

# Acts of Writing and Authority in Bəgwəna-Lasta between the Fifteenth Century and the Eighteenth Century: A Regional Administration Comes to Light

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## ABSTRACT

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*This presentation of a project for editing and translating documents that can be used to write the history of Bəgwəna-Lasta from the twelfth till the eighteenth century seeks to study the sorts of documents set down in writing as a function of the type of power exercised at the time and the means for writing and recording documents. Following a brief description of the corpus, the question of how these documents came to be kept in manuscripts in Bəgwəna-Lasta is examined. Through these documents, a regional administration comes to light, along with changes in it from the fifteenth till the eighteenth century. These changes are reflected in the production of written documents, which varies as a function of the powers-that-were in the region.*

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What constitutes an archival document in the Ethiopian kingdom between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries? What type of document can be considered as archival, and is it possible to talk of permanence or continuity in the way archives are produced? To answer such a question, it would first be necessary to decide whether archives exist, since institutional administration, like private property, is not systematically recorded in writing, and these writings are not organized in a systematic manner. Furthermore, not all documents that become sources for historians may be considered as archival ones (even if they certainly do constitute archives for the historian). However, the present article would first like to ask what types of documents are produced, in what contexts, and for what reasons, which will allow us to determine how to frame an Ethiopian diplomatic.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2005, we have concentrated our attention on the region of Bəgwəna and Lasta. This area was called Bəgwəna when it was the center of power under the Zagwe dynasty (from the eleventh to the thirteenth century) and then Lasta when it became the seat of a new regional power that, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, developed in opposition to the centralizing authority of the king of kings of Gondär. We aim to write the history of this region over a long period by placing the production of manuscripts, artwork, and monuments in their context and situating Bəgwəna-Lasta in the history of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia so as to determine its part in the realm's political and regional structure.<sup>2</sup> In the present article, an aspect of this project is presented, namely, the editing and translation of documents used to write this region's history between the twelfth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> The intent is to study the types of writing that are produced as a function of the forms of power and the needs of authorities.

Bəgwəna-Lasta is well known for its many rock-hewn churches, especially in Lalibäla, which UNESCO has classified as a World Heritage Site. These churches are more than monuments attesting the grandeur of the Zagwe dynasty and the recuperation of this heritage by those who called themselves the kings of Lasta in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By storing manuscripts in their libraries, religious texts as well as the writs of the royal and regional administrations, the churches in Lalibäla became guarantors of the permanence of an administrative system; and the manuscripts they kept shed light on this system from the fifteenth till the eighteenth century.

Let us recall a fact with which specialists working on Ethiopia are quite familiar. Most Ethiopian writings are religious or historical texts in codices. Texts, usually brief, of various sorts and for different purposes were written in the margins of these documents or on the blank guard leaves in codices. These texts are usually classified as marginalia, a term only referring only to their position in the manuscript and not to their function.<sup>4</sup> Next to a written prayer, we come upon a land grant or the donation of an object, an inventory of books or goods, a genealogy, the biography of a local personality (known as being righteous) that was to be read in commemoration of his death, and so on. Here, we will describe how these marginalia were written and copied.

What is noteworthy about our corpus is that it coherently brings together different types of documents that were used in a single place but at different times. This can help us better understand Ethiopian practices with regard to archives and changes in them over time. It can also help us classify the various types of documents. Our work involved making an inventory of all the manuscripts kept by the churches in Bəgwəna-Lasta. This inventory is nearly complete, although new manuscripts might turn up, since academics seldom have full access to church libraries. This article provides us with the opportunity to present our initial findings by describing in brief our corpus and demonstrating its value on a regional instead of an institutional basis. The documents in the manuscripts preserved in Bəgwəna-Lasta actually form a coherent corpus on a regional scale. Sometimes a single text was copied in several manuscripts stored in different churches, or a new act was recorded that referred to an older one while modifying it to suit current needs. Through these examples of how the marginalia were managed, the organization of the regional administration comes to light.<sup>5</sup>

### **Establishing a Comprehensive Corpus of Bəgwəna-Lasta Manuscripts**

Studying archives is usually considered to be useful and worthwhile when the archives come from a single institution (a church or monastery), since this is the best way to assemble information, cross-check it, and write history. The main difficulty with this approach is in gathering all the manuscripts from a single institution. Many churches and monasteries in Bəgwəna-Lasta lent their manuscripts out for microfilming by the

Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML) project in Addis Ababa.<sup>6</sup> The microfilm campaign was very efficient with regard to churches where, presumably, the church's entire library was microfilmed. For example, more than 50 manuscripts from the fifteenth to the twentieth century that belonged to the Zämädo Maryam church were microfilmed. We thus have what probably amounts to a rather complete corpus for this church.<sup>7</sup> This is not the case with regard to other churches, however. For instance, we have copies of only four manuscripts belonging to Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos, a very important church in Ethiopian history.

For this reason, we have not restricted our research to the EMML microfilms but have also tried to gain direct access to the manuscripts kept in the churches and monasteries in Lasta. We have thus been able to make color photographs instead of relying on the unsatisfactory black-and-white images on film, which are sometimes hard to read. Besides, the EMML project did not visit several churches in Lasta, for example, Sarzena Mika'el, Wəqər Mäsqälä Krəstos, Bəlbala Giyorgis, Bəlbala Qirqos, Qəddus Ḥarbay, Mäkina (or Əmmäkina) Ledäta, and Mädhane 'Aläm. We are trying to complete the photographic inventory of the documents kept in these churches. We have also made a complete inventory of the libraries outside Ethiopia where manuscripts<sup>8</sup> from monasteries or churches in Lasta, or microfilms<sup>9</sup> of them, are preserved. To complete this corpus, we have used the open-access data base created by Michael Gervers and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska.<sup>10</sup>

This approach has yielded encouraging results. Three manuscripts have been added to the corpus of the Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos church: a copy of the *Acts of King Lalibäla and Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos*,<sup>11</sup> the founder of the church, another copy of the *Acts of Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos* with the *Acts of the Martyrs*,<sup>12</sup> and a synaxary.<sup>13</sup> In all, there are about 250 manuscripts from churches in Bəgwəna-Lasta. Most of the corpus comes from the following churches in Lalibäla: Betä Mädhane 'Aläm, Betä Maryam, Betä Golgota and Däbrä Sina, Betä Giyorgis, Betä Amanu'el, Betä Märqorewos, Betä Libanos, and Betä Gäbrə'el. We did not find any manuscripts in two other churches there, namely, Betä Mäsqäl and Betä Dänagəl. The other part of our corpus covers manuscripts belonging to churches in the area around Lalibäla: Ašätän Maryam, Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab, Gännätä Maryam, Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos, Qəddus Ḥarbay, Sarzena Mika'el, Bəlbala Qirqos,

Wəqər Mäsqälä Krəstos, and Zämädo Maryam. We would like to establish a corpus that is as comprehensive as possible. The first step in organizing these documents was to rearrange the EMMML corpus by institution instead of shelf mark. Since the EMMML project microfilmed and numbered manuscripts in their order of arrival in Addis Ababa, the manuscripts from a single church are not necessarily consecutively numbered.

Two periods are well represented in these manuscripts. They correspond to times when the churches in Lalibäla had close connections with the political authorities: during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when King Lalibäla was venerated as a saint; and during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when local rulers enjoyed broad autonomy and exercised influence over these churches.

### Places of Production, of Preservation, and of Reference

Although most of our corpus is made up of manuscripts from churches in Lalibäla, the contents concern not only these churches but also churches in the surrounding area and establishments in other areas, such as Betä Ləhem in Gayənt. The place where a manuscript was produced, the place where it has been stored, and the place to which it refers can be completely different. A perfect illustration of this is the so-called trilingual folio in the *Betä Mādḥane ‘Aläm Gospel* in Lalibäla, which contains three documents in three different languages, Coptic, Arabic, and Ge’ez. Augusto Monti della Corte published the three texts as if they were part of a set, even though the translation shows that the Ge’ez text is of a later date than the other two and does not deal with the same subject.<sup>14</sup> Bärtälomewos, the metropolitan at the time of King Dawit (1379/80–1412), wrote the notes in Coptic and Arabic at the beginning of the fifteenth century. In the Coptic one, he presented himself:

Strength is with God. I, poor and miserable Bärtälomewos, deacon unworthy of the Ethiopians, came to this saintly place on the 4th of the month of *Paoni* in 1126 of the Year of the Martyrs [29 May 1410], during the time of King Dawit, loving Christ, who is called Constantine. May the Lord have mercy on all of us. Amen. Amen. So be it.<sup>15</sup>

In the note in Arabic, the metropolitan wrote about Dawit’s land donation to Betä Ləhem in Gayənt, a church founded by the king’s daughter, Dəl Mägäsa (or Dəl Mängäsa):

Power is from God! The lord, King Dawit—May God fill him with joy—named Constantine, the son of the virtuous Säyfä Ar‘ad—May Almighty God grant him His mercy—bequeaths the land called B.l.m.b.b.a, the land called Š.hā, the land of B.dāq and the land of K.wis to the church of Our Lady the Virgin called Betä Ləhem, which the blessed daughter Dəl Mägäsa had constructed, and also the land called B.k.n.sā. The aforesaid pious bequest belongs to the mentioned church. Nobody has the power, before God, to change this legacy, whether he be a landowner, chief, owner [?]. Neither the lion nor the horse nor the camel may trespass on the aforementioned legacy. Whoever opposes this writ will be shackled forever. Nobody has the power before God to change any of this. The offspring of the obedient will be blessed forever. So be it [?].<sup>16</sup>

We have not yet managed to identify the names of the lands donated to the church, but they were probably located in its vicinity in Gayənt, instead of in the area around Lalibäla.

Another document preserved in the Betä Ləhem church provides further information relevant to this royal grant. Although the document is about another donation, it helps us understand how the first was written. The writer—Dawit’s daughter, Dəl Mägäsa—explained how her father, the king, made a grant of market rights for observances commemorating his death and his daughter’s death (*täzkar*):

በሰመ ፡ ሥሉስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ተአሚነየ ፡ አነ ፡ ድል ፡ መገሣ ፡ ወክልእ ፡ ስምየ ፡ በትረ ፡ ኢሮን ፡ በመዋዕለ ፡ አቡየ ፡ ዳዊት ፡ ዘተሠምየ ፡ ቈሰጠንጢኖስ ፡ ወሊቀ ፡ ጳጳስነ ፡ አባ ፡ ማቴዎስ ፡ ወጳጳ[ስ]ነ ፡ አባ ፡ በርተ ፡ ሎሜዎስ ፡ ዘተጉልተ ፡ ገበያ ፡ ለቤተ ፡ ልሔም ፡ ለማርያም ፡ ወይሁለት ፡ ዳዊት ፡ አቡየ ፡ ወለትየ ፡ ድል ፡ መገሣ ፡ በእነተ ፡ ዝነቱ ፡ ጉሉልት ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩን ፡ ተዝክርየ ፡ ወለተዝክርኪ ፡ ወእምድሕሬነ ፡ ለፍሬ ፡ ክርሥን ፡ አንቲ ፡ ኩንኒ ፡ ዘክሬ ፡ ወአነ ፡ እኩውን ፡ ወራዔ ፡ ሐደስ ፡ ሕግ ፡ ከመ ፡ ኢይቤ ፡ ዘርእየ ፡ ወዘሰምዐ ፡ በእዘዘ ፡ በጌ ፡ ምድር ፡ ተሠርዓ ፡ ወጉልቱኒ ፡ በቃልየ ፡ ሰይፍ ፡ ወበወርቅ ፡ ገንታየ ፡ ወበጀወጀእካንየ ፡ አጽናዕከዋ ፡ ከመ ፡ ያክብርዋ ፡ ከመ ፡ ዕለተ ፡ ሰንበት ፡ ወበሰንበት ፡ አሑድ ፡ ኢይገብሩ ፡ ምንተኒ ፡ ከሚሁ ፡ ያክብርዋ ፡ ወኢይትዓደው ፡ መኑሃ ፡ እምነገሥት ፡ እስከ ፡ ነጋሥያት ፡ ወንግሥታት ፡ ወመኢንንት ፡ ወመሣፍንት ፡ ወመላህቅት ፡ ወእሙሃ ፡ እምስሉባን ፡ ዘየሐልፍ ፡ እደ ፡ በዓመፃ ፡ ወካህናተሂ ፡



ወራዕነ፡ ለተዝካርየ። ሿበግዘት፡ ለፍሬ፡ ከርሥየ፡ እስከ፡ ዘርእ፡ ዘርእየ። ወተካየድከዎሙ፡ በምድረ፡ ዋልቅ፡ ወበአቄት፡ ደበና፡ ወበታቦተ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወእደ፡ ጳጳስ፡ አባ፡ በርተ፡ ሎሜዎስ፡ ወጻራጌ፡ መሰሰራ። ወቁስ፡ ጎጾይ፡ ወዓቃቤ፡ ሰዓት፡ ወካልእን፡ እምዓበይተ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ከመ፡ ይኩኑ፡ ስምዔ፡ ለዓለም። ዘንተ፡ ማእኩተ፡ ነሣእነ፡ እነ፡ ድል፡ መንሣ። እምኅበ፡ አቡየ፡ ዳዊት፡ ወአጽሐፍነ፡ ኅበ፡ ወንጌለ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ወኅበ፡ ወንጌለ፡ መስቀል፡ ወጋርማ። ኩሉ፡ ሥርዓቶ፡ ወኩሉ፡ ንዋሮ፡ [erased letters]፡ ወዘይትመኃጸነሂ፡ በውስቴቱ፡ ይትማሃር፡ በፍቅረ፡ ማርያም፡ እመኒ፡ ተረከበ፡ በኩሉ፡ ጌጋይ፡ ነሣእነ፡ ማእኩተ፡ እምኅበ፡ አቡየ፡ ወዘንተ፡ ሥርዓተ፡ እትኅልፋ፡ ሕዝብየ፡ ከመ፡ ኢትባኑ፡ ውስተ፡ ግዘት፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አሜን።<sup>17</sup>

Putting my trust in the Holy Trinity, I, Dəl Mägäśa, my other name being Bätträ Aron. During the time of my father Dawit, also named Constantine, of our patriarch Abba Matewos [and] of our bishop Abba Bärtä Lomewos, he gave to Betä Ləḥem Maryam in *gwəlt* the [rights to the] market.<sup>18</sup> On the subject of this *gwəlt*, Dawit, my father told me: My daughter, Dəl Mägäśa, may it be for my *täzkar* and for your *täzkar* and after us, for our offspring. You, you will be for me the one who remembers; and I, I will be the legislator so that he who sees [it] or hears [it] will not say that it was instituted on an order from the *bäge mädər*. I gave *gwəlt* through the authority of my sword and my golden horns. Through my twelve envoys, I have ascertained that they hold the same respect for it as for the Sabbath and that, on the Sabbath, they shall do nothing. Let them respect it. Let no one transgress this rule, from the kings to the *nägaśi*,<sup>19</sup> to the queens, to the *mäkwännənt* (governors), to the *mäsafənt* (judges), and to the elders. May no one among the powerful defy these words by acting unjustly. As for the priests, I named fifty, under threat of excommunication, for my *täzkar* and for the fruit of my body and the seed of my seed. I concluded a pact in the land of Təlq in the tent of Aqet,<sup>20</sup> on the *tabot* of Jesus and by the hand of Bishop Abba Bärtä Lomewos, the *šärage mä'äsüre* and the king's priest, the *'aqqabe sä'at*, and the others among the kingdom's grantees so that they be witnesses for eternity. This promise that I received, I, Dəl Mägäśa, from my father Dawit, I have had it written in the Gospel of Jesus and in the Gospel of the Cross and of Glory. All these regulations and all these goods [illegible: a word has been erased]. The love of Mary will have pity on whoever seeks protection, regardless of his faults. I received the promise from my father, and I transmit this regulation to



my people. Let no one transgress this lest he be excommunicated. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

What first strikes us about this document is its precision. It does not resemble an ordinary charter, which contains formal elements attesting its authenticity. It is an account given by a person involved, Dəl Mägäśa, about how her father made the grant. The abridged introductory and concluding formulas suggest that she might have either read or told all of this: the formulas are abridged to remind the reader that he/she had to pronounce them at that point.

It is pointed out that the grant was made by the king himself, not by the *bäge mädär*, in other words, not by Dəl Mägäśa, since we know from other sources that she bore this title.<sup>21</sup> She declared that there was an authority higher than her own in the region she ruled. Dəl Mägäśa had this account written in the *Laḥä Maryam* manuscript in Betä Ləḥem, the church she founded. According to her account, Dawit gave market rights and named priests in the church to commemorate him and his daughter after their deaths. He proclaimed this in the royal camp in Təlq (Ifat) in front of his dignitaries, among them his daughter (who held the title of *bäge mädär*) and the metropolitan *Abba Bärtälomewos*. Since the king was not in the place being donated, he had to charge dignitaries to spread news of the grant. Dəl Mägäśa received this duty. According to her account in *Laḥä Maryam*, she had the official act written in the *Gospel of Betä Ləḥem*.<sup>22</sup> This might explain why her account is so unusual. It is not the official act itself.

This donation of market rights for memorial ceremonies very likely occurred at the same time as the land grants recorded in the *Betä Mädhane 'Aläm Gospel*. We know more about the context of the latter, but questions remain about why a document concerning Betä Ləḥem was kept in Lalibäla and why one of the texts was in Arabic. The text preserved in Betä Ləḥem is valuable for understanding how the royal administration was organized. In her account of the grant made by her father, Dəl Mägäśa stated precisely where she had put a copy of the act of donation: in the Gospel kept in Betä Ləḥem. We might assume that a similar record in Betä Ləḥem explained where the act of donation recorded in the *Betä Mädhane 'Aläm Gospel* was kept. If the purpose of making several copies of an act was to have evidence for corroborating

another version, preventing falsification, or making a backup of the original in case it were to be destroyed, why was the copy of this act written in Arabic? Bärtälomewos, the metropolitan, for reasons easy to understand, wrote his copy in his own language, Arabic. This implies that there were other copies of the same writ in Ge'ez, so that Ethiopians could control the document. This raises another question: how did the people of Betä Ləhem know that the act was in Lalibäla? We can imagine that, just as King Dawit donated market rights to the Betä Ləhem church in public and charged officials to spread word of this, he proceeded in like manner when making the land grant by charging certain officials, including the metropolitan, to preserve the act. The other witnesses also had a copy, and one of these copies was probably for Beta Ləhem, which leads to questions about the relations between Bärtälomewos and Lalibäla. Did Bärtälomewos copy the act there owing to his personal relationships with the place or on orders from the king?

Another example from the manuscripts kept in Lalibäla helps us better understand the workings of this administration. The subject is a land grant that King Ləbna Dəngəl (1508–40), to whom this text refers by his reigning name, Wänäg Sägäd, made to Romanä Wärq, probably his daughter. The act exists in two different Gospels, the one kept in Betä Golgota and the other in Betä Libanos, two churches in Lalibäla:

**Gospel of Betä Golgota<sup>23</sup>**

በአቡቴተ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡ ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወሀብት ፡ አነ ፡ ወናግ ፡ ሰገድ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡  
ጉልት ፡ ዘወይዘሮ ፡ ሮማን ፡ ወርቀ ፡ የነጃ ፡ አንጭቃ ፡ ጣሌት ፡ ኃጽ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩንዋ ፡ ገባረ ፡  
ኢይባእ ፡ ዛን ፡ ሴፍ ፡ አባዛ ፡ ዘሃደ ፡ ወዘተአገለ ፡ ውጉዝ ፡ ለይኩን ፡ በአፈ ፡ አብ ፡ ወወልድ ፡  
ወመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ አሜን። ወዘአጽሐፈ ፡ መዘከር ፡ አቡብ ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ዘወርወር ፡  
ተክለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ወቀይስ ፡ ገበዝ ፡ ተኩኛ ፡

By the grace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I, Wänäg Sägäd the King, gave the *gwält* of *wäyzäro* Romanä Wärq—Yänäğa, An'äqa, Ṭalat, Ḥeṣ—so that they provide taxes to her. May Zan Sef Abäza not trespass. May whoever oversteps or infringes this rule be excommunicated by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. The person who had this written is the keeper of records Abib; the chief priest of Wärwär [is] Täklä Maryam, and the priest administrator of the church [is] Täkeña.

Gospel of Betä Golgota<sup>24</sup>

በአኩቱተ፡ አብ፡ ወውልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ወሀብኩ፡ አነ፡ ወናግ፡ ሰገድ፡ ንጉሥ፡  
 ጀጉልት፡ ዘወይዘሮ፡ ሮማነ፡ ወርቀ፡ የነጃ፡ እንጭቃ፡ ጣሌት፡ ኃጽ፡ ከመ፡ ይኩንዋ፡  
 ገባረ፡ እይባእ፡ ዛን፡ ሴፍ፡ አበዛ፡ ሄገኖ፡ ዘሂደ፡ ወዘተአገለ፡ ውጉዘ፡ ለይኩን፡ በአፈ፡  
 አብ፡ ወውልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ አሜን። ወዘአጽሐፈ፡ መዘከር፡ አቢብ፡ እንዘ፡ ሊቀ፡  
 ካህናት፡ ዘወርወር፡ ተክለ፡ ማርያም፡ ወቀይሰ፡ ገበዝ፡ ማምረ፡ አብ፡

By the grace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, I, Wänag Sägäd the King, gave a *gwəlt* of *wäyzäro* Romanä Wärq—Yänägä, An’äqa, Ṭalat, Ḥeṣ—so that they provide taxes to her. May Zan Sef Abäza Hegäno not trespass. May whoever oversteps or infringes this rule be excommunicated by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. The person who had this written is the keeper of the records Abib; the chief priest of Wärwär [is] Täklä Maryam, and the priest administrator of the church [is] Šämrä Ab.

Comparing the two acts turns up slight differences, the major one being the names of the church administrators. A valuable point of information is provided by the mention of the office of *mäzäkär*, keeper of the records. There was apparently a person in charge of all the records kept in the churches in Lalibäla. He probably decided where an act was to be copied. As we can see in the *Gospel of Golgota* and the *Gospel of Libanos*, the same person served as *mäzäkär* in both churches—and very likely in all the churches in Lalibäla (called Wärwär at the time). He was in charge of making copies, under the auspices of the chief priest, for all these churches. We might conjecture that this *mäzäkär* had a registry for recording where acts had been copied.

These documents, among others, suggest that the churches in Lalibäla were the place—a place free from suspicion of falsification—where permanent administrative records were to be kept during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This might be the key to understanding why a land grant by King Dawit to the Betä Ləhem church was copied in the *Betä Mädhane ‘Aläm Gospel* in Lalibäla. Placing a record in an independent institution was the best protection against falsification. For this system to be practical, there had to be a registry, or catalog, for keeping track of the different copies of the same act. But nothing of the sort has yet come to light.

## Types of Power and of Written Documents: The Case of Lasta in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The archives in Lalibāla shed light on a situation that changed totally during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Instead of acts or other documents (such as *täzkar* donations) involving the administration or churches, we come upon texts of various sorts having to do with local rulers. The Ethiopian kings in Gondär never intervened in the area of Lalibāla. Nor did they order the observance of new *täzkar* ceremonies in Lasta, a province where they encountered too many political problems. For the time being, we do not have any information about the system of land tenure in this area during these two centuries.

What we do have is other sorts of texts. From the mid-seventeenth century till the mid-eighteenth century, regional chiefs, or kings, in Lasta had manuscripts written or copied in order to reinforce their position in opposition to the king of kings of Ethiopia in Gondär. Many of these manuscripts were books, mostly liturgical, such as *Gəbrä Həmamət*, *Miracles of Mary*, or *Acts and Miracles of the Zagwe Saint Kings, Lalibāla, Yəmrəhanä Krəstos and Nə'əkwəto Lə'ab*—evidence of the veneration of the Zagwe kings as saints at the time. The local chiefs used these documents to assert their cultural and political identity in the face of Gondär's centralizing power.<sup>25</sup> These historical considerations have implications for the types of documents that were written at that time.

Whereas medieval kings made donations for liturgical ceremonies commemorating the sanctified Zagwe kings,<sup>26</sup> local kings during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seemed more interested in having new accounts written about the lives of the Zagwe saint kings, as was the case for Nə'əkwəto Lə'ab and Ḥarbay.<sup>27</sup> They even had new Zagwe kings declared as saints and probably organized liturgical ceremonies for these new saints, thus allocating land revenues to fund these commemorations. However we have not yet come upon written records of such grants. We understand why local rulers would have done this, since they wanted to strengthen the legitimacy of their local power base. The Zagwe kings were, after all, part of the local heritage.<sup>28</sup> The grants made by medieval kings were more conventional than the actions of local kings during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which were more political. We thus

see a relationship emerging over time between the type of power and the sort of written documents preserved in church archives.

To date, very few administrative acts have been found in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscripts. We do come upon notices that give us a glimpse of the structure and scope of political authority. They were usually placed in colophons. Some colophons provide the usual basic information: a date, and the names of the person who commissioned the manuscript and of the scribe. For instance, the colophon of a compilation of the *Acts of the Saint King Yəmrəhanä Krəstos* and *Acts of the Martyrs (Gädlä Säma‘ətat)* is formulated as follows:

ተጽሕፈ. ፡ ዝነቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ በዘመነ ፡ መንሱት። በ፫ ፻ ወ ፳ ፻ ፫ ወ ፯ ዓመተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ በ  
፮ መጥቅቅ ፡ በ ፳ ወ ፫ አበቅቱ ፡ ተፈጸመ ፡ ስመ ፡ ፲ ወ ፳ ለወርኃ ፡ ሰኔ ፡ በ ፱ ሌሊት ፡ በ ፲  
ወ ፳ መዓልት ፡ ዘተወጥሰ ፡ በወርኃ ፡ መጋቢት ፡ ፡ ፡ ዘአጽሐፎ ፡ ለዝነቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ መሃይምነ ፡  
ክርስቶስ ወጸሐፊውኒ ፡ ወልደ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩኖ ፡ ለመድኃኒተ ፡ ሥጋ ፡ ወነፍስ ፡ አሜን።

This book has been written during the era of affliction<sup>29</sup> in 7177 of the Era of the World [1684–85 AD], the *mätq’ə* being 7, the epact 23; it has been completed on the 11th of the month of Säne, the number of the night being 9, the number of the day 11. It was started during the month of Mägabit. The person who has commissioned the book is Mähaymänä Krəstos, and his scribe is Wäldä Krəstos. For the salvation of the body and spirit, amen.<sup>30</sup>

A few years later, a colophon in a codex written for the same church provided additional information:

ዝመጽሐፍ ፡ ዘቅዱስ ፡ ይምርሃነ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ተጽሕፈ. ፡ ዝነቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ሀሎ፤  
በዘመነ ፡ ሉቃስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ በ ፫ ፻ ወ ፳ ፻ ፯ ወ ፳ ዓመተ ፡ ዓለም ፡ በዘነነ ፡ ዕለተ ፡  
ዮሐንስ ፡ ዕለተ ፡ ሥነ-ይ ፡ በ ፳ ወ ፰ አበቅቱ ፡ በ ፪ መጥቅቅ ፡ በመዋዕሊሁ ፡ ለንጉሥነ  
ቄርሎስ ፡ ወበዐለ ፡ ጉላትሂ ፡ ትምህርተ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ወዛ ፡ ወልድ ፡ ወን . . . ግል ፡  
ወቀይስ ፡ ገበዝ ፡ ተላዌ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ፡ ወጸሐፊሁ ፡ ርቱዕ ፡ አመላክ ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ለዘጸሐፎ ፡  
ወለዘአጸሐፎ ፡ ወለዘአንበዖ ፡ ለዝነቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ኅቡረ ፡ ይምሐሮሙ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡  
በመንግሥተ ፡ ሰማያት ፡ አሜን ፡ ፡

This book belongs to Saint Yəmrəhanä Krəstos. This book has been written during the year of the Evangelist Luke, in 7191 of the Era of



the World [1698–99 AD], on the day of John, adorned day, the epact being 28, the *mätq'ə 2*, in the days of our King Qerəlos; the owner of the *gwəlt* was Təmhərtä Krəstos; . . . <sup>31</sup> the priest administrator of the church was Təlawe Krəstos, his scribe was Rətu'e Amlak. May the Lord have mercy on him who has written, on him who has ordered the writing and on him who reads this book, united in the Kingdom of Heaven, amen.<sup>32</sup>

This is the oldest mention of Qerəlos's reign. It figures in a manuscript stored in a place apparently located on the western edge of his zone of influence. Although this colophon is of interest for several reasons (in particular, its unusual reference to *bä'älä gwəlt*), the point here is to note its evolution in comparison with the previous one. Here, the principal political authority is named first, followed by the *bä'älä gwəlt*, the representative of the church's administration, and finally the scribe, who did not forget to mention his own name. In contrast, the name of the person who probably commissioned the manuscript, a certain Əgäle, does not figure in this colophon, although benedictions and prayers for him are formulated throughout the book.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, starting from a basic formula, through which the scribe concludes the text that he has finished copying by giving the place and/or the date, texts of a very different nature develop. Through a similar but expanded structure, they present a hierarchy of officials that leads us to see the colophon as an act of promulgation. If we assumed that every manuscript should have a colophon, then the lack of one would be anomalous. Since, however, most Ethiopian manuscripts do not have colophons, the presence of one is not normal. Whatever the reason for the colophons might have been, were they read out loud in the manner of a proclamation? What is certain is that they provide us with written evidence of a hierarchy.

It should be pointed out that these are “pseudo-colophons,” since they are not always placed at the end of a manuscript. Some are inserted at the end of a section therein, or even at the beginning. In the *Miracles of Mary and Miracles of Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab* from the Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab church, a scribe wrote (we assume once he had finished his work) the “colophon” at the start of the manuscript, on one of the blank front pages:

እምሥጋዌ፣ እግዚእነ፣ ኢየሱስ፣ ክርስቶስ፣ በ ፲ ፪ ወ ፯ ፪ ፯ ወሰዱሱ፣ ዓመት።። እምሕንፀተ፣  
 ዛቲ፣ መቅደስ፣ ዘእግዝእተ፣ ኩልነ፣ ማርያም፣ ወላዲተ፣ አምላክ፣ ዘሐነዓ፣ ነክነቶ፣ ለኦብ፣  
 ብፀዓዊ፣ በብሔረ፣ ቆቅሕና፣ በ ፯ ፪ ወ ፮ ዓመት፣ ተጽሕፈ፣ ዝነቱ፣ መጽሐፈ፣ ተአምራቲ፣  
 ወውዳሴያቲ፣።። በ ፳ ፪ ወ ፳፻፯ ወሰዱሱ፣ ዓመተ፣ ዓለም። በ ፻፶ ወ ፹ ዓመተ፣ ምሕረት።።  
 በእደ፣ ዘእማኑኤል፣ ኃዋእ፣ ወድኑስ፣ በረከታ፣ ወምሕረተ፣ ወልዱ፣ ዘይሴፎ፣ ወዘየኃሥሥ።።  
 በመዋዕለ፣ ሢመቱ፣ ለመንበረ፣ ክርስቶስ፣ ወልዱ፣ ለአክሊለ፣ ክርስቶስ፣ ወቀይስ፣ ገበዝ፣  
 ብርሃነ፣ መስቀል፣ ሰፋኒ፣ ክርስቶስ፣ ወሠራዔ፣ ቤት፣ አምደ፣ ማርያም፣ ወሊቀ፣ ዲያቆናት፣  
 አሚን፣ በክርስቶስ፣ ወሊቀ፣ ካህናት፣ እደ፣ ክርስቶስ፣ ወንጉሥነ፣ ቄርሎስ፣ ኃይለ፣ ረድኤታ፣  
 ያዕቀብነ፣ እምሀውክ፣ ወባዕስ።

From the era of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the year 1796, beginning with the construction of this sanctuary (*mäqdäs*) of Our Lady of all of us, Mary, Mother of God, who built the blessed Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab in the land of Qoqḥəna in the year 705.<sup>34</sup> This book of his miracles and praises (*wəddase*) has been written in 7196 of the Era of the World, in 280 of the age of mercy [1703–4] by Zä-Amanu'el, sinner and impure—His blessing and the mercy of His son who has faith in Him and seeks after Him—in the time of duty of Mänbärä Krəstos, son of Aklilä Krəstos, of the priest administrator Bərhanənä Mäsqäl, of Säfani Krəstos, and of *šəra'e bet* Amdä Maryam, and of the head deacon Amin Bä-Krəstos. And the chief priest was ʿEdä Krəstos; and our king, Qerəlos; may his power help protect us from civil war and conflict.<sup>35</sup>

Although the scribe gave his name, Zä-Amanu'el, we notice that he was lying by omission when we examine the rest of the manuscript. If we look at all the names in the manuscript marked with red ink, we notice that the scribe of the first part (the miracles of Mary) was Wäldä Krəstos. Zä-Amanu'el, who wrote the second part only, had the privilege of finishing the document and claiming to be the only scribe. The rubrication also has to be taken under consideration in order to obtain a broader view.

The names of two persons who held unspecified offices in the church are listed: these were Mänbärä Krəstos and then Säfani Krəstos. Though it is not stated here, we learn from a manuscript written ten years later that Mänbärä Krəstos and Bərhanənä Masqal shared the office of priest administrator.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, the chief priest in Lalibäla and the king of the province with his seat at ʿəmmäkinä (not far from Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab) are named. They



did not have direct ties to the church but are quoted here as arbitrators, guardians, or patrons and thus they appeared as tutelary figures in the region. The chief priest in Lalibäla seemed to have preeminence, at least morally, among the church officials in the town and the surrounding area.

Without citing other, similar examples, it is clear that the unusual use of colophons can be partly put down to the particular situation of the kings of Lasta, especially of Qerəlos (?–1696–1726–?), the most powerful king of his lineage, who fought to establish himself in opposition not only to the king of kings in Gondär but also probably to other local chiefs. Who decided to refer to the local king? The scribe or the person who commissioned the book? Was it an obligation (backed by coercion of whatever sort) to mention the king's name, or did it reflect the choice of an allegiance grounded on a sense of identity?

The actions of Zena Gäbrə'el, the head priest (*liqä kahenät*) in Lalibäla, during 1720 and 1750, provides a counterexample. The life of this important figure in local history is described in an account written for the commemoration of his death (*täzkar*). According to this account, Qerəlos-Gubala, the local king, sent Zena Gäbrə'el to act as a middleman in the conflict between himself and King Bäkäffa (1721–30). Following this diplomatic success, Zena Gäbrə'el was said to have had several altar plates made for the churches in Lalibäla and new manuscripts copied for churches in the area. Whatever his diplomatic role might have been (the Gondär sources do not mention him), Zena Gäbrə'el was appointed chief priest by the king of Lasta and served during the 1720s. Three decades later, he declared allegiance to the king of kings in Gondär when the latter reasserted his authority in the region, even though Qerəlos's successors still claimed to be kings.<sup>37</sup> A short, enigmatic text that Zena Gäbrə'el had added to a manuscript in Betä Golgota, between the *Acts of Lalibäla* and the *Miracles of Lalibäla* (written under his predecessor, the chief priest ʿĒdä Krəstos [?–1703–14–?]), mentions the king of Gondär, at the time Iyasu II (1730–55).<sup>38</sup> This mention is formulated like a colophon. If these colophons were a sort of indirect record of the local administration and its powers, they might also have served as an act of indirect promulgation by local rulers.

Other texts, which start with a declaration of ownership and end with a genealogy, also seem to serve as a source of legitimacy, as a symbolic assertion of power, by the same authorities. For instance, the father of

the aforementioned Qerəlos, Maḥədärä Krəstos, who reigned in Lasta in the mid-seventeenth century, had a note added to an illuminated fifteenth-century gospel from eastern Tigray. According to this note, Maḥədärä Krəstos bought the manuscript, and his son Qerəlos gave it to the Gännätä Maryam church, which, at the time, was a center of resistance in Lasta against Gondär's hegemony:

This book belongs to our King Maḥədärä Krəstos, whose wife is Tälawitä Krəstos and whose sons are Qerəlos, Giyorgis, Yohannes, A'nafä Krəstos [and] Bätə'əzazä Krəstos, and whose daughters are Mäsqäl Kəbra, Akrosəya, Əlleni [and] Aqləsəya. May whoever steals or erases or seizes it by force be anathematized by the authority of Peter and Paul like Arius forever and ever. Amen.

The genealogy reads as follows:

Iyyäsus Mo'a begat Gərma Iyyäsus; Gərma Iyyäsus begat Känäfərə Krəstos; Känäfərə Krəstos begat King Maḥədärä Krəstos; and Maḥədärä Krəstos begat A'nafä Krəstos, Qerəlos, Giyorgis, Yohannes, Bätə'əzaz, Akilas [and] Anorewos. He acquired this book with his own money for the salvation of body and soul.<sup>39</sup>

### Networks of Power and of Archives in Bəgwəna-Lasta

The various copies of the same documents in the different manuscripts of the region of Bəgwəna-Lasta, the conservation of important documents concerning other communities in the churches of Lalibäla, the identification of scribes who were working for several churches in the region, and the acts of promulgation of the kings of Lasta copied into the manuscripts of different churches in the region reveal the existence of a double network: a regional power network, which leads to an archival network. To shed light on this administration, which operated throughout the period under study even if the modalities may have evolved over time, let us examine how, in the fifteenth century, religious establishments in Bəgwəna-Lasta formed a system and how scribes moved from place to

place therein. This network can be read within the document production itself.

As the following example shows, it was a common practice to copy the same act in several manuscripts, a point already made in reference to Betä Ləḥem. The following example tends to confirm what we have assumed with regard to the land grant made to that church. Only by comparing such texts, which turn out not to be identical, can we understand how this regional administration operated.

**Gospel of Betä Libanos<sup>40</sup>**

ጸሐፍኩ ፡ ስነ ፡ ስሳዕነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ዘገነተ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ዘከመ ፡ ተሠርቦ ፡  
 ድብተርነት ፡ በገነተ ፡ መርያም ፡ ጂመነኮሳት ፡ በቃለ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ያዓቆብ ፡ ደቂቀ ፡  
 ስቡነ ፡ በርተሎሜዎስ ፡ መምህረ ፡ ዠመዶ ፡ ምስለ ፡ ምህር ፡ በገነተ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ወበተኮዘገዛ  
 ማርያም ፡ ዠኅሮሙ ፡ ወምህራሞሙ ፡ ለነገሥተ ፡ እስራኤል ፡ ኅሩያን። ዘደምሰሶ ፡ ለዘነቱ ፡  
 መጻሕፍ ፡ ውጉዘ ፡ ይኩን ፡ በቃለ ፡ ጲዋርስ ፡ ወጳውሎስ።

I wrote, I, Aśa‘änä Maryam of Gännätä Maryam, chief priest, that, on the word of our King Zär‘ä Ya‘qob, five monks, [spiritual] children of our father Bärtälomewos, master of Zämädo [Maryam], were appointed as *dabtara* with his teaching, of Gännätä Maryam and Tägwozagweza Maryam, the sepulchers and sanctuaries of the elected kings of Israel. May he who destroys this book be excommunicated in the name of Peter and Paul.

**Gospel of Betä Giyorgis<sup>41</sup>**

ጸሐፍኩ ፡ ስነ ፡ ስሳዕነ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ካህናት ፡ ዘገነተ ፡ ማርያም ፡ ከመ ፡ ተሠርቦ ፡  
 ድብተርነት ፡ በሰኻላ ፡ በቃለ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡ ዘርእ ፡ ያዓቆብ ፡ ደቂቀ ፡ ስቡነ ፡ በርተሎሜዎስ ፡  
 ጂመነኮሳት ፡ በስፍር ፡ ወመዓር ፡ ምስለ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ደብተራ።

I wrote, I, Aśanä Maryam, chief priest of Gännätä Maryam that, on the word of our King Zär‘ä Ya‘qob, five monks, [spiritual] children of our father Bärtälomewos, were appointed as *dabtara* in Säkhla. . . . [Since the end of the text is obscure, we have not translated it].

Although the two documents do not mention the same places (Gännätä Maryam and Tägwozagweza Maryam are mentioned on the one hand



but Sākhla on the other),<sup>42</sup> they both refer to the same act, by which Zār'ā Ya'qob (1434–68) appointed in Gännätä Maryam or its vicinity five monks from Zāmādo Maryam.

This example is evidence of the geographical area covered by the archives preserved in Lalibāla. The churches there are not the only institutions concerned in the administrative texts recorded in the manuscripts. In this case, the chief priest of Gännätä Maryam was writing, or making someone write, the information about the appointments. It is noteworthy that this information was recorded in two manuscripts kept in two different churches (Betä Libanos and Betä Giyorgis) in Lalibāla, churches that apparently had nothing to do with these appointments.

These two documents, and especially the one in the *Gospel of Betä Libanos*, differentiate between the churches in Lalibāla and the churches of Gännätä Maryam and Zāmādo Maryam. The text presents Gännätä Maryam and Tägwozagweza Maryam (the latter is not mentioned in other sources) as the “sepulchers and the sanctuaries of the elected kings of Israel.” This means that Gännätä Maryam was the sanctuary of those who claimed to be descendants of Solomon (i.e., the Solomonid dynasty) and implies that the churches in Lalibāla were the sanctuary of the Zagwe kings. Despite this regional distinction, we detect no opposition between the two religious centers. After all, this account of the appointment of the monks was copied in manuscripts in Lalibāla. Zāmādo Maryam was thus associated with Gännätä Maryam through King Zār'ā Ya'qob's decision to link the two.

This regional network—linking together churches in Lalibāla, Zāmādo Maryam, Gännätä Maryam, and lesser known places such as Tägwozagweza Maryam and Sākhla—had ramifications for the writing and storage of the documents. Let us emphasize once again the preeminence of the churches in Lalibāla as places for storing archives, probably because Lalibāla was not at stake in the fifteenth-century power struggles. Furthermore, these documents provide evidence that the churches and communities in Bəgwəna-Lasta were not isolated from each other but, instead, formed the basis of a system, or network, of archives.

These interrelations still existed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but in a different form. Under the new system, the archives from one church were no longer stored in a different church for the purpose of cross-checking documents. Instead, a relational network

emerged involving people who worked with several churches, whether as scribes or as patrons who commissioned manuscripts. Another characteristic of this new system was that local kings proclaimed their power and zone of influence by having colophons inserted in manuscripts stored in various churches. These colophons were written at the behest either of the heads of these churches or of the local kings who had commissioned the manuscripts and given them to the churches. The system of making duplicates apparently for the purpose of cross-checking existed elsewhere (in Gondār,<sup>43</sup> for instance), but the system in Lasta during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries stands out owing to regional politics and local leaders' determination to assert a regional identity through specific religious and cultural policies.

To illustrate how this network operated, let us cite examples of interactions between the people involved. We know, for example, that Qerəlos, king of the region from 1696 till about 1726, had a man named Anəstasyos working as a scribe for the ʿEmmäkina Mädhane 'Aläm<sup>44</sup> church and a certain Yohannes working for the Zämädo church.<sup>45</sup> What we do not know is where these two persons actually worked. A man named Yohannes, perhaps the same as the aforementioned, worked during the same period for the chief priest Zena Gäbrə'el for a church in Lalibäla.<sup>46</sup> Zena Gäbrə'el also employed a scribe named Wäldä Dawit,<sup>47</sup> who had worked for Qerəlos previously, when the chief priest in Lalibäla was ʿEdä Krəstos.<sup>48</sup> Yet another example: the scribe named Wäldä Krəstos, mentioned earlier in this article, who was said to be from a place called Wärwär, worked for several persons in positions of authority. He wrote for Mähaymənä Krəstos (of unknown social status) a book for the Yəmrrəhanä Krəstos church in 1684–85.<sup>49</sup> In 1694–95, he copied the *Acts of Lalibäla* for the governor (*səyyum*) of Wag, Ar'äya Krəstos.<sup>50</sup> Sometime before 1703–4, he copied the first part of a manuscript for the Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab church.<sup>51</sup> This is the last mention of him. The second part of the manuscript was written by another scribe: either the work was shared between the two from the beginning, or else Wäldä Krəstos, unable to finish the work, was replaced.

A patron, whether lay or religious, could have several scribes working for him. In turn, a scribe might work for several patrons and also for different churches. A patron might commission manuscripts for more than one church. The study both of the manuscripts still kept in the

churches in Lasta and, especially, of the names of the people cited in the blessings (patrons, scribes, priests, etc.) yields information about a local network of religious and political authorities. In addition, the distribution of the manuscripts commissioned reveals the geographical extension of their authority, a map of the area where they exerted, or tried to exert, authority, in particular from Zämädo on the eastern slope of Mount Abuna Yosef to (at least) Yəmṛəhanä Krəstos on the western side.

## Conclusion

The examples presented in this article show how the production of written documents varied from one historical period to another, a variation related to the power exerted in the region. From the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, the churches in Lalibäla, no longer lying at the center of power, stood apart from conflicts and thus managed to maintain their status as a place of reference and prestige. From the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, local kings needed to legitimize themselves in opposition to the central power in Gondär. During the first period, Lalibäla was a place where royal archives were stored, whereas, during the second period, the official documents made and stored there were intended as acts of promulgation of the authority of local chiefs.

The documents preserved in Bəgwəna-Lasta form a corpus that amounts to more than a collection made and used by historians. Local authorities, both lay and religious, created this corpus. They had acts copied in the manuscripts of churches other than the church where the original was stored, or they had notices of the acts written in manuscripts in several churches in Bəgwəna-Lasta. In our opinion, this corpus is what remains of the regional and royal administrations, which were not centralized in a single site, as they developed the means for authenticating acts through a system of making copies for the purpose of cross-checking.

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## NOTES

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1. Article translated from French by Leila Qashu and Noal Mellott (CNRS, Paris).
2. On historical geography, see Derat (2009), Bosc-Tiessé (2009), Osmond (2009), and the archeological and historical work on Lalibâla, <http://www.cfee.cnrs.fr/spip.php?rubrique42> (accessed 31 November 2010).
3. These texts are being published on the website of Traitement électronique des manuscrits et des archives (TELMA), [www.cn-telma.fr](http://www.cn-telma.fr), as part of the Zekrâ Nâgâr project on Ethiopian manuscript archives headed by Anaïs Wion.
4. Mantel-Niećko (1994).
5. For an exhaustive bibliography of the work done on the acts written as

- marginalia in these Ethiopian manuscripts, see the articles by Alessandro Bausi (1994, 1995, 1997, 2001).
6. We have at our disposal only the records of these microfilms with the following items of information: place of conservation, title of the manuscript, date (when easily determined), and indication of the folios with notes or paintings.
  7. By comparison with other libraries, such as those that we know existed during the eighteenth century at the Ṭana Qirqos monastery and at the Narga Šəllase and Qwəsqwam churches, which were founded in the eighteenth century (Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 402–9).
  8. For example, the British Library has the manuscript titled Oriental 719, which contains the *Acts of Lalibāla* and an act of donation from King Zār’ä Ya’əqob (1434–68) to the Betä Golgota church in Lalibāla, and Oriental 516, an illuminated gospel from the seventeenth century made in Lasta (Bosc-Tiessé 2009, 90, 97, 118–19).
  9. Three microfilms of manuscripts from the region figure in the Donald Davies collection, now stored at the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library (HMML), St. John’s University, Collegeville, Minnesota: one from Ašätän Maryam, one from Lalibāla Betä Mädhane ‘Aläm, and the third from Lalibāla Betä Amanu’el (Macomber 1979, 12–13, 50–55).
  10. “MG” (for Michael Gervers, who photographed these manuscripts) is used to refer to this untitled database: Mäzɡäbä sə’əlat, <http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca>.
  11. A.Mā. IV 12394 (shelf mark attributed by the Amhara region); M.G.2004.123: 001, 002. See Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 124) on this manuscript and its illuminations.
  12. A.Mā. IV 12369; MG.2004.123: 008-010. See Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 124–25) on this manuscript and its paintings.
  13. No shelf mark; photographed in April 2008. This copy of the synaxary is of interest since it contains a short notice on King Yəmrəhanä Krəstos for the commemoration of his death on 19 Ṭəqəmt. No other known copy contains a note of this sort.
  14. Monti della Corte (1940, 136–40, pl. XXXV) published a photograph of the page and a translation of the three texts made by Arnold van Lantschoot.
  15. EMMML 6907, fol. 61v. Monti della Corte (1940, 138) published a translation of this text, which was reworked in October 2009 by Abba Wadi Abullif of the Franciscan Center for Oriental Christian Studies in Cairo, whom we warmly thank for his help.

16. EMMML 6907, fol. 61v. A translation of this text was published in Monti della Corte (1940, 138). We have referred in the present article to the new edition and revised translation published by Schneider (1970, 82–83).
17. *Lahä Maryam*, Betä Ləhem church, Gayənt, microfilm. Donald Crummey Illinois/IES 88.XXIV.g.
18. Crummey (2000, 43).
19. The feminine plural form used in Ge'ez, *nāgašyat*, is unusual. We have used *nāgaši* since it was a title for kings at the time in regions such as Gōḡgam (Marrassini 1993, 53; Kropp 1994, 6).
20. The name of a tent in the royal camp (Perruchon 1893, 25).
21. From the Four Gospels of Kəbran (fol. 1r, 234v, 235r according to the folio numbers written by EMMML on the manuscript itself, which differ from the count made by Ernst Hammerschmidt in 1973), we learn that Dəl Mägäša (or Dəl Mängäša) was the *bäge mädər* (or *mäge mädər*) during the reigns of her father Dawit and her brother Yəšhaq (1414–30). See also Taddesse (1972, 192–93, and 1974, 307, 310). Bägēmädər, the name of a region, first appeared as a title combined with a place name, as attested in the *History of the Wars of 'Amdä Šəyon* (Marrassini 1993, 53, note 10, and 69, note 1; Kropp 1994, 6, note 36). Given what we learn from later sources, we assume that, at the time of Dəl Mägäša, Kəbran marked the western boundary of Bägēmädər and Betä Ləhem the eastern.
22. The original has not yet been located.
23. EMMML 6934, fol. 163r.
24. EMMML 6948, fol. 122v.
25. Bosc-Tiessé (2009).
26. Derat (2009, 78–79).
27. It is uncertain when the unedited *Acts of Harbay* (Qəddus Harbay church) were written. Internal elements suggest a late date. The account of miracles refers to a conflict between Qerəlos (ca. 1696–1726), presented as king of Lasta, and another, unnamed king. The latter was Bäkaffa (1710–30), king of Gondär (fol. 52v–54r). We warmly thank Emmanuel Fritsch, who gave us his pictures of the text. See Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 99–101, 104).
28. Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 108).
29. “Era of affliction” is a synonym for *'amätä 'aläm*.
30. *Acts of Yəmrəhanä Krəstos and Acts of Martyrs*, Yəmrəhanä Krəstos church, A.Mā. IV. 12369 (Bosc-Tiessé 2009, 124).
31. We have not translated this passage, which contains gaps.

32. *Māṣḥāfā Gənzat* (EMML 7363), Yəmrəhanā Krəstos church, fol. 182v (Bosc-Tiessé 2009, 104).
33. For instance, fol. 22v, 40v, 52r, 58v.
34. We do not know how to interpret these two dates, which are not compatible with those that follow. The text refers to the church as being dedicated to Mary, whereas it is now known by the name of its founder, the Zagwe King Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab, who was declared a saint at a date yet to be determined.
35. *Miracles of Mary and Miracles of Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab* (EMML 7039), Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab church, fol. 2r. Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 131–32).
36. *Acts of Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab* (EMML 7050), Nā'ākwəto Lā'ab church, fol. 121r. Bosc-Tiessé (2009, 133–34).
37. See Ḥnbārām and Yosef (Bosc-Tiessé 2009, 99–100, 102, 105).
38. *Acts and miracles of Lalibāla* (EMML 6931), Betä Golgota church, fol. 78va:

እምእመ ፡ ነገሠ ፡ ለ ፡ ኦሳክ ፡ ይሕንድ ፡ መቅደስ ፡ በ ፲ ዓመት ፡ በ ፳ ወባ [sic] ፫ ዓመት ፡  
 ፈጸመ ፡ ሕንገ ፡ መቅደሱ ፡ ወእምእመ ፡ ተሐንገ ፡ እላንቱ ፡ ኦብያተ ፡ ከርሱቴያናት ፡ እስከ ፡ ይእከ ፡  
 ኮነ ፡ ፱ ፻ ፯ ወ ፱ ዓመት ፡ በመዋዕሊሁ ፡ ለዜና ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ ሊቀ ፡ ካህናት ፡ እንዘ ፡ ንጉሥነ ፡  
 ኢያሱ ፡ ወልደ ፡ በካፋ ፡ በ ፳ ወ ፳ ዓመት ፡ መንግሥቱ ፡ በዘመነ ፡ ሉቃስ ፡ ወንጌላዊ ፡ ወእጽሐፊ።

Since the time when La reigned, he began to build the sanctuary (*māqdās*) in the 10th year. In the 23rd year, he had the construction of his sanctuary finished; and from the building of these churches till today, 999 years in the days of Zena Gäbrə'el, chief priest (*liqā kahənat*) while our king [is] Iyasu, son of Bäkaffa, in the 25th year of his reign [1755], the year of Luke the evangelist, and he made me write this.

39. Gospel (EMML 7219), Gännätä Maryam church, fol. 12r. Text edited and translated by Getatchew Haile (1985, 42–46).
40. EMML 6957, fol. 52r.
41. EMML 6948, fol. 122v.
42. Sākhla is undoubtedly the Sekhla mentioned several times in the Chronicles of King Yohannes I (1677–82). See, in particular, Guidi (1903/1905, 22 for both the text and the translation).
43. Kropp (1989).
44. *Miracles of Mary*, Ḥmmākina Mādḥane 'Alām, B14-IV-10; A.M. IV.13009.
45. *Synaxary* (EMML 6968), 1723, Zāmādo Maryam.
46. *Miracles of Mary* (EMML 7496), Betä Golgota.
47. *Synaxary* (EMML 7506), Betä Maryam.

48. *Synaxary* (EMML 6935), Betä Giyorgis, first quire.
49. *Acts of Yəmrəhanä Krəstos and Acts of martyrs*, Yəmrəhanä Krəstos church, A.M. IV. 12369.
50. *Acts of Lalibäla* (EMML 6964), Betä Giyorgis.
51. *Miracles of Mary and Miracles of Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab* (EMML 7039), Nä'äkwəto Lä'ab church.

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