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Article

*The Long Voyage of MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32
from Egypt to France (1344/1371–1640s)*

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The Long Voyage of MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32 from Egypt to France (1344/1371–1640s)*

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Introduction

From the thirteenth century onward, several Ethiopian monastic communities settled in the main pilgrimage centres all over the Mediterranean basin, mainly in Jerusalem, Rome, and some monasteries in Egypt.¹ Particularly between the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries, these diasporic communities functioned as a connected network in which Ethiopian pilgrims, objects, and manuscripts circulated.²

While an Ethiopian community is attested in the Holy City at least from 1237 and received donations from Early Solomonic kings such as Yagba Səyon (r.1285–1294),³ another Ethiopian community grew in importance from the second half of the fourteenth century onward: that in Däbrä Qʷəsṣqʷam,⁴ the Ethiopic name for Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ. This famous Egyptian monastery was founded not far from the city of ʿAsyūṭ in around the seventh century and was restored in the twelfth century.⁵

This article aims to reconstruct the long voyage of an Ethiopic manuscript of the Four Gospels, which belonged for a century and a half to the Ethiopian community settled in Däbrä Qʷəsṣqʷam and which is now part of the Bibliothèque nationale de France's collection: MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32 (from now on

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¹ Cerulli 1943–1947; Ambu 2022; Kelly 2024.

² Ambu and Kelly forthcoming.

³ Cerulli 1943–1947, I, 88–89; Ambu 2022, 377.

⁴ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 354; Ambu and Pilette forthcoming.

⁵ Monneret de Villard 1928, 3.

Éth. 32).⁶ This manuscript served the function of a ‘Golden Gospel’⁷ for Ethiopian pilgrims, priests, monks, and deacons who resided in this important convent in Middle Egypt. Its place of production is as unknown as the conditions of its transfer from Egypt to France.⁸ Through an analysis of the Ethiopic archival documents and notices written in its margins and blank pages,⁹ this article will trace the different steps of Éth. 32’s long voyage from Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ to Paris, from the mid-fourteenth century to the 1640s. This contribution also attempts to integrate the ongoing discussions about the provenance of Ethiopic manuscripts outside of the Horn of Africa,¹⁰ and more in general, the material circulation of objects and people among the Ethiopian monastic communities abroad in the Middle Ages.¹¹

⁶ This manuscript has received particular attention by the scholarly community since the nineteenth century. In 1823, in his catalogue of Ethiopic Biblical manuscripts, the English Orientalist Thomas Pell Platt (1798–1852) studied the contents of the Four Gospels as they were copied in Éth. 32 (at that time under the shelfmark Saint-Germain-des-Prés 18 – Séguier). See Platt 1823, 11–18. In 1841, Joseph Balthazar Silvestre, author of the *Paléographie Universelle*, used Éth. 32 for his study of the Ethiopic Palaeography. See Silvestre 1839–1841, I, 205 (with plate 15). For more details on his works and others on Éth. 32’s dating, see fn. 14–19 below. Later, in 1877, this codex was fully catalogued by Zotenberg 1877, 24–29. Enrico Cerulli (1898–1988) used it for his edition and translation of the archival documents issued by the Ethiopian community in Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ; see Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 353–432. Moreover, Salvatore Tedeschi corrected the dating proposed by Enrico Cerulli regarding one of the notices that was published in Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 413–414; see Tedeschi 1982–1983, 79–88. Its illuminations have been studied in Monneret de Villard 1939, 1–24; Leroy 1962, 176–179.

⁷ See below.

⁸ The transfers of several Ethiopic manuscripts to French collections have been studied by Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 153–188.

⁹ For archival documents in the Ethiopian culture and practice, see, for instance, Wion 2019, 559–589.

¹⁰ See *inter alia* the debate on MS Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 148, and its place of production: Marrassini 1987, 90–97, fn. 16; Bausi 2016, 116–118; Nosnitsin 2022, 44; Butts 2024; Erho 2025, 423, fn. 99.

¹¹ See the International Conference ‘Ethiopians abroad in the Middle Ages’ organised by the ERC Project HornEast in May 2023 at the École française de Rome and the Pontificio Istituto Orientale (<https://www.efrome.it/la-recherche/agenda-et-manifestations/evenement/les-ethiopiens-hors-dethiopie-au-moyen-age-nbspethiopiens-abroadnbspin-the-middle-ages>, last access 16/07/2024). For the forthcoming proceedings, see Ambu et al. forthcoming.

From Ethiopia or from Egypt? From the Thirteenth or from the Fourteenth Century?

Whether Éth. 32 was produced in Ethiopia or abroad is difficult to determine. No colophon is recorded in its pages, and no indication concerning the place or time of its copying is explicitly mentioned in its many notes. It is made of parchment that, contrary to paper, distinguishes the manuscript culture of Christian Ethiopia until the twentieth century, when paper support for manuscripts became widespread.¹² However, if paper was used for Ethiopic manuscripts produced outside Ethiopia, as scribes conformed to local practices,¹³ Ethiopic manuscripts on parchment seem to have been produced by these communities abroad as well (for instance, MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 42 or MS Città del Vaticano, BAV, Vaticano Etiopico 1).¹⁴ Therefore, physical aspects of Éth. 32 are not probative for localising its place of production.¹⁵

The dating of its copying has also been a matter of discussion: first, the author of the 4-volumes *Paléographie Universelle*, Joseph Balthazar Silvestre (1791–1869), dated Éth. 32 to the twelfth century without explanation.¹⁶ Then, the cataloguer of the ‘Fonds Éthiopien’ belonging to the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, Hermann Zotenberg (1834–1909), dated it to the thirteenth century.¹⁷ In the same framework, the Italian Orientalist Ignazio Guidi (1844–1935) thought that Éth. 32 must have been written during Yəkunno ‘Amlak’s reign (1270–1285),

¹² Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015, 155.

¹³ See Balicka-Witakowska et al. 2015, 155–156: ‘The usage of paper is limited to specific contexts, namely in manuscripts produced in Ethiopian communities abroad, especially in Egypt and Rome, or in manuscripts copied by and for European scholars especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’. See also the discovery of an ancient Ethiopic manuscript fragment, written on paper, at the Monastery of St Anthony, in Egypt: el-Antony et al. 2016, 27–51.

¹⁴ Zotenberg 1877, 41b. On the cataloguers’ opinion, MS Vaticano Etiopico 1 was produced ‘ex membranis italicis’, see Grébaut and Tisserant 1935, 10. See also Butts 2024, 69–73.

¹⁵ See also Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 174–175.

¹⁶ Silvestre 1839–1841, I, 205 (with plate 15). There is also an English version of the work: Silvestre 1849, I, available here: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015081561618&seq=1>, accessed on 4 July 2024. Moreover, Silvestre writes as follows concerning the manuscript: ‘[it] exhibits an ancient form of these characters, attributed to the twelfth century; the figure of the Evangelist added, has no other merit, than that of being an effort of Ethiopian art’ (see Silvestre 1849, I, 72). Silvestre’s *Paléographie Universelle* was also cited in Fumagalli 1893, 190, fn. 1830 and later in Zanutto 1929–1932, II, 20, fn. 10. I am very grateful to Alessandro Bausi for signalling Fumagalli’s and Zanutto’s bibliographies in a private exchange.

¹⁷ Zotenberg 1877, 29a.

because the version of the Gospels copied inside it allegedly predates that of the so-called ‘Alexandrian Vulgate’.¹⁸ However, this dating was promptly corrected by the French Ethiopianist Sylvain Grébaut (1881-1955), who suggested a fourteenth-century date based on palaeography.¹⁹ Grébaut was in his turn opposed by Carlo Conti Rossini (1872-1947), who leaned towards an earlier dating.²⁰ Finally, in recent times, the German scholar Siegbert Uhlig fixed its dating to the fourteenth century in his definitive reference work on Ethiopic palaeography.²¹ However, the debate is still quite open.²²

A Donation by King Säyfä ‘Ar‘ad (r.1344–1371) to the Church of the Apostles in Däbrä Qʷəsqʷam

Some details emerge from a long donation note recorded at the very beginning of the codex, at fol. 1r–v.²³ I hereby edit the Ethiopic document, followed by an English translation.²⁴ The text is treated as a diplomatic source, in compliance with the definition provided by the *Vocabulaire international de la diplomatique*:²⁵

¹⁸ Guidi 1888, 35. Moreover, the dating of the recension of the Gospel of Mark witnessed in Éth. 32 has been questioned by Zuurmond, who fixes its *terminus ad quem* at the thirteenth century. He also suggests that its recension has influences from both the ‘Versio Antiqua’ and the ‘Alexandrian Vulgate’; therefore, he does not imply that the manuscript was dated to or after the thirteenth century. See Zuurmond 1989, 41–43, 61–62.

¹⁹ Grébaut 1931, 9–11.

²⁰ Carlo Conti Rossini seems not to share Grébaut’s opinion on a later dating, fixing it to the thirteenth century. See Conti Rossini 1936, 489; Conti Rossini 1895, 240.

²¹ Uhlig 1988, 188.

²² I hope that this particular point will spark the attention of the scholarly community, since a new study of the palaeographical features of this manuscript is needed.

²³ This manuscript has been digitised and is available online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b85388093/f1.item.r=%C3%A9thiopien%2032>, accessed on 5 July 2024.

²⁴ It should be noted that this donation note has also been translated into Latin. This translation is recorded in the front paper pages, added to Éth. 32 (at page Ar-v) and is fully quoted by Grébaut, who said concerning the identity of its anonymous translator: ‘Je n’ai pu encore identifier ce traducteur anonyme. La graphie dénoterait le commencement du XIX^e siècle ou, au plus tôt, la fin du XVIII^e. Peut-être s’agit-il de l’orientaliste Jean-Joseph Marcel (1776-1854) qui publia à Paris en 1819 ses *Leçons de langue éthiopienne données au Collège de France*?’ (Grébaut 1931, 10–11 and fn. 1). Moreover, this document was also edited and translated in Italian by Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 404–405.

²⁵ Cárcel Ortí 1997, 21: ‘Les sources diplomatiques sont formées: d’une part, des actes écrits; de l’autre, des documents résultant des actions juridiques et des activités administratives et financières de toute personne physique ou morale; enfin des lettres expédiées *ex-officio* et dont la forme est soumise à certaines règles. Constituées essentiellement de documents d’archives, les sources diplomatiques s’opposent, d’une part, aux textes littéraires et aux sources

| [በ]አኩቴተ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈ[ስ፡ ቅ]ዱስ። [ወ]ሀብኩ፡ እነ፡ ሰይፈ፡ ዐርአ
 ድ፡ [ን]ጉሥ። ወልደ፡ አምደ፡ ጽዮን፡ ንጉሥ። [በ]ስመ፡ መንግሥትየ፡ ቈስጣንጢኖ
 [ስ]፡ ዘንተ፡ ወንጌለ፡ ቅዱስ።²⁶ ለቤተ፡ ሐዋ[ር]ያት፡ ዘደብረ፡ ቍስቋም። እንዘ፡ እስ
 [ግ]ድ፡ በብረከ፡ መንፈስ። ኅበ፡ ተኅብአ፡ ውስቴቱ፡ መላኬ፡ ሥጋ፡ ወነፍስ። ምስለ፡
 እሙ፡ ንጽሕት፡ ድንግል፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ርኩስ። እንዘ፡ አነክር፡ ስልጣኖ፡ [ዐ]መ፡ ያድኅ
 ነኒ፡²⁷ አመ፡ ያቀውም፡ ደ[ይነ]።²⁸ አመ፡ ይደለው፡²⁹ መንበር፡ ለኩነኖ። [አ]መ፡ ያለ
 ብስ፡ ፀአድዒደ፡ ለዘ፡ ተ<አ>ምኖ። [ወ]አንትሙሂ፡ ካህናት፡ ወድያቆናት። እለ፡ ት
 ሴብሐ፡ በመዝሙረ፡ ዳዊት። በዛቲ፡ መካን፡ ቅድስት። ዝክሩኒ፡ ወ[ት]ረ፡ በኩሉ፡ ጸ
 ሎት፡ ወስእለት። በጊዜ፡ ዕጣን፡ ወመሥዋዕት። ከመ፡ እ[ክ]ሀል።³⁰ አምስጦ። አመዕ
 ለተ፡ ፍዳ፡ እምኩነኒ፡ ግርምት። ወለእመበ፡ [ዘ]ሄዶ፡ ወዘተግገሎ፡ ለዝንቱ፡ ወን[ጌ]
 ል። ይኩን፡ ቅዱመ፡ ወርጉመ፡ | [በ]ቅድመ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስበዝ፡
 ዓለም፡ ወበዓለም፡ ዘ[ይ]መጽእ፡ ለዓለመ፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን፡ ወአሜን።

fol. 1r

fol. 1v

<Invocation> [fol. 1r] By the prayer of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

<Intitulation> I, Säyfa 'Ar'ad, the king, son of 'Amdä Şəyon, the king, by my name of reign Q^wästantinos,

<Dispositio> I gave this book of the Holy Gospel

<Inscriptio> to the church (lit. house) of the Apostles of Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam,

<Narratio> as I prostrate myself kneeling in spirit, [to] where is hidden the Master of the flesh and the soul, with His pure mother, the Immaculate Virgin, while marvelling at His power, when He will save me, when He will carry out the judgement, when the throne is ready for the verdict, when He will clothe in white the one who has fa[i]th.

historiographiques, de l'autre, aux documents non écrits (sources iconographiques, documents archéologiques et objets matériels)'. I have used the criteria of diplomatic, as established by Cárcel Ortí 1997 (see also the online version: <https://www.cei.lmu.de/VID/>, last access: 05/07/2024) and by the École des Chartes (http://theleme.enc.sorbonne.fr/cours/diplomatique#index_7, accessed on 5 July 2024). The importance of Diplomatic for Ethiopian and Eritrean studies has particularly been explored by Anaïs Wion; see Wion 2006, 14–25.

²⁶ Here it should be the accusative form ቅዱስ.

²⁷ Cerulli incorrectly reads ያድኅነኒ.

²⁸ Cerulli has ደይን, but the last letter is entirely missing. I reconstruct as accusative to fit the syntax.

²⁹ Cerulli incorrectly reads ያደለው.

³⁰ Cerulli reads አባሀል 'io sia chiamato', but the second letter is in a lacuna. The reading አ[ክ]ሀል is equally possible and makes much better sense in context.

<Demande de prière or Gebetspassus> You too, priests and deacons who magnify [Him] with Psalms of David in this holy place, remember me perpetually in all prayers and petitions, at the time of incense and sacrifice, so that I may escape on the day of judgement from the terrifying power.

<Sanctio> If anyone steals or violently seizes this Gospel, let him be excluded and cursed [fol. 1v] before the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in this world and in the world to come,

<Apprecatio> forever and ever, amen and amen!

In the *Intitulatio*,³¹ this donation note reveals the identity of its author, who was none other than *Aṣe Säyfä 'Ar'ad* (r.1344–1371). More probably the king had it written by his own chancery, but it confirms his role as donor of the codex. In this sense, Sylvain Grébaut's hypothesis is not convincing.³² On the basis of this donation note, the French Orientalist suspected that a scribe from the royal chancery must have copied the whole Four Gospels in Éth. 32. However, the two activities can be, of course, separated. The king could have just sent the manuscript without financing its production or copy, especially as nothing is said about him being the sponsor in the donation note itself, which is quite peculiar. In fact, in the *Dispositio*,³³ it is made clear that the object of the legal document is the simple donation of the Four Gospels, Éth. 32. Therefore, this manuscript functions at the same time as a physical gift and a physical support for the written document of the

³¹ This is the part of the legal document specifying the name of the author and his titles. In Latin documents, it can start with the pronouns *ego*, *nos*. A parallel with አኅ (*anā*, 'I'), used by King Säyfä 'Ar'ad is quite compelling. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 54, fn. 187.

³² Grébaut 1931, 11: 'Faut-il croire avec Zotenberg et M. Conti Rossini que Sayfa-'Ar'ad ait fait don d'un Évangélaire ancien qui aurait été sa propriété ? Je ne le pense pas. Il est plus vraisemblable d'admettre que le roi, selon l'usage en honneur en Éthiopie, ait fait calligraphier par l'un de ses scribes l'évangélaire qu'il destinait à un couvent aussi célèbre que celui de Dabra-Quesquâm. Comme Sayfa-'Ar'ad a régné de 1344 à 1371, il devient alors impossible de faire remonter le manuscrit au XIII^e siècle. Et, d'autre part, comme l'examen paléographique a démontré la même impossibilité, il faut rajeunir le ms. et le situer dans la seconde moitié du XIV^e siècle'.

³³ This is the heart of the act. It reveals and explains the decision, the legal action of the document. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 57, fn. 198.

donation.³⁴ The *Inscriptio* (also called the *address*)³⁵ indicates, in this particular case, not an individual beneficiary, but an ecclesiastical institution to whom the Four Gospels manuscript was bequeathed by Säyfä 'Ar'ad: the church of the Apostles, located in Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam. The *Sanctio*³⁶ confirms the legal value of the transfer from the king to Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam, as it condemns whoever steals or seizes the manuscript, that was from then on a perpetual possession of the Church of the Apostles.

We can be certain that the Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam in this text corresponds to the Egyptian monastery of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ and not the one in Ethiopia, since the latter was founded by *Ītege* Məntəwwab (r.1730–1769) only in the 1730s or 1740s.³⁷ The name of the church of the Apostles is thereafter repeated several times in the numerous archivist documents that are recorded, until the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the other pages of Éth. 32.³⁸ These documents confirm that it was the place where Ethiopians lived as a diasporic community, in contact with Copts.³⁹

What should be noted in Säyfä 'Ar'ad's donation is that it is not specifically addressed to an Ethiopian community but, more generically, to a church. Only later, in the *Demande de prière* or *Gebetsspassus*,⁴⁰ the king addressed himself to the clergy of the site, though without specifying whether or not they were Ethi-

³⁴ A parallel can be made with Zär'a Ya'qob's (r.1434-1468) famous 'letter' written in the first pages of MS BAV Borgiano Etiopico 2, fols. 3r–4v. This codex witnesses the revised version of the *Senodos*, which the king sent to the Ethiopian community of Jerusalem in 1442. In his letter preceding the *Senodos*, the king also highlights that he made donations to an Ethiopian community abroad, including many units of gold and the book itself. See Grébaut and Tisserand, 1935, 779–781; Tekle-Tsadik Mekouria 1964, 43–52. In my dissertation, I called it 'une lettre royale "glissée" dans le *Senodos*' (Ambu 2022, 385–388).

³⁵ It is the part of the diplomatic document that indicates the name, titles, and qualities of the individual (or group) to whom the legal act is addressed, whether they are the beneficiaries or the executors. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 55, fn. 192.

³⁶ It is a clause intended to ensure the fulfilment of the act by providing for temporal sanctions against those who do not perform it or who prevent its fulfilment, and by threatening them with spiritual punishments. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 63, fn. 237.

³⁷ See Villa 2021, 90.

³⁸ See below.

³⁹ Ambu and Pilette forthcoming.

⁴⁰ This is a clause whereby, in return for a favour granted to an ecclesiastical establishment, its members are asked to pray for the person concerned. It may be accompanied by a particular perpetual foundation or by a request for the celebration of an obituary or other commemorative ceremony. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 59, fn. 212.

opians. This aspect of the document is quite curious and raises questions. Säyfa 'Ar'ad's donation is the oldest attestation of connections between Christian Ethiopia and Dayr al-Muḥarraq, whose *terminus ad quem* is undeniably 1371, that is, the end of Säyfa 'Ar'ad's reign. Since this monastery was located on the fluvial route of pilgrimage in Middle Egypt,⁴¹ Ethiopian pilgrims probably sojourned in Dayr al-Muḥarraq before the establishment of a permanent community. However, could the donation of this Four Gospels manuscript by the king not be the first sign of this? By offering a Four Gospels, necessary for the Ethiopian liturgy, was Säyfa 'Ar'ad offering a gift to a newly established Ethiopian community? Or perhaps was he even establishing a new one himself? That would explain the tone of the *Narratio*,⁴² in which the king made clear that the offering of the manuscript was for his own salvation during the Last Judgement. More than one century later, an echo of the importance of this site for Ethiopian kings is to be found in an Arabic letter, written in 1507 by Patriarch John XIII (1484–1524). As the head of both the Coptic and the Ethiopic Churches, John XIII sent it to Aṣe Na'od (r. 1494–1508) as a reminder of his personal obligations toward the Ethiopian churches of Jerusalem and Dayr al-Muḥarraq, which needed to be restored.⁴³ This suggests that Ethiopian kings were responsible for the well-being of these two communities abroad, both in spiritual and financial ways.

A 'Golden Gospel' for the Ethiopian Community of Dayr al-Muḥarraq in Middle Egypt (1388–1507/1508)

The Ethiopian community of Dayr al-Muḥarraq is attested in several manuscripts, including Éth. 32 as well as MSS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 35, Éthiopien 42, Éthiopien 52, and MS Città del Vaticano, Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. et. 66.⁴⁴ Through the archival documents inserted in their pages, it is possible to trace its activity from the mid-fourteenth century to 1578.⁴⁵ However, this community did not disappear, and some Ethiopian monks were still living in Dayr al-Muḥarraq in the twentieth century.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Monneret de Villard 1928, 3.

⁴² It is the part of the text explaining the circumstances in which the act was ordered, the reasons for it, and any background to the case. See Cárcel Ortí 1997, 57, fn. 197.

⁴³ It was dated by Fiacadori to 1497 (Fiacadori 2004, 683–684). It has been redated and fully published in Bechry forthcoming.

⁴⁴ Zotenberg 1877, 24–29, 32–36, 39–41, 53–59; Grébaut and Tisserand 1935, 245–247.

⁴⁵ As the previously discussed MS Éth. 32, fol. 1r–v is the oldest attestation of this community. The more recent and dated Ethiopic document is inserted in MS Éth. 35, fol. 199r, dating to 1578.

⁴⁶ Meinardus 1965, 28–29; Ambu 2024, 14–15, fn. 334–335.

Among the five manuscripts mentioned above, Éth. 32 contains most of the archival documents issued by Ethiopians in Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ (c.18 documents) spanning from 1388 to 1507/1508.⁴⁷ Some of them make references to the place in where they were written: Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam or, more precisely, in the church of the Apostles. Most of the time, these documents are written under the form of assembly deliberations, in which Ethiopian priests, deacons, and monks made decisions for the sake of the community. Éth. 32 has in this sense a double purpose: it served as a Four Gospels manuscript for the services and masses, and it was used as an archival register by the community. In fact, Säyḡä 'Ar'ad provided the Ethiopian community with a 'Golden Gospel'. This appellation can be attributed, as Ethiopist Alessandro Bausi explains, 'both to gospels considered to be of high quality and to those in which feudal concessions are recorded in the folios'.⁴⁸ These documents are not, *stricto sensu*, feudal concessions or land charters, but they are devoted to the proper administration of the community of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ, which is why Éth. 32 can be considered as such.⁴⁹

The nature of assembly deliberations changes from one archival document to another. They are an important source to understand the daily life and organisation of Ethiopians in Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ.⁵⁰ The list below summarizes, in a non-exhaustive way, the variety of their archival practices. I have selected only the dated documents, which suffice to illustrate the various legal, normative, and administrative matters with which Ethiopians had to deal from 1388 and 1507/1508.

- fol. 207va–b: Ethiopic-Arabic certificate of sale signed by both the Coptic and the Ethiopian abbots of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ: a cell of the church is sold to a lay family (1388).⁵¹

⁴⁷ Éth. 32, fols. 205vb–206ra. This new dating was proposed in Tedeschi 1982–1983, 83. Cerulli remarked that its chronology is problematic and converts the year of Grace 84 to 1424 CE. Cf. Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 404, doc. 41, fn. 1.

⁴⁸ Bausi 1997, 14, fn. 2.

⁴⁹ Ambu 2022, 378–379.

⁵⁰ On 8 June 2024, I presented my preliminary study on the daily life of the Ethiopian monastic community of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ (fourteenth to fifteenth century) in the framework of the International Conference 'Connected Revivals? Transregional Perspectives on the Syriac, Copto-Arabic and Armenian Cultural Renaissances (Eleventh-Fourteenth Centuries)', organised by the ERC Project RevIdem at the Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften in Vienna. See <https://www.oew.ac.at/imafo/veranstaltungen/detail/connected-revivals-transregional-perspectives-on-the-syriac-copto-arabic-and-armenian-cultural-renaissances>. This study will be published in the proceedings of the conference.

⁵¹ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 411–412, doc. 40. This legal document has been reevaluated and published in Ambu and Pilette forthcoming.

- fol. 206va–b: rules of the community: penances on insults and physical alterations (1388?).⁵²
- fol. 206ra–b: rules of the community: on garments and food, and new penances (1398).⁵³
- fol. 1v: an assembly is gathered by abbot Mäqarəs (1417).⁵⁴
- fol. 11va–b: donation of a cow for the commemoration of the Four Animals (1434–1452).⁵⁵
- fol. 205vb–206ra: an assembly deliberation on the prohibition of letting the manuscript out of the church (1507/1508).⁵⁶

This brief overview of dated legal documents issued by Ethiopians in Middle Egypt shows that clerics gathered in assemblies in which they made decisions concerning the rules and norms of their community, the management of donations and objects, and the administration of affairs with the outside world, until at least 1507/1508.

The varied and fragmented documentation found in Éth. 32 abruptly ceases to refer to Däbrä Q^wəsq^wam and the Church of the Apostles. Instead, a new name appears, that of 'Abu Mina.

From Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā in Cairo in the 1520s

Two dated documents in Éth. 32 seem to refer to a new site in which Ethiopians dwelled in the early-sixteenth century:

- fol. 162va–b: misread by Cerulli, who identified two separated documents,⁵⁷ this poorly legible document indicates that Mäkfälət Maryam, Bäk^wərä Giyorgis, and Täsfa Hawarya were sent to 'Abominā. The document dates to 172 year of Grace (= 1519/1520 CE).
- fol. 104v: this second and short document, dating from two years after the previous one (174 Year of Grace = 1522 CE), states that pilgrims who died in 'Abu Mina shall leave their gold to the monastery.⁵⁸

⁵² Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 385–386, doc. 6.

⁵³ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 384–385, doc. 5.

⁵⁴ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 404, doc. 30.

⁵⁵ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 402–403, doc. 29.

⁵⁶ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 413–414, doc. 41. Cf. Tedeschi 1982–1983, 83.

⁵⁷ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 399–400, doc. 22 and 24. For more information on the Ethiopian community in Cairo, see Ambu forthcoming; Ambu and Kelly forthcoming.

⁵⁸ See Ambu forthcoming; Ambu and Kelly forthcoming.

These archival documents, issued by the assembly of Ethiopian monks, refer to the affairs of another community, in 'Abu Mina, which is recorded in other documents that Cerulli published, but that he failed to locate.⁵⁹ For instance, MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 80 is sent from the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem to that of 'Abu Mina,⁶⁰ and at fol. 88v there is a record of an inventory of objects belonging to *Minas* from the 69th year of grace (1516/1517), which predates the presence of an Ethiopian community there. Moreover, MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 46, fol. 119ra–120vb is the most compelling document on this monastery: it is clarified there that, in 172th year of Grace (= 1519/1520), the aforementioned Mäkfälət Maryam, Bäk^wərə Giyorgis, and Täsfa Hawarya were sent to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā to build a new church for Ethiopian pilgrims.⁶¹ It repeats and expands what is said in the document in Éth. 32, fol. 162va–b, confirming the existence of a new community.

Where then is 'Abū Mīnā located?⁶² Other documents inserted in other manuscripts attest an Ethiopian community in 'Abū Mīnā until 1521/22,⁶³ and suggest that it was located in Cairo. In fact, the most important monastery carrying this name by the beginning of the sixteenth century was the famous Dayr 'Abū Mīnā in the district of Fum al-Khalīg in Cairo.⁶⁴

Two recently discovered documents also prove that the site, mentioned in the Ethiopic selected documents above, corresponds to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā. As recorded in a note, MS Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, BFBS 177, fol. 163r was brought to Cairo, in front of all the pilgrims gathered in the church of Ḥārat Zuwayla and by the time of the administrator (*qayəm*) of the Ethiopian community in Ḥārat Zuwayla, Täklä Haymanot, and Yəšəhaq, *qayəm* in 'Abū Mīnā.⁶⁵ Ḥārat Zuwayla is the district where the church of George, belonging to another Ethiopian community in Cairo, was located.⁶⁶ One more document, in MS Cambridge,

⁵⁹ Cerulli located it at a church of St Menas in Cairo, but in another monastery, that of St Georges in Ḥārat Zuwayla, and another monastery of St Mena in the desert of Sketis, between Cairo and Alexandria. See Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 354. The correct location is established in Ambu forthcoming. See also Meinardus 1965, 27.

⁶⁰ Ambu forthcoming.

⁶¹ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 409–411.

⁶² See also Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 354. On Cerulli's attempts to locate Dayr 'Abū Mīnā see fn. 59 above.

⁶³ Ambu forthcoming.

⁶⁴ El Gendi 2017, 24–25.

⁶⁵ Karlsson et al. 2023, 176.

⁶⁶ Ambu forthcoming.

Cambridge University Library, BFBS 171, fol. 13vb, concerns the construction and consecration of a church in 'Abū Mīnā, once again located in Cairo.⁶⁷

What does this mean for Éth. 32? Were Ethiopian pilgrims recording assembly deliberations that occurred in Cairo once they came back to Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ, to which Éth. 32 belonged? Or was the manuscript itself transferred from Middle Egypt to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā in Cairo? The second hypothesis is the most likely, since Éth. 32, as well as MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 46, which originally belonged to Ethiopians living in the Church of Elijah in Wādī al-Naṭrūn,⁶⁸ was probably moved to Cairo between 1507/1508 and 1520. As for the latter manuscript, the Church of Elijah presumably disappeared between 1427 and 1442, as recorded by the historian al-Maqrīzī (1364–1442),⁶⁹ and so perhaps this manuscript was transferred to Cairo as soon as an Ethiopian community settled in Dayr 'Abū Mīnā. As for Éth. 32, the Ethiopian community of Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ still dwelled in the site after the 1520s, but the manuscript was certainly transferred to Cairo at least by 1519/1520, when the document on fol. 162va–b was written, maybe to be used by a new and flourishing Ethiopian community as its own Four Gospels.

One more hint on its transfer to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā is provided by a short note in Armenian, written on the upper margin of Éth. 32, fol. 8r: Ժ[րիստոս]ս որդիս աստուծոյ (*sic*) 'Christ, son of God'.⁷⁰ Even if the content of this short Armenian note might be of mild interest,⁷¹ its presence in Éth. 32 further connects this manuscript to Dayr 'Abū Mīnā, given that, since the fourteenth century, this Cairene monastery hosted two important foreign communities: Syriac and Armenian.⁷²

⁶⁷ Karlsson et al. 2023, 176. The document is dated by the cataloguers to 1570/1571 (147 year of Grace). However, I wonder if it should not be dated to 1494/1495 (if we subtract the additional 76 years that have been added to the conversion of the cyclical calendar of Grace). See also Ambu and Kelly forthcoming.

⁶⁸ Cerulli 1943–1947, II, 354.

⁶⁹ Evelyn-White 1926–1933, II, 405–406: 'The Monastery of John Kama is near that of Elias. This latter belonged to the Abyssinians. But the woodwork of these two buildings having been eaten by the worms (white ants), they both collapsed, and now show nothing but ruins. The Abyssinians withdrew to the Monastery of the Virgin, our Lady of John the Little, which is a fine monastery situated near the Convent of Saint John the Little'. See also Ambu 2022, 365.

⁷⁰ I would like to express my profound gratitude to Jesse Siragan Arlen (UCLA) for deciphering the Armenian note for me. He points out further that the spelling աստուծոյ reflects the pronunciation at the time of the writing.

⁷¹ A parallel can be made with traces of Syriac in Ethiopic manuscripts, as studied, *inter alia*, by Butts 2024.

⁷² Al-Maqrīzī 2003, 1063; Drīdi 2015, 233; Croq 2021, 235–256.

After Éth. 32 entered this monastery, an Armenian monk must have had access to it—was it kept in a common library? —when he decided to simply write, above the illuminated scene of the *Women at the Sepulchre*,⁷³ ‘Christ, son of God’ in his own language.

From Cairo to France in the 1640s

The presence of Éth. 32 at Dayr ‘Abū Mīnā after the 1520s can be corroborated by yet another hint. At some point this codex left Egypt and arrived in Marseille, then further on to Paris to be integrated into the important manuscript collection acquired by the French Chancellor Pierre Séguier (1588–1672). Séguier was interested in acquiring Ethiopic manuscripts for his own collection and, through Monsieur de Champigny, administrator of the city of Marseille,⁷⁴ he was in contact with two merchants, the Magy brothers, whose company was based in both Marseille and Cairo. Between 1645 and 1648, Jean Magy succeeded where many other Europeans failed: ‘Jean Magy seemed to have found a better way to convince them [the Coptic monasteries’ authorities] because a few major manuscripts left the Ethiopian churches of Cairo and other Ethiopian monasteries in Egypt and entered the collection of Séguier’.⁷⁵ The whole of Séguier’s Ethiopic manuscript collection might have been acquired by Magy.⁷⁶

It seems more probable that, instead of going to remote monasteries in Middle Egypt, Jean Magy acquired Ethiopic manuscripts directly in Cairo, where they were centralised at some point in the sixteenth century.⁷⁷ And where else than in Dayr ‘Abū Mīnā, where a new Ethiopian community had at its disposal some manuscripts that it received, in the 1520s, from the other Ethiopian communities in Jerusalem and Egypt?

Finally, the movement of Éth. 32 does not end with its acquisition by Séguier. Rather, his grandson Henri-Charles du Cambout Duc de Coislin, bishop of Metz (1665–1732), inherited his collection and, at his death in 1732, bequeathed it to

⁷³ Monneret de Villard 1939, 5.

⁷⁴ Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 165. It should also be noted that Dorothea Reule and Nafisa Valieva presented their preliminary study on Ethiopic manuscripts’ movements from Egypt to European Libraries during the II^e Colloque sur les études éthiopiennes at the Société d’archéologie copte in Cairo on 27 February 2024. This study, that will be published in the proceedings of the conference, is titled: ‘The Egyptian Provenance of Ethiopic manuscripts in European collections’. See <https://sacopte.org/the-second-international-colloquium-on-ethiopian-studies/>, accessed on 10 July 2024.

⁷⁵ Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 173.

⁷⁶ Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 173.

⁷⁷ An investigation should be conducted on other Ethiopic manuscripts from Egypt. They might have at some point pass through Dayr ‘Abū Mīnā before coming to Europe.

the Abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés,⁷⁸ as confirmed by a strip that was added to fol. 1r by the Maurist brothers,⁷⁹ with the shelfmark Saint-Germain 18 – Séguier. After the French Revolution, in 1795, Éth. 32 left Saint-Germain-des-Prés and was integrated, under the shelfmark MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 22, in the National Library,⁸⁰ where, in 1877, it was catalogued by Hermann Zotenberg as MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32.

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⁷⁸ Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 165.

⁷⁹ See Bosc-Tiessé 2022, 165. The content of the strip is: 'Ex Bibliotheca MSS. COISLINIANA, olim SEGUERIANA, quam Illust. HENRICUS DU CAMBOUT, Dux DE COISLIN, Par Franciæ, Episcopus Metensis, &c. Monasterio S. Germani à Pratis legavit. An. M. DCC. XXXII'.

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Summary

The study of archival documents inserted in the pages and margins of MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32 uncovers the long voyage of this codex from Egypt to France. It is unclear if it was produced in the thirteenth or in the fourteenth century, in Egypt or in Ethiopia, but it was certainly donated by king Säyfa 'Ar'ad (r.1344–1371) to the new Ethiopian community established in a monastery in Middle Egypt, Dayr al-Muḥarraḡ. From 1388 to 1507/1508, this manuscript

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was used to store its legal and administrative documents. In the 1520s, MS Paris, BnF, Éthiopien 32 was transferred to the Cairene monastery of Dayr 'Abū Mīnā, where a new Ethiopian church was built next to the Syriac and Armenian communities. In the 1640s, French merchant Jean Magy acquired this manuscript in Cairo, perhaps in Dayr 'Abū Mīnā itself, on the account of chancellor Pierre Séguier (1588–1672). It is now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.