



# Aethiopica 24 (2021)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

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## Article

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MSS BL Or. 818 and BnF Éthiopien 146*

Aethiopica 24 (2021), 78–103

ISSN: 1430-1938

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Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut  
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik  
der Universität Hamburg  
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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## Multiple-Text Manuscripts from the Gondarine Age: MSS BL Or. 818 and BnF Éthiopien 146\*

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### Introduction

Ethiopic manuscripts preserved in large Western collections have been described since the nineteenth century. Studied by scholars for decades, they have undergone digitization processes in the twenty-first century, and these initiatives are still under way. It is a known fact, however, that some historical catalogues of major collections are rather uninformative regarding crucial data such as a considerable amount of codicological features and sometimes even the dating.<sup>1</sup> In addition, as little can be said about the early history of these manuscripts before their arrival in Europe, they have been treated as isolated objects, decontextualized from their original owning institutions, thus reduced to mere text-carriers.

In this contribution two manuscripts, well-known to specialists and cited in a variety of contributions and text editions, namely MSS London, British Library (= BL), Or. 818 and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France (= BnF), Éthiopien 146, are focused upon. These two skilfully executed manuscripts can be defined as ‘multiple-text manuscripts’, a label which appropriately replaces the old term

\* The core of this article has developed from research on the manuscript tradition of the Ethiopic *Physiologus* and, in particular, draws on my communication ‘The Ethiopic *Physiologus*: Manuscript Tradition and Desiderata’ made at the 19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Ethiopia—Diversity and Interconnections through Space and Time (Warsaw, 24–28 August 2015). I am grateful to Prof. Alessandro Bausi and to colleagues Eliana Dal Sasso, Sophia Dege-Müller, and Daria Elagina for sharing comments on this topic. I am also grateful to the anonymous reviewer for his/her valuable remarks.

<sup>1</sup> On a regular basis, historical catalogues up to Sylvain Grébaud and Eugène Tisserant’s catalogue of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, issued in the 1930s, supplied minimal and largely insufficient data on the material aspects of the manuscripts. Some early examples, such as August Dillmann’s catalogues, also abstain from providing a dating based on palaeography.

‘miscellany’.<sup>2</sup> This article intends to show how the history of the two manuscripts is interconnected to a much larger extent than presumed thus far and calls for a re-evaluation of the dating and genetic position of one of the two pieces. First, Section 1 features a brief introduction to the manuscripts, their textual contents,<sup>3</sup> and quire structure. Further to which the text-critical evidence will be illustrated validating a rethinking of their mutual genetic relationship (Section 2). Other pieces of evidence unrelated to the textual contents, such as prosopography, additional notes, and data taken from the contemporary historiographical literature will be discussed in Section 3. In the Conclusion, the survey’s results are briefly summarized.

### 1 MSS BL Or. 818 and BnF Éthiopien 146

Ms BL Or. 818 (= Wright 291, henceforth L) is a large-size parchment codex, 378 × 330 mm, 191 folia, three columns, 28 (A + 26 + B) quires, Ethiopian binding, dated by William Wright to the first half of the eighteenth century. Wright did not provide data on the early history of the book. Reportedly, it was part of the Maqdalā’s treasure collected by Tewodros (r.1855–1868) and at the latter’s death was looted and brought to the British Library.<sup>4</sup>

The manuscript contains a non-homogeneous collection of texts of various genres, in the following order:

- 1) *Kəbra nagašt*, ‘Glory of the kings’ (CAe 1709),<sup>5</sup> fols 3ra–47rc;
- 2) *Yohānās madabbar*, *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (CAe 1239), fols 48ra–103rc;
- 3) *Zenāhomu labədu ‘ān bamawā ‘ala ‘Erəmyās nabi*y, ‘History of the blessed men in the days of Jeremiah the prophet’ (CAe 1605), fols 104ra–108va;
- 4) *Zenā ‘Īskəndər*, ‘History of Alexander the Great’ (CAe 2616), fols 108vb–125rc;
- 5) *Zenāhu la ‘Īskəndər nəguś zatarakba ‘əm ‘Abušākər*, ‘History of King Alexander from ‘Abušākər’ (CAe 4092), fols 125va–127va;

<sup>2</sup> Bausi 2010; Bausi 2016a. The growing academic interest in the practice of selecting and juxtaposing different texts from different sources in one single manuscript is witnessed by the recent book edited by Bausi et al. 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Provided detailed descriptions were offered by Wright and Hermann Zotenberg in their catalogues: Wright 1877, 297b–314a (preliminary description in Wright 1870, 614); Zotenberg 1877, 222a–249a.

<sup>4</sup> For an account of the 1868 events related to the Maqdalā’s volumes see Pankhurst 1973.

<sup>5</sup> CAe refers to the univocal *Clavis Aethiopica* identifier. The *Clavis Aethiopica* is a repertory of Ethiopic works currently being developed by the Beta maṣāḥəft project (see <https://betamasasheft.eu/works/list>).

- 6) *Rā'əya naḡar zatarakba 'əmGiyorgis Walda 'Amid*, extracts from the *History of Giyorgis Walda 'Amid* (extracts from CAe 4723), fols 127vb–129rc;  
 7) *Zenā Səkəndəs ṭabib*, ‘Story of Secundus the sage’ (CAe 2625), fols 129va–144vc;  
 8) *Maṣḥafa ṭənta ḥəymānot*, ‘Book on the beginning of faith’ by Epiphanius (CAe 1976), fols 145ra–159rc;  
 9) *Fəkkāre 'Iyasus*, ‘Explanation of Jesus’ (CAe 1385), fols 160ra–161vb;  
 10) *Rā'əya Māryām*, ‘Vision of Mary’ (CAe 1124), fols 161vc–169ra;  
 11) *Ṭəbaba Sābelā*, ‘Wisdom of the Sibyl’ (CAe 2353), fols 169ra–171ra;  
 12) *Dərsān zabədu' Fisālgos*, ‘Homily of the blessed *Physiologus*’, α-recension (CAe 4915), fols 171rb–176vc;  
 13) *Rā'əya 'abbā Sinodā*, ‘Visions of 'Abbā Sinodā’ (CAe 5804), fols 177ra–179vc;  
 14) *'Aqāryos, Legend of Abgar* (CAe 1759), fols 179vc–181vb;  
 15) *Dərsān za'Efrem ba'ənta ḥəmāmātiḥu la'əgzi'əna 'Iyasus Krəstos wa-ba'ənta fayyātāwi*, ‘Homily by Ephrem on the Passion of Our Lord and the thief’ (CAe 1660), fols 181vc–182rb;  
 16) *Dərsān zaYa'qob zaŠərug ba'ənta mal'ak wafayyātāwi*, ‘Homily by Jacob of Serugh on the angel and the thief’ (CAe 1631), fols 182rb–186vc;  
 17) *Dərsān zaYa'qob zaNəṣbin zakama maṣ'a nəḡuṣa Farəs wəsta Nəṣbin*, ‘Homily by Jacob of Nisibis on the arrival of the king of the Persian to Nisibis’ (CAe 1275), fols 187ra–191va.

The manuscript consists of one single production unit. The quire structure can be summarized as follows:<sup>6</sup>

$$1\text{I}^{\text{fols } 1-2} + 2-98.\text{IV}^{\text{fols } 3-66} + 10\text{II}^{\text{fols } 67-70} + 11\text{IV}^{\text{fols } 71-78} + 12-132.\text{V}^{\text{fols } 79-98} + 14\text{II}^{\text{fols } 99-102} + 15(\text{I-pos. } 1)^{\text{fol. } 103} + 16-249.\text{IV}^{\text{fols } 104-175} + 25(\text{V-pos. } 10)^{\text{fols } 176-184} + 26(\text{II-pos. } 3-4)^{\text{fols } 185-186} + 27(\text{III-pos. } 1)^{\text{fols } 187-191} + 28(\text{I-pos. } 2)^{\text{fol. } 192}.$$

Ms BnF Éthiopien 146 (*olim* Éthiopien 123, henceforth P) is also a large-size multiple-text codex, 368 × 296 mm, 256 folia (i + 255), three columns, 32 quires, restored.<sup>7</sup> The book is undated; in his *Catalogue des manuscrits éthio-*

<sup>6</sup> The structure is described following the formula proposed by Patrick Andrist (Andrist 2015, 524).

<sup>7</sup> The manuscript has been resewn and the original sewing has been replaced by a new one. In addition, during the restoration process some strips of paper have been inserted between each board and the text block to reinforce the junctions. I am indebted to Eliana Dal Sasso for this information.

*piens*, Zotenberg proposed a seventeenth-century dating.<sup>8</sup> I shall come back to this dating below. The codex was donated to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 1850 by Charles-Xavier Rochet d'Héricourt, upon returning from his third journey to Ethiopia (1848–1849).<sup>9</sup>

P contains the same combination of seventeen texts as L, though arranged in a partially different order:

- 1) *Kəbra nagast*, 'Glory of the kings' (CAe 1709), fols 1ra–62rb;
- 2) *Yohannəs madabbar*, *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* (CAe 1239), fols 62ra–138vc;
- 3) *Fəkkāre 'Iyasus*, 'Explanation of Jesus' (CAe 1385), fols 139ra–142vc;
- 4) *Rā'əya Māryām*, 'Vision of Mary' (CAe 1124), fols 143ra–153ra;
- 5) *Dərsān zabədu 'Fisālgos*, 'Homily of the blessed *Physiologos*', α-recension (CAe 4915), fols 153ra–161rc;
- 6) *Zenāhomu labədu 'ān bamawā 'ala 'Erəmyās nabi*y, 'History of the blessed men in the days of Jeremiah the prophet' (CAe 1605), fols 162ra–167vc;
- 7) *Zenā 'Āskəndər*, 'History of Alexander the Great' (CAe 2616), fols 168ra–189vb;
- 8) *Zenāhu la 'Āskəndər nəguś zatarakba 'əm 'Abušākər*, 'History of King Alexander from 'Abušākər' (CAe 4092), fols 189vb–192rc;
- 9) *Rā'əya nagar zatarakba 'əm Giyorgis Walda 'Amid*, extracts from the *History of Giyorgis Walda 'Amid* (extract from CAe 4723), fols 192va–194va;
- 10) *Zenā Səkəndəs tabib*, 'Story of Secundus the sage' (CAe 2625), fols 194vb–213vc;
- 11) *Maṣṣafā tənta ḥāymānot*, 'Book on the beginning of faith' by Epiphanius (CAe 1976), fols 214ra–231vb;
- 12) *'Aqāryos*, *Legend of Abgar* (CAe 1759), fols 231vc–234rc;
- 13) *Rā'əya 'abbā Sinodā*, 'Visions of 'Abbā Sinodā' (CAe 5804), fols 234va–238va;
- 14) *Dərsān za 'Efrem ba 'ənta ḥəmāmātiḥu la 'əgzi'əna 'Iyasus Krəstos wa-ba 'ənta fayyātāwi*, 'Homily by Ephrem on the Passion of Our Lord and the thief' (CAe 1660), fols 238vb–240va;
- 15) *Dərsān za Ya 'qob za Šərug ba 'ənta mal 'ak wafayyātāwi*, 'Homily by Jacob of Serugh on the angel and the thief' (CAe 1631), fols 240vb–245vb;

<sup>8</sup> Zotenberg 1877, 249a. The twelfth-century dating proposed by Pitra 1855, lii, n. 2 is obviously untenable (cf. also Wright 1877, 311b). In Zotenberg 1883, 8 a slightly narrower range ('de la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle') is tentatively proposed.

<sup>9</sup> See the introductory note ('Avertissement') in Zotenberg 1877.

16) *Dərsān zaYa‘qob zaNəṣbin zakama maṣ’a nəguṣa Farəs wəsta Nəṣbin*, ‘Homily by Jacob of Nisibis on the arrival of the king of the Persian to Nisibis’ (CAe 1275), fols 245vb–252rb;

17) *Ṭababa Sābelā*, ‘Wisdom of the Sibyl’ (CAe 2353), fols 252rc–255rc.

The book was made in one single production unit.<sup>10</sup> However, three codicological ‘blocks’ of variable length can be identified. The first (quires 1–17, fols 1–138) includes the *Kəbra nagašt* and the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*. Quires are numbered in the upper inner corner with Ethiopic numerals 1 to 17. The second block (quires 18–20, fols 139–161) includes texts 3 to 5, from the *Explanation of Jesus* to the *Physiologus*. Quires are unmarked. The third and last block (quires 21–32, fols 162–255) includes twelve texts from the *History of the Blessed Men in the Days of Jeremiah the Prophet* to the *Wisdom of the Sybil*. Quires are numbered in the upper inner corner with Ethiopic numerals 1 to 11 (the twelfth and last quire is erroneously numbered as eleventh). All of this reflects a complex bookmaking process, which involved the presumably contemporary production of three separate units and their subsequent binding together.

The quire structure can be summarized as follows:<sup>11</sup>

$$\begin{aligned}
 & 1(\text{V-pos. } 10)^{\text{fols } i-8} + 2_{-12} 11.\text{IV}^{\text{fols } 9-96} + 13(\text{V-pos. } 2)^{\text{fols } 97-105} + 14_{-16} 3.\text{IV}^{\text{fols}} \\
 & 106-129 + 17(\text{V-pos. } 1)^{\text{fols } 130-138} + 18\text{III}^{\text{fols } 139-144} + 19\text{VI}^{\text{fols } 145-156} + 20(\text{III-} \\
 & \text{pos. } 1)^{\text{fols } 157-161} + 21_{-31} 11.\text{IV}^{\text{fols } 162-249} + 32(\text{IV-pos. } 7-8)^{\text{fols } 250-255}.
 \end{aligned}$$

The palaeographical features of the handwriting tally with those of the *g<sup>w</sup>əlḥ* script (Siegbert Uhlig’s period V, mid-seventeenth century to the second half of the eighteenth century):<sup>12</sup> great clarity and legibility, unambiguity of all vowel markers, even **h** and **ḥ**; absence or rarity of curved strokes; **ḥ** always takes the modern form, in which the vowel marker is attached to the right side of the body. Other features confirm this time range. Firstly, the layout ratio (368:296) falls within the type 3 of period V.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the layout is in agreement with the observation that two thirds of the period-V *g<sup>w</sup>əlḥ* codices are written on three columns, while the majority of codices of the preceding period IV are on two columns.<sup>14</sup> Given this congruency with the features attributed by Uhlig to period

<sup>10</sup> On the notion of ‘productive unit’ see Andrist et al. 2013, 59–60.

<sup>11</sup> Some aspects of the quire structure remain difficult to discern, especially in quires 18 to 20. I am grateful to Eliana Dal Sasso for her valuable remarks.

<sup>12</sup> Uhlig 1988, 545–653.

<sup>13</sup> Uhlig 1988, 558. Conversely, the ratio does not match any of the types of the preceding period IV, mid-sixteenth century to second half of the seventeenth century (Uhlig 1988, 442).

<sup>14</sup> Uhlig 1988, 444, 560.

V, it seems appropriate to reconsider the traditional dating of P and reassign it to a time frame between the mid-seventeenth century to second half of the eighteenth century. We shall see further down that this time range can be further restricted.

## 2 Textual Evidence

In addition to the sameness of textual components,<sup>15</sup> one cannot but observe that, for each work, L and P are surprisingly similar to each other in terms of variant readings. These similarities did not escape Zotenberg,<sup>16</sup> and have been independently evidenced from various angles in a number of successive studies. After the contents of L and P were announced to Western scholarship, a fair number of texts transmitted therein have been the subject of editions and surveys of their manuscript traditions. Among these, the *Physiologus*, published by Fritz Hommel;<sup>17</sup> the *Wisdom of the Sibyl*, investigated by Joel Schleifer;<sup>18</sup> the *Visions of 'Abbā Sinodā*, edited by Adolf Grohmann;<sup>19</sup> the *Beginning of Faith* by Epiphanius, surveyed by August Haffner;<sup>20</sup> the *History of Alexander the Great*, whose manuscript tradition has been investigated by Gianfrancesco Lusini;<sup>21</sup> the *Story of Secundus the Sage*, published by Martin Heide.<sup>22</sup> To these, we can add

<sup>15</sup> Texts are distributed in blocks of various length. The correspondence between the textual contents of the two pieces is the following: L1–2 = P1–2; L3–8 = P6–11; L9–10 = P3–4; L11 = P17; L12 = P5; L13–14 = P13–12; L15–17 = P14–16.

<sup>16</sup> In a letter sent by Zotenberg to Wright and published by Hommel the French scholar stated that 'le différences [between L and P] ne sont pas bien considérables. Le deux Mss. proviennent sans doute de la même source' (Hommel 1877, xx). The same judgement is repeated in Zotenberg's later contributions on the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*, cf. Zotenberg 1878, 248; Zotenberg 1883, 8. Considerable headway has been made recently in the understanding of the textual tradition of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu* by Daria Elagina, to whom I am grateful for sharing comments and suggestions on this topic; see in particular her doctoral dissertation (Elagina 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Hommel 1877, xx states that 'oft genug haben L. und P. die gleichen Fehler'. A fresh picture of the manuscript tradition, based on a survey of several additional copies of the text, is found in Villa 2021. L and P belong to a sub-branch of Phys. Eth. α, one of the three extant recensions of the Ethiopic version.

<sup>18</sup> Schleifer 1908.

<sup>19</sup> Grohmann 1913.

<sup>20</sup> Haffner places L and P together with MS BnF Éthiopiens d'Abbadie 67 and style them as 'die jüngere Überlieferungsgruppe' (Haffner 1930, 112).

<sup>21</sup> Lusini 1989; Lusini 1998–2002.

<sup>22</sup> According to Heide 2014, 61 'die Hss d'Abbadie 67 und Éth. 123 [= P] der Bibliothèque Nationale de France sowie die Hs Orient 818 der British Library scheinen sogar angesichts zahlreicher gemeinsamer Überlieferungsfehler eng verwandt zu sein'.

the *History of the Blessed Men in the Days of Jeremiah the Prophet*, published by Ernest A. Wallis Budge on the basis of P.<sup>23</sup> Nearly all these contributions devote at least one sentence to highlight the close resemblance between the two textual witnesses. A sound methodological caveat calls to mind that such a resemblance, resulting in a high rate of common variant readings, is not enough to establish that the two copies are genetically related, for a considerable amount of those common variants may well be genuine readings or independent innovations. In fact, only non-polygenetic shared innovations (the so-called conjunctive errors) are informative. An in-detail presentation of the conjunctive errors common to L and P will not be presented here. The critical apparatuses provided next to some of the said editions are illustrative in this regard. The reader will find there, for each text of the collection, a countless number of shared errors pointing to a close genetic relationship between the two copies. Meaningful examples transpire, for instance, in the editions of the *Wisdom of the Sibyl*,<sup>24</sup> of the *Visions of 'Abbā Sinodā*,<sup>25</sup> and in the discussion of the *stemma codicum* of the *History of Alexander the Great*.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Edition in Budge 1896a, 355–376; translation in Budge 1896b, 555–584. On the Ethiopic version see Brankaer 2016, 93–98.

<sup>24</sup> Schleifer 1908, 3b states that L and P are among the worst witnesses of the surviving tradition (L 'ist sie die schlechteste von den uns erhaltenen äthiopischen Handschriften; sie weist fast dieselben sprachlichen Fehler und Auslassungen auf wie P), a notable circumstance which is strongly evocative of their genetic link. In particular, both copies replace the short subscription at the end with a long conclusion of secondary origin (Schleifer 1908, 78b–79b). Other witnesses to the *Wisdom of the Sibyl* are known today in addition to the six copies available to Schleifer. Remarkably, among those which I managed to consult online (MSS BnF Éthiopien 205; Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMMML), 6429; Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Library, Robert Garrett Collection of Ethiopic Manuscripts, Garrett Ethiopic Manuscripts no. 41) none transmit the long conclusion.

<sup>25</sup> Grohmann 1913, 194. As an example, see the complex *varia lectio* generated by the opposition between LP **ወደቤ ፡** against **ወለእለ ፡** and **ወዲቦ ፡** of the other copies (Grohmann 1913, 195, 230, n. 25), in which, as sharply commented by Bausi 2016b, 65, n. 63, the erroneous reading exhibited by LP stems from (and presupposes) an unattested *lectio media* **ወዲቤ ፡**, the latter being an *e*-form that in less recent manuscripts sporadically alternates with the canonical form **ወዲቦ ፡**.

<sup>26</sup> Lusini 1998–2002, 157–158; Lusini 1989, 153–154 has demonstrated that L and P belong, together with MS BnF Éthiopien 159, fols 135r–182v (eighteenth century), to one and the same subarchetype δ.



However, these results do not exclude another possibility, only hesitantly evoked by some scholars, namely that one of the two manuscripts is a direct copy of the other.<sup>27</sup>

It is extremely difficult, methodologically, to prove that a certain manuscript is a derivative copy of another surviving witness. This can be predicated on the grounds of a combination of factors, which makes the filiation extremely likely, yet never certain. On the contrary, according to a well-known principle of textual criticism, such a possibility can be excluded by identifying at least one separative error of the presumed ancestor towards its presumed direct copy.<sup>28</sup> Some variants of L and P drawn from several texts will now be detected and discussed. It is to be anticipated that they provide important evidence to the claim in this article that considers P to be very likely merely a copy of L.

1) A systematic collation of the text of the *Physiologus* reveals the existence of some non-emendable errors of P, enough to rule out that it was the *Vorlage* of L.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, errors exclusively found in L seem somewhat trivial and on the whole do not preclude a derivation of P from it.<sup>30</sup> However, one passage deserves some attention: at the beginning of the chapter about the weasel (Ethiopic ብእንተ ፣ ጋሌን ፣, Greek *περὶ γαλιῆς*) L reads ቫነገር ፣ በእንጋሌን ፣ (| indicates line break). The reason for the error is obvious: the scribe forgot to complete the word after the line break. Interestingly, P also contains a corrupted text in the same place: ቫነገር ፣ በእጋሌን ፣, yet with no break line. The genesis of በእጋሌን ፣ is also easily explainable assuming the reading of L በእንጋሌን as a basis: it is a mere assimilation of the nasal *n* in a homorganic consonantal context (a very common phenomenon for which the scribal tradition offers countless examples), favoured by the unusual loanword ጋሌን ፣, which discouraged the scribe from finding an appropriate emendation to an already senseless reading. This reconstruction supports that P is derived from L, where the error was apparently produced. As we shall see, other instances of errors of P explainable by means of L are sporadically attested in other texts. Also, L has many corrections which indi-

<sup>27</sup> Schleifer 1908, 3b conjectured that L was a copy of P; conversely, Grohmann 1913, 194 did not exclude that P was derived from a copy of L.

<sup>28</sup> A separative error is a scribal error that, once occurred, cannot be successfully restored by conjectural emendation by later scribes. It is therefore particularly suitable to mark independence between the witnesses or the branches in the vertical transmission of the text.

<sup>29</sup> For instance, in the fox chapter P leaves out ላዕለ ፣ in the sentence እንዘ ፣ ላዕለ ፣ ይኔጽር ፣, ‘looking upwards’, rightly exhibited by L and by other witnesses (cf. Greek *ἄνω βλέπουσα*). Again, in the ibis chapter P has a meaningless ወትፀንስ ፣, ‘conceives’, against the primary ወትጸንሐ ፣, ‘lies in ambush’, displayed also by L.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, L reads አምሊሃ ፣ instead of P አምሳሊሃ ፣ in the weasel chapter and ወኢስርቅ ፣ instead of P ወኢትስርቅ ፣ in the deer chapter.

cate that, at some point after its production, it was collated and thereby contaminated with another copy. Interestingly, erasures, additions and expunctions are often found at places in the text where P has errors or omissions.<sup>31</sup> This not only suggests that the two copies shared the same corruptions, but also presupposes, once admitted that P derives from L, that L was contaminated *after* the copying of P.

2) The *Wisdom of the Sybil* offers no examples of peculiar errors of L, except one wrongly vocalized verb, a sight error which could be easily emended by a trained scribe.<sup>32</sup> On the contrary, P exhibits a couple of unique readings,<sup>33</sup> and one omission due to homeoteleuton in the long conclusion common to LP.<sup>34</sup> It concludes that nowhere provides P a significantly better text than L.

3) In the *Visions of 'Abbā Sinodā* P and L bear a substantially identical text. One place (Ch. 7.6) deserves a mention, in which all manuscripts read **ወከሉሎሙ ፡ ጸድቃን ፣** ‘and of all the righteous’, except P that has the wrong **ወከሉሎሙ ፡ ጸድቃን ፣**.<sup>35</sup> Such a discrepancy would be of little significance if in L the letter **ዘ** was not almost completely erased. This scribal circumstance might provide a reasonable explanation for the unique reading of P, the latter having been most probably taken from L.

4) Even in the short excerpts of the *Beginning of Faith* by Epiphanius, published by Haffner, the same scenario is encountered: no tangible example of unique mistakes of L, while P has at least one non-emendable *lectio singularis*.<sup>36</sup>

5) In the Introduction to his 1883 edition of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*, Zotenberg drew attention on a passage of the text displaying a meaningful *varia lectio*:

<sup>31</sup> For instance, in the frog chapter P has the erroneous reading **ማዕንቅ ፣** ‘turtle dove’, while L has the genuine **ማዕ<ም>ቅ ፣** ‘depth’ with **ም** corrected on erasure at a later stage. There is little doubt that also L originally had **ማዕንቅ ፣**.

<sup>32</sup> L **ተመዘብራ ፣** against the unanimous **ተመዘበራ ፣** ‘they were destroyed’, Schleifer 1908, 40b.

<sup>33</sup> P **ነግሠ ፡ በሮሜ ፣** ‘he ruled in Rome’, against the unanimous **ንጉሠ ፡ ሮሜ ፣** ‘king of Rome’ (cf. Ar. III **روميہ** مملک), Schleifer 1908, 10b; P **ቀተለ ፡ ወክዲወ ፣** ‘killing and shedding’, against **ክዲወ ፡ ደም ፣** ‘shedding blood’ (cf. Ar. III **واہراق** الدما), Schleifer 1908, 22b.

<sup>34</sup> Eleven words have been omitted in P due to proximity of two **ዓመተ ፣** (Schleifer 1908, 79a). Specialists consider long omissions due to homeoteleuton particularly suitable for excluding a direct derivation from the corrupted witness, as the produced lacuna is very hard to repair without consulting another source.

<sup>35</sup> Grohmann 1913, 236, n. 12.

<sup>36</sup> The plural in P **እምነፋሳት ፣** ‘from the spirits’, finds no parallel among the other witnesses, that unanimously read **እምነፋስ ፣** (Haffner 1930, 108, n. 12).

Dans le passage du chapitre XC, page 157, ligne 26, du texte imprimé ci-après, **ወንጉሥኒ ፣ ወሀቦ ፣ ብዙኅ ፣ ንዋያተ ፣**, le ms. B [= L], au lieu de **ወንጉሥኒ ፣**, leçon certaine, exigée par le contexte, porte **ወንገሥኒ ፣**, les deux premières lettres finissant une ligne, les deux dernières commençant la ligne suivante [= fol. 85va–b (Fig. 1)]. Cette leçon fautive s’explique facilement par une distraction du scribe qui, en commençant la seconde ligne, croyait avoir déjà écrit la lettre **ጉ** sur la ligne précédente. La leçon du ms. A [= P], **ወንሥኣኒ ፣**, est évidemment une tentative de correction de **ወንሥኒ ፣**. De ce fait on pourrait conclure que le ms. B est le prototype du ms. A. Cependant chacune des deux copies présente un certain nombre de petites lacunes et de fautes qui lui sont particulières, de sorte que la leçon exacte se trouve tantôt dans l’une, tantôt dans l’autre.<sup>37</sup>

Being a failed attempt to heal the already corrupted L **ወንገሥኒ ፣**, the example provided by Zotenberg of P **ወንሥኣኒ ፣** is reminiscent of the similar case seen above in the *Physiologus*, in which a bad reading of P is fittingly accounted for by L. However, Zotenberg treated this example as an erratic case. In his edition, he rejected many readings from P and sometimes also readings from L. The claimed existence of *lectiones singulares* in both exemplars prevented Zotenberg from further verifying P to be a direct copy of L. Also, Zotenberg considered P earlier than L, a fact which would make the filiation of P from L chronologically unacceptable. In fact, as previously seen, the proposed dating of P is questionable and is by no means cogent evidence. Aside from which, even excluding the trivial errors of L, which might be easily emended by a later scribe, it should be asked whether the rejected variants of L are truly secondary, as postulated by Zotenberg.

<sup>37</sup> Zotenberg 1883, 8–9.

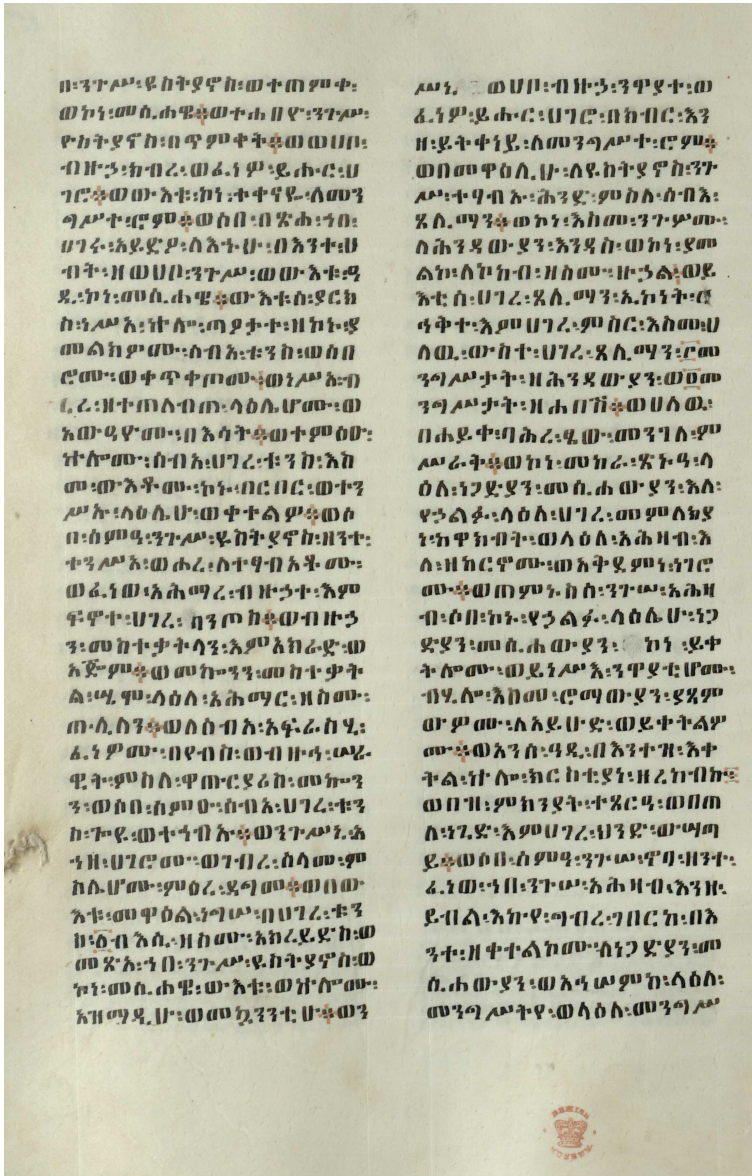


Fig. 1 BL Or. 818, fol. 85va–b. Photo courtesy of the British Library, London.

Maxime Rodinson and more recently Daria Elagina have shown convincingly that L and P form a separate branch of the *stemma codicum* of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*,<sup>38</sup> and have emphasized the need for a new critical edition of the text based on the additional witnesses now accessible.<sup>39</sup> Following their suggestion, I have collated the initial leaves of MS BnF Éthiopien d'Abbadie 31 (late seventeenth century, henceforth C) with L and P. Such an operation reveals a regular agreement between C and L, even in those cases in which Zotenberg preferred the reading of P.<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, in one case C አ.ያስጥም ፤, 'it did not inundate', corroborates Zotenberg's sharp correction over L አ.ያሥም ፤, meaningless, and the *lectio singularis* P አ.ያስምር ፤, 'it did not delight'.<sup>41</sup> This example is particularly telling because the variant of P appears once more to be a failed conjectural emendation of an already corrupted text, for which the senseless reading of L seems to be an ideal candidate.

In her doctoral dissertation, Elagina rightly claims that L cannot derive from P. This is demonstrated by the presence of several disjunctive errors in the latter.<sup>42</sup> She also identifies one presumably better reading of P which would invalidate the opposite statement, namely that P derives from L, where P has the *textus longior* 'the people of Alexandria and Constantinople' (considered as genuine by Elagina), while L reads only 'the people of Constantinople' (accepted by Zotenberg) and C has 'the people of Alexandria'.<sup>43</sup> All readings are written in the main hand. This case, an example of diffraction of variants,<sup>44</sup> is, in my view, not unambiguous and admits several solutions: as recognized by Elagina, both cities are mentioned in the text countless, a circumstance which might have encouraged frequent exchanges between them. Also, a contamination from another copy during the transcription cannot be ruled out.

<sup>38</sup> Rodinson studied Chapters 90 and 91 and illustrated a number of places in which C has a better reading than PL (Rodinson 1974, 133–135). For a discussion of the subgrouping of the manuscript tradition of the *Chronicle*, see Elagina 2018, lxiii–lxxiii.

<sup>39</sup> Rodinson 1974, 135; Elagina and Brown 2018, 121. An updated partial edition is now available in Elagina 2018.

<sup>40</sup> For instance, there is no reason to accept P መዋዕል ፤ (Zotenberg 1883, 11, n. 11) as a primary reading, because it is missing in CL (see now Elagina 2018, 2, l. 13), or P ለኔሮን ፤ (Zotenberg 1883, 18, n. 1) against CL ለኔሮስ ፤ (see now Elagina 2018, 12, l. 7), or again P ጽሑፍ ፤ (Zotenberg 1883, 28, n. 3) against CL ጸሐፍ ፤. Many more examples are extant.

<sup>41</sup> Zotenberg 1883, 20, n. 4. See now Elagina 2018, 16, l. 1.

<sup>42</sup> Elagina 2018, lxvi–lxvii.

<sup>43</sup> Zotenberg 1883, 22, n. 9; Elagina 2018, 18, l. 27. For a discussion of the entire variance, see Elagina 2018, lxvii–lxviii.

<sup>44</sup> On this notion, elaborated by Gianfranco Contini, see Contini 1986, 29–30.

In short, this in-depth analysis has established that L cannot be a copy of P, while no severe obstacle on a palaeographical or text-critical basis prevents us from assuming that P is a copy of L. In fact, several scribal errors in P can easily be explained in the light of the features of L. It is important to note that such pieces of evidence have been drawn from multiple texts, a fact that supports the idea that L was used solely as a model for P. Certainly, later interferences from other exemplars might well have been responsible for secondary corrections throughout the manuscript, visible through erasures and rewritings. Obviously, the new stemmatic status of P is not without considerable consequences in terms of text-critical value. This aspect will be returned to in the Conclusion.

### 3 Prosopography, Additional Notes, External Evidence

The presumable filiation of P from L does not say much about the history of the two sumptuous manuscripts. To gather new valuable elements, it is necessary to go beyond their textual components and examine the issue from another angle. In the absence of internal elements such as colophons or additional notes, it is very difficult to trace back the history of a specific codex from the bookmaking process to its ultimate owning institution. However, the search for significant insights has been much facilitated by the unique textual features of L and P.

MS BnF Éthiopien 112 is a superb large-size copy of *Hāymānota 'abaw* (CAe 1586). According to its colophon on fol. 266vb–c, it was commissioned in 1742 CE by Queen Walatta Giyorgis, the Christian name of Bərḥān Mogaṣā, or Məntəwwāb.<sup>45</sup> 'Ītege Məntəwwāb was the mother of 'Aṣe 'Iyāsu II (r.1730–1755). The initial folia of the manuscript host an extensive number of documentary notes penned in Amharic in a secondary hand. Most of these notes mention the incumbent *mal'aka ḍaḥāy*, a title reserved for the head of the church of Dabra Ḍaḥāy Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām. The latter was founded by the same 'Ītege Məntəwwāb in the outskirts of Gondar between the 1730s and the 1740s,<sup>46</sup> and represented a model for later foundations. Dabra Ḍaḥāy was, in all likelihood, the owning institution of MS BnF Éthiopien 112. The presence of numerous acts related to that monastery reveals that this manuscript enjoyed great prestige among the local community. On folium 4rc an undated inventory listing the books in the possession of an unnamed church is to be found which, in all likelihood, is the

<sup>45</sup> Zotenberg 1877, 125b–127a.

<sup>46</sup> Provided that the construction of the church took several years, up to 1743, there is no agreement among the scholars on the year of dedication of the *tābot*. The latter took place in 1733 CE (according to Schneider 1982 and Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 205–207) or in 1740 CE (according to Crumme 2000, 107–108). See also Fiaccadori 2014, 344–345.

same Dabra Daḥāy Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām.<sup>47</sup> The note shows that the library was rich and supplied with relatively rare books (Fig. 2). Notably, in this catalogue *ante litteram* several multiple-text manuscripts have been described by listing the main textual contents and adding ባንድ ፡ የተጠረዘ ፡, ‘bound together in one (book)’ or similar formulas. Halfway through the text, the scribe recorded the following item:

ጅበክብረ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ጀምሮ ፡ በያዕቆብ ፡ ዘንጽቢን ፡ የሚጨርስ ፡ ፲፮ መጻፍ ፡ ያለበት ።

One (book) containing 15 texts, beginning with the *Kəbra nagašt* and ending with Yā‘qob zaNəṣbin.

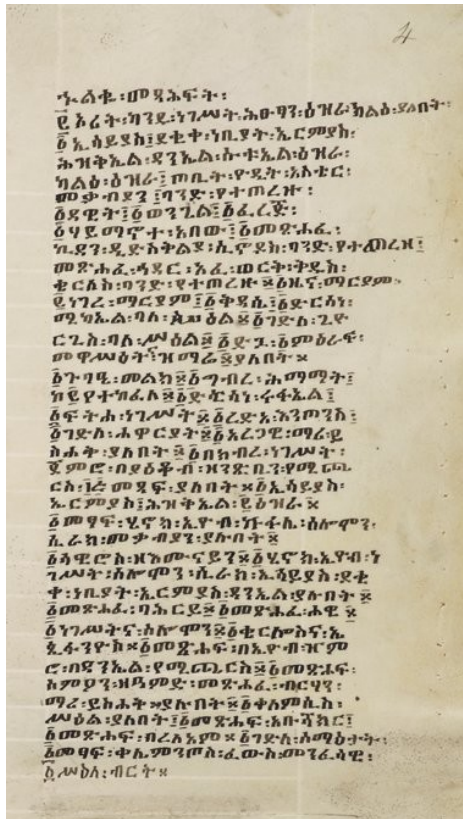


Fig. 2 BnF Éthiopien 112, fol. 4rc. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

<sup>47</sup> The inventory has been reproduced in full in Zotenberg 1877, 127a.

Interestingly, this peculiar description is not isolated. The exact content of the inventory note is slavishly reproduced in another source, a passage of the *Chronicle of 'Iyāsu II* (CAe 4634, Ch. 34) which lists in detail the goods and the books donated by 'Itage Məntəwwāb to Dabra Ɖaḥāy shortly after the *tābot*'s consecration. The passage runs as follows:

ወበዝየ ፡ ንኳልቀኑ ፡ መጻሕፍተ ፡ ዘወሀበት ፡ [...] ፩መጽሐፍ ፡ ክብረ ፡ ነገ  
ሥት ፡ ጀምሮ ፡ ያዕቆብ ፡ ዘንጽቢን ፡ የሚጨርስ ፡ ፲፮መጽሐፍ ፡ ያለበት ፡

Here we enumerate the books donated by her. [...] One book containing 15 texts, beginning with the *Kəbra nagašt* and ending with Yā'qob zaNəṣbin.<sup>48</sup>

The content and sequence of items reported in the additional note in MS BnF Éthiopien 112 and in the *Chronicle of 'Iyāsu II* are identical. This can hardly be coincidental. They must be related to each other or have come from the same source. Given the archival character of the notes transmitted in MS BnF Éthiopien 112, it can be reasonably assumed that such notes were among the sources used by the royal chronicler. The consequence of which is twofold: not only does it confirm that the booklist in MS BnF Éthiopien 112 refers specifically to the library holdings of Dabra Ɖaḥāy, but it also lends some truth to the claim that the Ethiopian historiographical works of this period are heterogeneous compilations, in which several sources were added to the core text of the work, that is, the official court annals recorded yearly.<sup>49</sup> The handlist in MS BnF Éthiopien 112 is one of these independent sources.

Interestingly, the textual content of the book described in both documents is strikingly similar to that of L. Likewise, L also begins with the *Kəbra nagašt* and concludes with the *Homily by Jacob of Nisibis*. A numerical discrepancy can be noted between the number of texts recorded by the librarian (15), and the effective number of texts transmitted by L (17). Such an inconsistency, however, can be easily bridged assuming the librarian did not count the three consecutive texts centred around the life of Alexander the Great, that is, the *Zenā 'Īskəndər*, the *History of King Alexander from 'Abušākər*, and the extracts from the *History of Giyorgis Walda 'Amid*, separately.

<sup>48</sup> Text in Guidi 1910–1912, I, 98, l. 25–99, l. 11; French translation in Guidi 1910–1912, II, 107, l. 1–25.

<sup>49</sup> Kropp 1994, 228; Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 216.



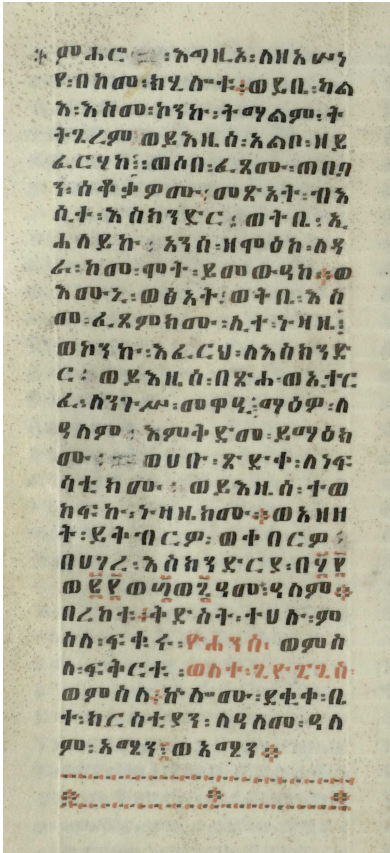


Fig. 3 BL Or. 818, fol. 127va. Photo courtesy of the British Library, London.

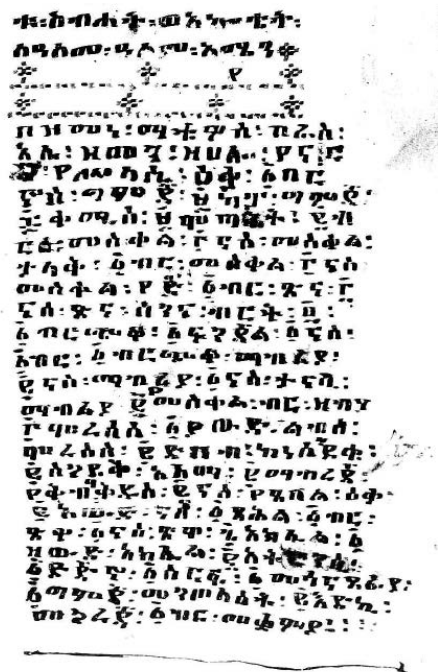


Fig. 4 BnF Éthiopien 146, fol. 255rb. Photo courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

In addition to the two book lists, the link between L and Dabra Ḍaḥāy’s foundation can be supplemented by an independent piece of evidence originating from the manifold supplication formulas disseminated throughout L. Supplication formulas traditionally contain the name of the owners or patrons of the manuscripts, to whose favour divine benevolence is invoked. In L we systematically find the names of Yoḥannēs and Walatta Giyorgis written in the main hand (e.g. on fols 46vb, 125rc, and 127va, Fig. 3).<sup>50</sup> There is little doubt that, given the prized features of L, Walatta Giyorgis is none other than *ʾItāge Məntəwwāb*,

<sup>50</sup> Cf. also Wright 1877, 313b–314a.

and, therefore, that L was commissioned by her and subsequently donated to the newly established church of Dabra Ḍaḥāy. Seemingly, the textual components of L were assembled from distinct manuscript sources of a greater age and gathered in one single codex. This patronage is entirely congruent with the queen's interest in prophecy and the apocalyptic,<sup>51</sup> and such explicit mention of the queen is indicative of the high-value status of the book.

This reconstruction does not conflict with prior knowledge of the late history of L. Indeed, it is believed that in 1866 large part of the Dabra Ḍaḥāy manuscript collection, among which most certainly also L, was carried off by Emperor Tewodros to Dabra Tābor and then, in 1867, to the stronghold of Maqdalā.<sup>52</sup> From there, L made its way to Europe two years later.

After reconstructing the chain of transmission of L, the attempt will be made to shed light on the circumstances of the production of P. The manuscript has no colophon which might clear up its provenance. However, at a closer look it offers an interesting detail which has hitherto escaped the attention of scholarship. P accommodates on folium 255rb–va an inventory note penned in a secondary hand (Fig. 4). The note starts as follows: በዘመነ ማቴዎስ ፡ በራስ ፡ አሊ ፡ ዘመን ፡ ዘሀሎ ፡ የኖርጋ ፡ የሥላሴ ፡ ዕድ ፡, 'in the year of Matthew, at the time of *Rās* 'Ali, in the vestry of Nārgā Šəllāse'. Then follows a list of liturgical objects and books. The well-known church of Nārgā Šəllāse is located on a small island at the centre of Lake Tānā and was established by 'Ītəge Məntəwəwāb shortly after the foundation of Dabra Ḍaḥāy in Gondar.<sup>53</sup> Scholars agree that both institutions are witnesses to the royal design to promote, not without political objectives, ecclesiastical and palatial foundations in a particular area, that of Lake Tānā, already home to ancient monasteries such as those of Tānā Qirqos and Kəbrān Gabra'el.<sup>54</sup> *Rās* 'Ali is to be identified with 'Āli G'wāngul, who was governor of Bagemdər and Gondar from 1784 to 1788.<sup>55</sup> The inventory must therefore have been drawn up in 1785, the only year of Matthew comprised within that time

<sup>51</sup> Bosc-Tiessé 2004, 313.

<sup>52</sup> Gondar was looted twice by Tewodros, and the books (in the number of 961 according to 'Alaqa Walda Māryām's *Chronicle of Tewodros II*, CAe 4119) were carried firstly to Dabra Tābor, then to Maqdalā (Pankhurst 1973). Incidentally, one can observe a discrepancy between the Amharic text of the chronicle edited by Mondon-Vidaillhet 1904, 40, ከየደብሩ ፡ የተገኘዎ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ህጻኝ ፡, and the latter's French translation 'on trouva dans les monastères neuf cent quatre-vingt-un manuscrits' (Mondon-Vidaillhet 1904, 50).

<sup>53</sup> The construction of the monastic complex on the Nārgā island started in 1737/1738 CE. The consecration of the *tābot* took place at some time between the late 1740s and the early 1750s (Euringer 1933–1934, 284; Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 205).

<sup>54</sup> Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 247.

<sup>55</sup> On *Rās* 'Āli, see 'Āli G'wāngul', *EAE*, I (2003), 201a–b (J. Mantel-Niećko).

range. The note was not unknown to Zotenberg. He, however, only stated that it was drawn up at the time of *Rās* ‘Ali in an unspecified church or monastery.<sup>56</sup> As a result, key information was missed, namely that as far back as the late eighteenth century P was connected to the church of Nārgā Šəllāse. Given the content of the note, it is reasonable to assume that Nārgā Šəllāse was also the owning institution of P. Can this hypothesis be supported independently?

The history of the foundation of Nārgā Šəllāse is the subject of the *Zenā Nārgā*, ‘History of Nārgā’ (CAe 2624), a document transmitted in a handful of manuscript copies and studied by several scholars.<sup>57</sup> Following a stylistic practice common to that of the *Chronicle of ‘Iyāsu II*, the *Zenā Nārgā* also incorporates a list of books and liturgical items donated to the church soon after its foundation.<sup>58</sup> It is likely that the book list emanated from a local handlist, as positively documented for the above passage of the *Chronicle of ‘Iyāsu II*. As evidenced by other specialists, the list is of considerable interest because it offers a detailed picture of the early composition of the ecclesiastical library of Nārgā Šəllāse.<sup>59</sup> I shall focus on one passage;<sup>60</sup> the translation is mine:

**ወእምዝ ፡ አስተሐመሙ ፡ መጻሕፍተ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ ወወሀቡ ፡ [...]  
 መጽሐፈ ፡ ክብረ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ዮሐንስ ፡ መደበር ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ፈ  
 ካሬ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ራእይ ፡ ማርያም ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ፊሳልንስ ፡<sup>61</sup> መጽ**

<sup>56</sup> Zotenberg 1877, 248b–249a.

<sup>57</sup> The *Zenā Nārgā* was first published in Bachmann 1893, 13–19. Johannes Bachmann’s edition was commented by Ignazio Guidi (Guidi 1896), who also published a new edition of the text on the basis of a distinct witness (Guidi 1905). Guidi’s edition was then translated into German by Euringer 1933–1934 and Euringer 1935. An Italian translation is available in Raineri 1999. More recently, the *History of Nārgā* has been thoroughly investigated in Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 199–247, who has highlighted the existence of several versions of the text.

<sup>58</sup> The inventory is published by Bachmann 1893, 15 on the basis of MS Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Orient. Fol. 595; by Guidi 1905, 242–243 on the basis of MSS BnF Éthiopiens d’Abbadie 108 and 181; and by Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 409.

<sup>59</sup> The manuscript collection of Nārgā Šəllāse still awaits a proper investigation. Nearly twenty manuscripts were microfilmed in the 1980s by the EMLL and are currently accessible in a surrogate copy at the Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency, in ‘Addis ‘Ababā. They are, however, still uncatalogued and, more ominously, their conditions are constantly deteriorating over time, a circumstance which makes the task of digitization of those photographic materials more and more urgent.

<sup>60</sup> Here reproduced according to Guidi 1905, 243.

<sup>61</sup> This is, as already noted in Guidi 1896, 403, n. 56, a better reading than **ፈላስፋ ፡**, that is, the *Book of the Philosophers*, as edited by Bachmann based on MS Orient. Fol. 595. This scribal trivialization reveals that the *Physiologus* was poorly known in the cultural context

ሐፊ : ዜናሁ : ለእስክንድር : መጽሐፈ : ጊዮርጊስ : ወልደ : አሚድ : መ  
 ጽሐፈ : ሥሉስ : ቅዱስ : ዘፈከራ : ኤጲፋንዮስ : መጽሐፈ : አቃርዮስ : ን  
 ጉሠ : ሮሐ : መጽሐፈ : ቅዱስ : ኤፍሬም : ዘደረስ : በእንተ : ሕማማቲ  
 ሁ : ለምድጎን : መጽሐፈ : ያዕቆብ : ዘሥሩግ : ዘደረስ : በእንተ : ፈያታ  
 ዊ : ወመልአክ : መጽሐፈ : ያዕቆብ : ዘንጽቢን : መጽሐፈ : ሳቤላ : እለ :  
 ሀለው : ውስተ : ፩ቀመር :

‘Thereafter, they concerned themselves with the books of the church and donated [...] the book of the *Glory of the Kings*, the book of the *Chronicle of John of Nikiu*, the book of the *Explanation of Jesus*, the book of the *Vision of Mary*, the book of the *Physiologus*, the book of the *History of Alexander*, the book of the *History of Giyorgis Walda ‘Amid*, the book of the Holy Trinity explained by Epiphanius, the book of ‘Aqāryos king of Roḥā, the book of holy Ephrem who wrote on the passion of the Saviour, the book of Jacob of Serugh who wrote on the thief and the angel, the book of Jacob of Nisibis, the book of the *Wisdom of the Sibyl*, [all of them] bound as one single book.’

All these works are said to be bound together as one single book. One cannot fail to notice that the description of this manuscript perfectly matches that of P, with few omissions. The similarity of the content arrangement is outstanding, especially considering that in the Ethiopian tradition there exists no homogeneous corpus comparable to that. As it is statistically very unlikely that two identical manuscripts with these textual features were simultaneously present in the early years after the church was established, one must conclude that the manuscript donated to Nārgā Šəllāse is in all likelihood P.

As a result, was P deliberately commissioned by ‘Itage Məntəwwāb as part of the sponsorship programme in favour of Nārgā Šəllāse? A concrete circumstance appears to stand in the way of such a statement. In fact, all supplication formulas throughout P mention a man and a woman named, respectively, Zenā Gabrə’el and Şəyon Mogasā (e.g. on fols 60va, 143ra, 152vc). In the manuscript Şəyon Mogasā is styled ፍቅርቶሙ ፤, ‘beloved (of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit)’, or አመታ ፤, ‘maid (of Mary)’, and, contrary to what Zotenberg states, she is nowhere indicated as Zenā Gabrə’el’s wife. Their identity is unclear. They may either have been involved in the manuscript production or have been the original owners of the book.<sup>62</sup>

in which *Zenā Nārgā* was copied, and its title could be easily mistaken for more popular works.

<sup>62</sup> Although the name of Şəyon Mogasā is apparently absent in the royal genealogy at the time of Məntəwwāb and ‘Iyāsu II, she is not unknown to the sources. Indeed, an individu-

Despite this indication seems difficult to reconcile with any direct involvement of 'Ītāge Məntəwwāb, there is no doubt that the making of P can ultimately be attributed to her patronage and intended as a gift for the library of Nārgā's monastery. An objection may be founded on the fact that the *ex-nihilo* creation of an entire library was a task which required years-long effort by scribes and illustrators, and, therefore, at least some books entered the newly consecrated institution after appropriation from a different library.<sup>63</sup> However, this does not appear to be the case with P. In fact, at this point of our inquiry all the pieces of this intriguing puzzle are ready to come together.

The palaeographical analysis informs us that P was written between the mid-seventeenth century and second half of the eighteenth century. The text-critical survey has supplied serious elements in favour of a direct derivation of P from L. As L was produced concomitantly with the construction of Dabra Ḍaḥāy, P was therefore most certainly produced in the time elapsing from the completion of L and the endowment of Nārgā, in the 1740s, approximately. After being kept in the library of the Nārgā sanctuary for about a century, in the mid-nineteenth century this parchment treasure somehow arrived in the hands of d'Héricourt and was shipped to Paris. Unfortunately, we cannot go any further in our reconstruction because the diary of d'Héricourt's third journey (1848–1849) remains unpublished and his itinerary cannot be determined precisely.

al with the same name is mentioned in various blessing formulas in MS BL Or. 521 (= Wright 48) together with her daughter Walatta Ḍəngəl (fol. 108rb, Wright 1877, 32a–b). This beautiful codex is a seventeenth-century (?) copy of the Gospel of John followed by *salām*-hymns and texts taken from the missal. It accommodates a secondary note (fol. 1v) with a list of goods donated by Rās Walda Lə'ul, brother of 'Ītāge Məntəwwāb, to the church of Qəddus Yoḥannəs, which he had built (Guidi 1910–1912, I, 127; Guidi 1910–1912, II, 138) and in which he was buried after his death in 1767 (Guidi 1910–1912, I, 223; Guidi 1910–1912, II, 232). The church of Qəddus Yoḥannəs was located in the environs of Gondar, and the manuscript might well originate from the same institution. If the two individuals named Şəyon Mogasā are one and the same person, it might be assumed that this elusive woman played some role in sponsoring the writing of books destined to the libraries of new institutions. As to Zenā Gabrə'el, research on this name has brought to light several individuals with ecclesiastical or secular offices: a certain Zenā Gabrə'el was *liqa kāhənat* of Dabra Roḥā in Lālibalā (Bosc-Tiessé 2009) and author of a short historical account transmitted in MS EMM 7506 (Getatchew Haile 1988). Besides, the *Chronicle of 'Iyāsu II* mentions a *bağərond* or 'chief treasurer' (Guidi 1910–1912, II, 81, l. 6, 111, l. 38) and a *bālāmbārās* (Guidi 1910–1912, II, 125, l. 6) both named Zenā Gabrə'el.

<sup>63</sup> This less expensive practice has been documented effectively in MS BL Or. 533, in which the name of the original owner or patron was at some time erased and replaced with that of 'Iyāsu ('Aşe 'Iyāsu II), cf. Bosc-Tiessé 2008, 289; Bosc-Tiessé 2014, 13; Fiaccadori 2014, 345.

## Conclusions

This inquiry has led to several results, which can be summed up as follows.

L and P are two multiple-text manuscripts containing a unique and heterogeneous collection of texts, ranging from history to apocalyptic and homiletics. They are twin luxurious parchment artefacts directly associated with the eighteenth-century royal patronage initiatives in the area of Lake Ṭānā.

More specifically, L was commissioned by 'Ītəge Məntəwwāb for the prestigious shrine of Dabra Ḍahāy Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām in Gondar. The production process took place in the years between 1730 (when Məntəwwāb took the power as regent queen) and 1743, when the construction of Dabra Ḍahāy's complex was achieved and the book donated to its library.

The age of P, fixed in Zotenberg's catalogue to the seventeenth century and thus far tacitly accepted by scholars, is not supported by crucial evidence. Not only is the codex written in a stately seventeenth–eighteenth century *g'əlh* script, but it appears to have been carefully copied taking L as a model and it eventually enriched the library of the church of Nārgā Śəllāse, also founded by Məntəwwāb. Provided that a suitable *terminus post quem* is c.1750, when the construction of the Nārgā compound was accomplished and the book donated to its library, the 1740s seem a reasonable date of production.

Lavishly endowed with a great number of land grants, luxurious books, and liturgical articles, the two monasteries of Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām and Nārgā were also supplied with a nearly identical copy of the same historical-apocalyptic-homiletic collection. In view of this, the textual dependence of P on L emblematically parallels the history of the foundation of Nārgā, that in turn took the foundation of Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām as a model.

The permanence of L and P in their respective libraries is supported, at least for the late eighteenth century, by secondary notes added on the manuscripts themselves. In the mid-nineteenth century, both manuscripts found their way to Europe separately. The ultimate irony of their exceptionally interwoven fate is that they were presented to the scientific community in the same year, 1877.

It appears that, contrary to what might be thought *prima facie*, parchment books kept in Western libraries and long since catalogued still have much to say. An in-depth investigation of the manuscript heritage in relation to its historical sources and secondary literature provides significant opportunities to establish fresh interconnections between manuscripts, places, and prominent individuals, and potentially permits a reconstruction of the 'virtual libraries' of books scattered in several institutions. This is precisely the case for the two manuscripts L and P, whose history can be traced from their origins to their current location.

Text-critically, the dependence of P on L has momentous implications in terms both of methodology and factual editorial choices. Concerning the first

point, it appears somewhat difficult to bring such an extraordinarily accurate transcription of an extensive and diversified sequence of texts into conformity with Bernard Cerquiglini's 'praise of the variant'.<sup>64</sup> What transpires from the scribe's efforts is the pursuit of a faithful consistency among exemplars, not fluid variation.

Finally, the derivation of P from L opens the door to the application of the well-known principle of the *eliminatio codicum descriptorum*. According to this principle, a copy of a surviving exemplar is of no value in reconstructing the original text, because nowhere does it bear a better reading than its model.<sup>65</sup> This seems to apply to P. However, there are some points to make which undermine or neutralize the effectiveness of this tenet. In some of the texts transmitted by the two manuscripts, P exhibits later erasures and corrections due to collation with another source. This circumstance, which makes P a 'hybrid' witness, can be conceived as a horizontal transfer of variants and leads to serious consequences. In such a context, the principle of the *eliminatio codicum descriptorum* is ultimately inapplicable, because, based on those texts bearing traces of contamination P, is not *exclusively* derived from L. In other words, P still has something to say to the editors regarding its lineage. Most certainly, in the coming years, scholars who devote their efforts to making fresh critical editions of the texts contained in L and P will have to deal with these transmissional phenomena and will provide new data on this topic. Such data will support, adjust, or—it goes without saying—even drastically change the conclusions reached in this article.

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<sup>64</sup> Cerquiglini 1989. See also Bausi 2016a, 130.

<sup>65</sup> On this core tenet, see Maas 1950; Reeve 1989; and, more recently, Roelli 2020.

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### Summary

It would be ungenerous to claim that the Ethiopian manuscript heritage preserved in major Western libraries, although having been identified and catalogued for decades, has no more surprises in store. MSS BL Or. 818 and BnF Éthiopien 146 are two skilfully executed multiple-text manuscripts which share the same combination of texts, although arranged in a different order. Independent philological surveys have recurrently evidenced a close genetic affinity between the two pieces. Nevertheless, an overall assessment of their history has never been made. A scrutiny of the textual and historical data reveals that the two manuscripts were produced and intended as gifts for the churches of Dabra Ḍaḥāy Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>ām in Gondar and Nārgā Šəllāse, both established and patronized in the mid-eighteenth century by *ʾItege* Məntəwwāb, mother of *ʾAše* ʾIyāsu II. The present study aims to demonstrate that the two manuscripts are not only outstanding examples of Gondarine bookmaking culture, but also witnesses to a deliberate initiative of production and dissemination of parchment artefacts in favour of ecclesiastical foundations in the area of Lake Ṭānā. Furthermore, independent pieces of evidence from several texts contained in the two codices suggest that MS BnF Éthiopien 146 was most likely copied from MS BL Or. 818.