt and at that time it was written in Arabic (Bezold 1909 [1905]: 172, 138). The Arabic text adds that two persons called “Abal'ez” and “Abalfarag” translated this document from Coptic into Arabic in 1225, during Lālibalā's reign. If one reconstructs the itinerary of the *Kebra Nagašt*, one may infer that the book was brought to Ethiopia from Egypt. As it was then written in Coptic, the text must date back before the tenth-eleventh century (in connection with the demand made by tenth-century Severus ibn al-Muqaffa', bishop of Ashmunein, that Arabic be used in the liturgy alongside Coptic). The document was then translated from Coptic to Arabic in 1225, by two persons with Arabic names, Abū al-Izz et Abū al-Faraḡ, who, judging from their bilingual faculties, were probably members of the Church of Alexandria. It would have been only later that the text was translated into Ge'ez after being uncovered at Nāzrēt, likely the place of its translation from Coptic into Arabic.

This is not the place to discuss the arguments that would lead one to think that the *Kebra Nagašt*, in the form in which it was spread throughout the Ethiopian kingdom from the fourteenth century, is the fruit of a Copto-Arabic translation and re-writing into Ge'ez. That stated, however, many authors have already brought to light the relationship between certain

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<sup>34</sup> For the mausoleums of the cemetery of Aswān, especially that of the *Saba' Banat* (CRESWELL 1952, vol. 1: 131-143, 289).

<sup>35</sup> The first mention of the sanctuary of St Mark apparently goes back to 1133 (E.M. 849) in the story of the Consecration of the Chrism by Gabriel III, Cod. Copt. Vat. XLVIII, f° 70 (EVELYN-WHITE 1926-1933, part 2: 37 n. 1). For photographs, see M. Gervers and E. Balicka-Witakowska's database *Mazgaba se'elat* under “Deir Abu Maqar” (log in and password: “student”), <<http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca>>.



texts known in Arabic and the *Kebra Nagast* (Amélineau 1888: 144-164; Bezold 1909 [1905]: XLIII-LX; Beylot 2002: 198; Piovanelli 2013: 31-32 n. 87).

Stuart Munro-Hay (2004: 24-25) proposed to identify Abalfarag (Abū al-Faraġ) with Abū al-Faraġ Ibn al-Ibrī, also known as Bar Hebraeus, the famous bishop of the Syriac Church of Antioch, author of many works in both Syriac and Arabic. However, this identification implies that the translation from Coptic to Arabic was done outside Ethiopia because Bar Hebraeus is not known to have travelled to Ethiopia. The colophon is, however, very clear about this point: it was in Ethiopia that the translation was done. Munro-Hay's identification is therefore far-fetched. Regarding the second translator—Abal'ez (Abū al-'Izz)—, Stuart Munro-Hay adopts a hypothesis put forward by Carlo Conti Rossini (1923: 506) who proposed viewing Abū al-'Izz as the father of a certain Dāwud ibn 'Izz. The latter is known to us through a letter sent to Sultan Qalāwūn (1279-1290), in which he introduces himself as the “vizir” of King Yāgbe'a Šeyon (1285-1294) and requests the sultan to appoint a new Coptic metropolitan in Ethiopia.<sup>36</sup> This identification looks more likely than the former one, even though it would require a certain longevity on the part of the father and/or son in order to be able to be active in both 1225 and as well in 1285. The merit of this hypothesis is the light it sheds on a community of Egyptian Christians who were fluent in both Coptic and Arabic and who entered the service of Ethiopian kings during the thirteenth century. One of the centres of that community seems unquestionably to be the church of Māryām Nāzrēt and surroundings and it was probably derived from the entourage which accompanied every new Egyptian metropolitan into Ethiopia and then settled in the country. If Dāwud is indeed Abū al-'Izz's son, it must be because the latter took wife in Ethiopia and had children, perpetuating a kind of Copto-Ethiopian élite in the service of the kings.

To provide even more evidence, an early sixteenth-century manuscript<sup>37</sup> lists a series of metropolitans, adding that six of them were buried in Nāzrēt. Only two metropolitans are mentioned by name: Sawirus and Mikā'el. The former was in charge during the middle of the eleventh century, which may imply that the Egyptian community already occupied the region before the construction of the church of Nāzrēt by Mikā'el. One may also wonder whether the names recalled are the correct ones as the list was compiled long after the facts. The presence among those names of Mikā'el, the founder of the church of Nāzrēt, nonetheless indicates a certain probability, although it is quite possible that several Mikā'els served as metropolitans of Ethiopia.

All these clues—namely the discovery of a text in Arabic at Nāzrēt, the presence of at least two scholars fluent in both Coptic and Arabic in the middle of the thirteenth century here, and the burial of certain Egyptian metropolitans in this place—point to the permanence and the importance of an Egyptian Christian presence at Nāzrēt, corroborated by the aforementioned structural elements.

In conclusion, these initial archaeological observations from Māryām Nāzrēt cross referenced with all of the textual data that could be gathered confirm the great benefit that would be derived from undertaking excavations on this site as well as neighbouring sites, Golegotā in particular. It is hoped that further archaeological investigations may help understand the nature of the Aksumite structure upon which the mediaeval church with Coptic architecture was built. Was it a church? When was it built? Was the new building constructed above a building in ruins? It is also hoped that further archaeological investigations will reveal the

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<sup>36</sup> It is the head-secretary of the *diwān al-inšā'*, Ibn 'Abd al-Zāhir, who mentioned the letter of Dāwud ibn 'Izz in his biography of Sultan Qalāwūn (QUATREMÈRE 1811: 270; IBN 'ABD AL-ZĀHIR 1961: 170-173).

<sup>37</sup> BNF Éthiopien 160, fol. 90r, ZOTENBERG (1877: 263), GUIDI (1899: 2).

exact plan of the church built by Metropolitan Mikā'ēl and the way the Egyptian occupation of the site was organised. Whatever data is unearthed, it will provide essential landmarks for both the history of an epoch and a region: a period that witnesses the decline of the kingdom of Aksum and the emergence of the Zāg<sup>w</sup>ē dynasty on the one hand, and a region that encompasses south-east Tegrāy—which at the beginning of the second millenium seems to have been particularly dynamic—with the founding of both a Muslim community around K<sup>w</sup>iḥa and a Coptic community around Nāzrēt.

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FIG. 1. — LOCATION OF THE SITES OF MĀRYĀM NĀZRĒT AND GOLEGOTĀ

Drawing by Marie-Laure Derat. N&B

FIG. 2. — MĀRYĀM NĀZRĒT ELEVATION, EAST FACADE

Drawing by Antoine Garric. couleur

FIG. 3. — MĀRYĀM NĀZRĒT AND MONOLITHIC PILARS

Drawing by Antoine Garric. couleur

FIG. 4. — MĀRYĀM NĀZRĒT, STONE BASIN TOP SIDE VIEW

Drawing by Antoine Garric. N&B

FIG. 5. — PLAN OF MĀRYĀM NĀZRĒT

Drawing by Antoine Garric. N&B

FIG. 6. — PHOTO OF THE SANCTUARY NORTH OF THE CENTRAL ONE SHOWING CUPOLA, NICHES AND SQUINCHES

Emmanuel Fritsch, 2014. couleur

FIG. 7. — PLAN OF THE SANCTUARIES OF MARYAM NAZRET

Drawing by Antoine Garric. N&B

FIG. 8. — PLAN OF GOLEGOTĀ

Drawing by Antoine Garric, 2014. N&B

FIG. 9. — SKETCH PLANS OF DAYR EŠ-ŠOHADA AND ST. ANTHONY IN EGYPT

After Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur*, plan n° 159 and Capuani, *Christian Egypt: Coptic Art and Monuments Through Two Millennia*, Cairo, 2002, p. 164 (drawing by Romain Mensan). N&B

FIG. 10. — PLAN AND ELEVATION OF THE SANCTUARY OF ST MARK

P.-H. Laferrière, fig. 5, p. 29 in Leroy (1982). N&B.

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