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Notes Towards a History of Aṣe Dawit I (1382–1413)

STEVEN KAPLAN

Anyone conversant with the history of Ethiopia during the golden period of Church and State between 1270 and 1527 is familiar with the deeds and exploits of the two outstanding rulers of the period ʿAmdä Ṣəyon I (1314–1344) and Zärʾa Yaʿəqob (1434–1468).¹ Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to say that compared to these two rulers, the other kings of the period have been confined to the shadows with their deeds largely neglected by researchers. While this is to some extent a reflection of their achievements and the length of their reigns, it is more than a coincidence that these are also the first two emperors whose deeds are recorded in chronicles or other unified historical records of their rule.² It is only natural that we as historians have tended to accept the testimony of the most readily available primary sources in producing our evaluations of the past. However, we would be remiss, if we were to allow the composition or survival of primary sources to be the sole criteria by which we evaluated rulers and reconstructed the past.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to reconstruct and explore the consequences of the main events in the reign of Aṣe Dawit I. Although his reign extended over three decades, he left behind no chronicle of his deeds. Thus, he has received far less attention than either his grandfather, ʿAmdä Ṣəyon or his son, Zärʾa Yaʿəqob³. Indeed, even the years in which he held

- ¹ See especially, TADDESSE TAMRAT, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270–1527* (Oxford, 1972).
- ² See JAMES MCCANN, “The Ethiopian Chronicles: An African Documentary Tradition”, *Northeast African Studies* 1,2 (1979) 47–61. See JULES PERRUCHON, ‘Histoire des guerres d’Amda Seyon, roi d’Éthiopie’, *Journal asiatique* ser. 8, 13, (1889) 271–363, 381–493; *Les Chroniques de Zar’a Ya’eqob et de Ba’eda Maryam* (Paris, 1893). The former of these has been printed four other times, GEORGE WYNN BRERETON HUNTINGFORD, *The Glorious Victories of Amda Seyon*, Oxford 1965; MANFRED KROPP, *Der siegreiche Feldzug des Königs ʿAmda-Ṣəyon gegen die Muslime in Adal im Jahre 1332* = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Aethiopicum* 99–100, Louvain, 1994; FRANCISCO MARIA ESTEVES PEREIRA, “Victorias de Amda Sion, Re de Ethiopia”, *Boletim da Sociedade de Geographia de Lisboa* 9, ser. No. 10–11, Sept–Dec., 1891; PAOLO MARRASSINI (ed., tr.), *Lo scettro e la croce. La campagna di ʿAmda Seyon I contro l’Ifat (1332)* = *Studi Africanistici; Serie Etiopica* 4 (Napoli 1993). Although this text does not follow that later form of a royal chronicle, neither does it clearly fit into any other genre.
- ³ Of course, it can be argued that Dawit’s father Säyfa Arʿəd who reigned for 28 years has suffered from even greater neglect!

power and the precise way he is to be designated remain uncertain. His accomplishments can only be known and understood through the piecing together of evidence scattered throughout the literature of the period. It is to this task that this article is devoted.⁴ In the first section, we shall attempt to clarify the vexed issue of the precise years of Dawit's reign. The remainder of the paper will then be devoted to an evaluation of his achievements particularly in the religious sphere.

Names and Chronology

We begin our examination of the reign of Dawit, with the troublesome issue of how he is best to be designated. His throne name, Qwästantinos, is well known, but rarely used. Moreover, although it appears likely that this fourteenth century ruler was the first Ethiopian king to bear the name Dawit, it is not uncommon to find him described as "Dawit dagəməwi", Dawit II.⁵ This designation appears to be in deference to David, the father of Solomon, who was, of course, the legendary founder of the dynasty which ruled Ethiopia for most of its known history. However, some traditions indicate that David, was also one of the names of the 6th century Ethiopian Emperor Kaleb,⁶ and this may have also influenced the writers of the period. This terminology has at times confused scholars. No less a figure than the French Ethiopianist Jules Perruchon believed a document he published and edited to be concerned with the reign of Ləbnä Dəngəl, whose throne name was Dawit II, when it in fact probably refers to Aše Dawit I.⁷

⁴ Two previous attempts to wrestle with some of the issues concerning Dawit's reign include, GETACHEW HAILE, "Documents on the History of Aše Dawit (1382–1413)", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 16, 1983, 25–35; ROGER SCHNEIDER, "Notes éthiopiennes", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 16, 1983, esp. 106–110, Sur la chronologie de règnes de Dawit, Téwodros et Yeshaq. Moreover, as the notes below demonstrate, several scholars have made important contributions to our understanding of specific features of Dawit's reign. This is, however, to the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to consolidate this material and summarize his achievements.

⁵ CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, *Vitae Sanctorum Indigenarum I: Acta Marqoréwos* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 33, Scriptorum Aethiopicum 16 (Louvain, 1962) 35, 47; TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 255, n. 3; VERONIKA SIX, *Die Vita des Abuna Tādēwos von Dabra Māryām im Tānāsee* (Wiesbaden, 1975), 31–32; STANISLAS KUR, *Actes de Samuel de Dabra Wagag* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 287, Scriptorum Aethiopicum 57 (Louvain, 1968) 12; Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML) 1601, no. 564, f. 13r.

⁶ SERGEW HABLE SELASSIE, *Ancient and Medieval Ethiopian History to 1270* (Addis Ababa, 1972) 125.

⁷ JULES PERRUCHON, "Légendes relatives à Dawit II (Lebna-Dengel), roi d'Ethiopie", *Revue sémitique* 6 (1898) 157–171. Cf. TADDESSE TAMRAT, *Church and State*, 255, n. 3;

The chronology of Dawit is a matter of even greater confusion. At least six different periods have been suggested for his reign: 1380–1409⁸; 1380–1412⁹; 1381–1410¹⁰; 1379/80–1413¹¹; 1382–1411¹²; and 1382–1413¹³. While some degree of disagreement regarding the exact period of a king's rule is not unusual, this is certainly an exceptional situation.

Of course, the confusion regarding the dates of Dawit's reign is at least in part connected to uncertainty regarding his immediate predecessor and successors. In particular, crucial dates in the life of Dawit and his sons Tewodros and Yəṣṣḥaq have been misunderstood because of mis-readings of numbers in texts. In recent years, Getatchew Haile and Roger Schneider have made major contributions to the clarification of this issue by correcting some of these readings. For example, a note in the *Liber Axumae* records that 'In the 66th Year of Mercy, Dawit died, Tewodros and Yəṣṣḥaq ascended the throne'¹⁴. If this is, in fact the case, and the tradition which dates his death to the 9th of Ṭəqəmt reliable, then Dawit's death would have occurred

Tadesse who gives the wrong title for the article does not explain his certainty that Peruchon misidentified the king in question. It should be noted that the story of Dawit halting the waters of the Nile also appears in some later versions of the *Miracles of Mary*, VERONIKA SIX, "Water – the Nile – And the *Tä'amrä Maryam*. Miracles of the Virgin Mary in the Ethiopian Version", *Aethiopica* 2 (1999) 53–68 and in other traditions, STUART MUNRO-HAY, *Ethiopia and Alexandria* = Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica 5 (Warsaw 1997) 159.

⁸ RENE BASSET, *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie* (Paris, 1882) 101; RICHARD PANKHURST, *A Social History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1990) 13.

⁹ TADDESSE, 279 n. 3; SIX, *Gädla Tādēwos*, 31.

¹⁰ TEKLE-TSADIK MEKOURIA, "L'influence du roi David et de son Psautier en Éthiopie", *Études éthiopiennes* (Proceedings of the Tenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies) (Paris, 1994) 145.

¹¹ SCHNEIDER, "Dawit", 110.

¹² SERGEW, *History*, 280 n. 97; KUR, *Gädlä Samu'el*, iv; FRANZ AMADEUS DOMBROWSKI, *Tānāsee 106: Eine Chronik der Herrscher Äthiopiens* = Äthiopistische Forschungen 12 (Wiesbaden, 1983) 154. DONALD CRUMMEY, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia* (Urbana and Chicago, 2000) 28, but cf. 26 and 361 where the dates 1380–1412 are given!

¹³ GETACHEW, "Dawit"; idem, *The Different Collections of Nägś Hymns in Ethiopic Literature and their Contribution*, *Oikonomia* 19 (Erlangen, 1983) 66–71.

¹⁴ GETACHEW, "Nägś" 70. CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, *Documenta Ad Illustrandam Historiam: I. Liber Axumae* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 54, Scriptorum Aethiopicum 24 (Louvain, 1962) 67. MAURICE CHAINE, "La date de la mort du métropolitain Abba Salama", *Aethiops* 1, 3 (1922) 35. Getatchew's revised reading is based on EMMI 50, f. 134v. Previous readings which dated these events to the 67th Year of Mercy = 1407 E.C. = 1414/1415 CE. were largely ignored, since 1414/1415 was clearly too late a date for the end of Dawit's reign.

on 9 Ṭəqəmt, 66th year of Mercy = 1406 Ethiopian Calendar = October 6, 1413 A.D. What other evidence exists to support this date?

A further clue is found in Ms. Kəbran 1 catalogued by Ernst Hammerschmidt.¹⁵ Although there is some disagreement concerning the exact reading of the text, the most reliable translation would appear to be as follows:

I, Dawit, whose regnal name is Qwäştanīnos, scion of Israel and from the house of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Judah, son of David and Solomon have had this record written. [And] I have had this matter written in this Gospel of the grace of our Lord in the 65th year of Mercy and in the 31st year of my reign. [When] I gave the order that they observe the *täzkar* of my father, Säyfa Ar^cəd on the 15th of Gənbət and the *täzkar* of my mother, Läzzäb Warqa, on the 12 of Säne ...¹⁶

Given that both this source and the *Liber Axumae* claim that Dawit was still alive in the 65th Year of Mercy = 1405 E.C. = 1412/1413 A.D. it would appear that we can safely eliminate the possibility that his reign ended between 1409–1411¹⁷. Moreover, it is rather unlikely based on the Kəbran 1 that Dawit died on the 9th of Ṭəqəmt 1412. If Dawit died in Ṭəqəmt, the second month of 1405 E.C., this document would have to have been written only a few weeks before his demise¹⁸. While this is certainly not impossible, logic would seem to dictate that Dawit would dedicate days to his parents' memory close to the dates in question in the 9th (Gənbət) and 10th (Säne) months respectively and not many months before¹⁹. Thus while the Kəbran document does not decisively exclude an earlier date, once again, the 9th of Ṭəqəmt 1406 E.C. = 6 October 1413 A.D. would appear to be the most likely date of Dawit's death.

Although further evidence can be produced in support of this dating, it need not detain us further here²⁰. We turn instead to the question of the

¹⁵ ERNST HAMMERSCHMIDT, *Äthiopische Handschriften vom Ṭānāsee 1* (Wiesbaden, 1973) [= Hammerschmidt, *Ṭānāsee*] 84–91, esp. 90.

¹⁶ Ibid., TADDESSE TAMRAT, "Problems of Royal Succession in Fifteenth Century Ethiopia: A Presentation of Documents", *Proceedings of the fourth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, Rome 1974, 507; GETATCHEW, *Nägś*, 68–69. GETATCHEW, "Dawit", 85, n. 73 indicates that both Hammerschmidt and Taddesse have misread some of the (crucial) dates in this text.

¹⁷ This is further confirmed by another land grant of Dawit dating to July 29 1412 = 5 Nəḥase. HAMMERSCHMIDT, *Ṭānāsee 1*, 87–88.

¹⁸ Thus, TADDESSE TAMRAT, "Succession", 508.

¹⁹ This can, however, not be completely ruled out, cf. Note 17 above.

²⁰ GETATCHEW, "Nägś" 65–70; SCHNEIDER, "Dawit", 111, both discuss the impact of this dating of Dawit for the history of his sons and successors.

beginning of his reign. As we have already seen dates ranging from 1379–1382 have been suggested. On face value this question appears comparatively simple to resolve. If 1405 E.C. = 1412/1413 A.D. was the 31st year of his reign²¹, he must have assumed the throne in 1374 E.C. = 1381/82 C.E. This accords well with the widespread tradition that he reigned for 32 years,²² as well as with other chronological evidence.

Although Dawit's father Säyfa Ar^cəd is commonly said to have ruled until 1372, there is some evidence that he may have died as early as 1371.²³ If we accept the tradition that his immediate successor (Dawit's brother) Nəwayä Maryam²⁴ ruled for ten years, this too would place also Dawit's accession to the throne around 1381/82. A tradition found in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*²⁵ offers even further evidence for this date. According to this account, the Egyptian Sultan Barquq ordered the Egyptian Patriarch Matewos to send a letter to the king of Ethiopia. Matewos, inspired by a divine revelation addressed the letter not to the ruling monarch Wəddəm Asfare (Nəwayä Maryam), but to Dawit. By the time the letter arrived, Nəwayä Maryam had been deposed and Dawit was on the throne. Since Barquq only came to power in 1382, this is yet further confirmation that this, and no earlier date, was the year of Dawit's accession.²⁶

Having considered at some detail the controversy concerning the dates of Dawit's rule, and found a preponderance of evidence in favor of the period from 1382–1413, we would be remiss if we did not offer at least a few addi-

²¹ Tadesse, Hammerschmidt, and Schneider all read the relevant document as having been written in the 34th year of Dawit's reign and made their calculations accordingly. Although I have not personally examined the text, I have chosen to accept Getatchew's reading which is suggested as a correction of the former two. Tadesse was well aware that this date was problematic and contradicted other traditions concerning the duration of Dawit's reign. See n. 20 below.

²² TADDESSE, "Succession", 508, GETACHEW, "Nägs" 68. It should be noted, however, that Ləbnä Dəngəl, who, as we have already noted, was also called Dawit II is said to have reigned for 32 years. The possibility of some confusion here can not be ruled out. There are also traditions which claim that Dawit's reign lasted only 29 years (CONTI ROSSINI, *Gädlä Märqorewos*, 47; BASSET, *Études*, 11), but in light of the evidence that he ruled for at least 31 years (see above), these must be discounted.

²³ SCHNEIDER, "Dawit", 107.

²⁴ This was his throne name. He was also known as Wəddəm Asfare. ANDRE CAQUOT, "Aperçu préliminaire sur le Maṣḥafa Tēfut de Gechen Amba", *Annales d'Éthiopie* 1 (1955) 99.

²⁵ SCHNEIDER, "Dawit", 107–108. SALVATORE TEDESCHI, "Les fils de Négus Sayfa-Ar'əd d'après un document arabo-chrétien", 0148, *Africa* 29 (1974) 580–587.

²⁶ SCHNEIDER, "Dawit", who has been forced by his reading of the 34th year (see note 19 above) to date David's rise to power several years earlier, is unable to successfully resolve this problem.

tional comments regarding the manner in which he reached the throne. As we have already seen the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* offers evidence that his rise to power was not uneventful. This confirms, an earlier suggestion made by Taddesse Tamrat, who cited a tradition in the *Sənkəssar* that the Egyptian Patriarch Matewos “had a revelation before the death of Nəwayä Maryam that Dawit would become king of Ethiopia in his place”.²⁷ Although he did not consider it in the context of the chronology of Dawit’s reign, he interpreted this reference as an indication of a power struggle between the two brothers. This insight was further confirmed and strengthened by evidence in the unpublished *Gädlä Abrəham of Däbrä Şəyon*. According to this text, Dawit reproached the saint for building a marvelous church without royal assistance and questioned whether this was a sign of the holy man’s disapproval:

“King Dawit, when he learned that Abreham had constructed a church that was admired by all, he sent him a message which reproached him for not having appealed to him in the construction, ... ‘Does it seem to you that I occupied the throne through my own will, rather than through the will of the Lord?’”²⁸

Having dealt with the question of when Dawit ruled, we now turn our attention to how he ruled. The reign of Dawit should perhaps be best remembered for its numerous religious accomplishments. We shall devote the bulk of this article to understanding his achievements in this and other areas.

The Cross and the Virgin: Seeing and Believing

Among his many achievements, Dawit is credited with bringing a relic of the true cross to Ethiopia. According to this tradition, which is recorded in several sources, Dawit received a fragment of the True Cross from the Coptic Patriarch as a reward for securing his freedom when he was arrested by the “King of Egypt”.²⁹ Dawit marched his troops down the Nile until the terrified Muslim surrendered. The grateful Patriarch offered him a reward of 120,000 dinars, but Dawit rejected the gold saying, “God did not save us with gold and silver, but through the blood of the Cross.” This incident, which is already recounted in detail in the days of his son, Zär’a

²⁷ TADDESSE, “Succession”, 505–506. ERNEST ALFRED THOMPSON WALLIS BUDGE (ed.), *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church* II (Cambridge, 1928) 454.

²⁸ SCHNEIDER, “Dawit”, 107. On the building of this church, cf. GEORG GERSTER, *Churches in Rock* (London 1970) 81.

²⁹ BASSET, *Études*, 11 (tx.) = 101 (tr.); CONTI ROSSINI, *Gadla Marqorewos*, 42–44; CAQUOT, “*Məşhafä Tēfut*”, 100–102.

Ya'eqob, in *Mäṣḥafä Təfut* is also vividly invoked in several of his (Zär'a Ya'eqob) *Nägs* hymns:

Hail to the Cross of the Lord, which was steeped in the blood of divinity
Today it paid our house a visit from Ser'
during the days of Dawit, the anointed,
the lamb who, because of Mary, was not lost,
blessed in his faith, (and) his trust steadfast.

Hail to the Cross of the Son which the Jews buried.
Behold, it is now planted in the garden (of) Ethiopia
The Son of Mary deserves a bow (of gratitude)
Dread possessed our enemies
The infidel tribes [=Moslems] were terrified by the
arrival of the Cross.³⁰

The arrival of the cross is said to have led to the inauguration of a new holiday, Mäsqäl, commemorating the finding of the True Cross on the 10th Mäskäram.³¹ *Mäṣḥafä Təfut* records that the piece of the Cross was accompanied by seven icons of St. Mary painted by Luke the Evangelist and the image of Jesus known as Kwər'atä rə'əsu.³² Other sources indicate that an icon St. Ura'el painted by John the Evangelist also came to Ethiopia during his reign.³³ Given the fact, that most authorities date the arrival of the Kwər'atä rə'əsu icon to the 17th century, the tradition regarding this particular object must be treated with caution³⁴. However, there appears to be a deeper truth behind these traditions. Although there is evidence that icons existed in Ethiopia prior to Dawit's reign, their use appears to have intensified during his reign, hand in hand with the growth of devotion to the cult

³⁰ GETATCHEW, "Nägs", 47–48, cf. 46 "The Cross of the Lamb came (to Ethiopia) during his days." GETATCHEW, "Documents", 26–27 (tx.) = 27–28.

³¹ CAQUOT, "Mäṣḥafä Təfut", 100. Cf. The entry in the *Sənkəssar*: "Greetings! The tree of the redemption of the Cross which was planted in Ethiopia on this day; Dawit and his people were reunited after acquiring what their heart desired; They raised a hymn of joy and celebrated a festival."

³² Ibid. Cf. DIANA SPENCER, "In search of St. Luke icons in Ethiopia", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 9, 2 (1972) 77–78. Tedeschi has suggested that the Patriarch was, in fact, a mediator, and that the relics were sent by the Republic of Venice, "Fils du Négus", 580–587. Cf. also MARILYN HELDMAN, "A Chalice from Venice for Emperor Dāwit of Ethiopia", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 53, 3 (1990) 442–445.

³³ EMMML 1942, 76a. This same source also speaks of only one Marian icon.

³⁴ STANISLAW CHOJNACKI, "The 'Kwera'ta Re'esu': its Iconography and Significance", *Annali del Istituto Universitario di Napoli* 45 (1958) 1–64; RICHARD PANKHURST, "The History of the Kwer'ata Re'esu: An Ethiopian Icon", *African Affairs* 91 (1982) 117–125.

of Mary.³⁵ Several miracles document Dawit's devotion to Mary and to an image of Mary made especially for him.³⁶ One of these reports that one of Dawit's generals deserted him and joined forces with his Muslim enemies. Dawit prostrated himself before an icon of Mary and prayed for revenge. "At once she answered him from the icon saying, 'Rejoice, O my beloved one; I have done for you what you have asked of me. As for the one who rebelled against you, I have had his head cut off where he went.' Having said this, she showed him the rebel with his head cut off."³⁷

Yet, another miracle tells of how the technique for using gold paint or gold leaf was discovered in Ethiopia in his time. According to this story, which is partially confirmed in one of the *Nägs* hymns³⁸, a youth, a translator from Arabic tried to mix a batch of gold paint to adorn the name and garb of Mary. He failed on his first attempt, but then a foreigner (*Romawi*) revealed the technique to him in a dream.³⁹

Although the tradition of depicting Mary under a canopy of wings can not be decisively dated to Dawit's reign, this appears likely. Two of the earliest drawings of this kind are found in a manuscript of the Miracles of Mary (*Tä'ammärä Maryam*) found today at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Ms. 777) and in a *Sänkəssar* preserved in the Şəyon Maryam Church at Lake Zway⁴⁰.

³⁵ MARILYN E. HELDMAN, "The Role of the Devotional Image in Emperor Zar'a Yā'eqob's Cult of Mary", *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (Addis Abeba, Uppsala, East Lansing, 1984) 132. KUR, Samuel, III. See also CAQUOT, "Məşəfä Tēfut".

³⁶ HELDMAN, "Devotional Image" 132.

³⁷ GETATCHEW, "Nägs", 48, "Documents", 30 (tx.) = 32 (tr.), Note that Getatchew suggests this may have been a statue rather than a painting. Cf. *Ibid.* 28, "When his retainer denied the son of Mary, his creator, Dawit wept ... Mary showed him ... that the head of the servant who had defected was cut off."

³⁸ GETATCHEW, "Documents", 28: "When he had (the image of) the Virgin Mary adorned with gilt, the artist thoughtlessly adulterated its gold. When he prayed, however, (God) revealed to him the material".

³⁹ ENRICO CERULLI, *Il Libro etiopico dei Miracoli di Maria e le sue fonti nelle letterature del medio evol latino* (Roma, 1943) 87–93. Cf. MARILYN E. HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Şeyon* = *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 6 (Wiesbaden, 1994), 102–104. STANISLAW CHOJNACKI, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting* = *Äthiopistische Forschungen* 10 (Wiesbaden, 1983) 193. A story in which Mary is said to have revealed a source for gold ink to Giyorgis of Sägla so that Dawit could have a copy of *Arganonä Maryam* properly prepared appears in that saint's *gädl*. GÉRARD COLIN, *Vie de Georges de Saglā* = *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 492, *Scriptores Aethiopici* 81 (Louvain, 1987) 21–22.

⁴⁰ CHOJNACKI, *Major Themes*, 180–181.

Indeed a distinctive and uniform style of manuscript illumination is associated with a palace scriptorium founded by Dawit early in his reign. Among the works under its influence which have survived to our time are manuscripts of the *Miracles of Mary* and the Octateuch, Four Gospels and *Sənkəssar* both found today at Gəšān Maryam, another *Sənkəssar* and *Gädlä Säma'ətat* at Kidanä Mehrät near Ankobär, a collection of Marian homilies found near Däbrä Tabor, and an illuminated Epistle of St. Paul, now in the National Library, Addis Abäba.⁴¹ From an artistic point of view, Marilyn Heldman has noted that “The painters of Dawit’s scriptorium had access to fairly recent Byzantine models or to Coptic paintings dependant upon Byzantine models ... Nevertheless, although the borrowing from Byzantine iconography is obvious, the over-all effect of Dawit court style does not suggest Byzantine influence.”⁴²

Literary Achievements

The religious achievements of Dawit’s time were not limited to the realm of iconography. His was also a time of considerable accomplishments in the areas of both original literature and translation. It should be remembered that the first years of Dawit’s reign overlapped with that of Abunä Sälama (1348–1388) popularly known as “The Translator” because of the many works translated from Arabic at his initiative⁴³. Once again the cult of Mary figures prominently among his attainments, with the beginning of the translation of the *Miracles of Mary* (*Tä'ammərä Maryam*)⁴⁴. Although this was the most famous work translated during Dawit’s reign, tradition claims that numerous other works were rendered into Gə'əz at this time.

Special mention must be made in this context of the *Sənkəssar*. Although there is substantial evidence that this translation dates to ca. 1400, i.e. within the reign of Dawit, it is not clear if the translator, Simon, was an Egyptian in con-

⁴¹ HELDMAN, *Frē Šeyon*, 104–105; EMMML 2514; RODERICK GRIERSON, ed., *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia* (New Haven and London, 1993) 147–151, 177–180. A manuscript of the *Mäšəfä Təfut* found in Gəšān Maryam and probably dating to the time of Zär'a Ya'əqob, depicts Dawit paying homage to Mary. Cf. also CHOJNACKI, *Major Themes*, 181, 194.

⁴² HELDMAN, *Frē Šeyon*, 106–107.

⁴³ Thus, Dawit clearly inherited a situation in which many translations were underway. See A. VAN LANTSCHOOT, “Abba Salama, métropolitte d’Éthiopie (1348–1388) et son rôle de traducteur”, *Atti di Covegno internazionale di studi etiopici (Rome 1–4 aprile 1959)*, Roma 1960, 397–401.

⁴⁴ CERULLI, *Il Libro*. Cf. also above the story of a youth translating and illuminating the *Miracles of Mary*.

tact with Ethiopians or an Ethiopian resident in Egypt⁴⁵. In either case, it is hard to imagine so grand an undertaking being accomplished without royal knowledge or patronage. The translation, editing and introduction of such a massive work must have been an event of considerable importance. Moreover, in the process of compilation, original material concerning local Ethiopian saints was added. Decisions would have had to have been made as to which saints to include. “This immense work could not have been done without active interaction between the translator(s), the royal authorities, and monastic leaders.”⁴⁶

According to a list contained in EMMML 1942, f. 76a works translated during Dawit’s reign included: *Gəbrä Həməmat*, *Haymanotä Abäw*, *Dərsanä Zenaha ... la Maryam*⁴⁷, *Mäṣḥafä ʾĪlatqārfa* (the Miracles of Jesus), *Mäṣḥafä Kidan*, *Mäṣḥafä Səməʿon zaʿAmd*, *Efrem baʿenta haymanot reteʿt*, *Mäṣḥafä Wəddaseha la Efrem*⁴⁸, *Mäṣḥafä (Dərsanä?) Sawiros*⁴⁹, and homilies attributed to Basəlyos of Caesarea, Yaʿəqob of Sarug⁵⁰, Yaʿəqob of Denbin (Nesbin?), Zəkaryas of Antioch, Abba Giyorgis (Gerleyos?) of Alexandria and two homilies on the Sabbath. It is not certain that all of these works were, in fact, translated at this time, and other works not listed may also date from this period. Verena Böll has indicated, for example, that the translation of the Anaphora of Mary by Cyriacus of Behnesa, may be dated to Dawit’s reign.⁵¹

The production of original church literature in Ethiopic seems to have been a far less centralized process than its translation. While there is considerable evidence that texts were brought at the initiative of the Abunä and translated at court or at monasteries the court supported, local works were part of a different system of patronage. *Gädlät*, for example, were typically produced at individual monasteries at the initiative of the abbot. Accord-

⁴⁵ GERARD COLIN, “Le Synaxaire Éthiopien: État actuel de la question”, *Analecta Bollandiana* 106 (1988) 286. I am grateful to Denis Nosnitzyn for drawing my attention to this reference and for his comments on the topic (Personal communication, 22.01.01 which is summarized below).

⁴⁶ Nosnitzyn, personal communication.

⁴⁷ It is difficult to determine if this is a reference to *Mäṣḥafä zenaha läqəddəst Maryam* or *Dərsanä Maryam*.

⁴⁸ Cf. KURT WENDT, *Das Maṣḥafa Milād und Maṣḥafa Sellāsē des Kaisers Zarʿa Yāʿqob* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 235, Scriptorum Aethiopicum 49 (Louvain, 1963) 97; CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, *Il Libro della Luce del Negus Zarʿa Yāʿqob* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 261, Scriptorum Aethiopicum 51 (Louvain, 1965) 140.

⁴⁹ There are in fact two collections with this title both translated from Arabic and attributed to Severos, Bishop of Ašmunayn.

⁵⁰ On the homilies of Yaʿeqob of Sarug, see SIEGBERT UHLIG, “Dərsan des Yaʿqob von Sarug”, *Aethiopica* 2 (1999) 7–52, esp. 20–21.

⁵¹ VERENA BÖLL, ‘Unsere Herrin Maria’. *Die traditionelle äthiopische Exegese der Marien-anaphora des Cyriacus von Behnesa* = Aethiopistische Forschungen 48 (Wiesbaden, 1998) 16.

ingly, it is difficult to give a comprehensive list of works composed during Dawit's reign, nor should we attach too much significance to the fact that works such as *Gädlä Qawstos*⁵² and *Gädlä Tadewos*⁵³ date to this period⁵⁴.

The situation is, however, somewhat different with regard to another work which can be dated to Dawit's reign: *Arganonä Maryam (Wəddase)* by Giyorgis of Säglä, (Gasəčča). According to *Gädlä Giyorgis*, the king was so pleased with the work that he had it copied with a special gold ink.⁵⁵ *Arganonä Maryam* is, of course, only one of the many works attributed to Giyorgis, one of the churches most prolific authors⁵⁶. It is impossible to know which of Giyorgis's other works can definitively be dated to Dawit's reign⁵⁷. However, there is every reason to associate much of Giyorgis's creativity with this king's period. Giyorgis's father served, after all, as one of the clergy in the royal court and the king must have known Giyorgis throughout most of his early life when he was educated at court. Even the saint's period at Däbrä Hayq Ḥṣṭifanos would not have completely separated him from the king, given the latter's close ties to that monastery. Moreover, Giyorgis and Dawit shared a deep devotion to the Virgin Mary through both literature and art. Not only did Giyorgis compose several works in her honor, but he also showed his devotion to her image.

A further indication that Giyorgis had already achieved a lofty status during the reign of Dawit, is found in yet another episode from his *gädl*. According to this text, Giyorgis is said to have required the queen to rise from her

⁵² Cf. EMMML 1513.

⁵³ SIX, *Gädlä Tādēwos*, 31. It is, in any event, problematic to speak of the "date of composition" of a *gädl*, since such texts were constantly being revised, edited and renewed. STEVEN KAPLAN, *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonian Ethiopia* = Studien zur Kulturkunde 73 (Wiesbaden, 1984) 2–4.

⁵⁴ This is even truer with regard to works composed by dissident groups which may have been writing in opposition to the views favored by the king. Cf. GETACHEW HAILE, "Religious Controversies and the Growth of Ethiopic Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981) 106–107.

⁵⁵ COLIN, *Gädlä Giyorgis*, 21–22. Although the *gädl* indicates that this work is also known as *Hohəta Bərhan* and *Ḥnzira Səbhat*, this does not appear to be the case. GETACHEW HAILE, "On the Writings of Abba Giyorgis Säglawi from Two Unedited Miracles of Mary", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 48 (1982) 65–69.

⁵⁶ Others include *Wəddase Məsqäl*, *Wəddase Ḥawaryat*, *Wəddase Dəngəl*, *Fəkkare Haymanot*, *Məṣḥafä Sä'atat*, and *Məṣḥafä Məṣṭir*. On the last of these see YAQOB BEYENE, *Giyorgis di Saglä. Il Libro del Mistero* (Məṣḥafä Məṣṭir), Louvain 1990/1993 = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 515–516, 532–533, Scriptorum Aethiopicorum 89–90, 97–98 (Louvain, 1990).

⁵⁷ If we assume that his *gädl* presents the correct chronological sequence then *Fəkkare Haymanot* was composed after Dawit's death but *Wəddase Ḥawaryat*, and *Ṣälötä Fättəto* before. Cf. COLIN, *Gädlä Giyorgis*, 25, 30, 32–33.

throne to receive the Eucharist like the rest of the people.⁵⁸ Dawit supported him on this occasion and shortly after appointed Giyorgis *nəburä ʾəd* of Däbrä Damo, one of Ethiopia's most venerated monasteries.⁵⁹ There is, therefore, every reason to believe that many of Giyorgis's writings and much of his ensuing reputation were established during the reign of Dawit.

Their relations were not, however, without difficulty. Giyorgis did not fare well when he clashed with Bitu, one of the King's favorites over Christological issues. Dawit sought to refer the matter to the Abunä, but Bitu succeeded in turning the tide by producing a forged letter which made it appear that Giyorgis had condemned the king as a heretic. The enraged Dawit, cast Giyorgis into prison where he remained, even after Bitu's death. Giyorgis was still in prison when Dawit died in 1413.

The Ewoṣṭatians

Dawit's clash with Giyorgis was a comparatively minor incident compared with some of his larger concerns. During his reign the most important issue facing the Church and the King was the challenge posed by the pro-Sabbath Ewoṣṭatian movement. Throughout the 14th century Ewoṣṭatians opposed the position of the *abunä* and the emperor and championed the traditional Ethiopian practice of observing Saturday as a holy day of Sabbath rest.⁶⁰ Despite the, at times violent, opposition of kings, bishops and other Church leaders, the Ewoṣṭatian movement flourished in the frontier areas of the north where the Ewoṣṭatians enjoyed local support.⁶¹ Their home monastery of Däbrä Bizän was one of the most powerful not only in the region, but in the country.

Abunä Sälama, whose crucial role in the translation of literature from Arabic was mentioned above, was not replaced until 1398/9 with the arrival of Abuna Bärtälomewos in Ethiopia.⁶² Shortly after his arrival in Ethiopia, Bärtälomewos working in cooperation with Säräqä Bərhan, the abbot of Däbrä Hayq Ḥṣṭifanos and a close ally of Dawit sought to bring the rebellious monks to heel⁶³. In 1400, the king convened a council intended to re-

⁵⁸ For a further discussion of this episode see STEVEN KAPLAN, "The Social and Religious Function of the Eucharist in Medieval Ethiopia", (forthcoming).

⁵⁹ COLIN, *Gädlä Giyorgis*, 22. The precise significance remains unclear. It may have meant he was to administer the monastery or perhaps the entire region. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that it is a sign of respect and of close relations between the saint and the king.

⁶⁰ GIANFRANCESCO LUSINI, *Studi sul Monachesimo Eustaziano (secoli XIV–XV)* = *Studi Africanistici*, Serie Etiopica 3 (Napoli, 1993).

⁶¹ KAPLAN, *Holy Man*, 38–39; TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 209–220.

⁶² KOLMODIN, *Traditions de Tsazzega et Hazzega, Archives d'études orientales*, A 23 and A 30, n. 9; TADDESSE, "Dabra Hayq", 105, n. 92.

⁶³ On Säräqä Bərhan, see TADDESSE, "Dabra Hayq", 103–104;

solve the controversy over the Sabbath.⁶⁴ The King avoided any direct involvement in the discussions, but gave the *abunä* a free hand to act as he wished. His allies, who controlled the proceedings wasted little time in bringing the council to its preordained outcome. When the Ewostätians refused to obey the bishop and cease their observance of the Sabbath, their leader Filəppos was imprisoned at Dabra Hayq Ḥṣṭifanos.

He was to remain there for four years, whereupon he was released following the death of Säräqä Bərhan. However, Dawit did not merely release Filəppos. He and his queen Ḥgziʾ Kəbra sent messages and asked to be remembered in his prayers. Their son remembered this vividly in *Mäṣḥafä Bərhan* where he wrote:

“My father Dawit king of Ethiopia ... sent messengers so that they might bring back the disciples of Maʿəqäbä Ḥgziʾə [Ewostatewos] from the areas where they had dispersed, and so that they enable them to re-enter their churches ... The king further commanded the disciples of Maʿəqäbä Ḥgziʾə to observe both Sabbaths as the Apostles had prescribed in the Senodos”.⁶⁵

In light of this dramatic reversal of policy in a relatively short period, it is interesting to speculate as to what factors precipitated Dawit’s decision and how they changed in such a short space of time. It is, to say the least, rather unlikely that his personal position regarding the Sabbath changed quite so dramatically in so short a period. With regard to his initial support for anti-Ewostätian measures, the arrival of a new *abunä* must have been an important catalyst. Over a decade elapsed between the death of Abunä Sälama and the arrival of his successor. The power vacuum could not have been beneficial to either the cause of church unity or the stability of the monarchy.

Dawit’s initiative may, moreover, have been motivated by immediate political considerations. According to a story contained in *Täʾammärä Maryam* some religious leaders received a revelation that Dawit had ruled too long and should abdicate in favor of one of his sons. Only Mary’s intervention and the support of two crucial allies kept him in power. If as both Cerulli and Tadesse have conjectured Dawit was confronted by a serious challenge to his rule around 1400, his decision to act in accordance with the wishes of both the *abunä* and the *ʿaqqabe säʿat* around that time may have been a bid to consolidate his support among the religious leadership⁶⁶. We

⁶⁴ CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, “Il ‘Gädlä Filipos’ ed il ‘Gadla Yohannes’ di Dabra Bizan”. *Memorie della Reale Accademia dei Lincei* 8, 1901, 111–120.

⁶⁵ CONTI ROSSINI, *Mäṣḥafä Bərhan* II, 82. Cf. TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 216.

⁶⁶ CERULLI, *Il Libro*, 79–86, TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 283. See also SYLVAIN GRÉBAUT, “Littérature éthiopienne pseudo-Clémentine”, *Revue de l’Orient chrétien* 16 (1911) 77. For yet another text which hints at problems during Dawit’s reign see EMMIL 1882, 112a–116a.

have already seen that Dawit's initial rise to power may have been assisted by Egyptian intervention as well. At the least, his vulnerability may have made it difficult if not impossible for him to resist the demands for repression of the Ewostätians from two of his country's most powerful clerics.

By 1404 his circumstances were markedly improved.⁶⁷ His stunning victory against the Muslim kingdom of Adal in 1402/3 including the capture and execution of its king added immensely to his prestige and authority.⁶⁸ The death of Säräqä Bərhan and the continued survival of Filəppos and his movement may well have been another consideration. According to *Gädlä Filəppos* military leaders from the north sympathetic to his cause were present at Dawit's court. Whatever the reasons behind his decision, Dawit moved to heal the rift within the Church. While the royal court and the *abunä* continued to follow the Alexandrian practice, the Ewostätians were not only tolerated but honored. In 1406/7 he granted land to Däbrä Bizän.

Church and State

The Ewostätians were not the only clergy whom Dawit sought to cultivate.

Taken as a whole, Dawit's reign would certainly seem to justify Getatchew Haile's remark that "Dawit may be considered the monarch who established church-state relations in Ethiopia on a firm basis."⁶⁹ A short notice in the *Zena Däbrä Libanos* offers considerable support for this view. According to this text, Dawit and his sister Däl Sefa offered land to the monastery of Däbrä Libanos during the period of the abbot Tewodros. He, however, refused to accept it. His successor, Yoḥannəs Käma, had similar reservations. However, after receiving a divine revelation he accepted the gift.⁷⁰

Consider, moreover, Dawit's relations with two of the best known saints of his period, Samu'el of Däbrä Wägäg, and Samu'el of Wäldəbba.⁷¹ Samu'el

⁶⁷ For what follows cf. TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 215–217.

⁶⁸ Maqrizi, 26–7, quoted by TADDESSE, BORIS TURAIEV, *Vita Samuelis Valdebanim* (Petropoli, 1902) 14–15; CONTI ROSSINI, *Gädlä Märqorewos*, 40–41. For a more detailed discussion of these wars see below.

⁶⁹ GETATCHEW, "Documents", 25.

⁷⁰ See MARIE-LAURE DERAT, *La formation du domaine royal éthiopien sous la dynastie salomonienne (1270–1527). Espace, pouvoir et monachisme*, 2 vols., thèse de doctorat, Université de Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne, Centre de Recherches Africaines, U.F.R. d'histoire 1998, 576–577, 585–586; BORIS TURAIEV, *Zena Däbrä Libanos*, 1906, 12. I am, once again, grateful to Denis Nosnitzyn for drawing my attention to these texts and discussing some of the problems they present.

⁷¹ According to a note in *Mäṣhafä Tēfut* the most illustrious clerics of Dawit's reign were Abunä Sälama, Samu'el of Wäldəbba, Samu'el of Wägäg, and Giyorgis of Säglä. Cf. CAQUOT, *Mäṣhafä Tēfut*, 101. Cf. also EMMML 1942 f. 76b.

of Däbrä Wägäg, whose father is said to have been associated with the rebel clerics of the first half of the 14th century, was himself a loyal ally of Dawit. The king is said to have given Samu^{el} the region of ʿĪndägäbṭan and to have sent him there as a royal official.⁷² Samu^{el} of Wäldəbba, another of the outstanding clerics of his reign joined Dawit on the battlefield and predicted his victory over a Muslim foe.⁷³

According to a miracle from the life of Samu^{el} of Däbrä Halleluya, it was during the reign of Dawit, that his renowned monastery abandoned its previous independence and began to accept gifts of religious objects and lands from the king⁷⁴. *Gädlä Märqorewos*, which goes to great pains to stress the close relationship which existed between its hero and the King, offers a particularly detailed listing of the lands Dawit granted to the holy man⁷⁵. Däbrä Hämlo, near Aksum was also honored by both Dawit and Abunä Sälama.⁷⁶ Other churches to have benefited from his beneficence included the Təgrean monasteries of Abunä Aron and Abuna Samu^{el} of Qoyäṣa and Däbrä Kəbran Gäbrə^{el}, which as we saw in our discussion of chronology, received support for the commemoration of Dawit's parents.⁷⁷ His daughter Dəl Mogäsä, also “made a generous grant of *gult* to the church of Betä Ləhem in the Amhara district of Gaynt, in which she invoked her father's authority.”⁷⁸

Mention should also be made at this time to a land grant from July 1412 which makes mention of Mä^cata Gone as the king of Gozam (Goḡḡam)⁷⁹. This text is one of several indications that it was during the reign of Dawit there was an intensive movement of Christian families from Amhara and Bägemdər into the Goḡḡam region⁸⁰. In addition several important monastic leaders including Tākästä Bərḥan of Däbrä Dima, Sinoda of Däbrä Ṣimmona and Särṣä Peṭros of Däbrä Wärq were active in the region during this period.

⁷² KUR, *Gädlä Samu^{el}*, 13–16, cf. KAPLAN, *Monastic Holy Man*, 55.

⁷³ TURIAEV, *Gädlä Samu^{el}*, 14.

⁷⁴ GETATCHEW HAILE, “From Strict Observance to Royal Endowment: The case of the Monastery of Däbrä Halle Luya, EMLL 6343, ff. 117r–118v”, *Le Muséon* 93 (1980) 163–172; GÉRARD COLIN, *Vie de Samuel de Dabra Halleluya* = Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 519, *Scriptores Aethiopici* 93 (Louvain, 1990) 60–64.

⁷⁵ CONTI ROSSINI, *Gädlä Märqorewos*, 44–46.

⁷⁶ EMLL 2514 f. 234b.

⁷⁷ HAMMERSCHMIDT, *Tānāsee*, 87; CRUMMEY, *Land and Society*, 29, 46; CONTI ROSSINI, *Liber Axumae*, 22–23; Cf. Note 17 above.

⁷⁸ CRUMMEY, *Land and Society*, 29.

⁷⁹ HAMMERSCHMIDT, *Tānāsee*, 87.

⁸⁰ For what follows see TADDESSE, *Church and State* 201–203 which is based on a series of, as yet, unpublished sources.

War and Peace

Gädlä Yäfqərännä Ǝgzi’ə is a particularly interesting source for the situation of Christians in this region just prior to and during Dawit’s reign. It also serves as a reminder, that although our primary focus in this article is upon Dawit’s religious achievements, we would be remiss if we did not make mention of his political-military successes. Our record of these is almost certainly incomplete, since they are based not on a chronicle or other internal royal document, but rather on a combination of hagiographical sources and external Arabic reports.

According to Gädlä Yäfqərännä Ǝgzi’ə⁸¹ during the first years of Dawit’s reign, there was a serious uprising of the *‘ayhud* in the regions of Səmen and Šällämt. Led by a rebel Christian monk named Qozmos, they defeated the Kāntiba of Dəmbiya, who was forced to join them. They destroyed numerous churches and killed many monks until Dawit was able to subdue them by sending fresh troops from Təgray.

As dramatic as this episode may have been, it was only a comparatively minor skirmish in the wider context of Dawit’s reign. Like his predecessors, his most important battles were fought against the local Muslims, particularly those of the kingdom of Adal. During the first half of Dawit’s reign the forces on the battlefield were quite evenly matched, and the leaders of Adal, particularly Šä’ad ad-Din enjoyed some remarkable successes. *Gädlä Märqorewos* reports that he easily destroyed the Ethiopian army, a claim echoed by a contemporary Egyptian author⁸². However, as the threat posed by the Muslim incursions grew, so did the resolve of the Christian kingdom. Dawit spent much of his time in the regions of Ifat and Fäṭägar, which were strategically important for the defense of the kingdom.⁸³ Moreover, he personally led at least two campaigns into Adal, the last of which ended in a stunning victory and the capture and death of Šä’ad ad-Din.⁸⁴ Perhaps in recognition of his successes, we find a reference, a few years later, to “Dawit’s Adal” as the place where his son, Tewodros I, died.⁸⁵

Finally, we should remember, that Dawit is also credited with coming to the defense of the Coptic Patriarch early in his reign, and having sent troops

⁸¹ CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, “Appunti di storia e letteratura falascia”, *Rivista degli studi orientali* 8, 1920, 571–573. Although this text, like many other hagiographic works may date much later than the events it describes the picture it presents of Dawit’s reign and the situation of the *‘ayhud* is consistent with other sources.

⁸² CONTI ROSSINI, *Gädlä Märqorewos*, 38, cf. Al-Qalqašandī quoted by TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 151–152.

⁸³ PERRUCHON, *Les Chroniques*, 67, 152.

⁸⁴ WILLIAM WRIGHT, *Catalogue of Ethiopic Mss. in the British Library* (London 1877) Or. 481 f. 154a; TURAIEV, *Gädlä Samu’el*, 14–15; CONTI ROSSINI, *Gädlä Märqorewos*, 40–41.

⁸⁵ GUISEPPE SAPETO, *Viaggio e Missione Cattolica tra i Mensa* (Roma 1857) 437–438.

to threaten the ruler of Egypt⁸⁶. Even if these reports are somewhat exaggerated and acquired an almost mythical status in later years, they are yet further testimony to Dawit's activist military policy⁸⁷.

It is apparently in this context that we should also understand the circumstances of Dawit's death. In the fall of 1413, on his way back from a successful military campaign, he was kicked in the head by a horse and died. As his son, Zär'a Ya'əqob wrote so plaintively, "Dawit was victorious, (but) he never came back from the campaign against the enemy. I personally looked for him; the sun was missing"⁸⁸. He was buried at Däbrä Daga Əstifanos.

The Legacy of Dawit

Dawit's death, untimely as it may have been for his people and as personally wrenching as it may have been for his son(s)⁸⁹, was not a national disaster. During the more than three decades during which he reigned, he had gone a long way to strengthening the religious and political fabric of Ethiopia. By promoting devotion to both the Cross and the Virgin Mary, he provided the Church with two pan-Christian symbols which transcended local rivalries and regional loyalties. These were, moreover, symbols particularly suited to visual representation and hence comparatively easy to propagate among Ethiopia's largely illiterate population. He did not, however, neglect the role of religious texts. His reign is remembered both for the important translations initiated, most notably *Tä'ammərä Maryam*, and for original works composed by his close associate Giyorgis of Sägla. Dawit also made great strides in solidifying Church-State relations, particularly through his generous land grants, and although he did not succeed in resolving the Ewostatian controversy, in the last decade of his rule, he moved towards a pragmatic accommodation. All this would by itself, qualify Dawit as one of the outstanding leaders in Ethiopian history. His military successes, particularly against the Muslims of Adal, can only further cement his reputation.

⁸⁶ Cf. n. 29 above.

⁸⁷ An unpublished tradition records that Dawit intended to march to Jerusalem. TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 255 n. 3.

⁸⁸ GETATCHEW, "Nägs", 46; On the specific circumstances see BASSET, *Études*, 11.

⁸⁹ Dawit had many queens, three of whom Əgzi' Kəbra, Şəyon Mogäsa, and Dəngəl Şäwänä are known by name. TADDESSE, *Church and State*, 220, n. 2. Four of his sons, Tewodros, Yəşhaq, Həzbä Nañ, Zär'a Ya'əqob became emperors. GETATCHEW, "Religious Controversies", 107 has also speculated that a son named Iyyosəyas may have sought to depose his father. Zär'a Ya'əqob, who was about 14 years old when his father died, may have felt the loss particularly deeply.

As we noted at the outset of this article, Dawit I has received far less attention than either his predecessor ʿAmdä Şəyon I or his son Zärʾa Yaʿəqob. This comparatively brief article has succeeded in only partially redressing the balance. However, by bringing together a series of widely scattered sources, we hope to have begun the process of restoring Aše Dawit I, to his rightful place in Ethiopian history.⁹⁰

Appendix: Tentative Chronology of Aše Dawit I

1382	Dawit becomes King War against the Ayhud
1388	The death of Abunä Sälama
1397/8	Wars against Adal
1398/9	The arrival of Abunä Bärtälomewos
ca. 1400	Attempted overthrow
1402	Arrival of embassy in Venice
1402/3	Defeat of Şäʿad ad-Din
ca. 1403	Death of Säräqä Bərhan of Däbrä Ḥşīfanos
1404	Release of Filəppos of Däbrä Bizän
1407/8	Land grant to Däbrä Bizän
Oct. 6, 1413	Death

Summary

Dawit I has received far less attention than either his grandfather ʿAmdä Şəyon I or his son Zärʾa Yaʿəqob. This comparatively brief article attempts to partially redress the balance.

During the more than three decades during which he reigned, Dawit strengthened the religious and political fabric of Ethiopia. By promoting devotion to both the Cross and the Virgin Mary, he provided the Church with two pan-Christian symbols which transcended local rivalries and regional loyalties. These were, moreover, symbols particularly suited to visual representation and hence comparatively easy to propagate among Ethiopia's largely illiterate population. He did not, however, neglect the role of religious texts. His reign is remembered both for the important translations initiated, most notably Tāʾammərə Maryam and for original works composed by his close associate Giyorgis of Säglä. Dawit also made great strides in solidifying Church state relations, particularly through his generous land grants, and although he did not succeed in resolving the Ewostātan controversy, in the last decade of his rule, he moved towards a pragmatic accommodation. All this would by itself, qualify Dawit as one of the outstanding leaders in Ethiopian history. His military successes, particularly against the Muslims of Adal, can only further cement his reputation.

⁹⁰I am grateful to Leonardo Cohen, Meley Mulugette, and particularly Denis Nositzyn for their comments on an earlier draft.