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Article

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## The Antiquities of Däbrä Zäyt Qəddəst Maryam (East Təgray, Ethiopia)\*

DENIS NOSNITSIN, Universität Hamburg

The old historical route linking the area of °Addigrat with that of the famous monastery of Däbrä Dammo is one of the most interesting and historically important corners of East Təgray. However, it has remained mostly outside the attention of travellers and scholars, who passed mostly along the route Sän°afe–°Addigrat, or paid attention to the historically prominent town of °Addigrat and the famous monastery of Däbrä Dammo, without attending much to the region in between. The cultural and historical geography of the area remained poorly studied also after the modern road to Bəzät (Däbrä Dammo) was built.<sup>1</sup> The team of the Ethio-SPARE project systematically investigated the area, and visited two sites, °Addäqäharsi Pəraqliṭos and Däbrä Zäyt Qəddəst Maryam.<sup>2</sup> In particular the latter site, previously unknown to scholarship, proved to be of special interest and yielded valuable material.

To reach the site of Däbrä Zäyt Qəddəst Maryam, one drives some 20 minutes on the road to Bəzät.<sup>3</sup> The main church of the site is partly visible from the road (fig. 1). At some point, one must stop driving and continue on foot on a difficult path to Däbrä Zäyt, descending into the deep gorge, crossing the dry riverbed and then climbing up. The picturesque site is situated on several terraces below the cliff. The more recent part of the site comprises a few storehouses, a massive recent rectangular church, a sacristy (°əqa bet), and a bell tower. A path leads down to the gate house (fig. 1, on the right).<sup>4</sup> The part of the site with recent structures is in principle accessible to everyone. Separated by a wall with a door is another part of the church compound, invisible from the outside and hidden by the overhang-

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<sup>1</sup> A side road to the left, ca. 8 km from °Addigrat on the main road to Zäla °Ambäsa.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 2, 3 in the Ethio-SPARE field mission report: <http://www1.uni-hamburg.de/ethiostudies/ETHIOSPARE/missions.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Today this area is included in *ṭabiya* Kəsad Ma°täb, *wäräda* Gulo Mäḳäda.

<sup>4</sup> Outside the gate, a few more community structures are built under the rock.



Fig. 1: Däbrä Zäyt, general view

ing cliff and the bushes. The local people say that this part of the site once hosted a monastic community; it is considered sacred, and one can enter it only after leaving one's shoes outside. Here, a few older structures are located one after another on a narrow strip of ground along the cliff. The terrace becomes a narrow path which leads to a small cave with a spring of holy water.<sup>5</sup> A small protective barrier is built on the left side of the terrace; behind the barrier, an abyss opens.

### Churches within the Site

The large rectangular church visible from the road was constructed in the late 1980s. Local tradition recounts that, before the spread of Christianity, the site was an "Old Testament synagogue" (*yä-<sup>3</sup>Orit mak<sup>w</sup>arab*), and a church was established here in the time of the half-legendary King Bazem.<sup>6</sup> The only historical source mentioning Däbrä Zäyt appears to be an *additio* in the "Golden Gospel" of Däbrä Libanos of Ham.<sup>7</sup>

During the investigation of the site it turned out that, beside the recently built main church, there is another, older one standing in the part of the

<sup>5</sup> However, it was dry at the time of the visit.

<sup>6</sup> Cp. HAHN 2003: 511a.

<sup>7</sup> This is a land grant donated by Ya<sup>a</sup>bikä <sup>3</sup>ägzi<sup>3</sup>, mentioning a certain Täsfa Şəyon, *aqabe sä<sup>a</sup>t* of Däbrä Zäyt (CONTI ROSSINI 1901: 26, no. 17; with a date corresponding to 1319 A.D.). The places referred to in the document are located in the same area as Däbrä Zäyt (Däbrä Ma<sup>o</sup>šo [see NOSNITSIN 2011], Daməmo [Däbrä Dammo?]; and Zäreda, which has not yet been identified).

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compound located behind the wall, not commonly accessible. According to the local people, the church is some 400 years old. It is certainly the most remarkable architectural feature of the site. An assessment of its age still remains to be done by specialists, but the traditional date does not seem unreasonable. Indeed it appears to be a church predating the Gondärine period, and it seems to have escaped any major rebuilding or renovation. It is a small basilica-like structure (ca. 8 x 4 x 2.5 m) with one nave and two rows of four timber columns inside, and a narthex. The narthex can be entered through the double doorway (fig. 2). Made of solid woodwork, the ceiling is supported by two wooden piers. There are murals on the northern (fig. 3) and eastern walls, partly white-washed over but partly still visible. One cannot overlook a striking similarity between these murals and those of



Fig. 2: Däbrä Zäyt, old church narthex entrance



Fig. 3: Däbrä Zäyt, murals



Fig. 4: Däbrä Zäyt, nave, sanctuary screened



Fig. 5: Däbrä Zäyt, southern wall (the old *mānbärä tabot* is in the centre)



Fig. 6: Däbrä Zäyt, general view from the east

another church of the area, Ara<sup>o</sup>ro Täklä Haymanot; probably, the murals were executed by the same painter.<sup>8</sup> A doorway in the western wall leads into the nave. The eastern part of the church cannot be entered because it is used as a sanctuary and the *tabot* is kept there.<sup>9</sup> However, one can see that the “throne” of the *tabot* (*mānbärä tabot*) is situated in a (square?) apse, formed by a stonework barrier and a rough arch above (fig. 4). The sanctuary is screened by a curtain. The church is built directly against the rock, which thus substitutes for the southern wall (fig. 5). The roof of the church is flat, with a small dome over the sanctuary indicating the presence of a cupola inside. In addition to the main entrance, there is a small door and a window in the northern wall of the narthex, a window in the northern wall of the nave, and a door and a window in the eastern wall of the church building (fig. 6).

### The Inscription

Behind the old church, stairs cut in the rock lead upwards, to a small elevated piece of ground. On the left, a small house stands, described by the priests as the former *‘əqa bet* of the old church. The surface of the rock at the bottom of the stairs is covered with crudely done and weathered graffiti-like designs; among those still

<sup>8</sup> See LEPAGE – MERCIER 2005: 206–07. In the Däbrä Zäyt murals, note the depiction of Gäbrä Mānfäs Qəddus to the right of the Virgin and the Angels.

<sup>9</sup> The liturgy is still regularly celebrated in the church.



Fig. 7: Däbrä Zäyt, inscription

visible, crosses and vocalized Ethiopic letters can be distinguished (fig. 7). On the left side of the surface, above a row of eight crude and weathered crosses, two larger letters (each ca. 23 cm high) can be read as ዝዩ “here”. The signs (?) which follow are too weathered to be identified. Below, under the string of crosses, the letters (each ca. 7–9 cm high) form an inscription in Gəʿəz: ጸልዩ ለዕሴ | ኣነ | ምክርም, meaning: “Pray for (me); I (am) Məḥrom”(?). Possibly the two inscriptions can be read together: “Here, pray for (me); I (am) Məḥrom”.<sup>10</sup> A string of (five?) crude and weathered crosses is also visi-

<sup>10</sup>The verb *šälläyā* requires an indirect object which is governed by the preposition *bäʾ-antä* or *läʿlä/laʿlä* with a pronominal suffix (cp. DILLMANN 1865: 1263; I thank Alessandro Bausi for useful suggestions concerning the reading and translating of the inscription). *Läʿle* is the archaic isolated form of the preposition attested both in epigraphic documents and in old manuscripts. The suffix of the 1<sup>st</sup> pers. sing., where called for by the context, is usually indicated. Perhaps in the case of the Däbrä Zäyt inscription the suffix was not expressed explicitly (the form would be *läʿläyā/läʿleyä*) or simply contracted to *läʿle*(?). Otherwise, if we consider *läʿle* an isolated form with adverbial meaning (better conveyed by *mälʿaltä*, however) the translation of the inscription could be: “(Here) above, pray. I (am) Məḥrom.”

The name Məḥrom is somewhat difficult to explain. There seems to be no known substantive *məḥr* in Gəʿəz; however, the word could also be a verbal form (perfect), *məḥrā* (existing alongside with *məḥarä*; cp. DILLMANN 1865: 157; 1907: 87), with the 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. masc. plur. suffix. The form *-om* instead of *-omu* could be explained by the influence of the spoken language (cp. *-om* suffix in Təgräñña; cp. also Təgräñña personal names such as ʾAsgäddom, ʾAsmärom etc.) or by inconsistent vocalization. Finally, the inscription might indeed have originally read *məḥromu*, but the stroke of the *u*-vowel is no longer clearly visible (weathered or damaged).

ble below the inscription.<sup>11</sup> The crudeness of the crosses,<sup>12</sup> as well as the full vocalization of the Ethiopic letters, indicate that the inscription should probably be attributed to the (early) medieval period.

### The Gospel manuscripts

It seems overwhelmingly likely that some old manuscripts of the collection have perished in the course of time. Though in very poor shape, some others have survived; it seems that the manuscript collection of the church was extended in the 16<sup>th</sup> century<sup>13</sup> and again perhaps in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>11</sup> A few more inscriptions have been found in Gulo Mākāda. A short, unvocalized inscription with content similar to that of Dābrā Zāyt, also accompanied by crude crosses, was recorded by the Deutsche Aksum Expedition at the foot of Dābrā Dammo: s. *DAE* I, 61, no. 33 [B] (BERNAND – DREWES – SCHNEIDER 1991, no. 233; the size of the letters is not known; the location of the inscription on the rock was not recorded exactly, and I was unable to find it during my visit in November 2011). Another short inscription was reported by C. Conti Rossini from the site of Dāhane (BERNAND – DREWES – SCHNEIDER 1991, no. 22; cp. ANFRAY 1973: 22, map “Plan du site de Etch-Marè, dans l’Agame”).

<sup>12</sup> Three types of crosses are visible on the rock surface. In the upper row, two crosses on the left and one on the right are crudely incised in the rock surface (cp. the inscription of Dābrā Dammo); they may represent technological stages leading to the cross of finer design seen in the middle, above the word *ʾanä*. Similar crosses, though of superior quality, are found elsewhere in the region (usually in a burial context, sometimes accompanied by monograms): e.g., at ʾĒč Märä/ʾĒč Maʾre (LECLANT – MIQUEL 1959: 108); two similar crosses were seen by the author on the walls of the shaft of a tomb at the church of Bet Marya near ʾAddigrat in December 2011; a stone plaque with a finely cut cross and monograms was also seen by the author near the church of Foqāda Maryam, Gulo Mākāda (May 2010; it is similar to the cross plaque of Dābrā Libanos of Ham, BAUSI – LUSINI 1992: 29, table 6, fig. 11). The third one, a kind of geometric design composed of incised lines, appears under the word *ʾanä*.

<sup>13</sup> At least four manuscripts of the collection can plausibly be dated to the 16<sup>th</sup> century: a manuscript containing the *Gädlä ḥawaryat* (a collection of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles); a manuscript with part of the *Haymanotä ʾabäw* (‘Faith of the Fathers’, a theological treatise) and a 95-story collection of the Miracles of Mary (*Täʾamrä Maryam*); a manuscript containing the Ritual of Baptism [*Mäṣḥafä krəstanna*], a portion of the Book of Spiritual Medicine [*Mäṣḥafä fäws mänfäsawi*] etc.); and a “leporello” manuscript of fine quality, with miniatures depicting scenes from the lives of the Holy Family and the saints on one side of the parchment, and a text narrating a single miracle of St. Mary on the other side. The presence of such a substantial number of 16<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts is not accidental, and may hint at a generous donation made by a wealthy person. (As to the precious wooden tryptich, also preserved in the collection of Dābrā Zāyt, an art historian should judge if it can be assigned to the same period.) Indeed we know that King Ləbnä Dəngəl (r. 1508–1540) was active precisely in this area during the last years of his reign.

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Fig. 8: Däbrä Zäyt, Gospel book, fols. 3v–4r

An important and interesting part of the church library is represented by its Gospel books. One of them is a recent manuscript dating to the late 19<sup>th</sup>/first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> As such the manuscript is of less interest, but it evidently replaced another, much older (pre-16<sup>th</sup> century) Gospel book (fig. 08). This older manuscript is in poor condition: its binding is destroyed, many leaves are in disorder and some are lost. There are no marginal notes<sup>15</sup> or other indications of the age of the manuscript; the shape of the *ductus*, however, is suggestive of the 15<sup>th</sup> century or perhaps even earlier. The last folio of the Gospel of Mark and the next (originally blank) folio host a guest text, which is a protective *ʿasmat*-prayer. The hand is different from that of the Gospels. Its age is difficult to estimate; less carefully executed, with an obvious tendency to cursive writing (fig. 09), it is certainly later than the main text, but not recent (late 16<sup>th</sup> cent.?).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The time of King Mənilək II (1889–1913).

<sup>15</sup> But an *additio* has been erased on the recto folio, fig. 13.

<sup>16</sup> The presence of protective *ʿasmat*-prayers in the manuscripts is in itself not remarkable, but it is not usual to find them in the (“Golden”) Gospel books. Here are the *incipit* and *explicit* of the prayer: ሃሌሉ፡ ለአብ ፡ ሰርወ ፡ ጥበብ ፡ ሃሌሉ፡ ለወልድ ፡ ምቅድሐ ፡ አስራብ ፡ ሃሌሉ፡ ለመንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ዘኢይቀብ ፡ መዝገብ ፡ አለብወኒ ፡ ወነጽር ፡ ላዕሌ፡ ... ኤዴ ኪል ፡ ዴኪል ፡ በኃይለ ፡ ዝንቱ ፡ አስማቲክ ፡ ቅፍጽ ፡ ግላ ፡ ወአሰሰል ፡ ዝንጋኤ ፡ ወአፈልፍል ፡ ማኅ ሌተ ፡ ሰብሐተ ፡ ድርት ፡ አንብዑ ፡ ደገሞተ ፡ ወደረሶተ ፡ ወአጽንዖተ ፡ ሊተ ፡ ለገብርክ ፡ እግሌ.



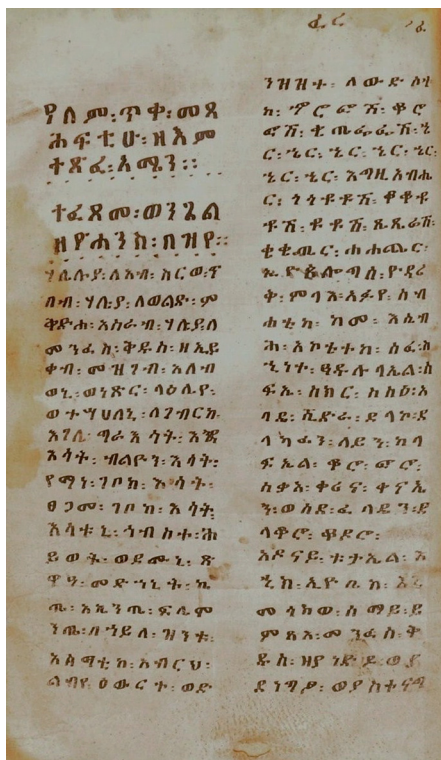


Fig. 9: Gospel book, protective prayer

Foreign Bible Society no. 170;<sup>22</sup> the third is the well-known manuscript from the Vatican Library, Vat. Aeth. 25;<sup>23</sup> which was recently dated on pal-

Seven “guest leaves” of smaller format<sup>17</sup> and a few fragments are crudely inserted between the end folios of the Gospel book<sup>18</sup>. Though badly damaged by humidity and rodents, the leaves are remarkable as they are the only remains of another, older Gospel manuscript (in the following referred to as DZG = Däbrä Zäyt Gospel). The *ductus* on these leaves shows typical features of the so-called “monumental script” predating the mid 14<sup>th</sup>-century.<sup>19</sup> The leaves contain a portion of the Gospel of Matthew: from Mt. 21: 32(ii) [...ገዎ፡ ወእንትሙሰ] to Mt. 23: 5(i) [...ለዓይነ ሰብእ ይገ...]. The text matches that of the so-called B(a)-recension, or the ancient B-recension of the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>20</sup> The ancient B-recension of Matthew is attested in three main old manuscript witnesses. The first is Ms. Ṭānāsee 59 – Däbrä Māryām 1;<sup>21</sup> the second one is Ms. London, British

<sup>17</sup> Height x width: 28 x 17 cm; writing area: 19.5 x 12.5 cm. The dimensions of the page of the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Gospel book are: 29.5 x 19 cm; writing area: 22 x 13 cm.

<sup>18</sup> Foliated as fols. 241–44.

<sup>19</sup> Cp. UHLIG 1988: 73–101.

<sup>20</sup> ZUURMOND 2001:10–17.

<sup>21</sup> HAMMERSCHMIDT 1977: 50–53 (cp. also ZUURMOND 1989, II, 58–59; no. 13) from the monastery of Däbrä Maryam on Lake Ṭana, roughly dated to the 14<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> cent. in the catalogue; cp. UHLIG 1988: 414–15 (with a sample photo), where the manuscript is ascribed to the period mid 15<sup>th</sup>–mid 16<sup>th</sup> cent. on palaeographic grounds.

<sup>22</sup> COWLEY 1982: 72–73, no. 38 (cp. also ZUURMOND 1989, II, 60–61; no. 14), dated to the late 14<sup>th</sup>/early 15<sup>th</sup> cent.

<sup>23</sup> GRÉBAUT – TISSERANT 1935: 127–31, dating the Ms. to the 15<sup>th</sup> cent., 1936: 12, table VIII, ill. c, showing a portion of Matthew, from Mt. 21: 2 (ጸጥሮስ፡ ወይቤሎ ...) to 18: 25 (... ብእ ሲቱ፡ ወ); no. 12 in the editions, cp. ZUURMOND 1989, II, 56–58 (also I, 225, 242) and 2001; recently, D’AIUTO et al. 2000: 167–168 (the note by O. Raineri), with the printed *incipit* page of Luke.

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Fig. 10: Däbrä Zäyt, DZG manuscript

aeographic grounds to a time prior to the mid 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> Though only a fragment, DZG is a new, fourth ancient witness of the B(a)-recension.

In Ethiopian palaeographic studies, the criteria for attributing a *ductus* to one of the major seven periods have been more or less securely established<sup>25</sup>. In contrast, a systematic approach to the identification of the geographical provenance, the style, and the hands/scribes has not yet been tried. Observations on the similarity of handwriting in different manuscripts<sup>26</sup> are based mostly on subjective “general impression” or assessment of scattered traits of the script shape<sup>27</sup>. However, there may be some more or less clear cases. Making a general assessment of the handwriting of DZG (fig. 10), one cannot help noticing that, beside the secure attribution of

<sup>24</sup> UHLIG 1988: 130–32, with a sample page included, dating the manuscript to the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> cent. at the latest. Cp. ZUURMOND 1989, II, 56–58, with the dating of “(possibly) late 13<sup>th</sup> cent.”. Still, O. Raineri (in D’AIUTO et al. 2000: 167–168) follows the 15<sup>th</sup>-cent. dating of GRÉBAUT – TISSERANT 1935: 127.

<sup>25</sup> UHLIG 1988, 1990; cp. a summary in UHLIG – BAUSI 2010: 101a–104b.

<sup>26</sup> Obtained, e.g., during the cataloguing work.

<sup>27</sup> Though sometimes supported by the identification of the scribe’s identity.

DZG and Vat. Aeth. 25 to the same (pre-1350) period, the texts are written, in all probability, by the same hand.

As in Vat. Aeth. 25, the script of DZG is relatively tall and slender, with letters very slightly and not uniformly slanted,<sup>28</sup> and broadly spaced. Below I present a few traits of the handwriting observed in both DZG (figs. 10–22) and Vat. Aeth. 25 (see publications in nn. 23–24) which in my opinion provide support for attributing the manuscripts to the same hand:

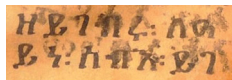


Fig. 11: Fol. 244vb

- (Fig. 11): the passage reproduced in UHLIG 1988: 130, from Mt. 23: 5(ii) to Mt. 23: 14,<sup>29</sup> has a few words overlapping with the text in DZG (fol. 244v): *ዘይገብሩ ፡ ለዓይነ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ይገ* ... showing the identical shape of the curved bottom stroke of *Yot* in the sixth order, with the stem of the letter very slightly slanted to the left; and *Aym* in the fourth order.

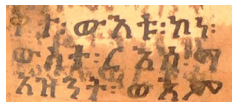


Fig. 12: Fol. 241va

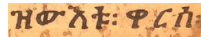


Fig. 13: Fol. 241vb



Fig. 14: Fol. 244ra

- (Figs. 12, 13, 14): the long zigzagging stroke towards the left, marking the sixth order of *Alif*, rises in the same way, at an angle of ca. 40 degrees; *Waw* has a round or slightly elliptic form, which is more pronounced in the sixth order (especially in the words *ወ-አቲ* or *ወ-ሰተ*).

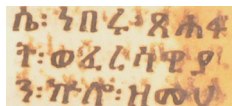


Fig. 15: Fol. 244vb

- (Fig. 15): cp. the shapes of *k* and *h* (*Sädäy*, *Ḥawt*) with two descendant side strokes starting not very high up (in the word *አሐፍት*), cp. esp. *አሐፍት ፡ ወፈረሳዊያን*, UHLIG 1989: 130, col. B, lines 10–11 from below.

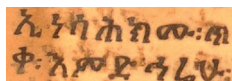


Fig. 16: Fol. 241ra

- (Fig. 16): the shape of *Täyt* in the sixth order with side strokes reaching close to the bottom (typical for the period) and a sharp, strongly articulated kink in the central stroke, located close to the upper part of the sign (cp. *T* in UHLIG 1989: 134, and *Täyt* in *አጥሮስ*, GRÉBAUT – TISSERANT 1936, table VIII).

<sup>28</sup> An important feature of the ancient pre-15<sup>th</sup>-cent. handwriting, cp. UHLIG 1988: 84.

<sup>29</sup> Cp. ZUURMOND 2001: 231–33.

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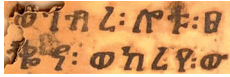


Fig. 17: Fol. 241ra



Fig. 18: Fol. 242va

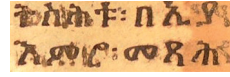


Fig. 19: Fol. 243vb

- (Figs. 17, 18, 19): the circular vowel marker of the seventh order for *Näḥas*, *Rəʿəs*, *Fäf* etc. is attached in the same way, directly to the (strongly) slanted stem of the sign, with no overhanging extension (cp. UHLIG 1989: 132).

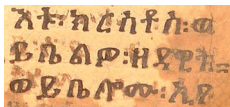


Fig. 20: Fol. 244rb

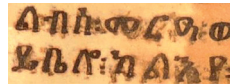


Fig. 21: Fol. 242va

- (Figs. 20, 21): cp. the word *ጠጽጠጠ* (cp. Uhlig 1989: 130, col. a, ll. 12–13 from the bottom), *ጽጠጠ* (cp. GRÉBAUT – TISSERANT 1936, table VIII, *ጽጠጠ*), in which it can be observed that the way of attaching the marker of the seventh order for *Lawi* is somewhat inconsistent in Vat. Aeth. 25 (sometimes attached directly to the right leg of the sign, sometimes on a thin stroke), but becomes consistent in DZG (always directly to the right leg). The bodies of *Bet* and *Lawi* appear very similar in both manuscripts: *Bet* with the upper part sometimes very slightly slanted to the left, nearly parallel legs, a big and very clear marker for the fifth order. *Lawi* tends to a parabolic shape. The loops of *Mim* are connected in exactly the same way in both manuscripts, as can be seen on figs. 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21 (notice also that the marker of the sixth order is attached at the same place and slanted at the same angle, ca. 45–50 degrees, figs. 12, 16, 19, 23).<sup>30</sup>
- (Fig. 22, and also fig. 10): both manuscripts show a very similar execution for Chi-Ro and paragraph-signs (cp. Grébaud – Tisserant 1936, table VIII). The set of punctuation signs appears to be similar in Vat. Aeth. 25 and DZG: notably, colon, double colon, and a sign consisting of two colons connected by two dashes in between to mark the end of a paragraph (on the same line, in the margin to the left of the column, a paragraph-sign appears).<sup>31</sup> In DZG, the last sign is executed somewhat inconsistently: sometimes it is placed in the margin to the right of the text column, sometimes it has one colon less or one more (usually on the right side).

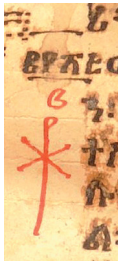


Fig. 22: Fol. 243r, ChiRo

A quick comparison of DZG with the “B-recension” as reproduced in Zuurmond 2001 demonstrates that, in terms of textual variation, DZG fre-

<sup>30</sup> In addition to the features described above, *Dəlt* in the third order should be also discussed. ZUURMOND 1989, II, 57, refers to the archaic shape of *Dəlt* in the third order (with two strokes on the right descending leg), but this feature is not visible in the photo published in GRÉBAUT – TISSERANT 1935 (table VIII, c), where the character occurs all four times (and in the same column) in its usual form. UHLIG 1988: 132 mentions the occurrence of both forms of the character in Vat. Aeth. 25; also in DZG (at least in the available fragment) the marker of the third order for *Dəlt* has its usual shape.

<sup>31</sup> Described in a slightly different way in ZUURMOND 1989, II, 57.

quently sides with Vat. Aeth. 25.<sup>32</sup> This fact provides further evidence in support for suggesting a relationship between the two manuscripts.

The size of Vat. Aeth. 25 is smaller than that of DZG.<sup>33</sup> The pen nib used for DZG appears somewhat broader (0.9–1 mm), and the strokes are somewhat thicker, which can make the similarity of the handwriting, at some points, not so obvious. A column in DZG has on the average 9 (sometime 10) signs for each line, which is a few characters more than in Vat. Aeth. 25.<sup>34</sup>

The fragments of DZG can be dated to the late 13<sup>th</sup>–first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> cent., and they are the oldest manuscript discovered by the Ethio-SPARE team at the site. On this basis, no final conclusions concerning the history of the site of Däbrä Zäyt appear to be possible for the moment, and it is still an open question how the pieces of evidence described above should be inter-

<sup>32</sup>The text of the edition is “basically based on manuscripts 12, 13, 14” (ZUURMOND 2001: 12), but the edition is eclectic and gives preference to Ṭānāsee 59 – Däbrä Māryām 1 (no. 13) and London, British Foreign Bible Society no. 170 (no. 14; ZUURMOND 2001: 14). Here are the text variants revealed in DZG through collation with the edited text of Matthew; the notation (12) appears each time that DZG coincides with Vat. Aeth. 25 (no. 12 in Zuurmond’s editions): Mt. 21: 32 ለአሚን; 21: 33 ፀቁኖ (12), ማሕፈድ; 21: 36 አብበርተ; 21: 37 ይኃፍርዎ; 21: 39 ይሬሲዮሙ; 21: 40 ሐረስት] ሓሳዊያን; 21: 41 ወዘሰ: ወድቀ (12); 21: 41 ዲቤዝ: እብን; 21: 42 ማአዝንት; 22: 1 መስል (12, reconstructed); 22: 4 ይብል] add. ሐሩ (12); 22: 4 መጋዝእትዮ; 22: 4 ከሉአ (12); 22: 4 ድልው; 22: 5 በዘወፈረ 22: 6 ኢንዝዎሙ: ለ (12); 22: 7 ቀተልት] add ወቀተልዎሙ (12); 22: 8 ወባሕቱ] ወእምዝ; 22: 10 ፍኛው; 22: 11 ይርአዮሙ (12), በሂየ (12) [cp. ZUURMOND 1989, II, 303]; 22: 16 ኢትሐስብ; 22: 19 ወዲናር; 22: 19 ዲናር; 22: 21 ለነጋሢ: ዘነጋሢ: ዘነጋሢ; 22: 24 ሞሴ; 22: 25 አውሰባ; 22: 29 ብእሲቶ (12); 22:30 ይሐይው; 22: 37 ወይቤሎ] add. ኢየሱስ (cp. 12); 22: 37 አምላክከ; 22: 40 በእላ; 23: 3 ዘይሚህሩ] add. ወለሊሆሙስ: ለባዕድ (12); 23: 4 ወይአስሩ] om ወ (12); 23: 4 መታክቱ (12). Apart from the variants, features occur which are usually considered as pertaining to “Ancient Ethiopic”: nearly regular *-e* endings with some (unsuffixed) prepositions and conjunctions: *sobe*, *ame*, *habe/em-habe* (but not *dibe*) (cp. BAUSI 2005a: 156; not indicated in the collation). Other ancient features are, e.g., the consistent spelling of some words with laryngeals in the fourth order: አንትሙ, አንተ, ካልአንኑ, ሐረስት, ኢሐዮ (አሐዮ in Vat. Aeth. 25, however, appearing twice in UHLIG 1988: 130; these forms are not indicated in the collation), and the forms like ይኃፍርዎ (Mt. 21: 37), (ኢ)ትሐስብ (Mt. 22: 16), ይሐይው (Mt. 22: 30) without the change of the prefix vowel before a laryngeal (cp. ZUURMOND 1989, II, 27. no. 6; indicated in the collation).

<sup>33</sup> According to my experience, the (outer) dimensions 20 x 12,5 cm are unusually small for an Ethiopian Four Gospel codex. One wonders whether the makers and scribe of Vat. Aeth. 25 produced a compact small-size Gospel book on purpose, intending it, e.g., for convenient use during a long journey (pilgrimage?).

<sup>34</sup> Cp. UHLIG 1989: 131–132 states that Vat. Aeth. 25 has 6–7 characters per line, which is in agreement not with Uhlig’s published photo, but with the photos in D’AIUTO et al. 2000: 167. However, when I counted the number of signs per line in Uhlig’s photo, I observed 7–9 per line (with word dividers).

puted to provide a coherent historical narrative. However, if correct, the attribution of both Vat. Aeth. 25 and DZG to the same hand is significant. In this respect, the fact that Vat. Aeth. 25 went abroad is remarkable in itself. Over the centuries, scores of Ethiopians embarked en route to Egypt and the Holy Land; and it is well known that one of the routes out of Ethiopia, indeed, went through the area of Gulo Mākāda.<sup>35</sup> Could DZG have been written by the same person who produced Vat. Aeth. 25, and in the same place? Could Ms. Vat. Aeth. 25 have been acquired by Ethiopian pilgrims who were passing through the area, preparatory to leaving the country? If not in Däbrä Zäyt, where could manuscripts DZG and Vat. Aeth. 25 have been written? Further research may reveal which churches or monasteries of the contemporary *wäräda* Gulo Mākāda could be relevant.

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<sup>35</sup> CRAWFORD 1955: 34–35 (map), 38–99. Those travellers who came from the interior of Təgray (Ḥändarta) took the route leading through the ʿAddigrat area, crossed the contemporary Gulo Mākāda area en route down to Sänʿafe and Guna Guna (Eritrea; s. BAUSI 2005b: 943b–944a), and then headed to the area of Asmāra and Sawākin (the "Imperial road"). Däbrä Zäyt is located not far from the beginning of another route, starting at Qärsäbär, an ancient village and church, and connecting the area of ʿAddigrat with Däbrä Dammo. Thus Däbrä Zäyt occupied a convenient position: it was well hidden, but stood as the first station on the road to Däbrä Dammo, and was also quite close to the road to Sänʿafe.

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### Summary

The article summarizes the results of the research at Däbrä Zäyt, one of the historical sites discovered by the team of the project Ethio-SPARE (Hamburg University, Hiob Ludolf Centre for Ethiopian Studies) in Gulo Mākāda, East Təgray. It presents different types of historical evidence (old church building of the site, an inscription, the church library) and focuses on the analysis of the fragments of the so-called “old Golden Gospel” of Däbrä Zäyt, written presumably by the same scribe as the one of the well-known manuscript Vat. Aeth. 25.