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Miscellaneous

*A Fragment of the Late Aksumite or Early Zag^we Period
on the Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*

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Miscellaneous

A Fragment of the Late Aksumite or Early Zagwe Period on the Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew

GETATCHEW HAILE †

Introduction

The old fragment of a manuscript of commentary on themes from the Gospel of Matthew presented here was found tucked at the end of a manuscript of *Nägärä Maryam* ('Story of Mary'), microfilmed by the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library: Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum & Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (= EMMML), 7229, fols 122r–123v.¹ The actual order of the folios of the piece is 123r, 123v, 122r, and 122v. I date it to late Aksumite to early Zagwe period because of its copyist's hand.² Since it is only two leaves, it might be helpful and easy to present it in a facsimile and a typewritten copy.

The fragment must be a translation of a commentary made by one of the early church scholars. It differs markedly in style as well as content from the two commentaries known to Ethiopian church scholars.³ The style is clear, a topic from Matthew is quoted and the commentary follows with the introduction 'And let us offer, with the help of Our Lord, the interpretation of this (matter)'. My search for its *Vorlage* was unsuccessful. The few direct quotations from the Gospel of Matthew show that the commentary is based on A-text.⁴

My translation will follow the copies of the text. In copying it, I have supplied illegible letters in brackets ([]). The four dots separated into two pairs by the equal sign (=) is my attempt to reproduce the punctuation signs as given in the manuscript.

¹ Parchment, 35 × 25 cm, 123 fols (including the two old leaves of the fragment), 2 cols, 22–25 lines, seventeenth century. At the time of microfilming, the manuscript belonged to the monastery of Zämädä Maryam in Lasta, Wällo.

² Cf. Uhlig 1988, 47.

³ See, for example, the relevant verses in *Wängel qəddus* 1923/1924.

⁴ Zuurmond 2001.

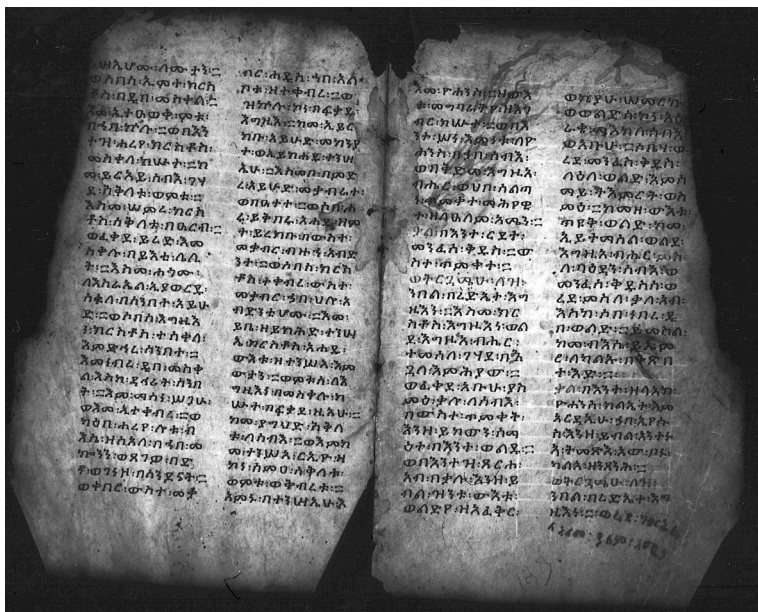


Fig. 1 EMLL 7229, fols 122v-123r.



Fig. 2 EMLL 7229, fol. 123r.

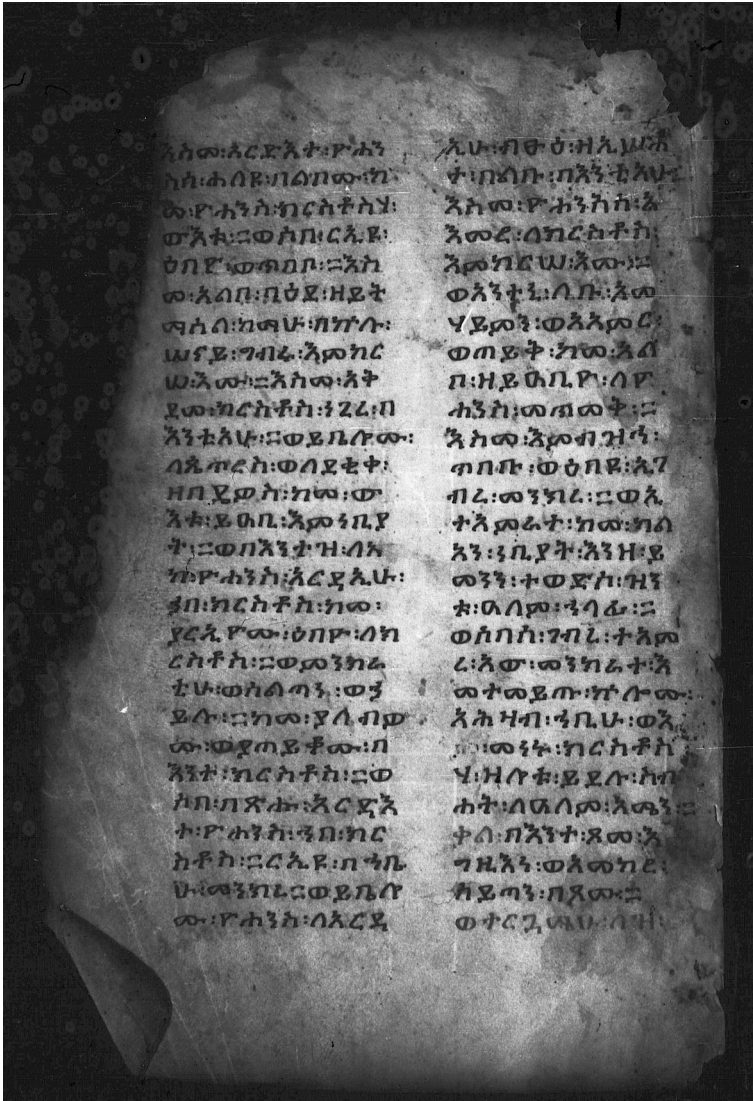


Fig. 3 EMMML 7229, fol. 123v.

Translation

fol. 123r | Jesus said, ‘John has seen what I came for, even when he was in his mother’s womb, as Elizabeth, the mother of John, [has said, “the child in my womb leaped for joy”],¹ which are my deeds that I will perform openly. Because of the beauty of the confession of John before people and God, (the Lord) granted him the authority to perform an everlasting life-giving baptism. Amen.’

A word regarding the descent of the Holy Spirit during baptism²

And let us offer, with the help of Our Lord, the interpretation of this (matter). 10

Our Lord Christ, the Son of God, was openly likened to human being. And his Father willed to let his word be heard to people at baptism being a witness for his Son. Therefore, the Father called loud with his voice, saying, ‘This is my Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased.’³ And the Son became a reconciler between humans and his Father.⁴ At that moment, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven upon the Son, a sign and a witness that he is indeed the Son, lest the Son of God is likened to other people. And the Holy Spirit descended with the voice of the Father until he rested on the Son. He looked like a man identifying the other with the beckoning of the hand.⁵ 20

A word regarding John’s sending two of his disciples to Jesus, saying, ‘Are you the one who is to come or are we to wait for another?’⁶

And let us offer, with the help of Our Lord, the interpretation of this (matter). 25

fol. 123v | The disciples of John had thought in their mind that John was the Christ when they saw his greatness and his wisdom, because there is

² Matt. 3:16–17.

³ Matt. 3:17.

⁴ Cf. Rom. 5:10.

⁵ The author of this commentary must be James of Serug who is quoted by Patriarch Mark as having said, ‘With this, heaven was open and the Holy Spirit came down in the likeness of a dove and rested upon him to identify (him) for the crowd. Therefore, the voice of the Father called lest the voice be mistaken and (the crowd) wonder about whom it was said. The Spirit was like the finger of the Father to show that this was the Son and the beloved one’, Murad Kamil 1942, 122.

⁶ Matt. 11:3.

እሙ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ እስመ፡ አቅደመ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ነገረ፡ በእንቲአሁ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወይቤ
 ሎሙ፡ ለጴጥሮስ፡ ወለደቂቀ፡ ዘበዴዎስ፡¹⁴ ከመ፡ ውእቱ፡ ይዓቢ፡¹⁵ እምነቢ
 ያት፡ ፡ ፡ ወበእንተዝ፡ ለአከ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ አርዳኢሁ፡ ኃበ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ከመ፡
 ያርኢዮሙ፡ ዕባዮ፡ ለክርስቶስ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወምንክራቲሁ፡¹⁶ ወስልጣኑ፡¹⁷ ወኃ
 5 ይሉ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ከመ፡ ያሉብዎሙ፡ ወያጠይቆሙ፡ በእንተ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡
 ወሶበ፡ በጽሑ፡ አርድእተ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ ኀበ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ርኢዩ፡ በኀቤሁ፡
 መንክረ፡ ፡ ፡ ወይቤሎሙ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ ለአርዳኢሁ፡ ብፁዕ፡ ዘኢሥሕተ፡
 በልቡ፡ በእንቲአሁ፡ እስመ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ አእመሮ፡ ለክርስቶስ፡ እምከርሠ፡
 እሙ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወእንተኒ፡ ለቡ፡ አመሃይምን፡ ወአአምር፡¹⁸ ወጠይቅ፡ ከመ፡
 10 አልቦ፡ ዘይዓቢዮ፡¹⁹ ለዮሐንስ፡ መጥመቅ፡²⁰ ፡ ፡ ፡ እስመ፡ እምብዝኀ፡²¹
 ጥበቡ፡ ወዕባዮ፡ ኢገብረ፡ መንክረ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወኢተአምራተ፡ ከመ፡ ካልአን፡
 ነቢያት፡ እንዘ፡ ይመንን፡ ተወድሶ፡ ዝንቱ፡ ዓለም፡ ኀላፊ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወሶበሰ፡
 ገብረ፡ ተአምረ፡ አው፡ መንክራተ፡ እመተመይጡ፡²² ኩሎሙ፡ አሕዛብ፡
 ኀቢሁ፡²³ ወእም፡ መነኑ፡ ክርስቶስሃ፡ ዘሎቱ፡ ይደሉ፡ ሰብሐት፡ ለዓለም [፡]
 15 አሜን ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡

ቃል፡ በእንተ፡ ጸመ፡ እግዚእነ፡ ወአመከሮ፡ ሰይጣን፡ በጸሙ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡

ወትርጓሜሁ፡ ለዝ፡ | ንበል፡ በረድኤተ፡ እግዚእነ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡
 እስመ፡ መክንያተ፡²⁴ ዘአወደቆ፡²⁵ ለሰይጣን፡ እምሰማይ፡ ወአውረዶ፡ እመን
 በረ፡ መላእክት፡²⁶ ፡ ፡ ፡ በእንተ፡ ዘፈጠሮ፡ እግዚእ፡ ብሔር፡ ለአቡነ፡
 20 አዳም፡ ወሚሞ፡ ዲባ፡ ኩሉ፡ ምድር፡ ወአዕባዮ፡ ወአክበሮ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወረሰዮ፡
 ነቢዮ፡ ወካህነ፡ ወንጉሠ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወበእንተዝ፡ ቀንኦ፡ ሎቱ፡ ሰይጣን፡ ወተቃ
 ወሞ፡ ወተቃረኖ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወዓዲ፡ ለደቂቁኒ፡ ከማሁ፡ ከመ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡
 ወሶበ፡ ሰምዐ፡ ቃለ፡ እግዚእ፡ ብሔር፡ አብ፡ ይጸርሕ፡ እምሰማይ፡ እንዘ፡
 ይብል፡ ዝንቱ፡ ውእቱ፡ ወልድዮ፡ ዘአፈቅር፡ ወኪያሁ፡ ሠመርኩ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡
 25 ዓጸቦ፡ ፈድፋድ፡ ለሰይጣን፡ ዝንቱ፡ ነገር፡ ወሐለዮ፡ በልቡ፡ እንዘ፡ ይብል፡
 ክርስቶስሃ፡²⁷ ሰ[ብ]እ፡ ውእቱ፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወበእንተዝ፡ ተቃወሞ፡ ሰይጣ[ን]፡
 ወአመከሮ፡ በጸም፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወዓዲ፡ ክርስቶስኒ፡ ተቃወመ፡ ለዕሌሁ፡²⁸ ፡ ፡ ፡
 እስመ፡ በእንተ፡ ሰሰዕተ[፡] መብልዕ፡ ኮነ፡ ድቀቱ፡ ለአዳም፡ ፡ ፡ ፡ ወበእን
 ተዝ፡ ፈቀደ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ያግህድ፡ ጸሙ፡ ለሰይጣን፡ ከመ፡ ንዋዮ፡ ሐቅል፡

fol. 122r

APPARATUS | 2 ¹⁴ For ዘብ? | ¹⁵ For ዮ”. 4 ¹⁶ For ወመ”. | ¹⁷ Both in this and in the following word, the expected accusative is not marked. 9 ¹⁸ For ወአእ”. 10 ¹⁹ For ዘዮ”. | ²⁰ For ”ም”. ²¹ Adjective (possibly for ብዙኀ), not genitive. 13 ²² For እም”. 14 ²³ For ”ቤ”. 18 ²⁴ Today ም”. | ²⁵ For ”ው”. 19 ²⁶ For ”ል”. 26 ²⁷ A second occurrence of the use of -ሃ ፡ for the predicate in a nominal sentence. 27 ²⁸ For ላ”.

⁷ Luke 7:28.
⁸ Unidentified, probably apocryphal. But cf. ‘And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me’, Matt. 11:6.

no one else who is likened to him in all his good deeds since he was in the belly of his mother, because Christ had foretold about him. He had said to Peter and the Sons of Zebedee that he is greater than the prophets.⁷ So, John sent his disciples to Christ to show them the greatness of Christ—his wonders, his authority, and his power—to make them understand, and to explain to them, about Christ.

When the disciples of John came to Christ, they saw wonders with him. John said to his disciples, ‘Blessed is he who did not err in his mind about him.’⁸ For John knew Christ from the belly of his mother. You, too, O believer, understand, know, and comprehend that there is no one greater than John the Baptist, because despite his much wisdom and greatness, he worked neither wonder nor miracles like other prophets, despising the praise of this ephemeral world. Had he worked a miracle or wonders, all nations would have turned to him, and would have rejected Christ, to whom praise is meet forever. Amen. 15

A word regarding the fast of Our Lord and the temptation of Satan at his fast⁹

fol. 122r And | let us offer, with the help of Our Lord, the interpretation of this (matter).

The reason that caused Satan to fall from heaven and deposed him from the throne of angels is that God created our father Adam and appointed him over the entire earth, and extolled him, honoured him, and made him prophet, priest, and king. Therefore, Satan envied him, and opposed him, and contradicted him. It happened the same with his descendants, too.¹⁰ 20 25

When (Satan) heard the Word of God, the Father, calling from heaven, saying, ‘This is my Son whom I love, with whom I am well pleased’,¹¹ the matter troubled him exceedingly. He thought in his mind, saying, ‘Christ is human.’ For this reason, Satan opposed him, and tempted him with fasting. Also, Christ, too, opposed him because greed for food was the fall of Adam. Therefore, Christ wanted to show 30

⁹ Matt. 4:2–4.

¹⁰ The homily on the Archangel Michael for the month of Tərr states Satan envied people because ‘saints will be counted in the diligence of the angels in the coming world’ (Gab-raśällāse Bərḥānu 2006/2007, 95–96, §§ 97–98: ወውሱተ ንትጋ ዚአሆሙ ይትኃለቁ ጻድቃን በዓለም ዘይመጽእ ። ወበእንተዝ ይቀንእ ሰይጣን ላዕለ ውሉደ ስብእ ወአልቦ ዘይመውኦ ዘእንበለ ዘመጠወ ነፍሶ በሃይማኖት ወበንስሐ ።).

¹¹ Matt. 3:17.

his fasting to Satan like a weapon of a warrior because Adam was defeated in Paradise by greed for food.¹² Therefore, the Son of Man defeated Satan by despising foods.

A word regarding the death of Our Lord in the open on the Cross¹³

And let us offer, with the help of Our Lord, the interpretation of this (matter).

fol. 122v Christ did not delay rising after he died, so that his resurrection may be | a raiser of the dead. If Christ had not died on the Cross, his death would have not been known to all. Therefore, Christ chose an open cross so that people may witness openly his crucifixion and his death. 10 Christ had consented his crucifixion to be on a Friday, and had willed to come down from his cross on the same night because it is the law of the Israelites that they do not bring down the crucified one on the Jewish Sabbath.¹⁴ If Our Lord Christ had been crucified after the Sabbath, he would have remained on the Cross until the next latter Sabbath.¹⁵ 15 His body would have been corrupt and would have not been buried.

Furthermore, he chose a man¹⁶ for himself who asked the ruler for the corps, and he gave (it) to him. He shrouded him in linen clothes and buried him in a new tomb wherein no one was buried. All this happened by the will of the Lord, lest the Jews find an excuse to deny 20 his resurrection. For there are in the land of the Jews tombs and caves, and when (people) go out to bury anyone who died, they find many corpses in any tomb. If Christ had been buried in a tomb in which there were their corpses, a denier of the Resurrection of Christ would have said, ‘The one who resurrected from the dead was any one.’ 25

Our Lord’s death on his cross was in the open by his will to exhibit his crucifixion to the public, so when he rose, whoever has seen (and) witnessed his crucifixion, his death, and his burial, believed his resurrection from [the dead]. |

fol. 121r

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¹² Interestingly, this point is made by Bishop Minas of Aksum in his homily on the Cross, Getatchew Haile 2018, 118.

¹³ Matt. 27:33–35.

¹⁴ Cf. *Sānbätä krəstiyān*, ‘Christian Sabbath’, i.e. Sunday.

¹⁵ Not clear; probably, ‘until next week’.

¹⁶ Joseph of Arimathea, Matt. 27:57–60.

List of References

Gäbräsellase Bərhanu 2006/2007. ድርሳነ ሚካኤል ፡ ድርሳነ ፡ ፋፋኤል ፡ መልክአ ፡ ሚካኤል ፡ መልክአ ፡ ፋፋኤል ፡ በግዕዝ ፡ በአማርኛ ። (*Dərsanä Mika’el dərsanä Rufa’el mälkä’a Mika’el mälkä’a Rufa’el, bāgə’əzənnā bā’amarəñña*, ‘Homiliary of Michael, image of Michael, homiliary of Raphael, image of Raphael, in Gə’əz and in Amharic’), ed., 2nd edn (Addis Abāba: Aksum mattämiya bet, 1999 EC = 2006/2007 CE).

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Zuurmond, R. 2001. *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The Synoptic Gospels, III: The Gospel of Matthew*, Aethiopistische Forschungen, 55 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001).

Summary

This short note presents the transcription and translation of the old fragment of a manuscript of commentary on themes from the Gospel of Matthew which was found tucked at the end of a manuscript of *Nägärä Maryam* (EMML 7229, fols 122r–123v). The fragment probably dates back to the late Aksumite to early Zagwe period and is likely to be a translation of a comment ary by an early church scholar. The *Vorlage* remains unknown.