

*Sonderdruck aus/Offprint from*

# AETHIOPICA

International Journal  
of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies

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

by Alessandro Bausi  
in cooperation with  
Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt,  
Susanne Hummel and Alexander Meckelburg

25 (2022)

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

AETHIOPICA. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN STUDIES is an internationally refereed academic journal, edited at the Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies and at the Department of African and Ethiopian Studies of the Asien-Afrika-Institut at Hamburg Universität, Alsterterrasse 1, 20354 Hamburg, Germany, Tel: +49 40-42838-7730/8380; email: *aethiopica.aai@uni-hamburg.de*.

The journal focuses on philology, linguistics, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religion, philosophy, literature, and manuscript studies with a regional emphasis on Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Horn of Africa, and related areas. The editors welcome contributions on relevant academic topics as well as on recent research in the respective field. Each issue of AETHIOPICA contains reviews of books which form a substantial section of the journal.

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Publication of this journal is partially supported by the project Beta maṣāḥaft: Die Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthiopiens und Eritreas: eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung, funded by The Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities through a project of the Academy of Hamburg, and includes immediate Open Access.

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Printing and binding by Memminger MedienCentrum, Memmingen

Printed on permanent/durable paper

Printed in Germany

*<https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de/>*

ISSN 1430-1938

eISSN 2194-4024

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## Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

# Yohannēs IV and the Patriarchate of Alexandria: Obtaining Four Coptic Bishops while Ceding Nothing on Jerusalem Issue (1876–1882)

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## Introduction

On 8 July 1881, the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church decided to appoint four bishops (one metropolitan and three bishops) for Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> This decision was exceptional: for the first time since the reign of King of Kings Zār'a Ya'qob (r.1434–1468), Ethiopia accommodated several Coptic bishops. King of Kings Yohannēs IV (r.1872–1889) had made this particular request a few months earlier, for every part of the kingdom to have a bishop and it had been accepted. The Copts, Bishops Pētros (1881–1917), Matewos (1881–1926), Luqas (1881–c.1900), and Marqos (1881–c.1882), arrived in Mäqälä on 18 October 1881.<sup>2</sup> Marqos died very soon after arriving. In 1883 Yohannēs kept Pētros with him in Təgray and sent Matewos to the *Nəguś* Mənilək (later Mənilək II, r.1889–1913) in Šäwa, and Luqas to the *Nəguś* Täklä Haymanot (r. c.1850–1901) in Goğgam, thus establishing for the first time bishopric regionalization in Ethiopia. Although officially Pētros was the metropolitan while the other two were simple bishops, each held the same diocese powers and no real hierarchy existed between them.<sup>3</sup>

According to historian Zewde Gabre-Sellassie, the appointment of four bishops for Ethiopia in 1881 (henceforth the '1881 appointment') is 'rightly regarded by Ethiopian historians as one of Yohannes' greatest achievements'.<sup>4</sup> However, it was not until the work (completed before 1912) of Gäbrä Šəllase Wäldä Arāgay on the life of Mənilək II that the exceptional and innovative character of the event was properly emphasized and explained.<sup>5</sup> Prior to his work, Ethiopian sources noted the event but explained little if anything at all and certainly did

<sup>1</sup> Murad Kamil 1950–1957, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Simon 1885, 344; see also Hartmann 1883, 110–112; Stecker 1883, 473.

<sup>3</sup> Krzyżanowska and Ancel 2014, 125–126.

<sup>4</sup> Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 169.

<sup>5</sup> Guèbre Sellassié 1930, 303–304.

not point out its exceptional character.<sup>6</sup> Gäbrä Šəllase's work was, however, not published until 1930 and the Ethiopian 'pioneers'<sup>7</sup> of the modern historical method initially said nothing about the event.<sup>8</sup> Only when Hərüy Wäldä Šəllase's work on Yoħannəs reign was published in Amharic in 1917/1918, did a publication highlight the exceptional and innovative nature of this event for a wider audience.<sup>9</sup> Thereafter, Ethiopian historians referred to the 1881 appointment extremely frequently to this day making it, as Zewde Gabre-Sellassie says, one of the greatest achievements of Yoħannəs's reign.<sup>10</sup>

Historians, both Ethiopian and foreign, have investigated the reasons why Yoħannəs requested several bishops from the Copts more specifically. They

<sup>6</sup> The chronicle (in Gə'əz and Amharic) considered to be the oldest (believed to be written in 1887) mentions the appointment of 1881 very succinctly: see MS BnF Éthiopien 259, fols 48v, 60v; about this manuscript, see Chaïne 1913a, 43–44; for the edition and translation of the Gə'əz version, see Chaïne 1913b, 184–185. There is still a doubt concerning the date of completion of this chronicle and its authorship by *Aläqa* Lämläm: see 'Lämläm', *EAE*, III (2007), 492b–493b (D. Nosnitsin), esp. p. 493a, cf. Bairu Tafla 1977, 15; Orłowska 2006, 26–27. *Aläqa* Lämläm mentioned the appointment of 1881 in his Amharic chronicle dated 1894/1895, but not in his short chronicle dated 1902: see MS BnF Éthiopien 259, fol. 27r–v; Turaiev 1910; MS BnF Éthiopien 260, fols 51v–52r; Ricci 1947, 48, 53. The chronicle published by Bairu Tafla (undated but assumed to have been written shortly after the death of Yoħannəs) mentions also the appointment of 1881: see Bairu Tafla 1977, 150–153. Four other chronicles (three undated and one dated 1909 authored by *Azmač* Gäbrä Mika'el Gərmu) have to be mentioned here but none bring new elements to the 1881 appointment: see Bairu Tafla 1977, 16–21; Orłowska 2006, 22, 27–28.

<sup>7</sup> As Bahru Zewde called them in Bahru Zewde 2000, 5–6.

<sup>8</sup> In their historical works, Fəššəħa Giyorgis 'Abiyä 'Əgzi' (between 1890 and 1900), Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus (in 1908/1909), Ašmä Giyorgis (between 1900 and 1909), Gäbrä Həywät Baykädañ (in 1912) and Tayyä Gäbrä Maryam (in 1922) did not mention the appointment of 1881: see Fesseħa Giyorgis 1987; Afäwärq Gäbrä Iyäsus 2007/2008; Bairu Tafla 1987; Guebrè-Heywət Baykedagne 1993; Täyya Gäbrä Maryam 1921/1922.

<sup>9</sup> Hərüy Wäldä Šəllase 1917/1918. See Italian translation Fusella 1943, 202.

<sup>10</sup> Among other works, see chronologically Hərüy Wäldä Šəllase 1922/1923, 13; Hərüy Wäldä Šəllase 2008/2009, 138–139 (1st edn 1928/1929); Hərüy Wäldä Šəllase 2006/2007, 125, 131 (written between 1934 and 1936); Kidana Wald Kefle 1986, 123–124 (written in 1942); Gebre-Igziabihir Elyas 1994, 200 (ed.), 493 (tr.) (finished in the 1940s); Afäwärq Adafre 1948/1949, 51; Märsə'e Həzän Wäldä Qirqos 1963/1964, 16; Täklä Šadaq Mäk'əriya 1967/1968, 56–60; Sergew Hable Selassie 1997, 34–35 (1st edn 1970); Aymro Wondmagegnehu and Joachim Motovu 1970, 11; Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 139, 168–169 (1st edn 1975); Täklä Šadaq Mäk'əriya 1989/1990, 205, 231–232; Bahru Zewde 2002, 48 (1st edn 1991). We have to notice the unpublished work dated 1940, authored by *Qäññ azmač* Fəššəħa Wäldä Mika'el and intensively used by Zewde Gabre-Sellassie and Isabella Orłowska. See Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 433–434; Orłowska 2006, 31–32.



concluded that the King of Kings used them as instruments to promote both the unification of the Ethiopian Church and its reform, and as means to establish a national and territorial unity based on a new relationship between the aristocracy and the monarchy.<sup>11</sup> However, these historians did not question the Copts' motivation in accepting Yoḥannəs's singular and exceptional request. Such lack in the historians' analysis can be explained by the nature of the available sources. Firstly, the Coptic patriarchate archives remain totally closed and very few of the Copts' documents have been publicly revealed.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Ethiopian sources never mention the Copts reasons for acceptance. It is perhaps to be presumed that such absence indicates Yoḥannəs's proposal to be so legitimate the Copts accepted it immediately, without discussion.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, the first Ethiopian historical works, and those of the first foreigners to consider the appointment in their historical analyses,<sup>14</sup> were written and published during the 1916 coup d'état and the confrontation between two bishops (Petros and Matewos), followed by Matewos's death in 1926, and finally *Ras Täfäri's* negotiations with the Copts to obtain Ethiopian bishops (1924–1930). Undoubtedly, these events motivated the consideration and explanation of the 1881 appointment: indeed, it marked an important step in the history of an ecclesiastical system strongly contested at that time.<sup>15</sup> But these same events influenced the historians of the period: as the Ethiopian power negotiated the obtaining of several bishops, the historians saw Yoḥannəs's demand as legitimate a posteriori, and thus indisputable by the Copts. The negotiations leading up to the autocephaly of the Ethiopian

<sup>11</sup> See especially Täklä Şadaq Mäk<sup>w</sup>äriya 1967/1968, 56–60; Crummey 1978, 441; Täklä Şadaq Mäk<sup>w</sup>äriya 1989/1990, 205, 231–232; Kefelew Zelleke and Heyer 2001, 24–25; Bahru Zewde 2002, 48; Orłowska 2006, 258; Ancel 2011; Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 139, 168–169. Curiously enough, the appointment of 1881 is not mentioned in Caulk 1972.

<sup>12</sup> As far as I know, only the works published by Antün Süryäl 'Abd al-Sayyid and Sven Rubenson provided documents coming from Coptic archives dated to this period. See Antün Süryäl 'Abd al-Sayyid 1985, 117–129; Antün Süryäl 'Abd al-Sayyid 2003, 124–139; Rubenson 2000, 252, 290, 314–315; Rubenson 2021, 32, 37, 41, 48, 50, 69, 79.

<sup>13</sup> This is especially visible in MS BnF Éthiopien 259, fol. 27r–v; Guèbre Sellassié 1930, 303–304; Gebre-Igziabiher Elyas 1994, 200 (ed.), 493 (tr.); Bairu Tafla 1977, 150–153.

<sup>14</sup> In addition to the works of the Ethiopians already mentioned, see Guidi 1922, 255; Pollera 1926, 165–172; Conti Rossini 1937, 185. It is to be noted that Harry Middleton Hyatt did not mention the appointment of 1881 and 'forgot' Petros in his list of the Ethiopian metropolitans. See Hyatt 1928, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Gäbrä Əgzi'abḥer Elyas and Kidanä Wäld Kəfle clearly referred to the current political context in their works. See Kidana Wald Kefle 1986, 118–133; Gebre-Igziabiher Elyas 1994, 199–200 (ed.), 492–493 (tr.). On the contestation of Coptic hierarchical authority, see Adugna Amanu 1969, 11–17; Wudu Tafete Kassu 2006, 46–79.

Church, from 1941 to 1959, influenced some historians similarly. The 1881 appointment was interpreted as the first step towards autocephaly, confirming Yoḥannēs's foresight and the pragmatism (or benevolence) of the Copts.<sup>16</sup>

But, at the same time, some studies questioned the motivation of the Copts in accepting Yoḥannēs's request, claiming the Copts accepted due to the pressure Yoḥannēs exerted upon them. Some stated, Yoḥannēs wanted Ethiopian bishops and the Copts, unwilling to accept this, chose an alternative in four Coptic bishops.<sup>17</sup> Others posited that Yoḥannēs entered into negotiations with other churches, thus threatening the link with the Copts, forcing the latter to accept his request.<sup>18</sup> According to these studies, the Copts had nothing to gain from negotiations with Yoḥannēs, other than maintaining their link with Ethiopia. Thus, the Copts would have renounced any compensation, despite an exceptional request (four bishops) which went beyond the normal limits of the previous negotiations, whereas they had asked for compensation for the appointment of Metropolitan Atnatewos in 1869.<sup>19</sup> In these studies, the reason for such renunciation is implied: Yoḥannēs would have been in a strong position, and thus able to either make the merits of his request heard, or pressuring the Copts to accept it.

However, in carefully contextualizing the events from 1876 to 1882, a doubt appears concerning this idea. Firstly, it seems that the balance of power between Ethiopians and Copts was far more balanced than previously thought: Yoḥannēs was far from a strong position against the Copts. Secondly, events were taking place in Jerusalem at exactly the same time as the negotiations and appointment of 1881. The Copts attempted to claim the monastery of Dayr al-Sulṭān for themselves. The coinciding of events in Jerusalem, Cairo, and Ethiopia suggests the Copts sought compensation in exchange for the appointment of the four bishops. However, as will be seen, this attempt failed. Yoḥannēs thus had it both ways: he obtained four bishops while safeguarding the integrity of the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem.

### **1876–1880: From the Death of Atnatewos to Yoḥannēs's Official Request**

On 16 November 1875 at Gundät and 9 March 1876 at Gura', Ethiopians defeated the Egyptian armies, thus putting an end to the claims of Egypt and Khedive

<sup>16</sup> See Murad Kamil 1950–1957, 1; Aymro Wondmagegnehu and Joachim Motovu 1970, 11; 'Ethiopian Church Autocephaly', *CE*, III (1991), 980a–984a (Mirrit Boutros Ghali); Sergew Hable Selassie 1997, 34–35.

<sup>17</sup> Märso'e Ḥazān Wäldä Qirqos 1963/1964, 16.

<sup>18</sup> Meinardus 1970, 391; Mara 1972, 25; Rubenson 1976, 340; Erlich 2002, 75.

<sup>19</sup> Tedeschi 1999.

Ismail (r.1863–1879) over the Horn of Africa.<sup>20</sup> Shortly afterwards, on 29 June 1876, the Coptic metropolitan of Ethiopia Atnatewos (1869–1876) passed away.<sup>21</sup> As a result, Yoḥannēs no longer had a bishop and was in a delicate situation: he had, on the one hand, to come to an agreement with the Copts and, on the other, to obtain authorization of Khedive Ismail for a metropolitan to be sent to Ethiopia. As early as 19 July 1876, Yoḥannēs wrote to the Coptic Patriarch Kīrillus V (1874–1927) announcing Atnatewos’s death requesting the link between Ethiopia and the Coptic patriarchate not to be broken, despite the recent conflict with Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Then in August of that year he sent Šahlu Gābrā ʿĒgzi’abḥer as a negotiator to Cairo, in charge of negotiating both peace with Egypt and the appointment of a metropolitan for Ethiopia.<sup>23</sup> However, Šahlu was not received by the Egyptian authorities and returned to Ethiopia in December 1876.<sup>24</sup> Muḥammad Rātīb, the general-in-chief of the Egyptian army, had indeed advised Khedive Ismail not to receive the Ethiopian negotiator for, to his mind, the king of kings of Ethiopia would have no sovereignty without a bishop.<sup>25</sup> The Egyptian authorities were thus well advised to obstruct the appointment of the bishop in order to weaken the king of kings. Thereafter, a long process of peace negotiation commenced between Ethiopia and Egypt that was to hinder the arrival of a bishop in Ethiopia.

In January 1877, Charles G. Gordon, the new general governor of the Sudan, was appointed by Khedive Ismail to head the peace negotiations with Ethiopia. In March 1877, he submitted proposals to *Ras Alula* (r.1847–1897), who was responsible for forwarding them to Yoḥannēs. Among these proposals was the appointment of a metropolitan. But, in June 1877, Yoḥannēs refused Gordon’s

<sup>20</sup> About this conflict, see Douin 1941; Rubenson 1976, 310–329; Täklä Šadaq Māk’āriya 1989/1990, 91–151; Erlich 2002, 66–77; Antūn Sūryāl ‘Abd al-Sayyid 2003, 80–124; ‘Egypt, relations with: Modern Egyptian–Ethiopian relations’, *EAE*, II (2005), 241a–243b (H. Erlich); Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 95–124.

<sup>21</sup> The exact date is given by the chronicle edited by Marius Chaïne: ‘the 23 of *sāne* during the fifth year of Yohannes’s reign’ (Chaïne 1913b, 184–185; translation from Gə’əz by the present author). It is also mentioned in Yoḥannēs’s letter to Kīrillus V dated 19 July 1876; Rubenson 2000, 252.

<sup>22</sup> Rubenson 2000, 252. This letter was published in Antūn Sūryāl ‘Abd al-Sayyid 1985, 117–129.

<sup>23</sup> Šahlu Gābrā ʿĒgzi’abḥer (also called simply Gābrā ʿĒgzi’abḥer) had led the Ethiopian delegation to Cairo in 1869 that negotiated the coming of Atnatewos to Ethiopia. See Tedeschi 1999, 106; Rubenson 2000, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Douin 1941, 1090–1092; Rubenson 2000, 252, 268–269. Gerhard Rohlfs mistakenly dated this embassy to 1887, see Rohlfs 1883, 68–69.

<sup>25</sup> Douin 1941, 1092. See also Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 117.

proposal, deeming the compensation—the recognition of Egyptian conquest of some Ethiopian territories—too high.<sup>26</sup>

Yoḥannəs was without a bishop for the moment, but relations with the Coptic Church were not interrupted. Two months after subduing his rival Mənilək, prince of Šäwa, in May 1878, Yoḥannəs convened an ecclesiastical council in Boru Meda. The council's aim was to put an end to the theological quarrel dividing the Ethiopian Church at the time, and to have the *yäšägga läğ* doctrine condemned in favour of the *täwahaḥado* doctrine, the doctrine closest to that professed by the Coptic patriarchate.<sup>27</sup> According to Gäbrä Šəllase Wäldä Arägay, a letter from Patriarch Kīrillus V, in which the *yäšägga läğ* doctrine had been condemned, reached Yoḥannəs and was read at the council.<sup>28</sup> However, he was the only one to report this fact, and it was not until the publication of his text in 1930 that this information appeared in the writings of later historians.<sup>29</sup> What is certain is that, after the council, Yoḥannəs sent a letter to the Patriarch, dated 26 November 1878, explaining how he had convened a council and requesting a letter from Kīrillus V absolving former followers of the condemned doctrine.<sup>30</sup> The Patriarch sent the letter of absolution and Yoḥannəs thanked him in a reply dated 28 April 1879.<sup>31</sup> In 1878–1879, Yoḥannəs was clearly the champion of the Alexandrian faith and in constant contact with the Coptic patriarchate despite Egyptian power continuing in its refusing Ethiopia's request for a bishop.

Negotiations with Egypt meanwhile focused on the problem posed by the Egyptian-allied *Ras Wäldä Mika'el* in Ḥamasen and Bogos. Gordon led the discussions on the Egyptian side, facing *Ras Alula*, the powerful Ethiopian prince in the region. *Ras Wäldä Mika'el* finally submitted to Yoḥannəs's authority in 1878, and in January 1879 Gordon, resumed peace negotiations directly with the King of Kings.<sup>32</sup> In a letter dated 9 January 1879, Gordon stated his negotiating strategy: 'if the king [Yoḥannəs] would be quiet, I would see that he got an archbishop from the Coptic Church of Alexandria'.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Gordon believed the obtaining of a metropolitan to be a very important issue for Yoḥannəs.

<sup>26</sup> Rubenson 1976, 337; Erlich 1996, 18.

<sup>27</sup> About this council, see among other works Tesfazghi Uqbit 1973, 83–86; Crummey 1978, 440–441.

<sup>28</sup> Guèbre Sellassié 1930, 151–152.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Ḥəruy Wäldä Šəllase did not mention it in his works. See Ḥəruy Wäldä Šəllase 2006/2007, 116–119; Ḥəruy Wäldä Šəllase 2008/2009, 155–156.

<sup>30</sup> Rubenson 2000, 290.

<sup>31</sup> Rubenson 2000, 314–315; This letter was published in Antūn Sūryāl 'Abd al-Sayyid 1985, 117–129.

<sup>32</sup> Rubenson 1976, 338–340; Erlich 1996, 22–24.

<sup>33</sup> Hill 1881, 332.

The letter sent by Yoḥannəs to Queen Victoria, dated 2 May 1879 shows Gordon to be correct.<sup>34</sup> Gordon sent William Winstanley to the court of the King of Kings in April 1879, but discussions failed to progress.

At the same time, in Egypt, the political situation was changing. A serious financial crisis hit the country in 1879 and the British were increasingly in control of the country. In August 1879, Khedive Ismail was forced to leave power, to be replaced by his son Muḥammad Tawfiq (r.1879–1892). When Gordon went to Däbrä Tabor in October 1879, he now represented Tawfiq and brought with him a letter in which the new khedive expressed his wish for a reconciliation between Ethiopia and Egypt. Negotiations, however, went very badly. Yoḥannəs still found the compensation in exchange for a bishop far too high,<sup>35</sup> and in November 1879 sent a letter to Tawfiq expressing his anger and refusal of the peace offer.<sup>36</sup>

Relations with Egypt remained extremely tense until April 1880,<sup>37</sup> at which time the situation improved. According to Rohlf's, during 1880, the Egyptian government finally accepted Ethiopia's requests for Coptic bishop,<sup>38</sup> confirmed by a letter written by the French consul in Massawa Achille Raffray, dated 10 December 1880:

Egypt had sent a Coptic priest to King Iohannes to deal with the disposal of an Abouna or bishop. This priest returned to Massauah, accompanied by a high religious dignitary from Abyssinia. He was well received by the King, and took with him, for the Patriarch of Alexandria, a considerable sum [of money] (estimated to be at least 50,000 francs) to buy a bishop. I was informed, from a good source, that the King, deprived of Abouna for several years, wants to obtain one from Egypt at all costs and that he makes the most seductive promises to reach his goal, determined moreover not to fulfil them when he will have been granted what he wants.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Rubenson 2000, 316–317.

<sup>35</sup> Rubenson 1976, 344–348.

<sup>36</sup> Rubenson 2000, 329.

<sup>37</sup> As evidenced by the letter sent by Yoḥannəs to Queen Victoria on 29 April 1880. See Rubenson 2021, 8–9.

<sup>38</sup> Rohlf's 1883, 75–76.

<sup>39</sup> CADC, 14CPC/4, fols 176v–177v (translation from French by the present author), Raffray to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Məṣṣəwə' (?), 10 December 1880. Zewde is wrong when he dates the same letter to 10 January 1881, which corresponds to the date when the French ministry received the letter. See Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 168, n. 95.

Nevertheless, the French consul was obviously not very well informed and did not know that Yoḥannəs wanted four bishops. Already in 1879 it was rumoured the King of Kings wanted several bishops for Ethiopia.<sup>40</sup> It was also unlikely that Yoḥannəs would have sent such a large sum of money (50,000 francs) through such a small delegation. Below, it will be seen that the payment was actually sent later. Raffray's testimony therefore should be treated with caution. As he was in Massawa, however, there is a good chance he did indeed see a small delegation leave for Egypt with the stated objective of resolving the Coptic bishop of Ethiopia problem. In terms of the amount of money, Raffray perhaps echoed the rumour circulating locally, people having in mind the considerable amount paid for Atnatewos.<sup>41</sup> At any rate, this was, as far as is known, the first Ethiopian delegation with such an objective since 1876. It may be deduced, therefore, that Yoḥannəs most likely made his official request to the Copts for four bishops in December 1880.

Unfortunately, the content of Yoḥannəs's official letter is unknown. The chronicle Bairu Tafla published, however, reported the King of Kings to have said, 'I beg your Holiness to send me four bishops. These bishops shall preach us the Gospel in their respective lots and dioceses, for behold, your vast preaching district is the country of the reign which God, your Lord, has given me'.<sup>42</sup> The need to send bishops to different parts of the kingdom appears to be the request's main justification. Some historians later made Yoḥannəs render the reasons for his request more explicit: Ethiopia was now too vast, the faithful too numerous, for a single bishop.<sup>43</sup> And so, between December 1880 and April 1881, Kīrillus V accepted the request: in a letter written in Arabic, dated 5 April 1881, Yoḥannəs thanked the Patriarch for agreeing to send him a metropolitan (*muṭrān*) and three bishops (*'usquf*).<sup>44</sup>

### 1876–1880: The Temptation of Separation?

It appears that as early as 1876 Yoḥannəs wished to pursue negotiations to obtain a Coptic bishop for Ethiopia and that only external politics, in particular the

<sup>40</sup> Simon 1885, 344; Massaja 1930b, 121.

<sup>41</sup> The amount of money paid for the Metropolitan Atnatewos would have been 20,000 Maria Theresa thalers. See Tedeschi 1999, 107.

<sup>42</sup> Bairu Tafla 1977, 151, 153 (tr.).

<sup>43</sup> Guèbre Sellassié 1930, 303; Gebre-Igziabiher Elyas 1994, 200 (ed.), 493 (tr.); Täklä Şadəq Mäk'äriya 1989/1990, 231–232; Ḥərüy Wäldä Şəllase 2008/2009, 138.

<sup>44</sup> Rubenson 2021, 54. In another letter, written in Gə'əz, sent to Khedive Tawfiq and dated the same day (5 April 1881), Yoḥannəs used the words *papas* and *epīs qoḥos* to translate the meaning of *muṭrān* and *'usquf*. See Rubenson 2021, 52–53.

refusal of the khedive prevented him doing so before 1881. According to some historians, the five year absence of a bishop had been due to Yohannēs's reluctance and that he had been tempted to put an end to the subordination of the Ethiopian Church to the Copts.<sup>45</sup> This is based on Guglielmo Massaja's memoirs, published from 1885. Firstly, the Italian missionary claimed that Yohannēs and Atnatewos were in conflict in 1876: allegedly Atnatewos was accused of betraying the Ethiopians to benefit his native country, and the rumour circulated that he had been murdered on the King of Kings' orders after the victory at Gura'.<sup>46</sup> Secondly, again according to Massaja, Yohannēs no longer wanted to accommodate a Coptic bishop, 'because after his wars with Egypt, and after finding that the Egyptian Atnatewos was an infidel, he would no longer admit any Abūna of that race into his house'.<sup>47</sup> Thus, Yohannēs would have been willing to receive one or more Greek Orthodox bishops.<sup>48</sup>

However, Massaja is anything but a neutral witness here. He was expelled from Ethiopia in 1879 and was a great failure for the Catholic mission. According to Massaja, Yohannēs and Metropolitan Atnatewos were responsible for this failure. Thus, back in Europe, Massaja had to do all he could to justify his expulsion (i.e. his own failure), causing him to denigrate and slander his two opponents. Furthermore, he had to show his readers there was still hope for the Catholic mission in Ethiopia. By claiming Yohannēs and Atnatewos had quarrelled, and that Yohannēs was ready to welcome bishops of another Church than those of the Copts, Massaja wanted to create the belief that the king of kings had the power to change ecclesiastical alliances, that the position of the Copts was not inevitable, and that nothing (aside from Yohannēs) could prevent Catholic bishops being appointed in their place at some point in the future.

Thus Massaja's information has to be treated with caution. Particularly as he was the only one, to this author's knowledge, to spread the rumour of Atnatewos's assassination. On the Ethiopian side, the metropolitan's death was explained in the chronicle written by Lāmlām: Atnatewos is said to have died of wounds received at the battle of Gura'.<sup>49</sup> There is undoubtedly little information on the circumstances of Atnatewos's death, and choosing one or the other explanation is not without risk.<sup>50</sup> In terms of the accusation of Atnatewos's betray-

<sup>45</sup> Meinardus 1962, 58; Märso'e Ḥazān Wäldä Qirqos 1963/1964, 16; Meinardus 1970, 391; Mara 1972, 25; Rubenson 1976, 342; Erlich 2002, 75.

<sup>46</sup> Massaja 1930a, 177.

<sup>47</sup> Massaja 1930b, 121 (translation from Italian by the present author).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 120–121.

<sup>49</sup> MS BnF Éthiopien 259, fol. 21v.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Tedeschi 1999, 109; 'Ethiopian Prelates (d. 1876–d. 1950): Atnatewos (d. 1876)', *CE*, IV (1991), 1036b–1038a (S. Tedeschi); Erlich 2002, 75.

al for the benefit of Egypt, Massaja was only repeating an Ethiopian topos about the Copts. The Copts had been accused many times of collusion with the Egyptian government. Not long before Atnatewos's death, King of Kings Tewodros II (r.1855–1868) accused Patriarch Kīrillus IV (1853–1862) himself of treason when he visited Ethiopia.<sup>51</sup> Such an accusation against Atnatewos made in Ethiopia—a country with so many opponents of the Christological doctrine as professed by the Coptic bishop—comes as no surprise. But no evidence proves it was made by Yoḥannēs. Ernest de Sarzec, French consul in Massawa at the time, says nothing of a conflict between the monarch and the bishop; on the contrary, he claims Atnatewos declared holy war against the Egyptians.<sup>52</sup> An Egyptian source, however, questioned Atnatewos's loyalty. Muḥammad Rif'at, an Egyptian officer commissioned by Muḥammad Rātīb to participate in negotiations with the Ethiopians after the defeat of Gura', talked in a book published in 1896/1897 of a conversation held with Atnatewos.<sup>53</sup> The latter told Rif'at of his disagreements with Yoḥannēs and smoked a cigarette with him, indicating that the very act of smoking could get him into trouble for the King of Kings had prohibited smoking. How is one to interpret this conversation? Some feel it demonstrates collusion between the prelate and the Egyptian army.<sup>54</sup> Others, describe Atnatewos as a character who, thanks to his origins, facilitated negotiations with the enemy, to benefit Ethiopia.<sup>55</sup> Thus such a conversation could well exemplify such benefits for Ethiopia? The lack of certain knowledge means it remains difficult to draw any secure conclusion.

There is more information regarding the rumour of an alliance with the Greek Orthodox Church. Massaja himself started the rumour: the presence at Yoḥannēs's court of the Greek vice-consul of Suez, Demosthenes Mitzakis.<sup>56</sup> Mitzakis was indeed present at the royal court from March to November 1879, and then during the year 1880 until early 1881.<sup>57</sup> Europeans in Ethiopia were unanimously opposed to the Greek consul, as he was competing with their own ambitions: Gordon openly accused Mitzakis of deliberately thwarting negotiations between Egypt and Ethiopia;<sup>58</sup> Raffray saw him as the main actor preventing French ambitions and the one responsible for the misfortunes of the Catholic mission, as did the Spanish consul Juan Víctor Abarguès de Sostèn, and the missionary in

<sup>51</sup> Rubenson 1976, 208–223.

<sup>52</sup> Coursac 1926, 306.

<sup>53</sup> Erlich 2002, 75.

<sup>54</sup> Erlich 2002, 75; 'Atnatewos', *EAE*, I (2003), 393b–394a (S. Rubenson).

<sup>55</sup> Gäbräyoḥannēs Gäbrāmaryam 2000/2001, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Massaja 1930b, 121.

<sup>57</sup> Natsoulas 1985.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–25.



Kärän Monsignor Touvier.<sup>59</sup> Mitzakis certainly strove to establish an alliance between Ethiopia and the Greek Orthodox which his correspondence of the day clearly shows.<sup>60</sup> And the Europeans passing through Yoḥannēs's court (Gordon, Rohlfs, or Raffray) were aware of Mitzakis's objectives.<sup>61</sup> Was Massaja's fear of Greek bishops in Ethiopia justified? Apparently not. Gordon, quoted by Rohlfs, was very clear: although Mitzakis promoted a Greek bishop for Ethiopia, Yoḥannēs did not want one.<sup>62</sup> In Mitzakis's correspondence, there is no evidence that Yoḥannēs, or the Ethiopian clergy, could have been attracted to his proposal.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, no one from the Ethiopian sources mentioned this hypothesis.<sup>64</sup> From which it can be safely surmised that Yoḥannēs never thought of separating the Ethiopian Church from the Coptic Church in favour of the Greek Orthodox Church.<sup>65</sup>

This is not to say that the fear, or hope, of an agreement between Yoḥannēs and another Church was not on the minds of foreign diplomats and missionaries at that time. Massaja and Mitzakis were convinced such agreement to be possible. When Rohlfs or Raffray reported on rumours regarding a Greek alliance, even following the agreement between the Ethiopians and Copts, it is because they thought it possible. The British, for their part, were extremely concerned about a possible alliance with the Russian Orthodox Church.<sup>66</sup> This concern of foreigners here was inextricably linked to their hope that Ethiopia would welcome missionaries (Catholics, Protestants, Greek Orthodox) most likely for the purpose of increasing their influence in the country. But this hope or concern was not based on any local factual reality: the Ethiopian Church was (and still is) in total disagreement with the Russian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants on doctrine. In hindsight, it is difficult to imagine Yoḥannēs imposing a Greek or Russian bishop, running the risk of reactivating theological

<sup>59</sup> CADC, 14CPC/4, fol. 214 r–v, Raffray to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Adwa, 19 June 1881; Touvier 1881.

<sup>60</sup> Natsoulas 1985, 22–28.

<sup>61</sup> Rohlfs 1883, 84–85; CADC, 14CPC/4, fol. 214r–v, Raffray to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, 'Adwa, 19 June 1881.

<sup>62</sup> Letter written by Gordon dated 24 July 1881 quoted in Rohlfs 1883, 84, n. 1.

<sup>63</sup> Natsoulas 1985, 26–27.

<sup>64</sup> Theodore Natsoulas is wrong when he says that the chronicler of Mənilək mentions the attempt of Mitzakis. This mention was made by Maurice de Coppet in a footnote. See Natsoulas 1985, 27; cf. Guèbre Sellassié 1930, 190, n. 11.

<sup>65</sup> After telling in 1972 that 'it also seems certain that Yohannes felt inclined to turn to other Eastern Churches', Yolande Mara is obliged to admit that 'this thesis cannot be proved for lack of necessary documentation' (Mara 1972, 25).

<sup>66</sup> Natsoulas 1985, 25.

quarrels that had poisoned the political and religious life of the kingdom since at least the seventeenth century which he had tried to resolve in Boru Meda in 1878.

It is perhaps due to this problem of doctrine other historians have talked of an agreement between Yoḥannəs and the Armenians.<sup>67</sup> But this statement was based on an unproven assumption made by Hyatt, published in 1928.<sup>68</sup> Besides, Hyatt (deliberately?) skipped the pontificate of Pētros and the 1881 appointment. He therefore did not refer to the period investigated here. Most likely, Hyatt referred to the situation in 1868–1869, rather than 1879–1881.<sup>69</sup> A last hypothesis was formulated by Märsə‘e Ḥazän Wäldä Qirqos who claimed Yoḥannəs wanted Ethiopian bishops so the solution of four Coptic bishops would have been a second choice.<sup>70</sup> As with the hypothesis of an alliance with the Greeks or the Armenians, nothing in Ethiopian or foreign sources exists to lend any support to such an hypothesis.<sup>71</sup>

It has to be admitted, however, that the hypothesis of an attempted separation was ‘attractive’ to historians: it allowed them to give Yoḥannəs a stronger position (compared to that of the Copts) and makes clear why the Copts accepted Yoḥannəs proposal without compensation, as suggested by Ethiopian sources. But, on the contrary, all facts show Yoḥannəs did everything to accord with the Copts and prove to them how much he really wished to ensure their goodwill: he organized the embassy of 1876, the Council of Boru Meda in 1878, the expulsion of Massaja in 1879, and the attack on foreign missions from July 1880.<sup>72</sup> In a letter to Patriarch Kīrillus V dated 28 April 1879 Yoḥannəs even pledged, not to mistreat the Muslims in his kingdom, attempting a response to the prelate’s concern after declarations made at the Council of Boru Meda.<sup>73</sup> It appears

<sup>67</sup> Meinardus 1962, 58; Meinardus 1970, 391; Erlich 2002, 75; Ephraim Isaac 2012, 110–111.

<sup>68</sup> Hyatt 1928, 46. Erlich 2002 referred to Meinardus 1970 who founded his own hypothesis on Hyatt 1928, 46 (like he did in Meinardus 1962).

<sup>69</sup> Indeed, as Tedeschi has very well shown, Gobaze (future Täklä Giyorgis) tried to rely on two Armenian prelates, Bishop Isaac of Kharpert and Father Dimothéos Vartabet, who had arrived from Jerusalem, to counter his rival Kasa (future Yoḥannəs IV). See Tedeschi 1999, 105; also Dimothéos 1871, 91.

<sup>70</sup> Märsə‘e Ḥazän Wäldä Qirqos 1963/1964, 16.

<sup>71</sup> Maybe this hypothesis is based on a misinterpretation of what Pollera said in his book about Yoḥannəs’s demand: ‘non si sa bene se sperasse di dare nuovo e migliore assetto alla chiesa di Etiopia o se volesse arrivare a formare una chiesa nazionale’, Pollera 1926, 164–165.

<sup>72</sup> About the foreign missions, see Erlich 1996, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Rubenson 2000, 314–315. This letter was published in Antūn Sūryāl ‘Abd al-Sayyid 1985, 117–129. See also Caulk 1972, 27. A concern that Yoḥannəs reportedly conveyed to

Yoḥannēs was not in a strong position vis-à-vis the Copts. But in fact he greatly needed an alliance with the Copts for his political and religious project in Ethiopia.

### **1876–1880: Jerusalem, the Second Issue for Yoḥannēs**

Yoḥannēs's extremely conciliatory attitude to the Copts could pose a problem in Jerusalem. Ethiopians and Copts were in conflict in the Holy City. Since the years 1848–1850, the Ethiopians accused the Copts of wanting to seize the Dayr al-Sultān monastery, located above the Armenian chapel of Saint Helena, in the middle of the Holy Sepulchre complex. This monastery had been the only place for Ethiopians to be accommodated in the city, since the seventeenth century.<sup>74</sup> In 1848, the Ethiopians accused the Copts, with the help of the Armenians, of seizing the keys of the monastery, locking them up and mistreating them. Violence broke out between the two communities. The Ethiopians complained to the civil authorities in 1850 and managed to obtain better living conditions.<sup>75</sup> But the problem remained: Copts and Ethiopians each claimed ownership of the monastery and relationship became difficult. Further violence broke out in 1862–1863 and the problem remained unsolved.<sup>76</sup> The Ottoman authorities agreed with the Copts but, noting that the monastery was occupied by the Ethiopians, maintained a precarious status quo for the moment. Thus, in the 1870s, the Ethiopians were still under the threat of expulsion from the monastery by the Copts.

Yoḥannēs had re-established an imperial ideology based on the great historical myths of Ethiopia and, in referring to himself as the king of Zion, could not do without the spiritual and eschatological link uniting his country to the Holy Land.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, at that time, the Western Christian world had become increasingly interested in Jerusalem and fierce competition between Western countries began as they vied for influence in the city.<sup>78</sup> For reasons of internal and external politics, Ethiopia had great interest in maintaining its presence in

Mənilək, asking him to do the same or Copts would suffer reprisals from the Muslims in Egypt. See Ḥərūy Wāldä Šəllase 2006/2007, 149.

<sup>74</sup> 'Dayr as-Sultān', *EAE*, II (2005), 117a–119a (K. Stoffregen-Pedersen).

<sup>75</sup> Cerulli 1947, 276–288; Filəppos 1959/1960, 1–14; Meinardus 1965, 131–133; Pedersen 1983, 17–23.

<sup>76</sup> Cerulli 1947, 313–322, 344–347; Filəppos 1959/1960, 19–29; Meinardus 1965, 134–138; Pedersen 1983, 24–26.

<sup>77</sup> Crummey 1988, 24–33; Orłowska 2006, 125–126; Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 18.

<sup>78</sup> See Lemire 2017; see also Laurens 1999, 50–64, 75–78.

the city.<sup>79</sup> Yoḥannās did everything he could to safeguard the Ethiopian community in the city. Even before he was crowned, he sent money to support the community in 1869 and 1870, and again in 1873, as king of kings. He followed its internal affairs carefully, remaining in constant contact with the community.<sup>80</sup> But financial support was not enough to maintain the community. The legal status of the small community was precarious. Ottoman authorities in the city did not recognize Ethiopians as members of an independent community: they were considered Copts, as well as Ottoman subjects, and were under the protection of the Armenian patriarchate which represented them in interactions with the city's civil authority.<sup>81</sup>

Being in conflict with the Armenians and Copts, the Ethiopians in Jerusalem sought support from foreign consulates. From 1838, British, Germans, French, Italians, Russians, had all settled in the Holy City, all seeking to 'protect' communities and in so doing increase their influence in the city.<sup>82</sup> The British were approached by Ethiopians for help in 1850, and again during the 1860s.<sup>83</sup> But the Ethiopians made a habit of soliciting several foreign actors simultaneously, and the French helped them promptly.<sup>84</sup> In 1875, Ethiopians turned to Antonin Kapustin, archimandrite of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Jerusalem, due to a conflict with the Armenians.<sup>85</sup> The Russians had become extremely powerful in the Holy City, particularly since the creation of their huge compound in the city suburbs in 1859. Yoḥannās had this in mind when writing to Alexander II, the tsar of Russia, on 19 June 1879 in which he reminded the Russian ruler of the difficulties Ethiopians were experiencing in Jerusalem.<sup>86</sup> The Greek Orthodox Church was also of sufficient power to offer the Ethiopians help in the city. The Greek Orthodox Church was the most influential religious institution in the Holy City and Jerusalem's largest landowners.<sup>87</sup> Yoḥannās may not have needed Greek bishops for the Ethiopian Church, as seen earlier, but he certainly required their help in Jerusalem. Yoḥannās saw the benefit of obtaining contact to the Greek government through Mitzakis and did so by entrusting him with a

<sup>79</sup> Ancel et al. 2020, 151–152.

<sup>80</sup> Rubenson 2000, 4, 58, 159, 338. See also Bairu Tafla 1977, 162–163, 168–169.

<sup>81</sup> Ancel 2020, 1–12.

<sup>82</sup> Mazza 2009, 54–55.

<sup>83</sup> Meinardus 1965, 131–138; Pedersen 1983, 17–26.

<sup>84</sup> Rouaud 2003.

<sup>85</sup> Ancel 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Rubenson 2000, 220.

<sup>87</sup> See Katz and Kark 2007.

letter in November 1879.<sup>88</sup> Further to which, on 6 December 1880, the Ethiopian monks in Jerusalem requested the ‘protection’ of the French consulate due to renewed conflict with the Armenians.<sup>89</sup> The French, fearing Italy, Germany, or Russia would appropriate their influence over the Ethiopians, agreed to ‘protect’ them in an unofficial capacity.<sup>90</sup> Yoḥannəs therefore hoped the Ethiopian presence at Dayr al-Sulṭān could be safeguarded by this established alliance network.

Due to the risk of expulsion, Yoḥannəs sought to find a new place in Jerusalem, purely for Ethiopians. He sent Wäldä Səma‘ət there in 1870.<sup>91</sup> The latter became the head of the community and looked for land to acquire for the community.<sup>92</sup> According to an 1920s Ethiopian text, a piece of land—the Ethiopians called *əbnä ḥəywät* (‘stone of life’)—was found in 1880.<sup>93</sup> It was located outside the walls of the old city, to the west, on the road to Jaffa, next to the large Russian complex. All that remained was to buy it and build a church there.

Yoḥannəs was well aware the mission to obtain the four bishops for Ethiopia should not hinder the work to be done in Jerusalem. He did everything to appease the Copts and protect the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem. But were the Copts aligned with this? Events in 1881 appear to show the contrary. The Copts felt the appointment of four bishops for Ethiopia was to have a concrete impact on the situation in Jerusalem.

### **1881: the Jerusalem Issue Intertwined with the Bishops’ Appointment Agenda**

On 5 April 1881, Yoḥannəs wrote to Khedive Tawfiq and Patriarch Kīrillus V announcing the sending of an Ethiopian delegation to Cairo,<sup>94</sup> this delegation charged with bringing the money required for the appointment of the bishops and to bring them back to Ethiopia. Among the members of this delegation were *Mäl’akä məḥrät* Dästa, *Şərag masäre* Fänta, *Mämḥər* Wäldä Arägawi, *Aläqqa*

<sup>88</sup> Mitzakis left Ethiopia temporarily in November 1879 with several letters from Yoḥannəs to Western governments, including Greece (Natsoulas 1985, 28).

<sup>89</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fols 19r–20r, translation of a letter sent by the Ethiopian community to the French consul in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 6 December 1880. Quoted also in Rouaud 2003, 71.

<sup>90</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fols 21r–25v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 15 December 1880.

<sup>91</sup> Rubenson 2000, 58.

<sup>92</sup> Pedersen 1983, 39–41.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 43. The manuscript JE692E (in paper, paginated) preserved in the archives of the community contains a ‘History of Dayr al-Sulṭān’ (pp. 234–290), written during the 1920s. This information is written on p. 269. About this manuscript, see Ancel 2018, 53.

<sup>94</sup> Rubenson 2021, 51–55.

Aśrat, and *Bäğəron*d Abustäli.<sup>95</sup> In another letter dated the same day, Yoḥannəs announced to the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem that he sent, via the same delegation, a very large sum of money to have a new church built in the city.<sup>96</sup> The French authorities of the Suez Canal saw the delegation pass and told the French minister of Foreign Affairs of the Ethiopians' double objective:

I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that notables, accompanied by a large company of about 75 Abyssinians, from the close circle of King John, have just passed through Suez to go to Cairo to [visit] the Viceroy, bearing gifts and a sum of 15,000 [Maria Theresa] thalers = 75,000 [French] francs, for the Patriarch of the Coptic Church in Cairo, and 20,000 [Maria Theresa] thalers = 100,000 [French] francs to build a church in Jerusalem.<sup>97</sup>

Announced in April 1881 by Yoḥannəs, the delegation was slow to leave Ethiopia and arrived in Cairo finally on 18 June 1881.<sup>98</sup> Not long after, on 8 July 1881, the Coptic Patriarch Kīrillus V convened the synod which officially ratified the decision to send four bishops (a metropolitan and three bishops) to Ethiopia.<sup>99</sup> Just after the synod was held, the Ethiopian delegation went to Jerusalem. On 15 July 1881, the French consul said the Ethiopians had arrived in the city a few days earlier. According to him, the Ethiopians' first goal was to deliver the money sent by Yoḥannəs to the Ethiopian community.<sup>100</sup> The Ethiopian delegates stayed in the Holy City until the beginning of September 1881, and returned to Cairo<sup>101</sup> to organize the four bishops' imminent departure to Ethiopia. Everything appeared fine between Copts and Ethiopians.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 52–54. *Mäl'akä məhrät* was a title used for the ecclesiastical chief of a *däbr* church dedicated to *məhrät*; *şərag masäre* means 'chamberlain', *bäğəron*d, 'treasurer'. Zewde Gabre-Sellassie gave a list, close but slightly different, based on the information collected from the works done by *Qäññ azmač Fəssəḥa Wäldä Mika'el* in 1940s. See Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 168.

<sup>96</sup> Rubenson 2021, 56–57; Bairu Tafla 1977, 170–173.

<sup>97</sup> CADC, 13CPC/2, fol. 410r (translation from French by the present author), letter from the French consul in Suez to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Suez, 20 June 1881.

<sup>98</sup> This information was given by the French consul in Jerusalem, quoting an Egyptian newspaper called by him 'Le Moniteur Officiel Égyptien'. CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 43r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 15 July 1881.

<sup>99</sup> Murad Kamil 1950–1957, 1.

<sup>100</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 43r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 15 July 1881.

<sup>101</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 44r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 6 September 1881.

But, during the same period—between April and September 1881—a serious problem had arisen concerning the monastery Dayr al-Sultān. On 23 April 1881, the French consul in Jerusalem informed his hierarchy that the Copts intended to open a gate (actually only to enlarge the existing gate) in one of the walls that delimited the Dayr al-Sultān monastery.<sup>102</sup> This information was given to him by the Franciscans, who were concerned about the safety of the ninth station of the Via Dolorosa, which they managed and which was attached to this very wall.<sup>103</sup> The case was crucial to the Ethiopians living in Dayr al-Sultān, for were the project to be approved and carried out, it would be official to all in Jerusalem that the Copts are the true owners of the monastery.<sup>104</sup> The project was naturally unacceptable to the Ethiopians who requested help from the French consul. The consul agreed to do so (insisting, however, that their help remained unofficial) and, in a letter dated 26 April 1881, announced to his hierarchy that he had succeeded in having the Ottoman authorities suspend the project.<sup>105</sup> In his letter the consul wrote that the Ethiopians had also asked the Russians for help, the notion being that he had to act quickly to avoid the Russians taking any advantage of the situation.

Questions are raised by the chronology of events. Was it pure coincidence, that at a time when the Ethiopians and the Copts reached an historic agreement concerning the bishops, and Yoḥannēs was simultaneously sending a delegation to Cairo, the Copts decided to launch a project clearly jeopardizing the Ethiopian presence in Jerusalem? Or were these events connected?

Fortunately for the Ethiopians, the project was blocked in late April. But it was not cancelled, merely postponed by the Ottoman authorities. When the Ethiopian delegation arrived in Cairo in June and then in Jerusalem in July, its members were very probably quite aware of the Coptic project and the danger it represented. In July, the French consul in Jerusalem reported that the first goal of this delegation was to bring money to the Ethiopian community, but also

<sup>102</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fols 2r–4v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 23 April 1881.

<sup>103</sup> The Via Dolorosa is the processional route marking the path Jesus would have taken on the way to his crucifixion. This processional route is marked by numbered stations, stationary places on the route where pilgrims pray in memory of an event that happened to Christ during his Calvary. The ninth station commemorates the moment when Christ falls for the third time.

<sup>104</sup> This was the opinion of the French consul, as he expressed it a little later: CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 8r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 6 September 1881.

<sup>105</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 41r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 26 April 1881.

specified the delegation's second goal: to promote the rights of Ethiopians at the holy sites in the city.<sup>106</sup> There is every reason to believe that the delegates' mission at that time was to prevent the completion of the Coptic project. Why did the events occurring in Jerusalem in April not impact the Coptic synod authorizing the appointment of the four bishops? The Copts, at that time, were unaware their project had been suspended due to the Ethiopians' actions. Naturally, the Ethiopians had no interest in letting the Copts know about their contact with the French consul, which was, for the time-being, a well-kept secret. The synod thus went on as planned.

### **Coptic Defeat and Ethiopian Diplomatic Ability**

Once the synod was over, the Copts did everything to ensure their project in Jerusalem would succeed. At the end of July 1881, while the Ethiopian delegation was in Jerusalem and the future bishops for Ethiopia still in Cairo, the Copts asked the Ottomans again for permission to work on the Dayr al-Sultān wall. Moreover, they now knew the French consul had blocked their first attempt. So, from the beginning of August they made several requests to meet the consul for him to explain himself. The French consul, however, did not respond to these requests.<sup>107</sup> The Ottoman governor Rauf Pasha (1877–1889) then lost his patience. On 24 August 1881, he sent a message to the French consul reminding him that he had agreed to suspend the work requested by the Copts. But added that from that point on the consul had to justify his opposition to the Coptic project in absolute legal terms, otherwise the work would gain authorization.<sup>108</sup> On 28 August 1881, the French consul replied to Rauf Pasha and reiterated his unequivocal refusal of the Coptic works on grounds of them endangering the ninth station of the Via Dolorosa, managed by the Latins. According to the consul, 'the Copts' claim is, however simple it may appear, about nothing less than changing a state of affairs that everyone has respected up until now'.<sup>109</sup> In other words, the French consul, as protector of the Latins, accused the Copts of chal-

<sup>106</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 43r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 15 July 1881.

<sup>107</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 5r–v, note from the French consulate administration, Jerusalem, 17 August 1881.

<sup>108</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 6r–v, letter from Rauf Pasha, governor of Jerusalem, to the French consul in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 24 August 1881.

<sup>109</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 7r (translation from French by the present author), letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to Rauf Pasha, governor of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 28 August 1881.



lenging the status quo, in force since 1852.<sup>110</sup> There was no mention of the Ethiopians in his letter.

Nonetheless, the French consul was acting for the benefit of the Ethiopians. In a letter dated 6 September 1881, he explained how the location of the ninth station on the wall of the Dayr al-Sultān enabled him to kill two birds with one stone: protecting the rights of the Latins officially, while protecting the Ethiopians unofficially.<sup>111</sup> According to him, the stakes were high: it was vital to prevent the Russians and the Italians from helping the Ethiopians, if not France stood to lose the opportunity to extend its influence both in Jerusalem and the Horn of Africa.

The case was taken very seriously by the Coptic patriarchate and Patriarch Kīrillus V himself wrote a letter to the French consul, who received it on 15 September 1881. The French consular agents translated it thus:

To the most honorable, etc. etc. (protocol) Consul of France in Palestine. You know very well, Mr Consul, that for a long time the Abyssinians have been subject to the Coptic Church [and] are respected as its own spiritual children; when one of the Abyssinians wishes to make his pilgrimage to Palestine, or to Cairo only, it is usual to receive him with respect in our convents and churches, both in the Patriarchate and in our hospices in all parts of Cairo. In the same way, those who go to Jerusalem are usually received in one of our convents,<sup>112</sup> and to enable them to make their devotions in peace we have assigned them a church in a convent. It is necessary that the one who would like to live in the holy places thanks this charitable Church for its benefits. Unfortunately, the ungratefulness which is found in all nations and the intrigues of several interested persons gave rise at the time of the late Patriarch Peter and at the time of the late Bishop Abraham to the idea that the Abyssinians claimed that the convent inhabited by them belonged to

<sup>110</sup> This status quo was a principle that governed the use of holy sites by different religious communities, each one having defined rights to one or several holy sites that were acquired and could not be modified. Established for the first time by an Ottoman decree in 1757, it was confirmed in 1852, then accepted by the international community at the Treaty of Paris in 1856, and the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

<sup>111</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 8r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 6 September 1881.

<sup>112</sup> i.e. Dayr al-Sultān.

them.<sup>113</sup> This claim was judged by the local authority courts [...] and they were not successful.<sup>114</sup> Some years later, during the time of the current bishop Basilius,<sup>115</sup> and through the intermediary of various interested persons, they raised the same issue and, by the grace of God, after this case was examined and re-examined by the courts of the local authority, it was seen that the Abyssinians had no right to their claims and that the Copts alone had rights over the convent and its churches.<sup>116</sup> We then obtained minutes, legal documents, and official orders that are in the hands of the said bishop. At this moment and despite all this, some Abyssinians with their superior Giyorgis started to argue with the bishop and to upset him,<sup>117</sup> claiming from him what does not belong to them and not considering what was done under the predecessors of the said Giyorgis. Now that the Abyssinians find themselves in the impossibility of reaching anything, since they have no paper in their hands to prove what they are saying, they approach both the respectable convents of various nationalities and the honorable consulates of Jerusalem to request their support. As I have just learned, they have come to ask for your benevolent support and protection in this matter, but I am convinced that your honorable person will be able to discern the just from the unfair. As the Abyssinians are subject to the Coptic Church, I will not hesitate to give them hospitality according to the ancient customs in our convents and churches; however, it is my duty to watch over our properties and defend our rights. I hope, Mr. Consul, that when you realize that the convent with the churches is our property, as shown by the minutes and titles which are in the hands of our bishop, you will dismiss their unjust claims. I would like to take this opportunity to express our respectful compliments, and at the same time to give you some explanations on this matter so that you will not give your support to people who do not deserve it and that you will no longer listen to their words which only give trouble without bringing

<sup>113</sup> Peter (Butros) was patriarch from 1810 to 1852 and Bishop Abraham headed the Coptic community in Jerusalem from 1820 to 1854. See ‘Jerusalem, Coptic See of’, *CE*, IV (1991), 1324a–1329b (Archbishop Basilius).

<sup>114</sup> Kīrillus V refers to the events occurred in 1848–1850.

<sup>115</sup> Bishop Basilius headed the Coptic community in Jerusalem from 1856 to 1899. See ‘Basilius II’, *CE*, I (1991), 358a (Archbishop Basilius).

<sup>116</sup> Kīrillus V refers to the events occurred in 1862–1863.

<sup>117</sup> Giyorgis stands for Wāldā Səma’ət. Indeed, he was often called ‘Djirdjis’ or ‘Giyorgis’ in French and Italian consular documents.

any results. I would be grateful, Mr. Consul, if you would honor me with an answer. Please accept my blessings, etc. etc. (protocol).<sup>118</sup>

Initially surprising in this letter is how Kīrillus V makes no mention of the problem of the ninth station. He focuses on the Ethiopians. Indeed, this letter reveals that the Copts, in September 1881, had just learned that the Ethiopians had made approaches to the French to thwart their project. From their point of view, the ninth station issue was just a pretext. They accused the Ethiopians of being responsible for the French refusal. Thus, Kīrillus V attacks the Ethiopians very violently in this letter to the point by which it is hard to imagine the Ethiopians and the Copts had just sealed a historic agreement concerning bishopric in Ethiopia. The Patriarch uses very harsh terms to describe the behaviour of the Ethiopians calling them ungrateful and unjust. He strongly reaffirms his ownership over Dayr al-Sultān. On two occasions in September 1881 (around the 15th and the 24th), a delegation of Copts went to the French consul.<sup>119</sup> On each occasion, the French consul repeated his refusal and denied any help to the Ethiopians. In his reply to the Coptic Patriarch, the consul even advised him to request an official opinion from Yoḥannēs, for, in his words, ‘only the word of his Majesty the Negus can adjudicate the matter’.<sup>120</sup>

It is easy to imagine the unease of the Copts upon hearing this: it made Yoḥannēs the mediator in a conflict in which everyone knew he was a stakeholder. Furthermore, when Kīrillus V wrote his letter to the consul, the Ethiopian delegates were still in Cairo for the purpose of accompanying the four bishops to Ethiopia. Should Copts require information regarding the King of Kings’ opinion on the matter, they could simply ask them. But the delegates apparently did not intervene in the discussion and the Copts understood they would get no satisfaction from either the French or Yoḥannēs. Thus, on 29 September 1881, they announced that they were to abandon their Day al-Sultān project,<sup>121</sup> at the very moment when the four new bishops embarked for Ethiopia. Nineteen days

<sup>118</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fols 12r–14r (translation from French by the present author), translation of a letter sent by Patriarch Kīrillus V to the French consul in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 15 September 1881.

<sup>119</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 15r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 22 September 1881; CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 17r–v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 24 September 1881.

<sup>120</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 20v (translation from French by the present author), letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to Patriarch Kīrillus V, Jerusalem, 4 October 1881.

<sup>121</sup> CADN, 294PO/A/135, fol. 18r, crypted telegram from French consul in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, 29 September 1881.

later, on 18 October 1881, the four Coptic bishops were received by Yoḥannəs at Mäqälä.

The failure of the Copts in Jerusalem was extreme. The question therefore arises: why did they launch this project at that time? Obviously, at first the Copts were confident thinking they could do it (and thus have their property on Dayr al-Sultān accepted), being convinced the Ethiopians did not have any means to prevent them. Negotiations between 1876 and 1880 had made it impossible to think otherwise. Yoḥannəs was in dire need of a bishop for his country. He had done everything to preserve the link between Ethiopia and the Coptic patriarchate and offered the Copts all the guarantees necessary for an agreement. For their part, the Copts granted him a favour: four bishops instead of one, and this without any official compensation. In April and then in August–September 1881, Yoḥannəs could not reasonably enter into conflict with them while the bishops were still in Egypt. Moreover, the King of Kings had sent money to build a new place for the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. The Copts most likely thought he was seeking an alternative to Dayr al-Sultān.<sup>122</sup> All conspires for the Coptic project to be understood as ‘self-granted’ compensation for the appointment of four bishops, ‘self-granted’ because the Copts operated according to their own will, as it was not negotiated in advance. Yoḥannəs had not agreed or promised anything—contrary to what Raffray may have thought in December 1880—otherwise the Copts would have told the French consul in September 1881.

Ironically, it was Yoḥannəs’s lack of official word that caused the Coptic project to fail. The King of Kings never took a stand against the Coptic project, nor did the members of the delegation present in Cairo at that time. The Ethiopians left the French to oppose the Copts alone. As a result, the Copts could not officially accuse them, nor reconsider their decisions concerning the four bishops. The Copts clearly underestimated the network of alliances Yoḥannəs had established in Jerusalem, and his ability to take profit from the rivalry between the Western powers. In asking the French consul for help, and making no secret of the fact that they had also asked the Russians for help, the Ethiopians were particularly clever. The French consul was obliged to react to oppose the ambitions of other powers (Russians, but also Italians and Greeks) in Jerusalem. In doing so, he took a gamble: he helped the Ethiopians without any official compensation from them, in hoping (perhaps naively) that this help would increase French

<sup>122</sup> It was the opinion expressed in 1898 by the current French consul in Jerusalem about these events. CADN, 294PO/A/135, fols 39r–40v, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 1 July 1898.

influence in Jerusalem and enable the French to gain the support of the Ethiopian government for French projects in the Horn of Africa.

### Conclusion

In 1881, Yoḥannəs succeeded in obtaining four Coptic bishops to ensure his religious policy in Ethiopia and simultaneously thwarted Coptic ambitions in Jerusalem thus protecting the Ethiopian community in the city. Furthermore, he was not obliged to offer compensation to either the Copts or the French. The latter were subsequently disappointed. Indeed, the French waited desperately for an agreement with Yoḥannəs. But their envoy to Ethiopia, Achille Raffray, was not able to reach any such agreement. Yoḥannəs had other plans. In September 1881, he announced to the Ethiopians in Jerusalem a protection agreement with the Greek government that he had made,<sup>123</sup> that is, exactly at the moment when the French were arguing against the Copts in favour of the Ethiopians. The French were unaware of this only learning of it a year later, when outraged in the realization that the Jerusalem Ethiopians now had Greek passports.<sup>124</sup>

For their part, the Copts did everything to prevent and thwart the construction of the new church for the Ethiopians in Jerusalem. Yoḥannəs, who now had his bishops at his disposal and was no longer in fear of anything, wasted no time in criticizing the Copts officially. On 20 February 1882 (14 Amšir 1874, 14 Yäk-katit 1874), the King of Kings sent a letter (in Amharic and Arabic) to the Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid II (r.1876–1909), vigorously complaining about the actions of the Copts against Ethiopian interests in Jerusalem and requesting sanctions against them.<sup>125</sup>

Without doubt, the year 1881 marked a turning point in the history of relations between Copts and Ethiopians, not only because it was the year of a historic agreement—the last one before the appointment of Ethiopian bishops—but also because, behind a friendship displayed and claimed by both sides, a very real animosity was revealed, which obtained its first and full expression in Jerusalem before articulating itself later in Ethiopia.

<sup>123</sup> Rubenson 2021, 68; Zewde Gabre-Sellassie 2014, 18.

<sup>124</sup> Rouaud 2003, 72; CADN, 294PO/A/134, fol. 48r–49r, letter from the French consul in Jerusalem to the French minister of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, 6 September 1882.

<sup>125</sup> BOA, Y.A.HUS.170–97, docs 5 and 6, letter from King of Kings Yoḥannəs IV to Sultan Abdul Hamid II, 'Adwa, 20 February 1882.

## Archival and Bibliographical Abbreviations

- BnF Éthiopien 259 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 259 (= Collection Mondon-Vidaillet, 72).
- BnF Éthiopien 260 = Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 260 (= Collection Mondon-Vidaillet, 73).
- BOA, Y.A.HUS.170–97 = Istanbul, Başbakanlı Osmanlı Arşivi, Yıldız Sadâret Hususî Maruzât Evrakı, Y.A.HUS (call number 170–97).
- CADC, 13CPC/2 = La Courneuve, Centre des archives diplomatiques, Archives diplomatiques du MAEE, Correspondance politique des consuls, Égypte, II, 13CPC/2 (1881–1881).
- CADC, 14CPC/4 = La Courneuve, Centre des archives diplomatiques, Archives diplomatiques du MAEE, Correspondance politique des consuls, Égypte, Massauah, IV, 14CPC/4 (1886–1888).
- CADN, 294PO = Nantes, Centre des archives diplomatiques, Archives diplomatiques du MAEE, Jérusalem (consulat général).
- CE = Aziz S. Atiya, ed., *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, I–VIII (New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991).
- EAE = S. Uhlig, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; ed., in cooperation with A. Bausi, IV: O–X; A. Bausi, ed., in cooperation with S. Uhlig, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
- JE692E = Jerusalem, Ethiopian Archbishop Residence in Jerusalem, Manuscript Section, Golden Gospels, Ms. JE692E.

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### Summary

This article connects two events that occurred in 1881: the arrival of four Coptic bishops in Ethiopia and the attempt by the Copts to remodel the Dayr al-Sultān monastery in Jerusalem. First, connecting these two events contradicts the idea that the Copts agreed to appoint four bishops without any compensation—on the contrary they sought a compensation in Jerusalem. Second, it sheds light on Yohannēs’s diplomatic policy, which enabled him to thwart the Coptic ambitions in Jerusalem and to kill two birds with one stone: he obtained four Coptic bishops, while preserving the rights of the Ethiopians in Jerusalem, and this without any compensation to be given in exchange to the Copts or anyone else. This article shows that behind a friendship demonstrated at the time by Ethiopians and Copts were hidden elements of deep discord. It therefore suggests the need, in the future, to rethink the place to be given to the 1881 agreement in the history of relations between Copts and Ethiopians and its influence on subsequent events.