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The Ethiopian Royal Family as Commissioners of Manuscripts and the Artistic Style of the ‘Sad Eyes’

Abstract: This article sheds light on the period of peak manuscript production and the influence of the royal family through the examination of illuminated Ethiopic manuscripts from the Early Solomonic Period. A manuscript fragment of the *Miracles of Mary* and its illuminations, linked to the scriptorium of Gəṣan Māryām, provides a starting point for further exploration. The commissioning and donation notes of the royal family contribute to our understanding of their patronage of manuscript culture. Finally, the distinct artistic style found in the illuminations gives insights into the artistic developments of the period.

1 Introduction

The manuscript culture in Ethiopia and Eritrea saw the development of new features in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, partly on behalf of the emperors or actively encouraged by them, which is attested by the surviving manuscripts as will be highlighted in the following examples. Emperor Dāwit I (r. 1379/1380–1413) and his son, the eclectic Emperor Zar’a Yā’qob (r. 1434–1468), are surely among the most influential rulers of the early Solomonic dynasty regarding the manuscript culture. Both had a lasting effect on the Christian realm, but the latter especially was extremely influential not only as a ruler but also an author of religious texts during his time, and the number of manuscripts that attest to his involvement are yet to be counted.¹ A group of illuminated manuscripts which articulate a distinct artistic style and can all be connected to the royal family, including Dāwit, his sons and successors Yəṣḥaq (r. 1414–1429/1430) and Zar’a Yā’qob, as well as his daughters, will be discussed in the following.

¹ The list of relevant publications for Zar’a Yā’qob is long, starting obviously with the chronicle published by Perruchon 1893 (for which Manfred Kropp is preparing a new edition, cf. Kropp 2017, 57–58), to numerous analytical articles, to name but a few, by Tadesse Tamrat 1974; Getatchew Haile 1980; Getatchew Haile 1981; Getatchew Haile 1992; Kaplan 2002; Kropp 2005a. One of the best English articles to sum up the motivation of Zar’a Yā’qob’s politics is Derat 2004.

One item shall be the starting point to venture into this specific point in time and a particular scriptorium, often termed the ‘royal scriptorium’. The example in question is in Munich’s Museum Fünf Kontinente (MFK). The latter’s MfVK 86-307647 contains the *Miracles of Mary* (CAe 2384),² and is decorated with lavish illuminations which link it directly to the famous scriptorium of Gəṣan Māryām, already known from Emperor Dāwit I’s time.³

Starting from the MFK manuscript, this article takes a fresh look at a number of donation or commissioning notes that refer to members of the royal family, and the intentions that they expressed through these notes. Regarding certain members of the royal family, these notes are the only evidence of the individual’s existence that we have so far. Several of the manuscripts discussed here can be linked through their illuminations, and I will present new material on the artistic tradition attested in the miniatures.

2 The royal family of Emperor Dāwit

It is known that the royal family in the late fourteenth century was vast, with the emperors marrying more than one woman and, having additional children from concubines, distant relatives occasionally made claims to the throne.⁴ After Emperor Dāwit had passed away, no less than six different rulers sat on the throne between the years 1412/1413 and 1434.⁵ Yet, only two of them, Yəṣṣāq and Zar’a Yā’qob ruled for extended periods. The men of the royal family, especially those who were crowned as emperors, are known from several sources; evidence for the female members, however, is usually scarce. Emperor Dāwit did not leave a chronicle, but several of his family members can be identified through notes in manuscripts or external sources, including, as discussed below, one of his wives and two of his daughters. The same accounts for Yəṣṣāq, for whose reign we have no chronicle, but rely on shorter notes in manuscripts. There is a chronicle only

2 Reference is provided here to the Clavis Aethiopica (CAe) ID numbers of texts. This constantly growing repertory of textual units attested in Gəʿəz literature is being developed within the digital research environment Beta maṣāḥəft. It enables users to refer unambiguously to a specific text/textual unit. For identification of a CAe number, type in the ID number (without any additions) here <<https://betamasaheft.eu/newSearch.html?searchType=text&mode=any&work-types=work>> (accessed on 22 August 2024).

3 Dege-Müller, Gnisci and Pisani 2022, 88–89.

4 Kaplan 2002.

5 Tadesse Tamrat 1974.

for Zar'a Yā'qob, however, his children were apparently so numerous that names which do not feature in the chronicle still appear in the notes.⁶ Zar'a Yā'qob himself was a prolific writer, and several of his contemporaries, family members as well as opponents, are known through his writings.

A number of Emperor Dāwit's sons are known and a number of sources, which will be discussed in the following, shed light on other members of his family. The Four Gospels manuscript of Ṭānā, Kəbrān Gabrə'el, Ṭānāsee 1 includes a note which commemorates his parents, Emperor Sayfa 'Ar'ād (r. 1344–1371) and his mother Lazab Warqā.⁷ The *History of the Monastery of Dabra Libānos* (CAe 2613)⁸ recounts that Dāwit also conquered the throne thanks to his sister Dəl Sefā.⁹ From the way the story is narrated, which is also incorporated in external sources such as the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church*, it seems that she was influential enough to exert some authority in this power struggle; though otherwise little is known of her. In the famous Gospel of Dabra Ma'ār Giyorgis (digitised as EMDA 00463),¹⁰ full of royal land grants and donation notes, Dāwit's wife Empress Magdalāwit is mentioned on fol. 235^{va}.¹¹ The fate of female family members unfor-

⁶ Even the author of the chronicle admits that he does not know all the names, Perruchon 1893, 5.

⁷ Kaplan 2002, 74. For the notes, found on fol. 236^{va-b}, see the manuscript itself <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/Tanasee1/viewer?fbclid=IwAR3AgQlWo5T3K8HyET9kEt2LztfKSKWC EVwUsFmFRe62_n3oJ9b_w06pWVw> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

⁸ The CAe entry for this number is void of any information, but it could be the correct identification. The text I refer to here was translated by Turaev (tr.) 1906.

⁹ All secondary sources on this matter refer to the *History of the Patriarchs of the Coptic Church* as the source for her name. However, this text seems to leave her without a name, referring to her only as 'sister'; cf. Khater and Burmester (eds) 1970, 252; cf. also Tedeschi 1974, 575–578. Her name, however, features in an account of the abbots of Dabra Libānos, in a sentence for Tewodros, its fifth abbot. This was indicated by Cerulli 1944, 139, who, in turn refers to Turaev (tr.) 1906, 356, who, in turn, translated the text from the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d'Abbadie 108, fol. 5^{rb}: a text that Antoine d'Abbadie had copied in Gondar from a much older manuscript, see d'Abbadie 1859, 122. I thank Nafisa Valieva for kindly confirming the correct identification in Turaev's Russian translation. A French translation is provided by Derat 2003, 329–345.

¹⁰ Manuscripts kept in repositories in Ethiopia and microfilmed or digitised by the EMDA, EMLL, or DSAE projects are treated in the following way: city/locality/repository (i.e. the location of the manuscript reported during its microfilming/digitisation); and, in the slot intended for a shelf mark, the respective microfilming/digitisation project's identification number has been provided (e.g. 'Lālibalā, Beta Madhāne 'Ālam, EMLL 6907'). The manuscript, digitised under the project number EMDA 00463 was catalogued by Ted Erho <<https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/601721>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

¹¹ The manuscript contains further interesting notes, such as, on fol. 235^{vb}, the commemoration of the death of the Coptic pope Gabriel (V, 1408–1427) and the information that he had sent the

tunately has too often been a simple ‘his wife’ or ‘his sister’, both in the original source and in academic studies.¹² A careful examination of the additional notes in manuscripts may well reveal further names and/or information about people already known.¹³

A recent contribution I co-published with Vitagrazia Pisani and Jacopo Gnisci draws attention to the supplication notes found in the small copy of the *Miracles of Mary*, Munich, MFK, MfVK 86-307647.¹⁴ The colophon on fol. 16^{vb} informs us that the manuscript was a donation by Zar’a Yā’qob to an unnamed church. Furthermore, the note states that Zar’a Yā’qob’s regnal name is Q^waṣṭanīnos, and that Emperor Dāwit was his father. There are several other notes throughout the manuscript that, next to Zar’a Yā’qob, also mention the names ‘Amata Māryām and Habta Māryām.¹⁵ Thanks to another manuscript, a *Senodos (Apostolic Canons)*, CAe 2317) manuscript from Dimā Giyorgis (digitised as EMDA 00342), we can identify ‘Amata Māryām as a sister of Zar’a Yā’qob.¹⁶ In the colophon of Dimā Giyorgis, EMDA 00342, ‘Amata Māryām is named as the commissioner of the manuscript, and identified as the daughter of Emperor Dāwit. It can, thus, be assumed that she commissioned the manuscript while her father was still in power. The *Miracles of Mary* in manuscript MFK MfVK 86-307647 is accompanied by five full-page miniatures painted in a distinct style, which will be addressed below.

head of the Evangelist Mark to Emperor Yəṣṣaq, son of Emperor Dāwit (I am indebted to Jonas Karlsson for drawing my attention to this note). I discovered the same note in the gospel manuscript of Dabra Šāhl, DSAE 1, fol. 177^{rb}; the manuscript is online, <<https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/501282>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). Ewa Balicka-Witakowska has published an extensive analysis of DSAE 1, also including this note. She proposes that the ‘head of Mark the Apostle [sic]’ is to be understood in a metaphorical form, meaning in fact the Coptic pope (Balicka-Witakowska 2017, 203). However, considering that there is a second such note in Dabra Ma’ār Giyorgis, it might just as well be a document regarding an important relic. After all, Yəṣṣaq is known for his contacts with foreign countries, and, just like his father and his brothers, he was interested in acquiring relics; cf. Krebs 2021, 61–120.

12 The *Life of Giyorgis of Saglā* (CAe 1456), for example, contains an account of Giyorgis insisting that the queen of Dāwit stands up and comes to him to receive the Eucharist, while only the emperor would be allowed to remain seated, Colin 1987, 22–23. Unfortunately, the queen is not further specified in this narration.

13 Herman (2020) offers a wide insight into the position of women in Ethiopian societies, and the roles they fulfilled therein. Regarding the time frame relevant to this article, she touches only on Zir Ganela and Dəl Mangəṣā (see below here for more information).

14 Dege-Müller, Gnisci and Pisani 2022, 88–89.

15 Dege-Müller, Gnisci and Pisani 2022, 68, 88–89.

16 EMDA 00342. The colophon is on fol. 96^{rb}. It was digitised by Mersha Alehegne and catalogued by Ted Erho, and can be accessed at <<https://www.vhmmml.org/readingRoom/view/533844>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

We learn of other royal family members in a gospel manuscript from 'Ēndāfare Māryām microfilmed as EMMML 3879, which was also commissioned by Zar'a Yā'qob and given to a church dedicated to Qirqos, most probably the one that he had commissioned to be built in Dabra Bərhan.¹⁷ The donation note further asks to bless his wife and children. The note was partly erased and overwritten with a short new note, referring to Dəl Samrā, his daughter – who is also known from his chronicle, as one of his family members who (allegedly) transgressed against him and was severely punished.¹⁸ In a second note (fol. 3^{va-b}), the time of the construction of Qirqos church is provided as 1460/1461 CE, and, in addition, some of the items with which Zar'a Yā'qob equipped the church are listed. There are many additional land grants and donation notes from several kings and queens after him, but, most importantly, from Zar'a Yā'qob himself, and from his wife 'Ēleni. Zar'a Yā'qob had at least three wives, out of whom 'Ēleni was surely the most renown. After his death, she served as queen regent for many decades and for two successive emperors – she was also active in the political affairs during her time. In one note in EMMML 3879 (fol. 3^{ra-b}), she portrays herself as the wife of Zar'a Yā'qob and lists her own endowments to the Qirqos church. We see the list of 'Ēleni's donations, followed by another list of donations from 'Zar'a Yā'qob's children, men and women' (fol. 3^{vb}). There is a third donation note that mentions the name 'Ēleni. This note is intriguing, as it suggests that after the death of her daughter Barbārā, 'Ēleni donated items in her honour to Qirqos church (fol. 3^{rb}):

እምድጎረ : አዕረፈት : ዘመበት : እሌኒ : ንግሥት : ለወለታ : ባርባራ : ከመ : ይኩና : ለተስካ
ራ : [sic] ለቤተ : ቂርቆስ : [...] ወተስከራሂ : [sic] አመ : ጅወጅ ሊታጎጎሥ ። ኢትርስዑ : ዘንተ :
ቃስ(?)ወስት : ወዲያቆናት ። በጊዜ : ጸሎት : በጊዜ : ማዕጠንት : ወመሥዋዕት ።¹⁹

(Things) that Queen 'Ēleni gave to her daughter Bārbārā, after she (Bārbārā) had departed, so that they may be to the memory of the church of Qirqos, [...] And her *tazkār* is on 25 Tāḥśās. Do not forget this, priests and deacons, at the time of prayer, at the time of incense and of offering.

17 The manuscript is available online at <<https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/205683>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). The donation note is on fol. 2^{ra}. There is also the detailed catalogue description by Getatchew Haile 1987, 207–209. Dabra Bərhan was possibly also founded by Zar'a Yā'qob and functioned as his capital, which would explain why the manuscript contains further notes from his family members, as it was part of the royal church of the court.

18 Perruchon 1893, 5, 98.

19 The note is somewhat unclear, as was remarked by Getatchew Haile (1987, 208). The spelling of the word *tazkār* ('memory, memorial, commemoration') as ተስከራ is interesting, but not uncommon. My own translation is presented here.

Queen 'Ēleni, whose regnal name was 'Admās Mogasā, was certainly an astonishing regent, known for her political involvement, foreign relations with Portugal and even as the author of religious hymns.²⁰ But so far, it had always been claimed that she was childless, except for one Portuguese source referring to a potential son.²¹ It is, of course, possible that the word 'daughter' here in the note has a spiritual connotation, similar to the mother-like relationship that 'Ēleni engaged in with Emperor Ba'ada Māryām, Zar'a Yā'qob's son (from another wife) and successor. Still the note might indeed refer to a biological daughter of 'Ēleni who died in early childhood (even at birth?), or to a child from a previous marriage, although this is unlikely since it is known that she was married to Zar'a Yā'qob at a young age.²² There are yet other possibilities to explain this mother–daughter relation: one of Zar'a Yā'qob's sisters was also called 'Ēleni; however, she would probably not be called 'queen'.²³ In any case, the reference in EML 3879 is, at least, striking, and the description of 'Ēleni's barrenness might have been false.

3 Stylistic characteristics of the artistic features

These short references to the personal names of Zar'a Yā'qob, 'Amata Māryām and Habta Māryām in the Munich manuscript MFK, MfVK 86-307647 invite us to delve deeper into the royal family as commissioners of manuscripts. However, it is also essential to investigate the artists who illuminated the manuscripts. The *Miracles of Mary* in manuscript MFK MfVK 86-307647 are accompanied by five full-page miniatures of two male saints each (Fig. 1).²⁴ They were painted in a unique style, of which several other manuscripts are known and can be traced back to the royal family. I have identified seven manuscripts which exhibit this artistic style and whose complex history will be elaborated in the following paragraphs.

²⁰ Chernetsov 2005.

²¹ This is a difficult source; the original text narrates that a son of the queen escaped from royal prison, but does not specify the queen's name, only the translators did. Cf. Beckingham and Huntingford (eds) 1961, 245.

²² Possibly around the age of 12, certainly not unusual at that time. Cf. Chernetsov 2005.

²³ This sister is mentioned in the *Maṣḥafa ʾēfut*, Caquot 1955a, 95, 103, as well as in its copy in London, BL, Or. 481, see more on this below. It might also be possible that these two 'Ēlenis were confused in all the sources as one person, which might be an explanation for the exceptionally long life of Queen 'Ēleni if it was only one woman.

²⁴ The miniatures are on fols 1^v, 4^v, 7^v, 11^v, 14^v.



Fig. 1: The Apostles Peter and Paul, fol. 4^r / Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente / 1434–1468 / MfVK 86-307647 / Copyright: Museum Fünf Kontinente, München. Photo: Nicolai Kästner.

Table 1: Overview of existing witnesses.

	Repository	Signature	Main text	Commissioner
1	'Ambā Gəšan	EMML 9002	<i>Miracles of Mary</i>	Dāwit
2	'Ambā Gəšan	–	<i>Maṣḥafa tēfut</i>	Zar'a Yā'qob
3	Beta Ləhem	–	with <i>Dərsāna Māryām</i> (CAe 1750)	Dəl Mangaśā
4	Addis Ababa, NALE	Ms 27 (= UNESCO 2-27)	Pauline Epistles (CAe 3505)	?
5	London and Oslo, Schøyen Collection	Schøyen 2345	Acts of the Apostles	?
6a	Sorā 'Ambā 'Abbo	EMML 7220	<i>Miracles of Mary</i>	Zar'a Yā'qob
6b	Munich, MFK	MfVK 86-307647	<i>Miracles of Mary</i>	Zar'a Yā'qob
7	Private collection ²⁵	–	<i>Miracles of Mary</i>	Zar'a Yā'qob

The style is articulate but relatively easy to differentiate from others. It will also become apparent that only manuscripts with specific contents were illuminated in this manner. Interestingly, even though the miniatures on which I focus here have been used in several studies, they have never been investigated in a comparative form.²⁶ Based on one of the most striking features of this style, one could call it the style of the 'sad eyes'. All the figures depicted have what appear to be sad and melancholic eyes, with the drawing line of the corner of the eyes often left open. When depicting the deceased, the eyes are painted all black or all white, for example, in the crucifixion scenes. Almost all images portray people standing in half-portrait, with a specific placement of the feet of those depicted. Mary's feet, and the feet of some other holy women, are usually half-covered in socks or slippers, while all others are barefooted. The foot positioned to the back seems to be missing the big toe, or to have the toe tucked under the foot. This detail may just be an exaggeration of the ball of the foot viewed from the side. The feet often reach over the border frame enclosing the painting. Additionally, the ears are of a

²⁵ The manuscript's last known location is London.

²⁶ Mercier (2021) simply calls it 'royal style', which I think is too generic, and, in fact, he includes manuscripts that have not been decorated in the style discussed here. While Heldman and Munro-Hay (1993, 178) do not use a specific term 'royal style', they connect them all to the 'palace scriptorium of emperor Dawit'. Stanisław Chojnacki's descriptions are of little use; he dated some of these items too late and placed them in the early sixteenth century (Chojnacki 1983, 58–59, 294), other manuscripts he correctly associated with Emperor Dāwit I (Chojnacki 1983, 192–194). However, at one point, he states that 'Stylistically, the miniatures in both manuscripts, that of Bethlehem and of Gešen Maryām belong to the same school and also date from the same period', contradicting his previous statements (Chojnacki 1983, 295).

pronounced shape and the noses are generally long and straight in some of the miniatures.

The miniatures of this style cover a full page. The images are colourful overall, and the background of each image is painted in a single bright colour, either blue, green or a yellow ochre. A few miniatures show architectural elements, or furniture, such as a throne on which Mary would sit. The images are surrounded by colourful frames in several different shades and, in most cases, decorated with interlaces. Many of the images depict one or two Apostles. When two, they are facing each other, usually holding a manuscript in one hand and a cross in the other. The clothes of those portrayed are vibrant, with intricate patterns, and often appear in a dynamic movement with zigzagged shapes. Captions are written both in the margins and inscribed into the coloured background; both are apparent in some manuscripts.²⁷

As far as the available images of all witnesses allow us to say, the incipit pages of the texts of the codices are also decorated with elaborate interlaced headpieces executed in the same colour scheme as the miniatures. The text is laid out in two columns in all witnesses, and the headpieces on the incipit pages often extend down not only on the side margins but also in the intercolumnar space.²⁸

The extraordinary miniatures of the 'sad eyes' style have been mentioned by several scholars before, however, without a comparative approach. Jacques Mercier selected individual witnesses, and simply referred to it as a 'royal style', while Marilyn Heldman emphasised the connection to the royal scriptorium of Emperor Dāwit.²⁹ Heldman also compared more than just one or two of the manuscripts available to her. Others have commented on the potential Byzantine influence of some of the miniatures, which is a discussion I do not want to repeat here.³⁰

²⁷ Unfortunately, these are often hardly legible in black and white microfilms.

²⁸ In this case, the *Maṣḥafa ʿēfut*, discussed in the following, is exceptional.

²⁹ Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, 178; Mercier 2021.

³⁰ See, for example, the studies by Fiaccadori 1994; Bosc-Tiessé 2020, 351–353; Mercier 2021, 131–142, 177–179.

4 Description of the witnesses available

Seven manuscripts that attest to this specific painting style are currently known. Two manuscripts from the churches on 'Ambā Gəšan are the most famous. The first is a *Miracles of Mary* manuscript commissioned by Emperor Dāwit, which was microfilmed as EMMML 9002.³¹ The writing of the manuscript was finished in December 1400 (fol. 282^{ra}), and it is known especially for the text it contains – most probably the first manuscript of this text translated from Arabic into Gə'əz – as well as the use of gold ink in the miniatures and Mary's name.³² The use of gold ink is extraordinary in the Ethiopian manuscript tradition and even made it into manuscripts itself as a story linked to a miracle of Mary. The paintings in this manuscript all centre around Mary, and show little variation in the style or arrangement of the figures (Fig. 2). Most of them depict the Virgin with the Child, flanked by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who form a canopy with their wings. Remarkably, Emperor Dāwit is featured in several of the images, prostrating to the Virgin. Interestingly, he is portrayed with a halo, in the same yellow colour as the halos of the angels, whereas the halos of Mary and the Child are painted in the gold ink.³³

31 The black and white images is available at <<https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/201729>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

32 These two manuscripts from 'Ambā Gəšan, along with the history of this 'royal prison', have been studied for a long time regarding the artistic features; see Spencer 1967; Mercier 2004, 12–14, 35–37; Mercier 2021, 133–136; Gnisci 2022, 142–143. Both Kropp 2017 and Bausi 2022 (pages 141–144 have the full text of the colophon plus an English translation) point out that it is the oldest known copy of the *Miracles of Mary* found so far in Ethiopia. Given the context of the text, the colophon and the miniatures, it can be assumed that this was indeed the first translation of the text from Arabic into Gə'əz.

33 Gnisci 2022, 142, 163.



Fig. 2: Annunciation of Mary, fol. 2^v / 'Ambā Gəšan / 1400 / EMM 9002 / Copyright/Photo: Diana Spencer with the permission of Michael Gervers.

The second manuscript from 'Ambā Gəšan is the famous *Maṣḥafa tēfut*. It may have been painted by two different artists, but a set of the images can quite certainly be attributed to the style of the 'sad eyes'.³⁴ This manuscript, which was commissioned by Zar'a Yā'qob, is famous for many reasons. It was used as a 'Golden Gospel'³⁵ of the church in 'Ambā Gəšan and hosts numerous notes, partly copied from older manuscripts, from various emperors starting from 'Amda Ṣəyon I (r. 1314–1344).³⁶ The fact that Zar'a Yā'qob commissioned the codex, and especially selected the three main texts therein – the Octateuch (*Orit*, CAe 2083), Four Gospels (*Arbā'tu wangel*, CAe 1560) and *Senodos* (*Apostolic Canons*, CAe 2317) – to be copied into one is relevant for our study. The emperor expressed his intentions in the colophon of the manuscript, which is written on an additional short quire at the beginning of the codex.³⁷

ወሀብኩ ፡ አነ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ ወስመ ፡ መንግሥትዮ ፡ ቈስጠንጢኖስ ፤ ዘን
ተ ፡ ኦሪተ ፡ ወመንጌለ ፡ ወሲኖዶስ ፡ ዘተጋብኦ ፡ ውስተ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ ጽሕፈት ፡ ጸታ ፡ ሰለስታ ፤ ለ
እግዝእትዮ ፡ ወፍቅርትዮ ፡ ማርያም ፤ ከመ ፡ ያንብቡ ፡ ካህናት ፡ በውስተ ፡ መርጡላ ፡ በበዓለ ፡
ወልዳ ፡ ወበበዓላ ፤³⁸

I, Zar'a Yā'qob, son of Dāwit, and my regnal name is Q^wasṭantīnos, gave this *Orit*, and Gospel, and *Sinodos* [sic] bound together into one script/writing, in threefold order, to my Lady and my Beloved One, Mary, so that the priests read it in her sanctuary on her Son's feast day and on her feast day.

³⁴ A lot has been said about this manuscript and its illuminations, usually in connection with its copy kept in the British Library, as Or. 481. See, among others, Spencer 1967; Fiaccadori 1994; Kropp 2018; Mercier 2021, 178.

³⁵ Golden Gospel 'indicates a book of the Four Gospels in which notes regarding the institution (usually a monastery or a church), the place or the region where the codex is preserved, or where its owner dwells, are contained'; [the notes] 'are acts and grants declaring rights of exploitation, land prerogatives and benefits', Bausi 2010b, 1130b.

³⁶ Especially useful for the overview of bibliography dedicated to this manuscript is Bosc-Tiessé and Derat 2010.

³⁷ The full description of this manuscript and its important notes is beyond the scope of this article. The first report is by Spencer (1967), highlighting especially the illuminations. We owe the first description of its content to Caquot (1955a), with a focus on the notes, but he relied on information provided to him by others. Lastly, Manfred Kropp has published on various occasions on different notes from the codex. Most interesting in our regard is the colophon by Zar'a Yā'qob, Kropp 2018, 162–164. The note was also copied into the copy BL Or. 481, but with errors.

³⁸ *Maṣḥafa tēfut*, fol. 1^{ra} – see also Kropp 2018, 161 (image of the folios), 162 (text), 163 (translation). Images in a higher resolution are available at Māzgābā səlat website <<https://ethiopia.utoronto.ca/>> (accessed on 4 September 2023), under the reference number MG-2008.081:002.

This combination of these three texts is a unicum in Ethiopia,³⁹ but beyond this, it is clear that Zar'a Yā'qob's intention was to create an object of high importance by also including the royal donation notes from previous kings. He himself left several extensive notes in the manuscript which attest to his church politics, both in creating new feast days, distributing land to churches and re-ordering the dioceses in the region of Təgrāy.⁴⁰ In addition to its texts, the *Maṣḥafa tēfut* is famous for its many illuminations of biblical scenes from Mary and the life of Jesus, as well as portraits of saints, which fit the stylistic oeuvre described in this study.⁴¹

The set of images is outstanding and differs from most of the other six manuscripts discussed here. While it is still the same style – sad eyes, the depiction of the feet, the colour schema – the scenes show much more variety as they illuminate scenes from the Octateuch and the Gospels. Thus, there are depictions of, for example, the Massacre of the Innocents by Herod, Jesus's Baptism in the Jordan River (Fig. 3) and how Moses received the Ten Commandments from God.⁴² In addition, there are many scenes from Mary's life, and later, from the Gospels.

³⁹ Obviously, except for the (almost) exact copy BL Or. 481. Note another interesting multiple text manuscript, albeit combining Old Testament, New Testament, Book of Enoch, *Ascension of Isaiah*, *Testament of Our Lord*, *Didascalia*, and *Senodos*, kept in Dabra Bizan, was described in Bausi 2022, 163–167, see also n. 128.

⁴⁰ Kropp 2005b.

⁴¹ The copy BL Or. 481 also quite faithfully copied the miniatures of the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*, from which unfortunately just a few images are openly available. What is striking in Or. 481 are the excessive decorations in the margins and intercolumn space of all the text pages. Similar decorations can be found in another manuscript from 'Ambā Gəšan, digitised as EMMML 9001, another Octateuch (*Orit*), thus, apparently an artistic feature applied to more than one manuscript in this scriptorium. There are two of the images Diana Spencer took of the *Maṣḥafa tēfut* which show some detail of decoration on text pages, but not enough to judge for the rest of the manuscript. My suspicion that the same type of marginal decorations is also to be found on all of the text pages of the *Maṣḥafa tēfut* has kindly been confirmed by Anaïs Wion, who is among the few who has seen more of the manuscript than just its miniatures. On the decorative features, see also Erho 2013, 80–81. EMMML 9001 can be accessed at <<https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/201728>> (accessed on 4 September 2023), judging by the palaeography, it might be older than the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*, and a comparison of both *Orit* texts seems to be an interesting endeavour.

⁴² This was extensively discussed by Fiacadori 1994.



Fig. 3: Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, from the *Maṣḥafa ʾəfət*, folio unknown / 'Ambā Gəšan / fifteenth century / no shelf mark / Copyright/Photo: Diana Spencer with the permission of Michael Gervers.

As a text, the *Senodos* was of high importance at this time, and Zar'a Yā'qob commissioned and donated another copy of this work to the Ethiopian church in Jerusalem in the eighth year of his reign, 1441/1442.⁴³ He possibly intended to provide the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem with an updated version of the text, as they were probably still using an older, 'Melkite' version.⁴⁴ Similarly to the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*, Zar'a Yā'qob had a long note in the first person singular included in the Jerusalem *Senodos* (fols 3^{ra}–4^v), in which he expressed his thoughts regarding the donation of this manuscript.⁴⁵ It can be assumed that he had similar intentions when commissioning the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*: to update the library of 'Ambā Gəṣan with a 'better' version of the *Senodos*. A similar goal probably led to the donation of a *Senodos* to Dimā Giyorgis (EMDA 00342) by 'Amata Māryām, Zar'a Yā'qob's sister.

The *Maṣḥafa tēfut* may also have been sent to 'Ambā Gəṣan because of the significance of the site. The plateau mountain in the shape of a cross is not far from the modern town Dase, in Wallo (northern Ethiopia), also goes by the name Dabra Karbe, and today hosts several churches. 'Ambā Gəṣan played an important role in the time of Dāwit and Zar'a Yā'qob when it functioned as a royal prison. It was customary that male relatives of the reigning monarch were held in custody there, either to protect them from rivals or keep them locked away so that they could not challenge the king's claim to the throne.⁴⁶ Zar'a Yā'qob spent almost thirty years on 'Ambā Gəṣan before he ascended the throne in 1434. 'Ambā Gəṣan is also famous for hosting the relic of the true cross that Emperor Dāwit sought to obtain for a long time, although he died before it arrived. Zar'a Yā'qob received the relic in 1456 and searched for a long time to find a suitable place for it. 'Ambā Gəṣan was shown to him in a vision, as worthy because of its cross-shaped mountain.⁴⁷

'Ambā Gəṣan was not only home to Zar'a Yā'qob personally, but also appears have had a scriptorium equipped for producing outstanding manuscripts, as the two examples mentioned here prove.⁴⁸ It is possible that other of the manuscripts presented here originate from 'Ambā Gəṣan's scriptorium.

⁴³ The manuscript is nowadays preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, as Borg. et. 2.

⁴⁴ Bausi 1992, 19. For additional bibliography on this text see Bausi 2010a.

⁴⁵ The full note and Latin translation in Grébaut and Tisserant 1935, 779–781, additional thoughts on the note in Cerulli 1943, 237–238.

⁴⁶ The custom as royal prison might date back to the thirteenth century, Haile Gabriel Dagne 2003.

⁴⁷ Caquot 1955a, 102–103.

⁴⁸ Unfortunately, only a few manuscripts from 'Ambā Gəṣan have been microfilmed, among them EML 9001, an Octateuch.

A third manuscript decorated in the style of the ‘sad eyes’ contains a collection of homilies, a *Dərsāna Māryām*, dedicated to the veneration of Mary,⁴⁹ among whose texts are also a number of Marian miracles. It was donated by Dəl Mangəśā,⁵⁰ daughter of Dāwit, as explained in a lengthy donation note, where her baptismal name Batra ‘Aron is also provided.⁵¹ The manuscript is still preserved in the church to which Dəl Mangəśā donated the manuscript, Beta Ləhem in Gäyənt, a church that she herself had built and that is known thanks to two remarkable notes in another manuscript: the Four Gospels of Lālibālā, kept in Beta Madhāne ‘Ālam church, which was digitised as EML 6907.⁵² Chronologi-

49 The texts in this manuscript have often been called the *Lāhā Māryām* (*Lamentation of Mary*, CAe 1750), which is, however, a title of a very specific homily on Mary composed by Cyriacus of Behnesa, and should not refer to the entire collection found in this manuscript from Beta Ləhem.

50 Her name is found in different spellings, other than those presented here in the following, for example, her name is spelled Dəlma Nəḡśā in the *Miracles of Libānos* (CAe 4717), Bausi (ed.) 2003a, 173 (text); Bausi (tr.) 2003b, 99, esp. n. 78. Her name is often rendered as ‘Dəl Mogāsa’ in secondary sources, for example, Wion 2017; Fritsch and Habtemichael Kidane 2020, 180, or in the form of ‘Dəl Māngəśā’ in, for example, Herman 2020, 373. See also the discussion in Bombeck 2022, 196–197. I choose the spelling Dəl Mangəśā as is found in the manuscript New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, M.828, fol 205^{vb}.

51 This manuscript has also been studied several times before, again with excerpts of the miniatures, for example, in Jäger 1957; Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, 92; Mercier 2004, 84–86. The manuscript, in fact, contains a mix of texts venerating the Virgin Mary, among them a collection of fifteen miracles of Mary, Kropp 2017. The full text of the manuscript was translated into German by Bombeck 2010, cf. also Bombeck 2022. The manuscript contains the *gʷəlt* donation note by Dəl Mangəśā on fol. 2ʳ. The full material is available on Bombeck’s website <<http://www.bombeck.de/stefan.html>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). The full note is also presented and translated in Bosc-Tiessé and Derat 2011, 90–92. Tony Burke created an entry for this manuscript on the North American Society for the Study of Christian Apocryphal Literature (NASSCAL) website on 1 February 2020, <https://www.nasscal.com/manuscripta-apocryphorum/dabra-tabor-bethlehem-church-no-shelf-number/?fbclid=IwAR17g_3M_NtOva4TKf91Flxf8qznnPLdpHE_9AIF4FhVGG7rQNglP5CB1zE> (accessed on 4 September 2023), this also includes links to the images and full text of the manuscript. I thank Marcin Krawczuk for bringing this to my attention. Chojnacki also used the manuscript for his study of major themes in Ethiopian paintings, he indicates that Diana Spencer took photographs of the manuscript (Chojnacki 1983, 58), however these are not available.

52 This manuscript is remarkable on its own. The two notes written in 1410 possibly by Metropolitan ‘Abuna Bartalomewos himself, one in Coptic and one in Arabic, which inform us about Emperor Dāwit’s land donations to the church Beta Ləhem, which his daughter had built are relevant for our case here. The manuscript is accessible online, the notes are on fol. 61ʳ, <<https://www.vhmm.org/readingRoom/view/200535>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). Many studies have used this manuscript including Schneider 1970; Bosc-Tiessé and Derat 2011; Wion 2017. See also Bosc-Tiessé 2020, 363. Jäger 1957 presented some colour images, but misidentified them, see his plates 3, 6, 9, 12, 15.

cally, this *Dərsāna Māryām* is actually older than the *Maṣḥafa ʾəfət*, and similar in age to the 'Ambā Gəšan *Miracles of Mary*.⁵³ The *gʷalt* note of Dəl Mangəśā mentions not only her father, but also Metropolitan 'Abuna Bartalomewos (who arrived in Ethiopia in 1398/1399, in office till 1436) and the Coptic pope (*liqa ʾāp̄p̄āsāt*) Māteḡos (1378–1409), which allows for a precise dating of the note to the time between 1398/1399 and 1409.

Dəl Mangəśā was the ruler of Bagemdər and is known from a few other notes, for example, the Zir Gānelā Gospel, dated 1400/1401,⁵⁴ as well as from the Four Gospels manuscript of ʾTānā, Kəbrān Gabrə'el, ʾTānāsee 1.⁵⁵ In the latter, two notes also mention her as the ruler of Bagemdər, the first note from the time of the reign of her father Dāwit, the second from her brother Yəṣḥaq's time, which proves that she was the ruler for a considerable time span.

The artistic style of the twelve full-page images of the *Dərsāna Māryām* manuscript in Beta Ləḡem is close to the other manuscripts. They resemble the style of the *Maṣḥafa ʾəfət* in the sense that the miniatures often depict lively scenes with several people, while the miniatures in the 'Ambā Gəšan *Miracles of Mary* usually only show Mary and the child flanked by the angels. The miniatures in the Beta Ləḡem manuscript depict mostly scenes from Mary's childhood (Fig. 4) and later life, accompanying the texts of the manuscript in her veneration, but also two portraits of single saints, 'Abba Həryāqos (i.e. Cyriacus of Behnesa, p. 321), and Bāsəlyos (i.e. Basil of Caesarea, p. 393, Fig. 5).

⁵³ The manuscript was originally commissioned by a Gabra Krəstos, Dəl Mangəśā was only a later owner; the original name of Gabra Krəstos still survives on page [sic] 270 of the manuscript, thus, the manuscript antedates her colophon.

⁵⁴ New York, The Morgan Library & Museum, M.828, fol. 205^{vb}. On Zir Ganela, see Heldman 2014. Note that in the *EAE* article, or also in Mercier 2021, 159, Zir Ganela is described as a half-sister of Dāwit, and daughter of Sayfa 'Ar'ād; the note in the manuscript, however, clearly states that she is a 'daughter of the daughter of King 'Amda Ṣəyon' (ወለተ ፡ ዋለቲ ፡ ለዓምደ ፡ ጽዮን ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ብሉ), grandfather of Dāwit, making them cousins.

⁵⁵ Taddesse Tamrat 1974, 506–507, 510. For the notes in the manuscript, see <https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/Tanasee1/viewer?fbclid=IwAR3AgQlWo5T3K8HyET9kEt2L2tFKSKWCEVwUsFmFr62_n3oJ9b_w06pWVw> (accessed on 4 September 2023), fols 3^{ra}, 237^{ra}; in this manuscript her name is spelled Dəlmangəśā [sic], and the second note is from her brother Yəṣḥaq, who ruled 1413–1440.



Fig. 4: Presentation of Mary at the Temple, p. [sic] 25 / Beta Ləhem / 1398/1399 to 1409 / no shelf mark / Photo: Kai Beerman, image provided by Annegret Marx.



Fig. 5: Basil of Caesarea, p. 393 / Beta Ləhem / 1398/1399 to 1409 / no shelf mark / Photo: Kai Beerman, image provided by Annegret Marx.

The depictions of the saints are specific, in frontal pose, with their feet neatly positioned underneath the body, as if they were standing on tiptoes. Both figures seem to wear a long, pointed hood, which extends high above their halos. This type of depiction of male saints only features in the manuscript from Beta Ləhem and not in the other manuscripts ascribed to this style. A rare depiction is that of the Assumption of Mary (*Fəlsatā*) on page 271, which shows Jesus surrounded by his Twelve Apostles praying over the shrouded body of his mother.⁵⁶ The image of the Annunciation of Mary in Beta Ləhem is similar to the one in the 'Ambā Gəšan *Miracles of Mary* (Fig. 2), and, to a slightly lesser extent, to the Annunciation in the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*.⁵⁷ Mary is positioned on the right, spinning thread and faces Gabriel who stands on the left side, holding a long cross, and pointing his finger at her. The depictions of Gabriel's wings, painted in red and yellow, with blue vertical lines in addition are especially similar in these two manuscripts.

One of the images in the Beta Ləhem codex, showing the Crucifixion (p. 213), might originate from another painter, as Mary has no halo in this one and her *maphorion* has an angular shape, without a cross symbol, while in all other miniatures, she has a halo, and the veil around her face is round-shaped and decorated with a cross symbol. In this miniature, she is also depicted without the typical small socks that she wears in almost all of the other images. Additionally, the background is left 'white', which is also a unicum, as the backgrounds are coloured in all the other miniatures. If this was indeed painted by another artist, this person paid great attention to following the overall style of the other images.

A manuscript with the Pauline Epistles (CAe 3505), kept at NALe as Ms 27, also digitised by the UNESCO as UNESCO 2-27, is next to be discussed here. Much less is known about this manuscript, and only a few colour images are accessible.⁵⁸ Yosef Demissie has studied the extensive text emendations that appear in this codex.⁵⁹ According to the UNESCO handlist, the manuscript came from Dabra Ḥayq

⁵⁶ For a depiction of this, see Chojnacki 1983, 318, for a description of the miniature, 294–295.

⁵⁷ This becomes obvious when comparing the miniatures in both manuscripts directly, search for 'DS-1966.006:004' on <<http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca/lightbox1.jsp>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). In addition, the image '45' on <<http://www.bombeck.de/stefan/bilder/bilder.html>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

⁵⁸ In Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, cat. 68 with two colour images from the manuscript: portrait of the three saints: Paul, Silvanus and Timothy standing (fols 99^v–100^r); portraits of Paul and Timothy standing (fols 54^v–55^r). A black and white copy of the manuscript via the copy of the UNESCO microfilm digitised by EMIP is available online <<https://betamasaheft.eu/manuscripts/NLA27/viewer>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

⁵⁹ Yosef Demissie 2015.

ʾĒstifānos.⁶⁰ Heldman stated that it is rather uncommon in Ethiopia to illuminate Pauline Epistles manuscripts, so, again, we encounter a deliberate act of its commissioner.⁶¹ Heldman notes further that there are presently twelve miniatures in the manuscript, but adds that ‘five portraits of Paul are missing’.⁶²

In this respect, Mercier suggests that a manuscript kept ‘in private collection’ constitutes the other half of the manuscript and he refers to the two as a ‘collection of *Epistles* and *Acts of the Apostles*, in two volumes’.⁶³ This manuscript, which is kept in the Schøyen Collection, contains the Acts of the Apostles. Even fewer images of this are available. Mercier shows one image (a standing portrait of the Apostle James)⁶⁴ and two more are available in the Sam Fogg Catalogue 18 (the Twelve Apostles and St Paul, and a single portrait of St Jude the Apostle), where it is indicated that the manuscript contains a total of seven illustrations.⁶⁵ Curt Niccum consulted the manuscript, and describes it in a short note, where it is called ‘ms. 2345’.⁶⁶ He notes that both this and the NALE Ms 27 were rebound, most probably still in Ethiopia, which caused the disarrangement of both parts of the text and the images.⁶⁷ In contrast to Mercier, Niccum does not believe that the manuscripts are a collection in two volumes but considers them as two individual codices that accidentally got mixed up. No text images are openly available from Schøyen 2345, but Niccum’s description of a heavily redacted or corrected text clearly resembles NALE Ms 27, which shows extensive traces of use.⁶⁸ The measurements of the two manuscripts are close, but too far apart to be one and the same codex, NALE Ms 27 measures ‘35 × 25 cm’;⁶⁹ and Schøyen 2345 measures

60 UNESCO 1970. It does not further surprise that the monastery of Dabra Ḥayq ʾĒstifānos would hold a manuscript which shows a close connection to the scriptorium of the royal family, as its monks together with ʾAbuna Salāmā (metropolitan from 1348 or 1350 to 1388 or 1390) were probably influential in placing Dāwit on the throne, see Wion 2017.

61 Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, 178.

62 Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, 178.

63 Mercier 2021, 177 and especially 327, n. 1 for Chapter 5.

64 Mercier 2021, 177.

65 Fogg and Miller (eds) 1996, 79–82.

66 Schøyen 1999, 123; Niccum 2008. I thank Ted Erho for the information on the Schøyen Collection.

67 Niccum 2008, 1.

68 ‘Either the original copiest [sic] or a contemporary made a number of corrections’, Niccum 2008, 2. The emendations are mentioned by Yosef Demissie 2015, who also shows sample images. In Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, cat. 68, bottom, some of this can be seen on the recto folio, next to the image of Paul and Timothy (fols 54^v–55^r).

69 Heldman and Munro-Hay 1993, 178b.

'335 × 235 mm'.⁷⁰ We have seen very uncommon combination of texts in the *Maṣḥafa tēfut*, combining the *Orit*, the gospels and the *Senodos*, illuminated by the artist under study here. Thus, it is not unprecedented in the early fifteenth century, and especially in the milieu of the royal court, to commission unusual manuscripts, however, the measurements of the two items are too far apart to indicate that they were once one codex. In addition, combining the Epistles and Acts of the Apostles into one codex happened only at a later time.

The miniatures in both manuscripts are executed in the style of the 'sad eyes', yet, their set-up differs from those discussed previously. The illuminated folios in the Epistles and Acts of the Apostles usually depict only one or two figures, mostly the Apostles or New Testament fathers that are mentioned in the texts. The only exception appears in Schøyen 2345, where, on fol. 77^v, St Paul is depicted together with the Twelve Apostles.⁷¹ In NALE Ms 27 there is one miniature with three figures, Pāwlos, Səlwānos, Țimotewos.⁷² Architectural features are not visible in these two manuscripts. Unfortunately, for neither of the parts of the manuscripts is it clear who commissioned them. Since Schøyen 2345 is not easily accessible, this question will have to remain open. We can only draw tentative connections based on the origin from Dabra Ḥayq 'Īstīfānos, which, at some point in time, was close to Emperor Dāwit and, in addition, is not too far away from 'Ambā Gəṣān.

There are two more manuscripts, both containing the *Miracles of Mary*, that were commissioned by Zar'a Yā'qob and which are also illuminated in the style of the 'sad eyes'. The first manuscript encountered a tragic fate and currently consists of two parts: the first part has been microfilmed as EMMML 7220 (from Sorā 'Ambā 'Abbo church) and the second is the Munich manuscript, MFK MfVK 86-307647, mentioned above.⁷³ The opening image in EMMML 7220 displays the Virgin with her Child in the *Kykkotissa* style, flanked by two angels. Then follows a depiction of Mary in *orans* pose (Fig. 6, fol. 7^v), executed in the same form as the two male saints in the Beta Ləḥem manuscript (see Fig. 5), in frontal depiction with her feet visible underneath her, as if on tiptoes, and, in this case, without her typical socks. The rest of the images in both manuscripts depict two New Testament figures each, always facing each other, the same as in both

⁷⁰ Fogg and Miller (eds) 1996, 79 (they already remarked on the similar size of the two manuscripts), the same measurements in Mercier 2021, 177.

⁷¹ Fogg and Miller (eds) 1996, 81.

⁷² The manuscript has not been foliated, and on the pictures, it is the verso page of the opening 97.

⁷³ Ted Erho was so kind to bring EMMML 7220 to my attention, we both hope to further elaborate on this manuscript in the future, which is why I limit the description of details here. The evidence that both parts formerly formed one codex, however, is indisputable. The manuscript is accessible online, <<https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/200792>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

NALE Ms 27 and Schøyen 2345. Four names are mentioned in the supplication formulas of these manuscripts. Next to Zar'a Yā'qob, there are 'Amata Māryām, Habta Māryām and Zamada Māryām, the first of which can be identified as his sister, while the latter two remain unknown.⁷⁴ One may notice, of course, that they all contain the name of Māryām, and they might be baptismal names of Zar'a Yā'qob's siblings, however, just as likely, they might be unrelated people who cannot be identified.



Fig. 6: Mary in *orans* pose, fol. 7^v / Sorā 'Ambā 'Abbo / 1434–1468 / EMML 7220 / Photo: image courtesy of the Sorā Ambā Abbo church in Wallo province, Ethiopia, and the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library. Published with permission of the owners. All rights reserved.

Finally, there is yet another manuscript which is known only through a short reference and one image.⁷⁵ This manuscript also contains the *Miracles of Mary*, and, based on Mercier's description, was also commissioned by Zar'a Yā'qob.⁷⁶ The

⁷⁴ Zamada Māryām is only mentioned in the EMML 7220 half of the original codex. For the other names, see Dege-Müller, Gnisci and Pisani 2022, 89.

⁷⁵ When Mercier showed this manuscript in 2000, it was owned by the art dealer Sam Fogg. Its current whereabouts are not known to me, cf. Mercier (ed.) 2000, 80.

⁷⁶ Mercier (ed.) 2000, 80.

one image that Mercier reproduces allows us to again identify the same artistic style discussed here: this opening shows the Virgin with Child on the verso side, and the Apostles Peter and Paul on the recto side, thus, following an artistic arrangement that we observed in the previous manuscripts. I was able to compare further miniatures of the manuscript, which altogether number ten.⁷⁷ The codex opens with the Virgin and Child accompanied by angels, followed by eight portraits of two male figures each and, finally, a depiction of Mary in *orans* pose on tiptoes, virtually identical to the one in EML 7220. What appears to be different in this private manuscript is that nine images follow each other on the first five folios of the manuscript, whereas in the other manuscripts, they are usually single miniatures in between text units. Here, only Mary in *orans* comes in between text units. This might be an indication that this manuscript has also been rebound at some point in time.

Similar to some of the others, this manuscript is incomplete, and its remaining half has not been identified. What is of interest is the particularly short invocation for Zar’a Yā’qob, for the protection of his soul and body, written in the first person singular. Mercier provides the following French translation of this note: ‘Ceci est le livre des Miracles de Notre-Dame la Sainte Vierge Marie que j’ai donné [...] (espace blanc) afin qu’il soit une médecine pour l’âme et le corps du roi Zār’a Yā’eqob’.⁷⁸ Similar lines are found in other manuscripts commissioned by Zar’a Yā’qob, and attest to his great devotion to the Virgin.⁷⁹

5 Manuscripts from other family members

It is interesting to see that three members of the royal family commissioned and donated manuscripts illuminated in the style of the ‘sad eyes’ over almost forty years. We saw the evidence for Dāwit, Dəl Mangəśā and Zar’a Yā’qob. There is,

⁷⁷ As has already been indicated by Mercier (ed.) 2000, 80. I am grateful to the owner of these images, who wishes to remain anonymous, for showing them to me.

⁷⁸ Mercier (ed.) 2000, 80.

⁷⁹ In addition to the long texts that the king authored, and which often include mention of him in the first person singular, there are other notes, especially in lengthy donation notes, such as for the *Maṣḥafa tēfut* (see above) or the *Senodos* now in the Vatican Library. During the conference talk from which this paper derives, I presented the manuscript London, BL, Add. 11678, which includes an identical line. I argued that this London manuscript potentially contains the text *Kəḥdata Saytān* (CAe 1711), which according to the chronicle, was composed by Zar’a Yā’qob (Perruchon 1893, 40, 77–78). This would argue against the claim by Fritsch 2013, and his identification of this text.

however, another son of Dāwit, Emperor Yəshaq I, who ruled in between Dāwit and Zar'a Yā'qob, and from whom some outstanding manuscripts are also attested. These are also illuminated manuscripts, which have a similar style, and might stand in some connection to a royal scriptorium, but there are noticeable differences that pertain to a different artist.

Unfortunately, in comparison to Zar'a Yā'qob, there is limited information about Yəshaq and his reign. There are, however, several manuscripts with donation notes and references to his reign. It is known that he was also an active regent, and part of his reign was dedicated to the fight against the Beta 'Ēsrā'el, the Ethiopian Jews. Where he defeated them, especially in Wagarā province (north of Gondar town), he built churches to mark his victory, and equipped those churches with manuscripts and land grants.⁸⁰ In addition to the churches in Wagarā, there is one manuscript in Məṣəle Fāsīladas, on the shore of Lake Ṭana, famous for its depiction of the death of Herodias, and the martyrdom of Saint Qirqos (Quiricus) and Julitta.⁸¹ This was a donation by Yəshaq as is stated in the text, 'f. 254v: "This is the book that I, Yəshaq, have given, and my royal name is Gabra Masqal, to the place of Mary in Dabra Metselle".⁸² Some of the stylistic features of its images are reminiscent of the 'sad eyes' style: the eyes are also shaped in a similar form, sad and droopy, and the ears are of similar shape, as are the feet, in the Məṣəle manuscript. The general colour scheme and the way the garments are decorated are also close. Yet, it was clearly not executed by the same artist.

The artist who illuminated the Məṣəle manuscript is also known from another manuscript, kept in Bərbər Māryām: a richly illuminated *Rətu'ā hāymānot* (CAe 2222) homiliary.⁸³ This manuscript contains not only lavish miniatures, but also elaborate headpieces and marginal decorations on the text pages, which are reminiscent of those in the *Maṣḥafa tēfut* and EMMML 9001. Again, the features are similar to the 'sad eyes' style, for example, the wings of the archangel Gabriel in the An-

⁸⁰ The information is indeed limited. The latest study about Yəshaq's campaign against the Beta 'Ēsrā'el and the foundation of churches is by Kribus 2023.

⁸¹ Mercier 2021, 129 (a stunning miniature of the forty martyrs of Sebaste), and 144–145. The image is also available from the collection of Chojnacki, hosted by the Vatican Library, <<https://digi.vatlib.it/stp/detail/20035454>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

⁸² Quoted after Mercier (ed.) 2000, 327b, n. 21.

⁸³ Mentioned in Chojnacki 1983, 117; Dege-Müller, Gnisci and Pisani 2022, 91. It was microfilmed as EMMML 9084, but is unfortunately one of those films that can only be accessed at the NALE in Addis Ababa. Some images are available through the Māzgābā səəlat website, with the search terms 'Birbir' and 'Bərbər' <<http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca/lightbox1.jsp>> (accessed on 4 September 2023). There are some images available in publications, see Haberland 1976, fig. 1; Mercier (ed.) 2000, 150.

nunciation scene have almost identical patterns and colour arrangements as those in the manuscripts of Beta Ləhem and the 'Ambā Gəšan *Miracles of Mary* described above. In addition, the manuscript is decorated with several full-page miniatures of crosses, with lavish colours and interlaces.⁸⁴ Regarding the *Rətu'ā hāymānot* text, this is apparently the only manuscript known with illuminations.⁸⁵ Yəshaq, thus, acted like his other family members in ordering specific copies of illustrated manuscripts.

The church of Bərbər Māryām is a remarkable place, situated in the Gāmo province close to Abaya Lake, some 400 km south of Addis Ababa, thus, in the fifteenth century, really in the hinterlands of the Christian realm. The few studies dedicated to the church so far see its foundation in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, associating it either with Emperor Ba'əda Māryām (r. 1468–1478)⁸⁶ or Emperor Ləbna Dəngəl (r. 1508–1540).⁸⁷ The one manuscript from Bərbər Māryām, EML 9092,⁸⁸ that includes donation notes from Ba'əda Māryām, however, also includes two much older notes and seems to have been used as a Golden Gospel of the church. One note on fol. 153^v is from 'King Gabra Masqal'. There were several kings with this name as a baptismal name; however, there is also additional information in the note that lets us date it to Yəshaq's reign and, indeed, his baptismal name was also Gabra Masqal.⁸⁹

በስመ : ስሉሥ : ቅዱስ : ተፈነወት : ዛቲ : ክርታስ : እምኃቦ(?) : ን(?)ጉሥነ : ገብረ(?) [...]ስ(?)
ቀል : ዘተሰመይኩ : በጸ(?)ጋ : እግዚአብሔር : ትብ(?)ጸ(?)ሕ : ኃቦ : ሕዝብዩ : ኢትዮ(?)ጵያ : አ
እረፈአ : ብጽዕ : ሊቀ : ጳጳስነ : [sic] አቡነ : አባ : ገብርኤል : ወግበሩ : ተዝካሮ : ፵ : ዕለተ :
እምአሚሩ : ለታኃሣሥ : [sic] እስከ : እም : ፲ለጥር : ወዕለተ : ዕረ(?)ፍ(?)ቱ(?) : ይእቲ : አሚ(!)
ሃ : ወዘ : ተሰይመኒ : ሊቀ : ጳጳስነ : [sic] አባ(?) : ዮሐንስ : ዝክሩ : ስሞ : እንዘ : ተ(!)ዓርጉ : ዕ
ጣነ : ወመስዋዕተ : ወለእለ : ገበርክሙ : ትዝካሮ : [sic] ለአቡነ : አባ : ገብርኤል : ጸሎቱ : ወበ
ረከቱ : ወሃ(?)ይ(?)ግኖቱ : ተሀሉ : ምስለ : ኩልነ : ውሉደ : ጥም(?)ቀ(?)ት : አሚን : ጸሎቶ
ሙ : ወበረከቶሙ : ለሊቀ : ጳጳስነ : [sic] አባ : ዮሐንስ : ወብዕዕ : ጳጳስነ : [sic] አባ : በርተሎ
ሜ(?)ዎስ : ትገብልናሆሙ : ወጸጋ : ረድኤቶሙ : ይዕ(?)ቀብክሙ : እንዘ : ትገብ(?)ሩ : ፈቃ

84 Yəshaq was a fan of crosses and there are many that he donated to various churches, see Mercier (ed.) 2000; Mercier 2021.

85 Erho 2024, 330, 375–376.

86 Deresse Ayenachew 2011, referring to a land grant in EML 9092, fol. 7^v.

87 Caquot 1955b.

88 The manuscript includes several royal notes, also from 'Eskendār (r. 1478–1494) and Ləbna Dəngəl. The manuscript is available online: <<https://w3id.org/vhmmml/readingRoom/view/201780>> (accessed on 4 September 2023).

89 The manuscript was damaged by water, also the quality of the microfilm is low, even the colour images on Māzgābā səlat do not help to clearly read all passages. The parts that remain unclear I marked with (?). Some parts are completely lost and marked with [...].

ዶ : ለቡኅሙ : [sic] ሰማ[...]**ዊ** : በ(?)[...]ሉ : ጊዜ : ወበኩሉ : ሰዓት : እስከ : ለዓለም : አሜን : ለ
ይኩን ።⁹⁰

In the name of the Holy Trinity. This letter/book (*kārtās*) was sent from our king, Gabra Masqal, I who by the grace of God am called [...]. May it reach to my people, to Ethiopia, [that] ‘the blessed (Coptic) pope (*liqa pāppāsāt*) ‘Abuna ‘Abbā Gabra’el has departed’. Hold his *tazkār* for 40 days, from the first day of Taḥśās until the tenth of Tərr. And the day of his departure, that is then. And he who was appointed is (Coptic) Pope ‘Abbā Yoḥannēs. Remember his name when you send up incense and offering. And you who perform the *tazkār* of our father ‘Abbā Gabra’el, may his prayer and his blessing and his faith be with all us children of the baptism. Amen. And may the prayers and blessings of (Coptic) Pope ‘Abbā Yoḥannēs and of our blessed Metropolitan ‘Abuna Bartalomewos, their intercession and the grace of their help, keep you as you do the will of your Heavenly Father, at every time and at every hour until eternity. Amen, let it be (so)!

The note commemorates the passing of the Coptic pope Gabriel V and informs about the appointment of his successor John XI, which took place in 1427 CE, providing us with a rough date.⁹¹ If the note was coeval to the manuscript, it would possibly allow us to antedate the foundation of the church. The language here is not clear, ‘a letter that was sent’ (ተፈነወት : ዛቲ : ክርታስ :), might indicate that it was indeed a letter from Yəshaq, copied into the manuscript at a later time. But ክርታስ (*kārtās*) could also translate to ‘book’, and would, thus, refer to the manuscript itself. Eike Haberland, one of the few scholars who has visited the church, stated that indeed the manuscripts were prepared in the north of the kingdom and sent down to the south.⁹² This is further supported by another note in this gospel manuscript. There is a note on fols 10^{va}–11^{ra} that was unfortunately erased in certain sections, therefore, the name of the king is no longer visible, but that appears to record gifts to the ruler (*ṣāyyum*) of ‘Agāme ‘Aghadom.⁹³ This ‘Aghadom is known from several other manuscripts, and was a contemporary of Dāwit and possibly also of Yəshaq.⁹⁴ There is a short Arabic line in the upper margin of fol. 10^v, difficult to

⁹⁰ Text transcribed and translated by myself.

⁹¹ The Synaxar mentions Gabriel on the fifth of Tərr. Yəshaq seemed to have a special connection to Pope Gabriel, maybe because the pope had sent him the relic of Mark’s head?

⁹² Haberland 1976, 21.

⁹³ ‘Agāme is a region in north-east Təgrāy.

⁹⁴ ‘Aghadom, sometimes also spelled ‘Akḥadom, was an important figure in the history of Təgrāy, and is mentioned in the oral tradition in ‘Agāme and its surroundings. He is also mentioned in a gospel manuscript from Māryām Māy ‘Ab’a in Təgrāy, now preserved in Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Ms 1894 – more on this in Karlsson, Dege-Müller and Gnisci 2023 – as well as in EMMML 2514, a *Gadla samā’tāt* manuscript in ‘Astit Kidāna Məḥrat church. While these two seem to be coeval to ‘Aghadom’s lifetime, there are also later reports on him, for example, in

decipher, which could say ‘thanks be to God for the wealth/possession’, i.e. thanks be to God for giving me this book (الشكر لله على المال).⁹⁵

Additional evidence as to the time of the foundation of Bərbər Māryām might come from the illuminated *Rətu’ā hāymānot* mentioned above. It is illuminated in the same style as the Məṣəle Fāsīladas manuscript for which there is a donation note from Yəṣṣəḥaq. Thus, it is possible that Yəṣṣəḥaq donated these two manuscripts to Bərbər Māryām when the church was established. Should this align with the commemoration note for the appointment of the Coptic pope John XI, the manuscript must be dated around the year 1427, possibly the year after. Yəṣṣəḥaq’s manuscripts in Bərbər Māryām are a further source that proves how far south he expanded the Christian Solomonic realm.⁹⁶

Yəṣṣəḥaq shows the same behaviour as his family members. After conquering a region, he founded churches therein to manifest his influence; this is attested by several churches stretching over a wide area of Ethiopia. In more than one of these churches, manuscripts have been preserved that go back to these foundations by Yəṣṣəḥaq, as he equipped them with essential manuscripts such as the Four Gospels. Some of these manuscripts have clearly been illuminated by the same artist. Also similar to his family members, we find texts richly illuminated which are otherwise not known to have been decorated, such as the *Rətu’ā hāymānot* in Bərbər Māryām.

6 Conclusion

The imperial Ethiopian family of the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century left a lasting impression on the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands shaping its borders, intensifying Christian beliefs, changing the church doctrine and calendar, expanding international relations and also influencing the artistic expression of the era by commissioning the construction of churches and the production of icons,⁹⁷ crosses and manuscripts.

the *Gadla Yāfṣəḥaranna ‘Ēgzi*, Wajnberg 1936, 59; Tsegay Berhe G. Libanos 2003, or the *Gadla Libānos* (Bausi (tr.) 2003b, 55, 59).

⁹⁵ The note is not easy to read due to water damage of the folio.

⁹⁶ Other sources are the imperial songs which list all the regions in the south that brought tribute to Yəṣṣəḥaq, among them Gamo, cf. Guidi 1889, 55–58; Littmann 1914, 12–16; Haberland 1976, 17, who further presents a map (‘Karte 2’) with a few dozen churches in the southern regions, near Bərbər.

⁹⁷ On the emergence of icons in Ethiopia and Eritrea, see Krebs 2024.

This article has examined references to members of the royal family in manuscripts in order to gather some new information about the patronage of female family members, who have often been ignored or simply referred to as ‘his wife’ or ‘his sister’ in the literature. In this regard, there are several noteworthy women who can be identified through manuscripts and other sources: Emperor Dāwīt’s wife, Queen Magdalāwit, in the Gospel of Dabra Ma’ār Giyorgis; his sister, Dəl Sefa, who is credited with helping him ascend to the throne; and his daughter ‘Amata Māryām as a donator of a *Senodos* manuscript. His other daughter, Dəl Mangəśā, is featured in several notes, which attest to her power as ruler over the region of Bagemdār. One of the manuscripts that mentions her is the richly illuminated Gospel by Zir Ganelā, Dāwīt’s cousin.

Regarding Zar’a Yā’qob, Dāwīt’s successor, we have identified several family members in just one manuscript (EMML 3879), with notes of his wife ‘Ēleni, her potential daughter Barbārā and other children who remain anonymous. His daughter Dəl Samrā, who in later years lost her father’s appreciation, still features in this manuscript as a benefactor to the church of Qirqos.

Concerning Yəšhaq, one of the two influential successors of Dāwīt, manuscript evidence highlights his expansion politics into the southern region of Gāmo and places him in the same line as his relatives: founding churches and furnishing them with essential manuscripts. His name is found in many donation notes in important manuscripts, and there are at least three that mention the Coptic pope Gabriel, who passed away during Yəšhaq’s lifetime. It can be argued that Yəšhaq received an important relic from the pope, assumedly before the year 1427. The manuscripts that Yəšhaq commissioned are not only lavishly illuminated, but he also selected specific texts, such as the *Rətu’ā hāymānot*, which are not usually illuminated. While these manuscripts were illuminated in a similar style to the ‘sad eyes’ style commissioned by his family members, they were produced by a different artist and contain noticeable differences.

Finally, the article has presented the first systematic overview of the seven known manuscripts illuminated in the style of the ‘sad eyes’ (see Table 1). I have reconstructed the history of the objects, which have partly become dismembered and currently constitute eight units of circulation. It is remarkable that these seven manuscripts were produced over a period of almost forty years. One has to ask whether we are looking at the work of one artist – active for a long period of time – where the slight variations in style could be seen as a normal evolvement of any artist – or whether we are instead looking at an artistic school, with a distinct style, possibly based in the royal scriptorium.

What is clear is that the royal family had a strong preference for a distinct group of artists and hired them repeatedly. Many of the manuscripts that were

decorated with their miniatures contained either texts new to Ethiopia – such as the *Miracles of Mary* – or closely connected to Emperor Dāwit and other members of the royal family, three of them to Zar'a Yā'qob. In addition, several of the witnesses originate directly from or an area close to the royal mountain of 'Ambā Gəšan. The hypothesis that the artists were actually based in a royal scriptorium is not farfetched, and, if so, this scriptorium was most likely located on 'Ambā Gəšan.

The manuscripts were specific creations and contain texts that were not usually illuminated, such as the Pauline Epistles and *Rətu'ā hāymānot*. In the case of Dəl Mangəśā and the Beta Ləhem manuscript, we learn from the donation note therein, that she searched particularly for this manuscript in order to donate it to the church. The case of the *Maṣḥafa ʾṭefut* commissioned by Zar'a Yā'qob, which presents a unique collection of texts, primary and secondary notes, and miniatures, is also striking. One of its texts, the *Senodos*, the most important canonico-liturgical collection of instructions 'dealing with various aspects of ecclesiastical practice, such as appointment and functions of the hierarchy (from the reader to the patriarch), liturgy (esp. baptism and mass), prayer, Biblical canon, moral teachings and disciplinary rules',⁹⁸ was donated more than once by him and other members of the royal family (cf. the manuscript Dimā Giyorgis, EMDA 00342, donated by his sister 'Amata Māryām). In addition to the *Senodos* in the *Maṣḥafa ʾṭefut*, Zar'a Yā'qob commissioned another *Senodos* manuscript, now kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Borg. et. 2, which the emperor deliberately sent to the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem in 1441/1442.⁹⁹

Overall, this article, based on the investigation of a limited number of illuminated manuscripts, offers insights into the important historical and cultural contributions of the ruling family of Ethiopia and Eritrea in the late fourteenth to early fifteenth century.

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⁹⁸ Bausi 2010a, 623a.

⁹⁹ Vitagrazia Pisani elaborates on this in her article in this volume.

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Abbreviations

BL = London, British Library.

CAe = Clavis Aethiopica.

DSAE = Dabra Šāhl Agwazā monastery.

EAe = Siegbert Uhlig (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 1: A–C; vol. 2: D–Ha; vol. 3: He–N; in cooperation with Alessandro Bausi, vol. 4: O–X; Alessandro Bausi (ed.), in cooperation with Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 5: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014.

EMDA = Ethiopian Manuscript Digital Archive, is an open collection of digitised Ethiopian manuscripts accessible through the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN.

EMIP = Portland, Ethiopian Manuscript Imaging Project.

EMML = Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, deposited at Addis Ababa, National Archives and Library of Ethiopia, and at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Saint John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN.

MFK = Munich, Museum Fünf Kontinente.

NALE = Addis Ababa, National Archives and Library of Ethiopia.

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