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# Performing (with) Multiple-Text Manuscripts in the Making of the Ethiopian Sainthood: Matter and Devotion in Ethiopia between the Fourteenth Century and the Present Time

**Abstract:** The present contribution offers an insight into the formation and development of multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs) transmitting works earmarked for liturgical and healing performances connected with the veneration of saints in Ethiopia. The time span covered ranges between the fourteenth century and the present time. Themes related to the role of manuscripts in the making of Ethiopian sainthood and keeping it alive will be explored. The main points discussed are (1) the acquisition and structuring of a corpus of hagiographic texts in MTMs; (2) the perception of these MTMs in connection with the construction of Ethiopian sainthood; (3) their function in the authentication to sainthood in Ethiopia; and (4) their use in liturgical and healing performances.

## 1 *Vox populi, vox Dei*

The construction of the *fama sanctitatis* of holy people in Ethiopia, as in the rest of the Christian world, generally arises among the members of the community who were in touch with them during their lifetime or in places connected in some way with their fame. These locations progressively became pilgrimage destinations, sites of churches, and shelters for sufferers and indigents who invoked their intercession and made known the effects of it (healings, protection, comfort). The *fama sanctitatis* spread from these places, often with the patronage of the local ecclesiastical communities which encouraged, legitimising it, a cult already established in popular practice by the faithful.

The verification of sainthood in late antique and medieval Ethiopia did not entail any official initiative from the high religious authorities in a modern sense, although a sort of ratification probably occurred when the hagiographic narrative of saints was written down and copied in manuscripts which started to circulate and be read on their memorial day. This stage possibly marks the formal, official establishment of the devotion towards saints, since the manuscript is the essential medium which makes possible their liturgical commemoration

and other ritual practices connected with their veneration. One can more generally assume that the circulation and ritual use of hagiographic manuscripts contributed to officialising the *fama sanctitatis* in premodern Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> Essential evidence of the emergence of the devotion also provides ancient chant manuscripts, at times preserved only in a fragmentary state but extremely archaic in their text and material appearance,<sup>2</sup> as well as hymnodic celebrations which play an essential role in the spreading of the veneration practices.<sup>3</sup>

## 2 Legitimation to sainthood: the *kidān* and the *tazkār*

Crucial evidence of the role of hagiographic manuscripts in legitimising and promoting the veneration of saints in medieval Ethiopia is offered by the *kidān* ('pact'),<sup>4</sup> a textual section of the saints' *Lives* which endorses the celebration of the saint's *tazkār* ('commemoration').<sup>5</sup> The narrative structure of the *kidān* is usually shaped in the form of a vision: God or Jesus Christ appears to the saints shortly before their death and gives his word (sometimes at the saint's request) that all the prayers made in the saint's name will be fulfilled and that their intercession will ensure eternal life to the faithful who address to them and celebrate their commemoration.

An example of *kidān*, excerpted from the *Life* of Saint Malkə'a Krəstos,<sup>6</sup> is as follows:

ወመጽአ፡ እግዚእነ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ምስለ፡ አዕላፍ፡ መላእክቲሁ፡ ወምስለ፡ ነቢያት፡ ወሐዋርያት፡ ጸድቃን፡ ወሰማዕት፡ ደናግል፡ ወመነኮሳት፡ ጌራን ። ወይቤሎ፡ በቃሉ፡ እግዚእነ፡ ለመልክዓ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ፍቅርየ፡ ወፍቅረ፡ እምየ፡ ጎረይ፡ ኃብታተ፡ ዘፈቃድክ፡ እምኔየ ። ወአውሥአ፡ ወይቤሎ፡ አቡነ፡ ባርክ፡ እግዚእ፡ ሀገርየ፡ ምድር፡ ትኩዝ፡ ወመክረም፡ ወምድረ፡ ቀያህቲ፡ ወአለሉ፡ ወአድ፡ ክሳድ፡ ወምድረ፡ ትሹም፡ እሰመ፡ አፈቅሮን፡ ፈድፋድ፡ እምኩሉ፡ አህጉር ። ወባርክ፡ እግዚእ፡ ዛተ፡ ሀገረ፡ ወካልዓተኒ፡ አህጉረ ። ወባርክ፡ ገዳማትየ ። ወባርክ፡ ደቂቅየ፡ መሐር፡ እግዚእ፡ እለ፡ ይገብሩ፡ ተዝካርየ፡ ወእለ፡ ይጹው፡ ።

1 A preliminary assessment on the relationship between hagiography and liturgy in the Ethiopian Church was published by Brita 2015.

2 Cf. Nosnitsin 2016 and Nosnitsin 2018.

3 Cf. Karlsson 2022.

4 Kur and Nosnitsin 2007.

5 Mersha Alehegne 2010.

6 CAe 4118. The critical edition with an Italian translation of the text was published by Raineri 2009.

ስምዖን ፡ ወእለ ፡ ይትመሐፀኑ ፡ በጸሎትዮ ። ወይቤሎ ፡ እግዚእነ ፡ ለአቡነ ፡ መሐርኩ ፡ ለከ ፡ ከሉ ፡ ዘሰዓልከኒ ፡ ዘገብረ ፡ ተገነዘረከ ፡ ወዘጸውዓ ፡ ስመከ ፡ ወዘጸንዓ ፡ በትምህርትከ ፡ ወዘአጽሐፊ ፡ መጽሐፊ ፡ ገድልከ ። ወዘሐለየ ፡ ማኅሌተ ፡ በበዓልከ ፡ ወዘሐነፀ ፡ ቤተ ፡ ክርስቲያን ፡ በእንቲአከ ፡ ወበእንተ ፡ እምዮ ። ወዘያበውዕ ፡ ዕማነ ፡ ወማኅቶተ ፡ ለተገነዘረ ፡ በዓልከ ። ወዘተማኅፀነ ፡ በጸሎትከ ፡ እስከ ፡ ፲ወ፩ትውልድ ፡ እምህር ፡ ለከ ፡ ከመዝ ፡ ተካየድኩ ፡ ምስሌከ ። ወለእመ ፡ ኢተዓደዉ ፡ ትእዛዛየ ፡ ወእምትእዛዛከ ፡ ኢይመውቲ ፡ በረኅብ ። ወአነሂ ፡ ኢያመጽእ ፡ ላዕሌሆሙ ፡ ንዴተ ፡ ወተፅናሰ ። ወእባርክ ፡ ፍሬ ፡ ምድሮሙ ። ወለእመ ፡ ጸለዩ ፡ ኅቤየ ፡ እንዝ ፡ ይብሉ ። አእምላኩ ፡ ለመልክዓ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ርድኣኒ ፡ ፍጡኅ ፡ እሰምዖሙ ፡ ኃጥዓንሂ ፡ ለእመ ፡ ተቀብሩ ፡ ውስቴታ ፡ ለገዳምከ ፡ ትኩዝ ፡ እምህር ፡ ለከ ፡ እመሰ ፡ ዘኢይምህሮሙ ፡ ኃጥዓን ፡ አወጽኦሙ ፡ እምኔሂ ። ወለእለ ፡ አፍቀርክዎሙ ፡ አመጽኦሙ ፡ ኅቤሂ ፡ ወየዓርፉ ፡ ባቲ ። ወለእለ ፡ ያፈቅርዎ ፡ አፈቅሮሙ ፡ ወለእለ ፡ ይጸልዕዎ ፡ እጸልዎሙ ። ወእህሩ ፡ እምድር ፡ ዝከሮሙ ። ወአጠፍዕ ፡ ዘርዎሙ ።<sup>7</sup>

And Our Lord Jesus Christ came with thousands of his angels, and with prophets and apostles, righteous and martyrs, virgins and pious monks. And Our Lord told, with his word, to Malkə'a Krəstos: 'My beloved and beloved of my Mother, choose the bestowals that you wish from me'. And our father replied and said: 'O Lord, bless my country, the land of Təkkuz and Makram, and the land of Qayāhti and Alatu and Add Kəsād, and the land of Təšum because I love them more than any other lands; and bless, O Lord, this land and also the other lands; and bless my monastery; and bless my [spiritual] sons; have mercy, O Lord, on those who celebrate my *tazkār*, and on those who invoke my name, and on those who entrust themselves to my prayer'. And Our Lord told our father Malkə'a Krəstos: 'I will have mercy, for you, on everything you asked me; on the one who celebrates your *tazkār*; and on the one who invokes your name; and on the one who persists in your teachings; and on the one who commissions the manuscript of your *gadl*;<sup>8</sup> and on the one who sings hymn during your celebration; and on the one who builds a church for you and for my Mother; and on the one who offers incense and lamps for the commemoration of your festival; and on the one who entrusts himself to your prayer. Up until eleven generations I will have mercy on you. So, I stipulate [this pact] with you. And if [the faithful] will not transgress my orders and your orders, they will not starve to death. And destitution and misery will not reach them, and I will bless the fruit of their soil. And if [the faithful] will address their prayers to me, by saying "O God of Malkə'a Krəstos, help me!", I will hear them immediately. And if sinners are buried in your monastery of Təkkuz, I will have mercy on you. In fact, I will not have mercy on [other] sinners and I will send them away from there. And those whom I love I will send them to you and they will rest there. And those who love it [the monastery] I will love them; and those who hate it, I will eradicate their memory from the world and I will extinguish their descendance'.<sup>9</sup>

7 Raineri 2009, 364 and 366, §§ 103–105.

8 The term *gadl* (pl. *gadlāt*), 'spiritual combat', in the present article is either left in its original form or translated into English with the more generic terms *Life* or *Acts*, the latter only when referred to martyrs or saints of early Christianity (as, for instance, in the labels *Gadla samā'tāt* and *Gadla qəddusān*).

9 The English translation is mine.

The text shows how the *kidān* prescribes, among several devotional actions, the patronage and the copying of the hagiographic manuscripts. Another example, excerpted from the *kidān* of Saint Libānos’s *Life*, reads as follows:<sup>10</sup>

ዘንቲኒ ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ዘጸሐፈ ፡ ወአጽሐፈ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ሀለወ ፡ በሥጋ ፡ አነ ፡ እሁቦ ፡ ኅይለ ፡ መዊእ ፡ በቅድመ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ወአዐቅቦ ፡ አነ ፡ በጽንዕየ ፡ ወአፈቅሮ ፡ ከመ ፡ ረድእየ ፡ ወድኅረሂ ፡ አመ ፡ ምጽአትየ ፡ እሬሰየ ፡ ይኅልፍ ፡ ምስሌክ ፡ በግህደት ፡ አልቦ ፡ ዘይትማሰለክ ፡ ዘእንበለ ፡ ማርያም ፡ እመየ ፡ ዘንቲኒ ፡ ኪዳን ፡ ይኩን ፡ ከመ ፡ ኪዳን ፡ ለእምየ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ዙተአመነ ፡ በጸሎትክ ፡ በዝባ ለም ፡ ወበዘይመጽእ ፡ ዓለም ፡ ይድኅን ፡ እሰመ ፡ ኅግድ ፡ አንተ ፡ ወፈለሰክ ፡ እምብሔርክ ፡ በእን ቲአየ ፡ ወይቤ ፡ ብፁዕ ፡ ሊባኖስ ፡ ስብሐት ፡ ለክ ፡ አምላኪየ ፡ ዘወሀብኪኒ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ኩሉ ፡ ኪዳን ፡ ሰማይ ፡ ወምድር ፡<sup>11</sup>

The one who wrote and the one who commissioned this manuscript, while being alive,<sup>12</sup> I [the Lord] will give him the strength to win against everyone, I will protect him with my toughness and I will love him as my disciple, and, later, at my second coming, I will make sure that he manifestly moves with you.<sup>13</sup> There is no one else like you, but Mary, my Mother. Be this the *kidān*, like the *kidān* of my Mother. Whoever confides in your prayer in this world and in the world to come will be saved, since you are a pilgrim [who] emigrated from your country for the sake of me. And the blessed Libānos said: ‘Praise to you, my God, who gave me all this *kidān* of heaven and earth’.

In the *kidān*’s section, it is the undisputed authority of God which sanctions the writing of the hagiographic manuscripts and the liturgical commemoration of the saints and, therefore, officially validates their legitimation to sainthood. Seemingly, the presence (or absence) of a *kidān* in the *Life* of a saint defines the border between a mere literary work and a text object of ritual. It, thus, represents the agency of hagiographic manuscripts, since it legitimises the efficacy of the *tazkār*. Last, but not least, the *kidān* fosters the copy, the translation, the donation, and the ritual use of hagiographic manuscripts contributing to the

<sup>10</sup> CAe 1473. The critical edition of the text with the Italian translation was published by Bausi 2003. I made the English translation of the text passages quoted in the following paragraphs, and it follows the critical text reconstructed by Alessandro Bausi.

<sup>11</sup> Bausi 2003, vol. 1, 13, § 48. The manuscripts transmitting this passage are Rome, Biblioteca dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Fondo Conti Rossini 26, 1934 CE (manuscript ‘A’ in Bausi’s edition) and Asmara, Biblioteca del Centro di Studi Etiopici, Pavoni Social Center, no shelfmark, twentieth century (manuscript ‘D’ in Bausi’s edition), cf. Bausi 2003, vol. 1, ix.

<sup>12</sup> Literally ‘while he is in the body’.

<sup>13</sup> The passage ‘he manifestly moves with you’ is a textual reconstruction’s hypothesis based on conjecture proposed by the editor of the *Gadla Libānos*, Alessandro Bausi. The corrupted passage is present only in manuscript ‘D’ and it is omitted in manuscript ‘A’, cf. Bausi 2003, vol. 1, 13, § 48.

spread of the *fama sanctitatis* of the protagonists whose *Lives* are transmitted therein.

### 3 ‘The holy water of the manuscript’

In addition to that, there are cases in which the devotional actions related to the patronage, copy, translation, reading and use of hagiographic manuscripts are entrusted to other sections of the saints’ *Lives*. What follows is again a passage from the *Life* of Libānos aiming at encouraging the faithful to commemorate the saint. The manuscript tradition of the text presents two different versions of this passage. In this case, it is the Holy Spirit who requests the writing of the *gadl*:<sup>14</sup>

First version:

**ወይቤሎ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለኤጲስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ጸሐፍ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ ያንብብዎ ፡ በዕለተ ፡ ተዝካሩ ፡ ወይ  
ትአመኑ ፡ በጸሎቱ ፡<sup>15</sup>**

The Holy Spirit said to the bishop: ‘Write this [manuscript], so that they read it on the day of his *tazkār* and have faith in his prayer’.

Second version:

**ወይቤሎ ፡ መንፈስ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ለኤጲስ ፡ ቆጶስ ፡ ዘአከሱም ፡ ጸሐፍ ፡ ዘንተ ፡ መጽሐፈ ፡ ገድሱ ፡  
ለፍቁርያ ፡ ሊባኖስ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይኩን ፡ መድኃኒተ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ወእንሰሳ ፡ እመሂ ፡ ዘተረቅየ ፡ ወእ  
መሂ ፡ ዘተኅፀበ ፡ አው ፡ ዘሰትየ ፡ ማየ ፡ ጸሎቱ ፡ ለዝንቱ ፡ መጽሐፍ ፡ ከሱሎ ፡ ዘተመዘየ ፡ አነ ፡  
እሁቦ ፡ ወአዘንም ፡ ላዕሌሁ ፡ ሣህልየ ፡ ወምሕረትየ ፡ ከመ ፡ ማየ ፡ ክረምት ፡ በዕለተ ፡ በዓሉኒ ፡  
ክብርት ፡ ወበኩሎን ፡ ዕለታት ፡ ሠርክ ፡ ወነግሀ ፡ ለዘያነብባ ፡ አነ ፡ እከውኖ ፡ አፈ ፡ ወልሳነ ፡ ወለ**

<sup>14</sup> The first version is witnessed by the manuscripts: (1) Rome, Biblioteca dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Fondo Conti Rossini 88, 1940 CE (manuscript ‘B’ in Bausi’s edition); (2) Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Fondo Cerulli Etiopico 198, 1809–1813 CE (manuscript ‘D’ in Bausi’s edition); and (3) Asmara, Biblioteca del Centro di Studi Etiopici, Pavoni Social Center, no shelfmark, 1674 CE (manuscript ‘E’ in Bausi’s edition). The second version, slightly longer and more elaborated, is transmitted in the manuscripts: (4) Rome, Biblioteca dell’Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei e Corsiniana, Fondo Conti Rossini 26, 1934 CE (manuscript ‘A’ in Bausi’s edition); and (5) Asmara, Biblioteca del Centro di Studi Etiopici, Pavoni Social Center, no shelfmark, twentieth century (manuscript ‘D’ in Bausi’s edition), cf. Bausi 2003, vol. 1, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Bausi 2003, vol. 1, 39, § 168, manuscripts ‘B’, ‘C’ and ‘E’.

ዘጸሐፊሂ ፡ በእዱ ፡ ወለዘአጽሐፎ ፡ በንዋዩ ፡ አነ ፡ እጽሐፍ ፡ ስሞ ፡ ኀበ ፡ ዐምደ ፡ ወርቅ ፡ በቀ  
ለመ ፡ ጽድቅ ፡<sup>16</sup>

The Holy Spirit said to the bishop of Aksum: ‘Write this manuscript of the *gadd* of my beloved Libānos, so that it is the salvation of men and animals. If one was exorcised, was washed or drank the holy water of this manuscript, I will give him everything he wishes, I will make rain upon him my compassion and my mercy, like the water of the rainy season. I will be mouth and tongue of the one who will read it [the manuscript] on the day of his [of Libānos] honourable festival, and every day, evening and morning. On the golden pillar I will write, with the pen of justice, the name of the one who wrote it [the manuscript] with his hand and of the one who commissioned it at his own expenses’.

In this second version, an additional element offers fresh clues regarding other possible ways to perform rites with manuscripts. This element is, so to say, hidden in the sentence ‘If one was exorcised, was washed or drank the holy water of this manuscript’. The expression **ማየ ፡ ጸሎት** (lit. ‘the water of prayer’) is attested in Gə‘əz with the meaning of ‘holy water’,<sup>17</sup> but what is interesting here is its combination in a genitive chain with **ለዝንቲ ፡ መጽሐፍ** (‘of this manuscript’). The result is a sentence that apparently does not make sense and becomes clear only when it is interpreted in the light of contemporary ritual performances. This sentence indeed probably refers to a specific action performed during rituals, which I personally documented during my fieldtrips in Ethiopia in February 2017 and October 2018. The ceremony’s officiant, after reading a portion or the whole *Life* of the saint aloud to the audience, blows in a basin or a bottle containing water. The action of blowing into the water, as I was told, aims at transmitting the spirit (*manfas*), acquired by the officiant through the reading of the manuscript, to the water which then becomes holy and curative. This water is subsequently used for performing healing rituals, such as exorcisms and ablutions of patients’ bodies (also of animals), and is also sprinkled on cultivated fields infested by parasites (see Subsection 8.2). During the ceremony of the saint’s *tazkār*, the same water is also sprinkled over the ceremony’s attendants to bless and protect them from any sort of illness and demons’ attack. If the attendants have relatives or friends that are bedridden or infirm, they

<sup>16</sup> Bausi 2003, vol. 1, 39, § 169, manuscripts ‘A’ and ‘D’.

<sup>17</sup> *Māya šalot*, ‘holy water’, cf. Leslau 1991, 376a. The expression is also reported in Tigrinya in the following forms: **ማይ ጸሎት** *may šälot*, **ማይ ጨሎት** *may čälot* and **ማጨሎት** *mačälot*, with the meaning of ‘holy water, lustral water; spring or fountain where sick persons bathe in order to obtain healing; mineral or sulphurous water (note: bathing for healing purposes is ordinarily accompanied by an animal sacrifice, us. a sheep or goat, to the saint or spirit to whom it is dedicated)’, cf. Kane 2000, 500b. On the use of holy water in healing and other rituals and the related symbolism in Ethiopia, see Finneran 2009.

bring bottles full of water with them and, at the end of the manuscript reading, ask the officiants to blow into them so that they can deliver the curative water to the patients' homes. I could also observe that the action of blowing is not always performed, especially during the celebrations of the annual commemoration of the saints, probably because of the high number of people attending the ceremonies. On these occasions, the faithful, shortly before the reading of the manuscript, place open bottles or jars full of water (Fig. 1) near to the lectern which holds the manuscript during the reading and collect them once the reading is accomplished. In these cases, the action of reading the manuscript aloud is sufficient to transmit the *manfas* to the water and for this reason, both bottles and jars are left open during the reading.



**Fig. 1:** Open bottles and jars containing water placed near the lectern which holds the manuscript during the reading. Annual *tazkār* of St Pāntalewon *zašomā't*, 'Ēndā 'Abbā Pāntalewon (Təgrāy, Ethiopia). Photograph by Antonella Brita (October 2018).

From a methodological point of view, this datum will encourage one to reconsider, when possible, the interpretation of textual and non-textual features transmitted in manuscripts used in performances in the light of current practices. Scholars often tend to attribute their lack of understanding to a yet unspecified 'unclear' text or 'unclear' feature, instead of considering that this dearth of

understanding might simply depend on a lack of knowledge about the use and function of manuscripts. Obviously, the study of manuscripts and related practices is contextualized and analysed from a synchronic perspective, but this does not mean that such a paradigm might not have a diachronic relevance. In the example shown above, the two witnesses transmitting the sentence ‘If one was exorcised, was washed or drank the holy water (deriving by the reciting) of this manuscript’ are dated to the twentieth century and, indeed, they attest a contemporary practice. On the other hand, observing the contemporary use of manuscripts reveals some facets which cannot be detected from their material evidence. The reason is that these facets pertain to a sphere of immaterial knowledge which follows a different channel of transmission – oral or experiential transmission – that usually does not leave any material trace in the manuscripts. The results provided by both material and immaterial evidence not only complement each other, as long as the diachronic perspective is observed, but also inform us about evolutions and possible changes over time. There is no question that each piece of evidence mirrors the historical context to which it is referred, but it is also true that contemporary practices can be projected back into the past – if they are supported by material evidence – and ancient practices can be considered still alive – if they are materially detectable in manuscripts.

## 4 Multiple-text manuscripts (MTMs): assembling the hagiographic corpus for the celebration of the saint’s *tazkār*

### 4.1 Ancient hagiographic presences in Ethiopia

The oldest typology of hagiographic manuscripts known so far in Ethiopia consists of collections of texts transmitted in MTMs to be read on the commemoration day of the saint. The most widespread types are *dərsānāt* (pl. of *dərsān*, ‘homily’), collections of homilies not exclusively hagiographic, attested in manuscripts from the thirteenth to fourteenth century,<sup>18</sup> and *gadlāt* (pl. of *gadl*), collections of hagiographic work of various lengths about martyrs and saints of the

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<sup>18</sup> On homiletic collections in Ethiopia, see the recent article by Bausi 2019.



oriental and universal Church, with a few exceptions (see below).<sup>19</sup> The latter are, specifically, attested in manuscripts labelled respectively *Gadla samā'tāt* (*Acts of the martyrs*)<sup>20</sup> and, less systematically, *Gadla qəddusān* (*Acts of the saints*),<sup>21</sup> transmitting a corpus of fewer than two hundred hagiographies.<sup>22</sup> The structure of each manuscript generally reflects its nature as a liturgical book. The texts do not occur all at once in the same manuscript (the largest MTMs contain around sixty texts), therefore, these MTMs were not produced to cover the celebrations of the saints for the whole liturgical year. The reason probably lies in the commemorative practices spread in the late antique and early medieval period in Ethiopia and particularly in the fact that only the veneration of a certain number of saints was diffused at that time. In order to better contextualize this evidence, it is useful to consider the formation and transmission of the corpus of the hagiographic texts over the centuries.

## 4.2 The reception of foreign sainthood: paths of transmission

The most ancient MTMs known to us are dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth century and witness the first detectable layer in the transmission of the corpus in Ethiopic, although presumably not the oldest. Material, linguistic and philological evidence collected so far allow one to ascertain that the reception in Gə'əz of the hagiographic corpus must have had a complex genesis, so far only partially traceable. The reception of individual texts embodied in the collection is marked by an early phase datable to the Aksumite period (fourth to seventh century), as witnessed by a nucleus of texts apparently translated from Greek, along with texts that were translated from Arabic at the earliest from the thirteenth to fourteenth or even twelfth century.<sup>23</sup> The hagiographies to be ascribed to the Greek translation are, at least, the *Acts* of Anicetus and Photius;<sup>24</sup> 'Arsenofis, Peter and 'Askiryon;<sup>25</sup> 'Ḥmārāyəs;<sup>26</sup> Euphemia;<sup>27</sup> Phileas bishop of

19 MTMs containing both homilies and *gadolāt* are also attested.

20 CAe 1493.

21 CAe 1487.

22 The matter of labels and titles of MTMs and related problems is discussed in Brita forthcoming.

23 This preliminary assessment of the *Gadla samā'tāt* transmission is based on various evidence collected and published by Bausi 2002, 15–17.

24 CAe 6501. Villa 2021.

25 CAe 1902. Edition and Italian translation by Conti Rossini 1938.

26 CAe 4039. Edited by Pereira 1902.

27 CAe 4043.

Thmuis;<sup>28</sup> Sophia and his three daughters: Pistis, 'Elpis and 'Agape;<sup>29</sup> Tewofelos, Pātroqyā and Damālis;<sup>30</sup> and, perhaps, Cyprian and Justina.<sup>31</sup> These texts, to which others may be added, probably constitute the core of an earlier collection circulating in the Aksumite period that, at some point, ceased to exist. Its texts were then redistributed and rearranged in new collections transmitted in MTMs together with new texts translated from Arabic. The reception of the latter in Gə'ez apparently displays two different paths of transmission: (1) an Egyptian (Copto-Arabic) transmission supported by a certain number of texts' subscriptions explicitly stating that they were translated from Arabic or connecting their translation to a Copto-Arabic milieu; these subscriptions are found in the *Acts* of Abakerazum;<sup>32</sup> Abraham the stone-cutter;<sup>33</sup> 'Abuqer and Yoḥannəs;<sup>34</sup> 'Arsānyos; Bəsoy;<sup>35</sup> Cornelius the Centurion;<sup>36</sup> Basilides;<sup>37</sup> Galāwdewos;<sup>38</sup> Nob;<sup>39</sup> 'Orni;<sup>40</sup> Peter, patriarch of Alexandria;<sup>41</sup> Pifāmon;<sup>42</sup> Theodore the Oriental;<sup>43</sup> Isaac of Tiphre;<sup>44</sup> Justus, his son Aboli and his wife Thecla;<sup>45</sup> and the miracles of Theodore Stratelates.<sup>46</sup> (2) The second channel of transmission, more difficult to ascertain, is probably identified on the opposite shore of the Red Sea, in the area between the Sinai Peninsula and South Arabia, as it is witnessed by a certain number of hagiographies which are apparently unknown in the Copto-Arabic tradition;<sup>47</sup> these are the *Acts* of Athanasios of Clysma<sup>48</sup> and the texts related to

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28 CAe 3162. Edition and Italian translation by Bausi 2002.

29 CAe 1900. Villa 2018.

30 CAe 3168. Edition and Italian translation by Ricci 1947.

31 CAe 3159.

32 CAe 6435.

33 CAe 6381. Simon 1931.

34 CAe 1010.

35 CAe 6537. Compendium in French by Beylot 1986; edition and French translation by Colin 2002.

36 CAe 6540.

37 CAe 1893. Pereira 1907, edition: 1–78; Latin translation: 1–70.

38 CAe 4827. Pereira 1907, edition: 193–226; Latin translation: 173–204.

39 CAe 5631.

40 CAe 6380.

41 CAe 6499. Edition and German translation by Elagina 2013.

42 CAe 6346.

43 CAe 1904. Pereira 1907, edition: 123–164; Latin translation: 105–143.

44 CAe 4835. Edition by Pereira 1903.

45 CAe 2595. Pereira 1907, edition: 81–122; Latin translation: 71–103.

46 CAe 6182. Bausi 2002, 10–12.

47 Bausi 2016.

48 CAe 1797. Raineri 2001.

the historical episode of the massacre of Nāgrān and the subsequent expedition of the Ethiopian king Kāleb, in particular the *Acts of Arethas*<sup>49</sup> and of 'Azqir.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, two additional marking features transmitted in the MTMs can also be regarded as clues to the stages of transmission. The first feature, attested in some MTMs, is represented by a both Greek-Coptic and Arabic form of the month's name attested in the date of the saint's death, for instance, in the *Acts of 'Arsenofis, Peter and 'Askiryon* (*ḡāhuni* or *ḡahin* instead of *sane*); Cyprian and Justa (*meker* instead of *ṭəqəmt*) (Fig. 2); Phileas bishop of Thmuis (*meker*); and Theodor the Oriental (*meker*). The second feature concerns the presence in some MTMs of a short final title at the end of some individual texts. It is found, for instance, in the *Acts of Phileas bishop of Thmuis*; Philemon the Gleeman;<sup>51</sup> Theocritus the Reader;<sup>52</sup> Tālāsēs and 'Al'azār.<sup>53</sup> The presence of a title at the beginning of the text in the Ethiopian Christian manuscript culture is quite common, while a title at the end of the text is a rather atypical phenomenon and may well be evidence of a relic of transmission.<sup>54</sup>



Fig. 2: Reading indication of the *Acts of Cyprian and Justa*: 'for the month of *meker* (= *ṭəqəmt*) Qopryānos'. Manuscript Təgrāy, Dag'wa a Tamben, Dabra 'Abuna 'Abiya 'Egzi', AAE-001. Photograph by Antonella Brita (May 2013).

49 CAe 1891. Edition and Italian translation by Alessandro Bausi, in Bausi and Gori 2006.

50 CAe 1425. Edition and Italian translation in Bausi 2017.

51 CAe 4040.

52 CAe 1903.

53 CAe 6500.

54 For further details on end titles, see Brita forthcoming.

### 4.3 Embedding hagiographic works in liturgy: the structure and use of MTMs

The considerations made about the transmission of the hagiographic corpus in Gə'əz suggests that its organisation in the MTMs had a complex history, the process of which can be at present only partly understood.<sup>55</sup> The structure of the collections, as it is known today in the manuscripts, must be regarded as the result of a long process of revision, adaptation and reshaping of both texts and manuscripts. The most ancient MTMs so far known are dated to the thirteenth to fourteenth century and can be chronologically set in an intermediate period between the disappearing of the late antique Aksumite heritage based on Greek knowledge transmission and the absorption of the medieval Christian Arabic culture. The growing number of texts translated from Arabic, from the fourteenth century onwards, must have required a reshaping of the corpus in the MTMs and the revision of the individual texts both from a linguistic and material point of view. The new texts translated from Arabic were combined with more ancient texts translated from Greek, some of which might also have possibly gone through a retranslation process from Arabic or through a revision based on one (or more) Arabic model.<sup>56</sup> This process, aiming at producing manuscripts readapted each time to liturgical needs, was not only associated with a physical rearrangement of the texts in the MTMs, but also with a progressive change in the size of the MTMs. The evidence collected show that the increasing number of saints to be celebrated fostered an enlargement of the corpus, leading to the production of manuscripts of considerable size (in some cases, two volumes), large enough to accommodate more hagiographies. The *Acts of the martyrs* and (although less) the *Acts of the saints'* collections were very popular in the Ethiopian monasteries between the fourteenth and the sixteenth century: a growing number of MTMs were copied, disseminated and used for the liturgical commemoration of the saints. The chronological attestation of the MTMs allows one to determine the importance of these collections attested in a few MTMs even before the diffusion of the first recension of the Ethiopic *Synaxarion* at the end of the fourteenth century. The peak of both *Acts of the martyrs* and *Acts of the saints'* MTMs circulation is attested between the fourteenth and fifteenth centu-

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<sup>55</sup> Apart from a few exceptions (Bausi 2002; Bausi 2017; Bausi and Gori 2006), the lack of proper critical editions of the texts of the corpus makes it difficult currently to propose more accurate conclusions, mostly concerning the thorny matter of the *Vorlage* of the individual texts, for which some reflections were proposed by Bausi 2002, 15–18.

<sup>56</sup> A process well-known in works translated in the Gə'əz language, cf. Bausi 2018.

ry. However, the diachronic distribution of the surviving manuscripts reveals an undeniable countertrend looming on the horizon from the second half of the sixteenth century and symptomatic of a cultural change in veneration practices in progress. In this period, the circulation of MTMs transmitting the second recension of the Ethiopic *Synaxarion* increased and kept on growing in the following centuries, while the circulation of the *Acts of the martyrs* and *Acts of the saints*' MTMs progressively began to decrease. It can be presumed that the spread of the second recension of the Ethiopic *Synaxarion* must have offered a new model of MTMs that the old MTM type could not emulate, determining its progressive dismissal.<sup>57</sup> From a material point of view, indeed, the MTMs transmitting the *Synaxarion* are organised in a less rigid structure, compared with the *Acts of the martyrs* and *Acts of the saints*' MTMs, and, consequently, their arrangement satisfied the new ritual requirements in a more effective way: (1) the hagiographies are shorter; (2) they cover the whole liturgical year; and (3) more than one saint is commemorated each day. The short readings, in substance, allowed one to accommodate the commemorative readings of more saints for the whole liturgical year in solely two volumes. The reason behind the success of the new MTMs' form lies in a change in the liturgical practices: the veneration of more saints implied a multiplication of hagiographic texts to be read (almost) every day of the liturgical year. This does not mean that this sort of conflict between the two MTM types entailed the replacement of the former to the advantage of the new type, since the two collections have a different function, being read at two different moments of the liturgical office.<sup>58</sup> It only means that the new MTM type could not serve as a model for reshuffling the old MTM type. The inclusion of more and more texts and additional commemoration dates would have led to the production of giant MTMs – even bigger than they were already – impossible to handle. From the second half of the sixteenth century, the old MTM type was set aside, although not yet completely dismissed, and additional MTM forms started to emerge. This process coincides with the increasing production of texts on local saints.

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<sup>57</sup> This hypothesis, already proposed by Bausi 2002, 12–14, is corroborated by the new documentation acquired in the last few years, which allowed the number of MTMs known at the time to double.

<sup>58</sup> The *Synaxarion* is performed every day during the office of the morning while the *Acts of the martyrs* and the *Acts of the saints* are a main reading on the memorial day of the individual saints.

#### 4.4 The visual patterns of the performance

The visual patterns<sup>59</sup> of the *Acts of the martyrs* and *Acts of the saints'* MTMs reveal their nature of liturgical books. The individual textual units are shaped in the form of commemorative readings of various lengths laid out in calendrical order to be performed on the saints' memorial days. The visual organisation of the MTMs' pages enables the reader to easily identify each textual unit and sub-unit. The decorations of the frontispiece and the beginning of the textual units range between plain geometric ornaments and more elaborated pictorial motifs. They can consist of rubricated words; straight lines made of dots or/and strokes in alternate black and red ink; pictorial frames filled with geometric patterns surrounding the text area (and the columns) and sometimes dividing the page into two registers (upper and lower); and traditional *ḥarags* or ribbon-shaped horizontal bands (sometimes enriched with perpendicular bands framing the text from the side and dividing the columns) filled with interlaced geometric or organic motifs and provided at the top with stylized leaves. The frontispiece can occasionally also be decorated with illuminations portraying the saints or Biblical figures. Linear graphic lines are normally used to (1) mark the end of the previous textual unit (Fig. 3); (2) delineate the caesura between two textual units (Fig. 4); or (3) distinguish the sub-units (e.g. miracles, blessing formulae, final titles, subscriptions, colophons) of the textual units (Figs 3 and 4).

The most lavish MTMs use pictorial frames, *ḥarag* and sometimes miniatures to flag the beginning of a textual unit, although their use within the same MTM is often inconsistent (Fig. 5). They can differ in style and size, be placed over one (Fig. 4), two (Figs 2 and 6) or three columns, or frame the text area and/or the intercolumn. The title and *incipit* of the textual units are commonly written in red and black ink in alternate lines or group of lines and sometimes also in balanced columns, distributed in the upper or lower register of the text area, where the vertical space is precisely calculated to obtain columns of the same length (Fig. 6). The balanced columns can also shape the end of a textual unit.

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<sup>59</sup> For a definition of 'patterns' in manuscripts, see Wimmer et al. 2015.

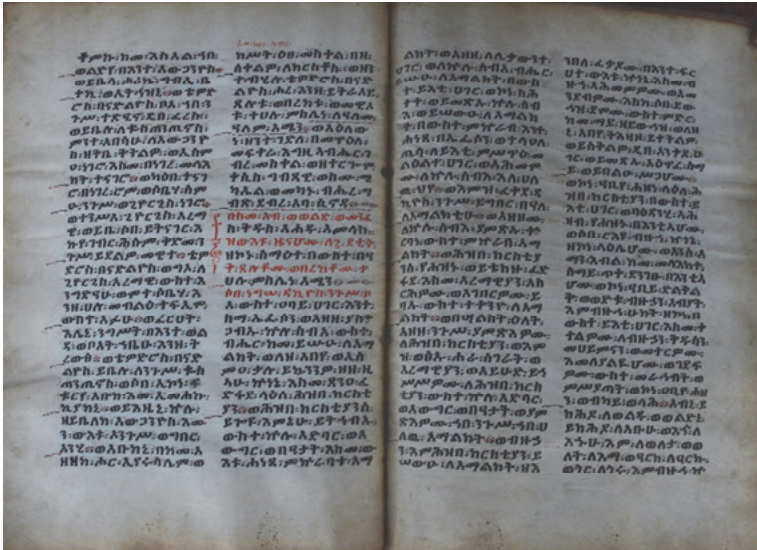


Fig. 3: Graphic lines dividing two textual units and subunits. Manuscript Təgrāy, Dag<sup>w</sup>a Tamben, Dur 'Ambā Šəllāsse, DAS-002. Photograph by Antonella Brita (May 2013).



Fig. 4: Graphic lines used for marking the caesura between two textual units and subunits. Manuscript Təgrāy, Dag<sup>w</sup>a Tamben, Dabra 'Abuna 'Abiya 'Əgzi', AAE-001. Photograph by Antonella Brita (May 2013).





**Fig. 5:** Image of the Sts Cyricus and Julitta. Manuscript Təgrāy, 'Aksum, Märyām Şəyon, MaySe-001. Photograph by Antonella Brita (November 2016).



**Fig. 6:** Balanced columns. Manuscript Təgrāy, Dag<sup>w</sup>a Tamben, Dabra 'Abuna 'Abiya 'Əgzi', AAE-001. Photograph by Antonella Brita (May 2013).



Reading indications bear witness to the MTMs' use, designating the time of the liturgical ritual performance. They are shaped in the form of paracontent<sup>60</sup> written in the margins of the pages, in correspondence with the beginning of the textual units (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7:** Reading indication. Monastery of Gabra'el Wuqen (Taḡrāy, Ethiopia). Photograph by Antonella Brita (May 2013).

The formulae employed are quite heterogeneous, as the following examples show: 'on the 26th of *ḥədār*'; 'on the 6th of *ṭəqəmt* Saint Pāntalewon martyr'; 'on the 25th of *naḥase* reading'; 'for the month of *maskaram* on the 15th'; and others. As has already been mentioned above, in some MTMs, a Greek-Coptic form of the name of the month is also preserved, for instance: 'for the month of *meker* [= *ṭəqəmt*] on the 7th Qoṗryānos' (Fig. 2). In addition to the variety of formulae employed, the reading indication reveals the date of the death of the saint (*dies natalis*), i.e. when the ceremony of the *tazkār* takes place and the text must be recited.

<sup>60</sup> For a definition of 'paracontent' as alternative term for 'paratext' in manuscripts, see Ciotti et al. 2018.

These manuscripts show how the process of assembling and structuring hagiographic MTMs aimed at creating a performative device to be used for establishing, observing and actualising the time and rhythm of the saints' liturgical commemoration, and for evoking and renewing the presence of the saints among the faithful each time the manuscript is read.

#### 4.5 The rise of the Ethiopian hagiography: variations on the theme of foreign sainthood

The sporadic presence of texts about local saints in MTMs witnesses the gradual emergence of a local hagiography committed to manuscripts from the end of the fourteenth century, along with the copying and revision of more ancient texts and the translation of new ones. The earliest texts known about Ethiopian saints were included in these MTMs, in addition to the texts on foreign saints known previously. Most of the first local saints of the Ethiopian Church are claimed to be of foreign origin but to have lived in Ethiopia in the Aksumite period, with the aim of disseminating the Christian faith among the population of the Ethiopian highlands.<sup>61</sup> An example of such an initiative is the *Life* of the saint Pāñtalewon *zaṣomā't* (lit. 'the one of the cell'),<sup>62</sup> a pious monk living in seclusion in a rock-hewn cell close to the city of 'Aksum (Təgrāy, North Ethiopia). The earliest copy of the text is transmitted in the manuscript Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 7602,<sup>63</sup> a fourteenth-century copy of the *Acts of the saints*<sup>64</sup> and, from the fifteenth century onwards, in some *Acts of the martyrs*' MTMs as well. The core narrative of the *Life* of Pāñtalewon *zaṣomā't* is based predominantly on written sources related to the military campaign of King Kāleb to South Arabia, with a few original passages.<sup>65</sup> It is based more specifically on two hagiographic texts that are also part of the *Acts of the martyrs*' corpus transmitted in MTMs: the *Life* of Kāleb<sup>66</sup> and the *Acts* of Arethas mentioned already, deriving respectively from two different recensions of the

61 Brita 2010.

62 CAe 1532.

63 Fiaccadori 1993.

64 For details on the manuscript tradition of the *Life* of Pāñtalewon, see Brita 2008.

65 For an overview of the textual transmission of the *Life* of Pāñtalewon *zaṣomā't*, see Brita 2008, 271–292.

66 CAe 6507. The text is attested so far in a *codex unicus* and is still unpublished. Overviews were provided by Bausi 2010, 249–251, and Marrassini 2014, 112 and *passim*. An edition with translation is in preparation by Alessandro Bausi.

Arabic version of the *Acts of Arethas*, the first more ancient and close to the Greek version and the second more recent.<sup>67</sup> Compelling evidence reveals the complexity of the relations between the Ethiopic and foreign versions (mainly Arabic and Greek) of these hagiographic traditions.<sup>68</sup> The name of the protagonist, P̄anṭalewon, is attested only in the Ethiopic sources (except for the *Life of Kāleb*) and replaces the names *Zonaïos* and *Zaynūn* occurring in the Greek<sup>69</sup> and in one of the three Arabic recensions<sup>70</sup> of the *Acts of Arethas*, respectively. The recent hypotheses, based on philological evidence, proposed to explain the discrepancy of the name of the monk in the sources are not convincing.<sup>71</sup> It is more reasonable to assume that the name P̄anṭalewon derives simply from the name of the homonymous martyr, a physician of Nicomedia, whose hagiography was also translated in Gəʿəz.<sup>72</sup> The two P̄anṭalewon (the Ethiopian monk and the Byzantine martyr) are indeed celebrated on the same date (6 ṭəqəmt) in the Ethiopian liturgical calendar and their commemorative readings follow each other in the *Acts of the martyrs'* MTMs, when they are both present, although the two texts are unrelated.

The presence of foreign hagiographic motifs on the earlier examples of local hagiography is also variously recognisable in other texts. The *Homilies* of Libānos, Garimā<sup>73</sup> and the *Life of Zamikāʿel ʿAragāwi*<sup>74</sup> are influenced at different levels by the *Life of Gabra Krəstos*,<sup>75</sup> i.e. the Byzantine saint Alexis, translated into Gəʿəz and transmitted not only in the *Acts of the saints* and *Acts of the martyrs'* MTMs but also in smaller hagiographic MTMs. The material co-presence of the texts of both Aksumite and foreign saints in the same manuscript is the reason for, or perhaps the consequence of, such an influence.<sup>76</sup>

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67 Paolo La Spisa has recently published a valuable work containing the critical editions and translations of all Arabic recensions of the *Acts of Arethas*, cf. La Spisa 2021. An additional updated bibliography can also be found here.

68 For a general discussion on the textual relationship between the *Life of P̄anṭalewon zašomāʿt* and the related sources, see Brita 2010, 146–174; Marrassini 2011; Marrassini 2014, 160–170.

69 The Greek version of the *Acts of Arethas* was published by Marina Detoraki with a French translation by Joëlle Beaucamp, see Detoraki 2007, 179–285.

70 La Spisa 2021, 357, § 30 e 356–357, n. 128.

71 Fiaccadori 2006, 64–65; Detoraki 2007, 266, n. 189.

72 CAe 3158. Edition and Italian translation by Pisani 2006; see also Pisani 2015.

73 CAe 1285. Edited by Conti Rossini 1897 and translated by Ducati 1939.

74 CAe 1526. Edited by Guidi 1895 and translated by Van den Oudenrijn 1939.

75 CAe 1450. Cerulli 1969.

76 Marrassini 2005, 112; Brita and Gnisci 2019.

In some cases, the texts on local saints are extended versions of earlier shorter texts already circulating in the homiletic collections transmitted in MTMs and dated to the thirteen to fourteenth century. An instance is the homily in honour of the Aksumite saint Libānos (previously quoted regarding his *kidān*) in the short *Homily* of ʿAbbā Eləyās, bishop of Aksum on Maṭāʿ transmitted in the manuscripts Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 1763 and Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 8509;<sup>77</sup> the extended version of the *Homily* of Libānos<sup>78</sup> is also attested, among other manuscripts, in the MTM Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 7602 mentioned above. Another example is the *Homily* of Luləyānos, bishop of Aksum, on the Holy Fathers, to be read on the commemoration day of the Aksumite saint Garimā attested in the *codices trigemini*.<sup>79</sup> (1) Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 1763; (2) Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 8509; and (3) London, British Library, Or. 8192 and in manuscript Təgrāy, Bəherāwi Kəlləlāwi Mangəsti, ʿUrā Qirqos, UM-046.<sup>80</sup> Additional texts devoted to Aksumite figures are also transmitted in homiletic collections, such as the *Homily* on the Aksumite King ʿElla ʿAšbəha<sup>81</sup> and the *Homily* on Frumentius,<sup>82</sup> the first bishop of Aksum. Furthermore, the core of some of these short texts was apparently excerpted from Aksumite historical texts based on a Greek *Vorlage* and shaped in the form of liturgical readings.<sup>83</sup>

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**77** CAe 1294. Edition and English translation by Getatchew Haile 1990. See also Bausi 2003, vol. 1, xi-xii and vol. 2, xvi-xix.

**78** Edition and Italian translation by Bausi 2003.

**79** Proverbio 2001, 518–519.

**80** CAe 1286. Edition and English translation by Getatchew Haile 1985.

**81** CAe 6394. Edition and English translation by Getatchew Haile 1981.

**82** CAe 1612. Edition and English translation by Getatchew Haile 1979.

**83** At least two cases can be mentioned. The first case, investigated by Alessandro Bausi, is the core of the *Acts* of Saint Peter of Alexandria excerpted from the *History of the Episcopate of Alexandria* preserved in the manuscript Təgrāy, Bəherāwi Kəlləlāwi Mangəsti, ʿUrā Qirqos, UM-039; the Gəʿəz version is the sole extant complete witness of the *History* since the Greek version is lost and only a portion is preserved in a Latin translation; see Bausi 2019, 71–74; Bausi and Camplani 2016, *passim*. The second case, investigated by Massimo Villa, concerns the *Homily* on Frumentius and its possible derivation from an Aksumite translation of the history of Aedesius and Frumentius in the version reported by Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I, 19. In this second case, the Gəʿəz version of Socrates’s account is missing and can only be supposed; see Villa 2017, 95–100.

#### 4.5.1 A few examples of intertextuality: some textual and philological considerations

Some textual and philological features are discussed in the following paragraph in order to show how complex it is to trace the origin of the early texts on local saints. Various sources<sup>84</sup> were employed for their composition and their reception and adaptation in making sense or producing new meanings from them is a crucial matter for philologists. The relationship between the texts and their sources are convoluted to such an extent that it is often difficult to tell the different layers apart. Only a few examples will be given due to space constraints. I try to be as clear and understandable as possible in my exposition, so that the reader who is not familiar with the Gə'əz language can still follow the discussion.

Jonas Karlsson, in his recent and impressive PhD thesis, has dealt with a type of collection of Ethiopian antiphons, transmitted in a work labelled *Dəggwā*, largely widespread in Ethiopia because of its centrality in the liturgy.<sup>85</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this is the first (successful) attempt to systematise such material (or at least a part of it), whose importance for our understanding of the Ethiopian veneration practices is sometimes underestimated. Chapter 3 of his work is devoted to the study of the textual interrelationship between some of the texts of the antiphons and the *Lives* and *Acts* of various earlier Ethiopian saints.<sup>86</sup> With the aim of tracing the textual development of the antiphon corpus and the degree of fluctuation of the text over time, the author carefully compares the short texts of the antiphons with the longer hagiographic texts, highlighting not only points of contact but also divergences between the two textual traditions. He concludes that, among the case studies he analyses, not all texts follow the

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**84** I use the word 'sources' in the same acceptation as the one expressed by Cornelia Horn: '[T]he concept of "sources" used here is open to at least two differentiable, yet closely related, meanings. It may characterize a given text that serves as an immediate and direct text at the origins of at least one or several parts of another text, including direct citations. It is also an apt label with which to describe the role or function of a text through which that text witnesses to one or several traditions, which in their turn in oral or written form directly or through further mediation have contributed to the process of communicating ideas in and to the production process(es) of another text. In the second case, a text may still be understood to be a "source", even if its own precise wording is not present in the text to which it contributes. In that second instance, the "source" text may serve as the place of origin from which traditions, in whichever direction, traveled to the recipient text in question, and it may serve as a textual location from which our present-day knowledge receives information about the very existence of such process of transmission', cf. Horn 2017, 60.

**85** Karlsson 2022.

**86** Karlsson 2022, 332–675.

same development patterns. In particular, there might be cases in which the text of the *Life* of the saint gave birth to the antiphons, as in the case of the *Acts* of Pānṭalewon the Martyr, and cases in which the short text of the antiphon might be considered as the precursor of the larger hagiographic narratives dedicated to the saint, as in the case of the *Life* of Pānṭalewon *zaṣomā‘t*.<sup>87</sup> An interesting hypothesis that, if confirmed, would contribute to shedding light on the complex process of hagiographic composition practices. According to Karlsson hypothesis, the short text of the antiphons dedicated to Pānṭalewon *zaṣomā‘t* (and to other saints) may constitute a sort of germ which, through expansions and textual accretions, later developed into the *Life* of the saint. Having made a critical edition of the *Life* of Pānṭalewon during my PhD,<sup>88</sup> I would like to add some considerations to the arguments raised by Jonas Karlsson, with the aim of fostering a further reflection.

#### 4.5.1.1 Old and new meanings. Some thoughts on the motif: *‘albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat*

Several antiphons dedicated to Pānṭalewon *zaṣomā‘t* contain a motif that, due to its frequent occurrence, appears to have been particularly meaningful in the tradition about the saint. The same motif is indeed also attested in the *Life* of Pānṭalewon. I, firstly, introduce both versions of the motif and then make some considerations.<sup>89</sup>

Antiphon:

ጼና፡ አልባሲታ፡ ለእንጠለዎን፡ ከመ፡ ጼና፡ ስኂን ። አልባሲታ፡ ዘሚላት ዘወረደ፡ ውስተ፡ ገነት፡

*ṣenā ‘albāsihu la-Pānṭalewon kama ṣenā səḥin; ‘albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat*

The scent of the garment of Pānṭalewon is like the scent of frankincense; his fine linen garment which descended into Paradise.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Karlsson 2022, 566 and 570.

<sup>88</sup> Brita 2008, 273–352.

<sup>89</sup> I decided in the examples provided here to also give, when necessary, a transliteration of the Ethiopic text, unlike in the rest of the contribution. This is done to allow the reader who is not familiar with the Ethiopic script to follow the details.

<sup>90</sup> I report the transcription and translation of this antiphon given by Karlsson 2022, 567. In the antiphon, the motif is expressed by two sentences that here, for the sake of simplification, I

*Life of Pāntalewon:*

ጼኛ ፡ አልባሲከኒ ፡ ከመ ፡ ጼኛ ፡ ስኒን ፡ ወጸጣዕትከኒ ፡ ከመ ፡ ጼኛ ፡ ገነት ፡ ወአልባሲሁ ፡ ዘሜ  
 ላት ፡ ዘወረደ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ገነት ፡ አውረደ ፡ ቃሎ ፡ ኅቤከ ፡ ወመንገረሰ ፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ተናዘዘ ፡ ምስሌከ ፡  
 ውስተ ፡ ማኅደርከ ፡ ወኅበርከ ፡ ጸብሐ ፡ ምስለ ፡ መላእክት ፡ መዓልተ ፡ ወሌሊተ ፡ ቀዊመከ ፡ ቅድ  
 መ ፡ መንበሩ ፡ ለእግዚእከ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ሆሎከ ፡ በሥጋከ ፡ ዲበ ፡ ምድር ፡

*šenā 'albāsikani kama šenā səḥin wa-šomā 'təkani kama šenā gannat wa-'albāsihu za-melāt  
 za-warada wəsta gannat 'awrada qālo ḥabeka wa-manfas qəddus tanāzaza məseleka wəsta  
 māḥdarka wa-ḥabarka šabḥo məsala malā'əkt ma'alta wa-lelita qawimaka qədma manbaru  
 la-'Egzi'əka 'ənza halloka ba-šəgāka diba mədr.*

The scent of your garments is like the scent of frankincense and [the scent of] your cell is like the scent of the Paradise. The One who descended into the garden, [whose] garments are [made] of purple, brought down his [of God] voice to you and the Holy Spirit consoled himself with you in your dwelling. You took part to his glorification, together with the angels, day and night; you were standing in front of the throne of your God while you were in your flesh on earth.<sup>91</sup>

Leaving aside the first sentence, *šenā 'albāsihu la-Pāntalewon kama šenā səḥin* (in the *Life of Pāntalewon: šenā 'albāsikani kama šenā səḥin wa-šomā 'təkani kama šenā gannat*), that is the re-elaboration of a quotation from Cant. 4:11,<sup>92</sup> as it can be noticed from the passages quoted above, two different interpretations of the same (second) sentence have been proposed by Jonas Karlsson and me, lexical details apart ('fine linen' vs 'purple' and 'Paradise' vs 'garden'), to which I will come back later. Karlsson interprets the sentence '*albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat* ('his fine linen garment which descended into Paradise') as related to the previous sentence, and, thus, considering the chain '*albāsihu za-melāt* ('his fine linen garment') as the subject of the verb *warada* ('descended') resumed by the relative pronoun *za-* ('which') prefixed to the verb. In my

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divide with a semicolon. These two sentences do not always occur together in the antiphons, being transmitted in various arrangements; cf. Karlsson 2022, 367, 373, 393, 395, 412, 413, 417, 420, 422, 430, 433, 440, 444, 525–526, 527 and 567.

**91** The English translation is mine and it is based on the Italian translation that I proposed in my critical edition of the text, with some improvements that, in any case, do not alter the sense of the sentence: 'L'odore delle tue vesti è come l'odore dell'incenso, e anche [l'odore della] tua cella è come l'odore del Paradiso. Colui che è disceso con le sue vesti di porpora nel Paradiso ha portato la sua voce presso di te e lo Spirito Santo si è consolato con te nella tua dimora', cf. Brita 2008, 337, § 87.

**92** ወጼኛ ፡ አልባሲከኒ ፡ ከመ ፡ ጼኛ ፡ ስኒን ፡ *wa-šenā 'albāsəki kama šenā səḥin* ('and the scent of your garment is like the scent of frankincense'), cf. Gleave 1951, 20–21; already in Karlsson 2022, 568.

translation ('the One who descended into the garden, [whose] garments are *made* of purple'), I link the same sentence to the following lines of the *Life* of Pāntalewon text instead, and, thus, consider the relative pronoun *za-* ('the One who'), prefixed to the verb, as the subject of the verb *warada* ('descended') and the chain 'albāsihu *za-melāt* ('[whose] garments are *made* of purple') as an anticipated asyndetic relative clause related to the relative pronoun *za-* prefixed to the verb and resumed by the cataphoric possessive pronominal suffix *-hu* ('of him').<sup>93</sup>

The interpretation of this passage is certainly quite problematic for various reasons. When we have a look at the reading variants attested in the two manuscript traditions, we observe that the manuscripts transmitting the antiphons display a higher degree of fluctuation<sup>94</sup> compared with the *Life* of Pāntalewon.<sup>95</sup> This means that the sentence also sounded somehow odd to the ear of the scribes that copied the manuscripts. In fact, one cannot deny that the image of the 'garments descending into Paradise' is quite bizarre. The main problem in this sentence is to identify the subject of the verb *warada*, a third person masculine singular form. On the one hand (*Life* of Pāntalewon), we have the relative pronoun *za-* that agrees in both gender and number with the verb *warada* and, thus, works perfectly as the subject of the verb. On the other hand (antiphons), we have the broken plural form of an inanimate noun, 'albās-i-hu, that can take a singular verb agreement. In this regard, I would say that both interpretations appear to be correct. A second problem lies in the awkward expression *za-warada wasta gannat* ('that descended into Paradise') for which we would expect a different verb, such as **OC7** 'arga ('ascended') as – just to oversimplify –

<sup>93</sup> A synthesis of the different types of 'za-construction' in Gə'əz as well as its attestation in Epigraphic Gə'əz was offered in a precious contribution by Maria Bulakh, with further bibliography (Bulakh 2009).

<sup>94</sup> *Nāhu warada* ('behold, [his fine linen garment] has descended'); *warada* ('[his fine linen garment] descended'); *za-warada 'əm-samāyāt* ('[his fine linen garment] descended from heaven'); *za-waradat* ('[his fine linen garment] descended'), with the feminine instead of masculine form; cf. Karlsson 2022, 568, and individual antiphons.

<sup>95</sup> 'Albāsihu ('[the One who descended into the garden, whose] garments [are made of purple]'), without the *wa-* conjunction in manuscript 'A'; *wa-'albāsikani* ('also your garments [made of purple which descended into the garden]'), a clear *lectio facilior*: the second person masculine possessive pronoun *-ka* ('your') is introduced to align the text to the previous sentence *šenā 'albāsikani kama šenā səḥin wa-šomā'təkani kama šenā gannat* ('the scent of your garment is like the scent of frankincense and [the scent of] your cell is like the scent of the Paradise'), cf. Brita 2008, 233 and 309; cf. also Karlsson 2022, 569, n. 1329, who spotted a mistake in my apparatus, further corroborating my hypothesis of reconstruction: the *lectio* adopted in the critical texts reflects the reading of the majority of the manuscript families.



we all imagine the Paradise as a place located far above the sky.<sup>96</sup> A third, and crucial, problem is to find out to whom the *'albāsihu za-melāt* ('his garments made of fine linen/purple') belongs, thus, to whom the possessive personal pronoun *-hu* ('his') refers.

From my perspective, the short text of the antiphon lacks the general context and contains only a few details of the whole sentence, thus, limiting our understanding and, consequently, interpretation of the motif. On the contrary, the longer text of the *Life* of Pāṅṭalewon offers more details that may guide us to recognise the original intent and meaning of the episode narrated. From the enlarged picture offered by the text of the *Life* of Pāṅṭalewon, for instance, we understand that the motif is embedded in an explicit reference to the Trinity. The one '[whose] garments are [made] of purple' is without doubt Jesus Christ,<sup>97</sup> and the model that inspired the motif can be traced back to the sources narrating Jesus's *passio*. A preliminary investigation of some of these sources circulating in Gə'əz has allowed me to identify two possible interrelated sources as the place of origin of our motif: the unpublished episode of the Crucifixion transmitted in the *Ta'amməra 'Iyasus* ('The Miracles of Jesus'),<sup>98</sup> a work based largely on the Arabic apocryphal Gospel of John,<sup>99</sup> and the canonical Gospel of John.<sup>100</sup> In these two texts, the episode of Jesus's *passio*, indeed, contains a few details relevant not only to explain contextual features of our motif but also useful to

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**96** In my edition of the *Life* of Pāṅṭalewon I also translated the word *gannat* with the term *Paradiso* ('Paradise') but, in the light of new evidence, I had to reconsider this translation, cf. Brita 2008, 338, § 87.

**97** Explicitly mentioned in the antiphon *Pāṅṭalewon mazmur ('əsmā la-'ālam)* 028, cf. Karlsson 2022, 527–528.

**98** The *Ta'amməra 'Iyasus* (CAe 2382) is a work widespread in Ethiopia, translated from the Arabic version of the *Apocryphal Gospel of John* probably in the fourteenth century, with contributions from other sources, such as the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (translated in Gə'əz in the Aksumite period from a Greek model, cf. Voicu 1998), the *Protovangelium of James*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, the *Book of the Rolls*, and with the addition of original episodes composed in Gə'əz. The edition of the episode of the Crucifixion is not present in the partial edition of the *Ta'amməra 'Iyasus* published by Sylvain Grébaut in *Patrologia Orientalis* (the first thirty episodes) and in *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* (three additional episodes), with a French translation. For a general overview and bibliographical references to the edited episodes of the collection, see Arras and van Rompay 1975; Witakowski 1995; Witakowski 2010; Tedros Abraha and Daniel Assafa 2010.

**99** Editions and translation by Galbiati 1957; Moraldi 1991 (*non vidi*). See also Van Esbroeck 1975; Horn 2017.

**100** CAe 1693. A critical edition has been published by Wechsler 2005.

clarify the interpretation of some of the terms attested therein.<sup>101</sup> I quote in the following lines from these two works the passages that are pertinent to our discussion. As for the Gə‘əz texts, I use the manuscript London, British Library, Or. 654 containing the *Ta’amməra ’Iyasus* for the episode of the Crucifixion and Michael Wechsler’s edition for the Gospel of John; the English translation is mine.

*Ta’amməra ’Iyasus:*

ወእምዝ ፡ አምጽኡ ፡ ልብሰ ፡ ሜላት ፡ እምአልባሰ ፡ ነገሥት ፡ ወአልበስዎ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፤ ወዓዲ ፡ አልበስዎ ፡ ላዕሌሁ ፡ ልብሰ ፡ አሮን ፤ ወወደዩ ፡ ዲበ ፡ ርእሱ ፡ አክሊሊ ፡ ዘምክ ፤<sup>102</sup> ወሐሩ ፡ ጎበ ፡ መካን ፡ ዘሀለወ ፡ ውስጥ፡፡ ታቦተ ፡ ስምዕ ፡ ወነሥኡ ፡ ጃዕፀ ፡ እምነ ፡ ዕፀው ፡ እለ ፡ ይጸ ውሩ ፡ ቦቱ ፡ ታቦተ ፤ ወዓበጥዎ ፡ ለብእሲ ፡ ዘይሰመይ ፡ ስምዖን ፡ ቀራናዊ ፡ ወአጸርዎ ፡ ይእተ ፡ ዕፀ ፤ ወሐሩ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ገንት ፡ እንተ ፡ ሀለወት ፡ እምሀገር ፡ አፍኦ ፡ ዘትሰመይ ፡ ጎልጎታ [...] ወተ ከልዎ ፡ ህዩ ፡ ለዕፀ ፡ መስቀል ፡ በማእከለ ፡ ምድር ፡<sup>103</sup> [...] ወስቀልዎ ፡ ለእግዚእነ ፡ ኢየሱስ ፡ ክር ስቶስ ፡ ዲበ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ዕፀ ፡ መስቀል ፤<sup>104</sup>

And after that, [the soldiers] conveyed a purple garment from the garments of the kings and clad Our Lord; in addition, they put on him the garment of ’Aron and put on his head a crown of thorns. They went to the place where the tabernacle of the martyr was and took one tree among the trees that buttressed the tabernacle. They compelled a man called Sam’ on Qarenāwi to carry that tree and went in a garden called Golgotā, which was located out of the city. [...] They drove the tree of the Cross there, in the middle of the ground. [...] And they crucified Our Lord, Jesus Christ, on that wood of the Cross.

Three noteworthy details emerge from the passages quoted. Firstly, a ‘purple garment from the garments of the kings’ (*lābsa melāt ’əm’albāsa nagašt*) was employed to clothe Jesus.<sup>105</sup> Secondly, the purple garment was not taken off the body of Jesus.<sup>106</sup> Thirdly, Jesus, still wearing the purple garment, went with the

**101** The episode is also present in the Gospels Mark (CAe 1882) 15 and Matthew (CAe 1558) 27 as well as in the *Acts of Pilate* (CAe 1890) and in the *Lamentation of Mary* (CAe 1750) with slightly different details.

**102** Manuscript London, British Library, Or. 654, fol. 159<sup>rc</sup>–159<sup>va</sup>; for the parallel passage of the Arabic apocryphal Gospel of John, cf. Galbiati 1957, Chap. 45, v. 2.

**103** Manuscript London, British Library, Or. 654, fol. 159<sup>va</sup>; for the parallel passage of the Arabic apocryphal Gospel of John, cf. Galbiati 1957, Chap. 45, v. 3.

**104** Manuscript London, British Library, Or. 654, fol. 159<sup>vb</sup>; for the parallel passage of the Arabic apocryphal Gospel of John, cf. Galbiati 1957, Chap. 45, v. 4.

**105** The reason for clothing Jesus with the purple of the kings was to mock him, cf. Matt. 27:28–31; Mark 15:17–20; John 19:2–5.

**106** In the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, but not in John, the soldiers, after putting the purple garment on Jesus’s body, take them off and give him back his clothes before his crucifixion.

soldiers and Simon of Cyrene, who carried his cross, into a ‘garden’ (*wəsta gannat*) whose name is Golgotha. As it can be noticed, these elements are, so to say, summarised in the sentence under investigation: *’albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat* (‘The One who descended into the garden, [whose] garments are made of purple’). In the light of this evidence, it can be confidently assumed that, at least in the *Life* of Pantaḷewon, the construct *za-melāt* can be rendered as ‘purple’ and the word *gannat* as ‘garden’, instead of as ‘Paradise’. This might be different, as we will see, for the antiphons.

The three noteworthy details attested in the episode of the Crucifixion are also scattered in the Chapter 19 of the Gospel of John:

**ወፀፈሩ ፡ ሐራ ፡ አክሊለ ፡ ዘሥክ ፡ ወአስተቀጸልዎ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ርእሱ ፡ ወአልበስዎ ፡ ሚላት ።<sup>107</sup>**

They [the soldiers] wove a crown of thorns and put it on [lit. ‘in’] his head; and clad him of purple.<sup>108</sup>

**ወቦ ፡ ገዥ ፡ ውስተ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ መካን ፡ ኀበ ፡ ሰቀልዎ ፡ ወውስተ ፡ ደእቲ ፡ ገዥ ፡ ዝኅረ ፡ ሐዲስ ፡ ዘአልቦ ፡ ዘተቀብረ ፡ ውስቲቱ ። ወቀበርዎ ፡ ህዩ ፡ ለኢየሱስ ፡ እስመ ፡ ዐርቦሙ ፡ ውእቱ ፡ ወቅሩብ ፡ መቃብሩ ።<sup>109</sup>**

There was a garden in that place where they crucified him and, in that garden, [there was] a fresh sepulchre in which no one had been buried. They buried Jesus there, since it was their [of the Jews] Friday [i.e. the Parasceve] and his tomb was nearby.

It can be added that, also in the canonical Gospel of John, the episode of the soldiers taking off the purple garment (*melāt*) from Jesus’s body is missing.

Coming back to the main point of the discussion, it is clearly evident that the motif *’albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat* has its roots in the textual traditions related to Jesus’s *passio* and, therefore, the subject of the motif must be identified with Jesus Christ; at least in origin. My impression is that the way the sentence is tailored and syntactically structured in the two textual traditions, i.e. the *Life* of Pantaḷewon and the *Dəggwā*, reflects two different aims and meanings. In the *Life* of Pantaḷewon, the stress of the sentence is on *’awrada qālo ḥabeka* (‘brought down his voice to you’), so, the head of the sentence is

<sup>107</sup> John 19:2, cf. Wechsler 2005, 112.

<sup>108</sup> In Matt. 27:28: **አልበስዎ ፡ ከሌሚዳ ፡ ዘለይ ፡ ’albasəwo kalamedā za-lay** ‘[the soldiers] clothed him of a scarlet chlamys’, cf. Zuurmond 2001, 286–287 (A text = B test). According to the *Acts of Pilate*, Pilate was also dressed with purple garments before being hanged on the cross: **ወአልበስዎ ፡ ልብስ ፡ ሚላት wa’albasəwo ləbsa melāt** ‘et lui firent revêtir un vêtement de pourpre’, cf. Beylot 1993, 640 (text) and 641 (translation), § 17

<sup>109</sup> John 19:41–42, cf. Wechsler 2005, 117.

the constituent *za-warada* ('the One who descended'), the main verb is *'awrada* ('brought down'),<sup>110</sup> and the *za*-construction *'albāsihu za-melāt* ('[whose] garments are [made] of purple') is the relative that is functional to the identification of Jesus Christ. Whereas, in the antiphons, the stress of the sentence is on *warada wəsta gannat* ('descended into Paradise'), so, the head of the sentence is the constituent *'albāsihu za-melāt* ('his fine linen garment') and the main verb *warada* ('descended'). It could be added that, from a textual point of view, in the *Life* of Pantałewon, the garments of the saint are never mentioned, unlike the 'voice of the Father who descended', respectively, on the dwelling of the saint, or on his mount, or on him.<sup>111</sup> Being quite familiar with the rhetoric of the *Life* of Pantałewon text, I can confidently admit that the absence of celebrative passages devoted to the garments of Pantałewon can only mean that the *'albāsihu za-melāt* were not perceived as belonging to the saint, unlike in the *Dəggwā*.<sup>112</sup>

An alternative explanation to Karlsson's hypothesis then could be that the motif was originally present in the *Life* of Pantałewon and, at some point, it was excerpted and inserted in the antiphons of the *Dəggwā*. Here, it lost its original meaning and assumed a new one. The fluctuation of the reading variants detected by Karlsson in the manuscripts of the *Dəggwā* might be symptomatic of its problematic reception when compared to the greater stability attested in the manuscripts of the *Life* of Pantałewon. In this transposition, the *za*-construction *'albāsihu za-melāt* underwent a sort of process of crystallization in the antiphons of the *Dəggwā*, probably due to the anticipated position of the asyndetic relative clause in the *Life* of Pantałewon but also to the loss of the second part of the sentence *'awrada qālo ḥabeka*, that is, the reference to the voice of God. In losing its original syntactic function, the expression *'albāsihu za-melāt* became the head of the sentence in the new context and, as a consequence, the possessive pronominal suffix *-hu* ('his') which originally referred to Jesus Christ was reinterpreted as referring to the saint Pantałewon. In this process, a residuum of

**110** All witnesses of the *Life* of Pantałewon agree on this point, except one, the manuscript Təgrāy, Dag<sup>w</sup>a Tamben, Dur Ambā Səllässe, DAS-002, which displays the *lectio* **ወአውረደ ፡ ቃሉ ፡ ንኪክ ፡ wa-'awrada qālo ḥabeka** ('and brought down his voice to you'). This manuscript is not included in the critical edition because it is among the unpublished witnesses that I discovered after 2008.

**111** There are all in all nine occurrences of this motif, cf. Brita 2008, 300–302 (text), 333–334 (translation), §§ 46–53.

**112** The only probable mention of his garment is, as we have seen, in the quotation from Cant. 4:11. Everything belonging to the saint is celebrated and praised in the text: his cell, his mount, his beauty, his scent. Furthermore, a detailed description of the body of the saint is given as well as the dimensions of his cell, but not a word about the way he was dressed.

the previous meaning remained in a certain measure in the following antiphon, where Jesus Christ is mentioned:

ጼኖ፡ አልባሲሁ ለአባ፡ ጳጳሳጤዎን፡ ከመ፡ ጼኖ፡ ስኒን፡ አልባሲሁ፡ ዘሚላት፡ ዘወረደ፡  
ወ-ስተ፡ ገነት፡ በመስቀሉ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ገብረ፡ መድኅኒተ ቆ።

*ṣenā 'albāsihu la'abbā Pāṇṭalewon kama ṣenā səḥin 'albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat bamasqalu Krəstos gabra madḥanita.*

The scent of the garment of 'Abbā Pāṇṭalewon is like the scent of frankincense, his fine linen garment which descended into Paradise. Through his cross, Christ effected salvation!<sup>113</sup>

At last, an interesting aspect mentioned by Karlsson deserves to be underlined: the same motif is also found in a contemporary *mazmur* hymn for the saint Gabra Manfas Qəddus.<sup>114</sup> This can be possibly considered a further reflex of the crystallization process.<sup>115</sup>

#### 4.5.1.2 Textual interconnections

Additional considerations may be adduced to problematise the hypothesis that the composition of the *Life* of Pāṇṭalewon may have been developed from the antiphons of the *Dəggwā* dedicated to Pāṇṭalewon. As has already been mentioned, an important section of the *Life* of Pāṇṭalewon is based on written sources related to the military campaign of King Kāleb to South Arabia, and particularly on the *Life* of Kāleb. In addition to the considerations already made

<sup>113</sup> Karlsson 2022, 527.

<sup>114</sup> Karlsson 2022, 567, n. 1322.

<sup>115</sup> Out of curiosity, I made a search in YouTube and came across quite a number of videos of contemporary performances of the *mazmur* hymn for Gabra Manfas Qəddus mentioned by Jonas Karlsson. What I find interesting is that, although the motif was originally connected with the veneration of Pāṇṭalewon *zaṣomā't*, I was not able to find any single video performing the hymn for Pāṇṭalewon. I copy here a few of these links for the reader who is interested in hearing the *mazmur* hymn (and eventually singing it, after all this disquisition it will not be so difficult: it is enough to replace the name Pāṇṭalewon with Gabra Manfas Qəddus). In the first video the wording of the motif is the following: *ṣenā 'albāsihu la-Gabra Manfas Qəddus kama ṣenā səḥin 'albāsihu za-melāt za-warada wəsta gannat* ('the scent of the garment of Gabra Manfas Qəddus is like the scent of frankincense; his fine linen garment which descended into Paradise'), while in the second and in the third *wəsta gannat* ('in the Paradise') is replaced by *wəsta samāyāt* ('in heaven'), which rhymes with *za-melāt* ('of fine linen'). (1) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j1gi-6-3F0w>; (2) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GUMqbjmw1qc>; (3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdHZOhjP6bM>.

in Subsection 4.5, I present only one relevant passage that is parallel to the three texts introduced.<sup>116</sup> I use my edition for the *Life* of Pāntalewon, the edition of Karlsson for the *Dægḡwā*<sup>117</sup> and a preliminary edition of the *codex unicus* of the *Life* of Kāleb that Alessandro Bausi has prepared in view of his edition of the text.

*Life* of Kāleb:

ወበከዩ ፡ ወጸርኑ ፡ ወሰአሉ ፡ ኀበ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ አምላኮሙ ፡ ወአስተብቀኑ ፡ {n.l. ወ}ተማሕ  
 ፀኑ ፡ ኀቤሁ ፡ ። ወመጽአ ፡ ቃል ፡ እምሰማይ ፡ ገሃደ ፡ ወሰምዕዎ ፡ ከኑሎሙ ፡ ወይቤ ፡ ገብርኤል ፡  
 ገብርኤል ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ ወዕእ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ መኀከሰ ፡ እምሰብእ ፡ ኢትዮጵያ ፡ ወቦቲ ፡ ምስሌሁ ፡  
 ማዕተብ ፡ ዘኀጸኝ ፡ ወዓርገ ፡ እማእከለ ፡ በዋጽያት ፡ ወተመጠወ ፡ ስልሔ ፡ አሐዱ ፡ ፈረስ ፡ በፀ  
 ጋመ ፡ እደሁ ፡ ወወግአ ፡ ከርሃ ፡ በከተማ ፡ በትረ ፡ ማዕተብ ፡ እንተ ፡ ምስሌሁ ፡ ወበረረት ፡  
 ወሰተ ፡ ከርሡ ፡ ፈረስ ፡ ወረገዎ ፡ ፈረስ ፡ ሶቤሃ ፡<sup>118</sup>

[The soldiers] wept, cried out and prayed to the Lord, their God, and besought [him] and entrusted themselves to him. And a voice came manifestly from the sky and everyone heard it, and it says: ‘Gabrə’ēl, Gabrə’ēl, Gabrə’ēl’. A monk departed from the land of Ethiopia and having with him a standard of iron, rose from the middle of the rafts,<sup>119</sup> took the <tail><sup>120</sup> of a horse with his left hand and speared his abdomen with the tip of the pole of

**116** I exclude the passages that are also shared with the Ethiopic *Acts* of Arethas, since I discussed extensively them in Brita 2010, 271–292.

**117** Karlsson 2022, 542–549.

**118** *Gadla Kāleb*, § 37c–d in the preliminary edition by Alessandro Bausi.

**119** The term በዋጽያት ፡ *bawāṣəyāt* is, as has already been noted by Paolo La Spisa, a calque of the Arabic term بواصي *bawāṣī* (broken plural of بصي), a loanword from Persian بوزی, cf. La Spisa 2021, 167, n. 247 and 171, n. 254. The Gə’əz form *bawāṣəyāt* is a regular plural of the Arabic broken plural. I decided to translate it here with the English term ‘rafts’ instead of ‘ships’, firstly, to differentiate it from the term አሕማር *’ahmār* ‘ships’ (broken plural of ሐምር) also present in the text of the *Life* of Kāleb and, secondly, considering the development of the textual plot. La Spisa also translates it with *scialuppe* (‘rafts’), cf. La Spisa 2021, 171, n. 254.

**120** The text in this point is unclear. The *codex unicus* of the *Gadla Kāleb* displays the reading ስልሔ *səlḥe* preceded by an erased letter difficult to reconstruct. The term *səlḥe* is not attested in the Gə’əz lexis, neither is the root ስለሐ *salaḥa* (or ስልሐ). Considering the context in which the term occurs in the text, some very preliminary, even though not decisive, observations can be made. The closest semantically (but not morphologically) related term is recorded in Wolf Leslau: ሰላሂ *salāhi* (‘horsefly’), cf. Leslau 1991, 499. One could then guess that the term derives from the same root as *salāhi* with a possible meaning of ‘horse tail’. An alternative hypothesis could be that the root is ስሐለ *saḥala* (‘to sharpen’) instead, and that the word *səlḥe* underwent metathesis of the second and third radical. The root is well attested in Gə’əz (cf. Dillmann 1865, 327; Leslau 1991, 493) as well as in other semitic languages, cf. Leslau 1991, 493 (see particularly the metathesis occurring in Hebrew: *šəlah* ‘javelin’). With approximatively the same meaning, the verb በሉኅ *balḥa* (‘to be pointed’) and the name ብሉኅ *bələḥ* (‘tip, cusp’) also occur in

the standard which he had with him; and it [the pole] penetrated deep into the abdomen of the horse and the horse then kicked him.<sup>121</sup>

*Life of Pāntalewon:*

ወኢያእመሩ ፡ አግብርተ ፡ ንጉሥ ፡ ዘገብረ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ አላ ፡ ሐዘኑ ፡ ወርኅቡ ፡ ወጸርጉ ፡ ወጸለዩ ፡ ኅብ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ ወቦ ፡ እለ ፡ ጸርጉ ፡ በጸሎተ ፡ ጳጳሳዊዎን ፡ ዘጸማዕት ፡ ወእግዚአብሔር ፡ ሰምዐ ፡ ጸሎቶም ፡ ወተሰምዐ ፡ ዝነገር ፡ ከመ ፡ መካከሉ ፡ መጽአ ፡ ፍጽመ ፡ ወአኅዘ ፡ ዘነቦ ፡ ፈርሰ ፡ ወወግኦ ፡ በማዕተብ ፡ ወይቤሉ ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ እስመ ፡ ከማሁ ፡ ስሙ ፡

The servants of the king ignored what happened to their lord [the king] but [they] were grieved and hungry and they cried out and prayed to the Lord. And there were those that cried out with the prayer of Pāntalewon of the cell and the Lord heard their prayer. It was heard this discourse: how a monk came to the forefront and held the tail of a horse and speared it with [the pole of] the standard. And they said: ‘Gabrə’el!’ because that was his name.<sup>122</sup>

*Dəggwā:*

አስተብቀኑዎ ፡ ኅቤሁ ፡ ወመጽአ ፡ ቃል ፡ እምሰማይ ፡ ሰምዐ ፡ ከሎሎም ፡ ወይቤ ፡ ዝሃደ ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ ገብርኤል ፡ ገብርኤል ፡

They beseeched him, and from heaven came a voice [which] they all heard, openly saying: ‘Gabriel, Gabriel, Gabriel!’<sup>123</sup>

The passage parallel to the three texts shows that the episode of the monk piercing the horse in the *Life* of Pāntalewon can only be explained through its pres-

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Gə‘əz (cf. Dillmann 1865, 488) and በልሂ *balhe* (‘to be pointed, sharp’) and በልሔ *balhe* (‘to be pointed, sharpened, well-whetted’) in Tigrinya (cf. Kane 2000, 1087a–b and 1088b–1089b). In this acceptance, the term might hint at the sharpen tip of the iron pole of the standard that the monk later stuck into the horse’s abdomen and, consequently, one can suppose a corruption in the text. In any case, for the time being and for the sake of brevity, I render the term as ‘tail’ in the translation based on the readings attested both in the *Life* of Pāntalewon (see in the text above) and the first Arabic recension of the *Acts* of Arethas (فتناول بئنب فرس ‘afferrō [...] la coda di un cavallo’), cf. La Spisa 2021, 170 (text) and 171 (translation), § 37b. *Coda* (‘tail’) is also in the Italian translation of this passage of the *Gadla Kāleb* made by La Spisa 2021, 171, n. 254, who does not provide an explanation for his choice. This simplification is only functional for the aim of the present article. I am, of course, aware that this is not the best choice and that a further and deeper reflection is needed to understand the text better or, eventually, to restore it. I am confident that Alessandro Bausi will be able to provide a better explanation in his edition of the text.

121 The English translation is mine.

122 Brita 2008, 316 (text) and 343–344 (translation), §§ 125–126.

123 Karlsson 2022, 546.

ence in the *Life* of Kāleb, being missing in the *Dəggwā*. This means that the text of the *Life* of Kāleb or an earlier text translated from Arabic and used for the redaction of both the *Life* of Kāleb and the *Life* of Pāṅṭalewon must have circulated independently from the antiphons. The author(s) of the *Dəggwā* certainly knew these textual traditions and made use of them for the composition of antiphons dedicated to Pāṅṭalewon. One important aspect must be emphasised: in the *Life* of Kāleb, the monk is never identified as Pāṅṭalewon of the cell, and the fact that this text was used for the composition of antiphons dedicated to Pāṅṭalewon only means that the monk, patron of the Nāgrān military expedition, had already been identified as Pāṅṭalewon when the antiphons were composed.

#### 4.6 ‘Parchment saints’: the perception of MTMs in the authentication of sainthood

The question about how the process leading to the official recognition of saints functioned in late antique and early medieval Ethiopia will be considered under two perspectives: for foreign saints and local saints. The validation of foreign saints was, in all probability, not needed, since they were already recognised as such when their hagiographies were translated into Gə‘əz. The situation is different for local saints. Procedures comparable with the modern concept of saints’ canonisation process<sup>124</sup> are not known for late antique and early medieval Ethiopia, but they must have been performed by adopting a series of measures (composition of hagiographic texts; manuscript production, circulation and use; church construction; consecration of *tābots*;<sup>125</sup> and others) taken

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**124** A fundamental work on canonisation procedures in Europe remains the three volumes published by Vauchez 1981.

**125** A *tābot* (pl. *tābotāt*) is a blessed portable altar tablet, made of wood or stone, used for the consecration of the Eucharist, Coptic in origin. It is considered a holy artefact and is kept in the *sancta sanctorum* (*maqdas*) of the church, where only the regular clergy are allowed to enter. The *tābots* can be dedicated to saints, angels, God, Mary, Jesus Christ, the Trinity or the Holy Spirit. They can be engraved with decorations, crosses, figures and short inscriptions, usually the name of the dedicatee, cf. Heldman 2010, with additional bibliographical references. Churches can possess more than one *tābot*, but the name of the church always derives from the main *tābot* in use, which is considered the embodiment of the person to whom is dedicated and ensures her/his presence during the liturgical celebrations. In an important contribution devoted to the Ethiopian altars, Emmanuel Fritsch explains the presence of more than one *tābot* in Ethiopian churches in the light of veneration practices. Evidence on the ‘multiplication of *tābotāt*’ in Ethiopian churches of the Lästā region is attested already in the thirteenth century,



on the initiative of local ecclesiastical authorities, monastic communities and royal power. One cannot exclude that the local bishops, appointed by the Egyptian metropolitan and sent to Ethiopia from the Patriarchate of Alexandria, could have played a central role in this process, being personally involved in the composition of the texts. The claimed authorship of the first texts composed on local saints, at least, seems to point in this direction. The composition of the *Life* of Panṭalewon, for instance, is attributed to ‘the Orthodox, who was appointed bishop of Aksum’.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the *Homily* of Libānos is ascribed to ‘the blessed and saint bishop ’Abbā Elyās’;<sup>127</sup> the *Homily* on the Holy Fathers to ‘the blessed and saint bishop Luləyānos of Aksum’<sup>128</sup> or to the ‘blessed and saint bishop ’Elyās<sup>129</sup> of Aksum’;<sup>130</sup> and the *Homily* of Garimā to ‘Yoḥannəs, bishop of Aksum’.<sup>131</sup> On the other hand, one must also admit that the attribution of texts to illustrious authors recalls a pattern well attested in the ancient homiliaries, where several works are claimed to be written by renowned authors. Regarding the texts about Aksumite saints, it is still difficult to ascertain whether their authorship was real or pseudo-epigraphic and, despite the relevance of such information, in this context, the answer would not change its aim: conferring authority to texts and facilitating their circulation.

In any case, no centralised institution responsible for the authentication of sainthood was present in Ethiopia at that time. The evidence collected so far lead one to consider the assumption that hagiographic manuscripts were perceived as agents in substantiating the holiness of the protagonists of their texts, contributing to spread their *fama sanctitatis* throughout the country. The co-

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but it is only starting from the fifteenth century that it becomes the norm. According to the scholar, this phenomenon in Ethiopia ‘was a sequel to a movement in the Coptic Church whereby people wanted to respond to their felt need to dedicate churches to more saints. Unable to build new churches because of adverse circumstances, they erected new altars dedicated to these saints’, cf. Fritsch 2012, 454 and *passim*. It is interesting to note that the ‘multiplication of *tābotāt*’ in Ethiopian churches has a parallel in the ‘multiplication of hagiographic texts’ occurring in the same period, as we have seen, which reveals that they are the consequence of a ‘multiplication of saints’ to be venerated and, at the same time, the evidence of a cultural and religious change in progress.

**126** Brita 2008, 293 (text) and 327 (translation), § 1.

**127** Bausi 2003, vol. 1, 24 (text) and vol. 2, 28, § 2.

**128** According to manuscript Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 1763. See Getatchew Haile 1985.

**129** Probably the same author of the *Homily* of Libānos.

**130** According to manuscripts Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 8509 and London, British Library, Or. 8192.

**131** Conti Rossini 1897, 141 and 149.

presence of new hagiographies about local saints and old hagiographies about foreign saints – already officially benefitting from their *fama sanctitatis* – must have facilitated the circulation and the promotion of the liturgical commemoration of the former. The production, dissemination and liturgical use of hagiographic MTMs must, therefore, have contributed to the official recognition of the local saints, spread their fame and fostered their commemoration beyond the local communities, where their cult was initially promoted.

The sacral value assigned to hagiographic manuscripts and their central role in the liturgical commemoration of saints must have acted as an agent in perceiving them as institutional objects capable of testifying the sainthood of the figures described therein. A sort of official device for the official recognition of saints. Texts were apparently included in (and excluded from) these MTMs as soon as the commemoration of their protagonists was introduced (or ceased) in the country. This process explains the progressive translation of texts and the continuous reshaping and revision of the collections. The inclusion of hagiographies on Ethiopian saints of foreign origins reveals, on the one hand, the progressive emergence of the local hagiography and, on the other hand, the effort to make the veneration of the local saints official. Furthermore, the advantage of the editorial innovation introduced by the *Synaxarion* made it possible to increase the number of hagiographies about local saints and, consequently, their commemoration. The MTMs were widespread in the main monasteries and churches (as is witnessed by the number of copies still extant), so that the names of those saints had the possibility to circulate widely throughout the country and be fixed in the collective memory through the ritual reading.

Hence, these MTMs will not be considered as a heterogeneous combination of individual texts but rather as a coherent result of a project planned and realised on the basis of specific material and religious demands and readapted each time to specific liturgical needs and veneration practices.

## 5 Performing (with) manuscripts as a social function

The reading of the manuscripts during the liturgical commemoration of the saints fulfils a social function. The repetitive reading of and listening to hagiographic texts do not only contribute to the diffusion of the saint's memory and veneration but also to anchor them to a perfect model of life and virtues. This model, to which society is implicitly called to aspire, is instilled in the ceremo-

ny's attendants by the exemplary life of the saint and the sacrifice of the martyr. It proposes a moral example and, simultaneously, advocates the adoption of a set of edifying virtues. These teachings are codified variously in narrative form, but most of the time they are unwritten and rather experienced through the saint's bodies (e.g. fasting, ritual weeping, privation of sleep, perpetual prayer, corporal punishment, death)<sup>132</sup> and souls (e.g. obedience, patience, acceptance, forgiveness, piety, endurance, humility, love, courage). As observed by Derek Krueger,

as a cultural performance, ascetic practice deployed power over the subject to produce identities conforming to established ideals. Preaching exhorted Christians to emulate the virtues of biblical exemplars. [...] Performances of fasting, vigilant prayer, and resistance of demonic temptation presented a visible spectacle, directed toward the laity, toward other ascetics, toward the ascetic self, or even God, but always depending on an audience for meaning. Ascetic achievement was a text to be read.<sup>133</sup>

The function of these experienced virtues transmitted to the Christian communities as *text to be read* was to educate the individuals not towards a subjective but a universal moral code, offered by the life and sacrifice of Christ and followed by the saints (and, therefore, certified) to be adopted by each member of society. This contributed to shape habits and behaviours in daily life, propagate an ethics of respect, altruism, obedience and sacrifice, and submissively accept adverse and unpleasant experiences as God's will. The ones who adopted a different moral code instead, following alternative models of virtues experienced through the behaviour of Satan and his demons (pervasively present and carefully described in the hagiographies), are destined to have an awful life and an even worse death, with no possibility of salvation.<sup>134</sup>

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**132** For a preliminary discussion of these themes in Ethiopian hagiography in a comparative perspective, see Brita 2019.

**133** Krueger 2004, 194.

**134** These arguments may sound quite naïve or simplistic to the reader who is not familiar with the Christian edifying literature, to which hagiography also belongs. In fact, the current perception of these works is culturally too distant for conceiving their meaning and scope in the late antique and medieval period. In order to be properly understood, the reception of this literary genre should be contextualized and brought back to the mentality of that time. Hagiographies were addressed to a simple public, not used to the abstract theological debates dominating Christian thought (especially in the Oriental churches). The stylistic choice of an intelligible language and straightforward metaphors was addressed to a public (mostly uneducated) who had difficulty abandoning old beliefs and needed to be persuaded with concrete examples, drawn from a familiar everyday life in which, through a sentiment of identification, they could feel indirectly protagonists.

The liturgical ritual possesses an essential role in transmitting this model. As remarked by Nienke Vos,

It is important to view the liturgy as including and perpetuating rituals that have a stabilizing function. As such, the liturgy is conservative: the language incorporated in it is familiar to those who participate. The notion of repetition is significant: the community returns time and again to the same stories, songs, formulae, and rituals. This creates a setting of stability and a sense of safety: one knows what to expect. In this way, the liturgy has the potential to become an anchor in people's lives [...]. Thus, in hagiographic texts, the liturgical wording functions as a hermeneutical key to the stories of the saints. By extension, this wording enables the reader to understand not only the fate of the protagonist but also his or her own fate. As the life of the saint is illuminated by the liturgy, so is the life of the text's recipient, because the context of the liturgy generated meaning on two levels. First, it offers a paraenetic model and encouragement for life on earth. Secondly, it creates hope and comfort based on the promise of a life to come.<sup>135</sup>

## 6 Smaller MTM forms: shaping the Ethiopian hagiographic and ritual identity

The creation of a local hagiography is sporadic in the fourteenth century, but becomes more substantial in the following centuries. In concomitance with the increasing of the local hagiographic production, as mentioned above, the use of the large MTMs transmitting hagiographic collections, such as the *Gadla Samā'tāt* and the *Gadla Qəddusān*, started to decrease in favour of the diffusion of different MTM types, apparently more suitable to cope with the proliferation of the hagiographic texts in progress. These MTMs, smaller in size, offer various arrays of hagiographic collections, consisting of a few texts (usually fewer than a dozen). Aside from the study of some individual texts, the thousands of MTMs of this type have never been the object of systematic research in a broader perspective, so crucial for understanding hagiographic, liturgical and veneration practices spread through the country at different times of the Ethiopian Christian history. A first and inexhaustive scrutiny of this material allows one to preliminarily group these MTMs based on clusters of texts they transmit: (1) texts on foreign saints already circulating in the large MTMs;<sup>136</sup> (2) texts on both for-

<sup>135</sup> Vos 2017, 50–52.

<sup>136</sup> Manuscripts: Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 430, EMLL 1344, EMLL 1934, EMLL 4002; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d'Abbadie 45, d'Abbadie 60, d'Abbadie 183, Éthiopien 133, Éthiopien 134; Ṭānāsee 170. The list of manuscript provided here

eign and local saints;<sup>137</sup> (3) texts on exclusively local saints;<sup>138</sup> (4) texts on both foreign or local saints combined with non-hagiographic texts;<sup>139</sup> and (5) a set of texts on individual saints, both foreign and (mostly) local.<sup>140</sup>

The design of these manuscripts offers, in terms of text arrangement and patterns, more room for the accommodation of the individual hagiographies, enabling people to not only copy the single texts from the large MTMs but also enlarge them and include additional textual units, such as miracles and poetic compositions devoted to the saints (*salām* and *malkəʾ*). Furthermore, some of these manuscripts also include a series of illuminations portraying the most representative episodes and miracles selected from the *Lives* of the saints. The ‘parchment saints’ of these smaller MTMs are not only the foreign saints and the local saints of foreign origin of the large MTMs but also Ethiopian-born saints who, within a few centuries, exceed the former. This new creation possesses an intrinsic revolutionary character: Ethiopian women and men, kings, intellectuals and charismatic figures who had promoted monastic practice and intellectual debates were recognised as saints for the first time – on the basis of the ideological canon previously received through hagiographic MTMs – and became, in their turn, the main characters of new narratives fixed in MTMs and used in ritual and devotional practices.

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and in the following footnotes is not exhaustive; it only aims at providing a concrete example of some of these MTMs per type.

**137** Manuscripts: Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 208, EMLL 1960, EMLL 2610; London, British Library, Or. 696, Or. 700, Or. 702, Or. 709, Or. 711; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d’Abbadie 14, d’Abbadie 46; d’Abbadie 126, Éthiopien 132; Ṭānāsee 164. A further division of this group could be made between MTMs transmitting text on (1) local saints of foreign origin unknown outside Ethiopia and (2) local saints of Ethiopian origin, for which see Marrassini 2005.

**138** Manuscripts: Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 4; London, British Library, Or. 701; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 136, Éthiopien 137. The texts collected in some MTMs of this group are about monks belonging to the same monastic lineage, manuscripts: London, British Library, Or. 695, Or. 705, Or. 728; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d’Abbadie 88, d’Abbadie 177.

**139** Manuscripts: Collegeville, MN, Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, EMLL 5; London, British Library, Or. 694, Or. 730; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d’Abbadie 29, d’Abbadie 54, d’Abbadie 91, d’Abbadie 94, d’Abbadie 103, d’Abbadie 123.

**140** London, British Library, Or. 707, Or. 710, Or. 716, Or. 717, Or. 718, Or. 719, Or. 721, Or. 723, Or. 724, Or. 725, Or. 726, Or. 727, Or. 729, Or. 770; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, d’Abbadie 36, d’Abbadie 43, d’Abbadie 56, d’Abbadie 59, d’Abbadie 61, d’Abbadie 89, d’Abbadie 139, Éthiopien 135, Éthiopien 343.

## 7 The timing of the *tazkār*: the annual and the monthly commemoration of the saints

The saints in Ethiopia are celebrated both on their *dies natalis*, i.e. the main commemoration that occurs once a year, and each month on the same day of the annual commemoration. If, for instance, the main celebration of a saint falls on 5 August, then the monthly celebration takes place on the 5th of each month. The whole hagiographic text is read on the day of the main *tazkār* and only a portion on the day of the monthly commemoration. This element is substantiated in the MTMs, once again, by reading indications, in the form of paracontent, consisting of the name of the month written in the margins of the pages, in correspondence with the beginning of the text's portion to be read during the monthly commemoration or even in its textual segmentation in distinct sections subsequently. It is not clear when the monthly commemoration of the saints was introduced in Ethiopia. Reading indications for performing the text on the monthly commemoration already appear in manuscripts dated to the end of the fifteenth century. This practice is still performed in Ethiopia today, together with a number of devotional ritual practices involving the use of hagiographic manuscripts.



**Fig. 8:** Reading of the *Gadla Ṣādqān Zadagʷe* at the annual *tazkār* of the Sts Ṣādqān Zadagʷe. ʾĪndā Ṣādqān Zadagʷe (Təgrāy, Ethiopia). Photograph by Antonella Brita (February 2017).

It can be presumed that the progressive diffusion of small MTM forms mirrors a cultural change in the perception of Ethiopian sainthood, implying (1) a transformation in the authentication of holiness, where the miracles assume an increasing importance as evidence of the elevation to sainthood – as is witnessed by the composition and the insertion of sections of miracles in the MTMs; and (2) a transformation in the liturgical commemoration practices, consisting of the introduction of the monthly commemoration of the saints, occurring on the same day of the annual commemoration but each month. The progressive emergence of smaller MTMs possibly coincides with a change in the ritual function of hagiographic works that, for this reason, needed to be accommodated in a different manuscript form. An interesting aspect of this process concerns the composition and addition of miracles to hagiographies of foreign saints copied from the larger to the smaller MTMs. These miracles (usually post-mortem) are set in Ethiopia, although these saints have never had any previous connection with the country. One might claim that the power of holiness goes beyond borders established by human beings. In actual fact (and without summoning metaphysical powers), this facet can be considered to be the reflection of the lively assimilation of foreign elements which characterises the Ethiopian culture in many aspects and mostly in literature, where translated texts were always actively received and transformed to be adapted to the local culture. The composition of the Ethiopian miracles has a double-sided connotation: (1) a literary meaning, i.e. the active reception of a model assimilated, digested and repurposed in a customised form (a similar example is provided by the *Miracles of Mary's* collection, translated in Gə'əz and enriched with Ethiopian miracles);<sup>141</sup> and (2) a cultural meaning, i.e. the Ethiopianization of the foreign saints, a process implying a cultural assimilation of the foreign saint to the local culture and, simultaneously, a change in the Ethiopians' perception of foreign saints, whose hagiographies were first used as a model to shape the Ethiopian devotional and ritual culture and subsequently remodelled based on reinterpreted cultural canons. The effects of this course sometimes moved beyond the expected consequences. The *Life* of one of the most venerated Ethiopian-born saints, Takla Haymānot, was translated into Arabic and sent to the Egyptian patriarchate in Alexandria, contributing to spread the fame and veneration of this Ethiopian saint in the Coptic Church:<sup>142</sup> a so far unique case in Gə'əz literature.

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141 Cerulli 1943; Balicka-Witakowska and Bausi 2010; Reule 2022.

142 Nosnitzyn 2000.

## 8 Performing (with) hagiographic manuscripts in contemporary Ethiopia

### 8.1 Reading of the manuscript on the saints' *tazkār*

The contemporary liturgical celebrations of the saints allow one to witness the actual practices and the way hagiographic manuscripts are used. The general rules are the same throughout the country, but some features may vary according to specific procedures in place in churches, districts or regions.

The description which follows is based on field research I carried out in February 2017 and October 2018 in the area of Aksum (Təgrāy, north Ethiopia), where I had the opportunity to attend some ceremonies for the commemoration of the saints and interview Qes Ḥaylu Walda Giyorgis, a scribe and member of the regular clergy of Māryām Şəyon cathedral, the beating heart of Ethiopian Christianity. In the area of Aksum, the ceremonies for the celebration of the saints' *tazkār* are characterised by various readings and singings of texts transmitted in manuscripts, which are performed by the officiants partly inside and partly outside the church. All the singing and reading, including the *Life* of the saint, are regulated by the beginning of the liturgy of the mass (*qəddāse*), which takes place: (1) on Mondays to Fridays before Easter between 1:00 and 3:00 p.m. and for two months after Easter between 6:00 and 8:30 a.m.; (2) on Saturdays between 8:00 and 10:30 a.m.; and (3) on Sundays between 6:00 and 8:30 a.m. This means that all the readings must be concluded before the start of the *qəddāse*. Accordingly, they begin very early in the morning during the weeks before Easter, whereas on Saturdays, Sundays and in the six weeks after Easter they begin in the night. The officiants read part of the following manuscripts inside the church: the Gospel, the *Zemā*, the *Mazgab*, the *Miracles of Mary*, the *Miracles of Jesus* and the *Kidān*. Then the priests, along with the people attending the ceremony, move outside the church, into an area called the *'awda məḥrat* ('court of mercy'), where the reading of the hagiographic manuscripts is performed. The reason for reading the manuscript outside the church is apparently due to a specific ground, that is, to allow everyone who wishes to hear the *Life* of the saint to take part in the reading and, above all, the faithful who, for various motivations, are banned from entering the church, for instance, people who have committed severe crimes or are divorced. Saints are egalitarian and inclusive; they do not discriminate against anyone.





**Fig. 9:** Reading of a section of the the *Gadla P̄anṭalewon zaṣomā't* at the monthly *tazkār* of St P̄anṭalewon *zaṣomā't*. 'Endā 'Abbā P̄anṭalewon (Təgrāy, Ethiopia). Photograph by Antonella Brita (February 2017).

Both the celebration of the annual and monthly *tazkār* takes place only in the church dedicated to the saint, where a *tābot* of the saint is present. As already mentioned, on the annual *tazkār*, the whole manuscript containing the *Life* of the saint is read, whereas on the monthly one, only a portion of the manuscript, selected according to the monthly reading indication, is read. In addition, the officiant can optionally spell the names of other saints celebrated on the same day. The officiant initially reads a portion of the manuscripts in the Gə'əz language and then he (or some other priests) translates or paraphrases its words into the local spoken language (Tigrinya, in this case). This is due to the fact that nowadays laypeople do not understand Gə'əz, the classical language of Ethiopia that survives only in the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church.

After reading the text, the officiant stands with the manuscript in his hands and the faithful attending the ceremony move towards him to receive his blessing. He blesses people using the manuscript and props the manuscript against their foreheads or against their backs while they bow in front of it. Then the people kiss the manuscript, being a devotional object that embodies the saint. The faithful holding water bottles in their hands approach the officiant soon after the reading of the hagiographic text and place the open bottle near the

mouth of the priest who blows inside the bottle (according to the procedure described in Section 3).



**Fig. 10:** Blessing of the faithful with the manuscript of the *Gadla Šādqān Zadagʷe* at the annual *tazkār* of the Sts Šādqān Zadagʷe. ʿĒndā Šādqān Zadagʷe (Təgrāy, Ethiopia). Photograph by Antonella Brita (February 2017).

## 8.2 Healing rituals: manuscripts as agents of the saints' charisma

Hagiographic manuscripts are also used in contexts different from the liturgy in contemporary Ethiopia, i.e. in healing and protective rituals. Similar to the rest of the Christian world, saints in Ethiopia are also considered protectors and healers. In addition to the proper saint physicians, such as Cosmas and Damian or Pantaleon of Nicomedia, all the saints possess a thaumaturgical power that they can use to the benefit of the people who believe in them. This charisma (*barakat*) is granted to them by God in virtue of their exemplary life and for having overcome the limits of human nature through ascetical practice.<sup>143</sup> Each

<sup>143</sup> Brita 2019.

saint in Ethiopia has one (or even more than one) charisma and can use it in favour of the people who address to them. In practical terms, the charisma of individual saints are detectable either from specific miracles they have performed or specific episodes of their *Life*, both recorded and transmitted in manuscripts. There are saints who are able to handle the weather conditions, others that can heal specific diseases or cure infertility, and many others could be listed. Saint Zamikā'el 'Aragāwi, for instance, has the power to heal people who have been poisoned by being bitten by a snake. The charisma attributed to him possibly originates from a passage of his *Life* detailing how he was able to reach the top of a high mountain, where he chose to dwell: he ordered a big snake that appeared to him in the sky to lower its tail and used it as a rope to climb up the mountain.<sup>144</sup> In actual practice, the charismas of the saints are released during specific healing rituals in which the manuscripts transmitting their hagiography are involved.

In these rituals, the hagiographic manuscripts have a central role in the performance. In principle, depending on the kind of ritual, manuscripts can be rubbed on the body of the patient, put under the pillow in case the patient is confined to bed, carried on the back of women like a child to cure infertility,<sup>145</sup> or rubbed on the belly of women in labour. Protective scrolls can, for instance, be worn by pregnant women, in correspondence to their womb, to protect them from abortion and their children from cot death. In this case, the ritual is not performed when the scroll is worn but when it is produced. Any sort of illness is generally ascribed to attacks by demons in traditional Ethiopian society. The aim of the ritual is to defeat the demons, and the manuscript is the most powerful medium, besides holy water and prayer, to do that. The saint makes genuine use of their power by interceding through the manuscript, and the manuscript assures the presence of the saint at the exact moment in which it is needed.

What follows is the brief description of one of these rituals reported to me in November 2016 by 'Abbā Surāfel 'Asaffā, a monk from the monastic community of Dabra Madarā ('Adwā, Təgrāy), a monastery founded by the monk 'Abbā Garimā. In fact, the ritual involves precisely the saint 'Abbā Garimā, who has, among other charismas, the power to heal fields affected by parasites. I suppose that this charisma derives from at least two famous miracles of the saint. In the first miracle, Garimā sows seeds of wheat that germinate and ripen in a few hours. The wheat is collected and partly used for the Eucharistic sacrifice and

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144 Guidi 1895, 63–68; tr. Van den Oudenrijn 1939, 45–49.

145 Krzyżanowka 2015, 130–131.

partly given to the poor.<sup>146</sup> In the second miracle, very similar to the previous one, Garimā plants a vine shoot under a rock and the shoot germinates and bears fruit on the same day.<sup>147</sup>

The ritual is performed to heal fields when the crop does not grow as it should. The farmers address the monastery of Garimā and ask for a healing ritual. Two priests and three deacons from the monastery go to the field, which is the setting for the ritual, bringing with them (1) the manuscript containing the *Life of Garimā*, (2) a processional cross, (3) incense, (4) a censer, (5) the ceremonial garments, (6) holy water, and (7) at least one processional umbrella to protect the manuscript from the sun or rain. After a sequence of prayers (it is always the same in this kind of ritual), one of the priests starts to read from the manuscript the *Life of the saint*. Then, the priests and the deacons take the manuscript in procession clockwise around the field three times. During the procession, the manuscript is kept in the hands of one of the priests; the last deacon in line sprinkles the holy water on the field (the *ṣabal*, ‘the soil collected from the monastery of the saint’, is sometimes added to the holy water); the second priest lets the smoke of the incense rise over the field using his right hand and, simultaneously, holds the processional cross in his left hand. After the procession, they perform the *burāke*, a ritual blessing formula, usually transmitted orally, that is created and adapted each time according to the circumstances of the ritual. The ceremony can be repeated if the first attempt does not achieve the desired results. Once the farmers harvest the healed field, they offer a portion of the crop to the monastery of Garimā as a token of gratitude.

## 9 Final thoughts

In consideration of the assumed role of the manuscript in the authentication of holiness in late antique and medieval Ethiopia, the circulation of the hagiographic MTMs must have contributed to the diffusion of the saints’ memory and veneration throughout the country. The distribution of the MTMs containing the *Acts of the saints* and, even more, *Acts of the martyrs* and *Synaxarion* stands in direct proportion to the importance of these collections. Each monastery possessed at least one copy.

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**146** Conti Rossini 1897, ll. 346–355; tr. Ducati 1939, 128. Concerning the intertextuality of this miracle among the hagiographic texts about the Nine Saints, see Brita 2010, 68–69. See also Nosnitsin 2016, 88–89.

**147** Conti Rossini 1897, ll. 557–565; tr. Ducati 1939, 146. See also Mersha Alehegne 2016.

The documentation collected and examined so far, allows a preliminary identification of at least four phases in the genesis of the formation and transmission of the ‘parchment saints’.

The first phase (from the thirteenth to fourteenth century onwards) attests the accomplished acquisition of a corpus of texts about foreign saints translated into Gə‘əz and transmitted in MTMs, with a peak of dissemination occurring between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. The *fama sanctitatis* of these saints was already officially and universally ascertained and their hagiographies, already used for their liturgical commemorations in other Christian countries (and in other languages), were also read in Ethiopia during the liturgical celebrations.

The second phase (from the end of the fourteenth century onwards) displays the progressive inclusion in these MTMs of hagiographies about local saints. Unlike the foreign saints, these local saints were not blessed with an acknowledged *fama sanctitatis*. It can be presumed that the insertion of their hagiographies in MTMs transmitting texts about saints universally recognised aimed at the authentication and acceptance of their sainthood and the promotion of their liturgical veneration beyond the boundaries of their respective local communities.

The third phase (from the sixteenth century onwards) can be considered a further implementation of the previous phase: the translation, from Arabic into Gə‘əz, of the second recension of the *Synaxarion* accommodated in MTMs with a less rigid material structure (short texts which, in solely two volumes, enabled the coverage of the liturgical celebrations of the saints for each day of the whole liturgical year) allowed the association of a great number of local saints to the foreign saints, thus, elevating the former to sainthood. The introduction of the *Synaxarion* into the liturgy made the recognition of a wide number of local saints possible (although some of them were and are only remembered by their name and their commemoration date); different versions of the *Synaxarion* were produced, each of them including both ‘famous’ and ‘less famous’ saints, contributing to the legitimisation of local cults. Even nowadays, in remote areas, specific versions of the *Synaxarion* exist including saints only venerated at a local level that are evidence of local veneration practices. This evidence supports the hypothesis that the production and liturgical use of some specific manuscripts contributed to the official authorisation to holiness.

The fourth phase (from the sixteenth to seventeenth century onwards) gradually sees the diffusion of smaller MTMs forms, although sporadic evidence

of some of this type of MTMs witnessed their emergence already in the fifteenth century or earlier.<sup>148</sup> The flexibility of this manuscript format permits each manuscript to host not only the hagiography but also additional texts devoted to the saints, such as miracles and poetic compositions (*salām, malkəʿ*). There are hagiographies on both local and foreign saints in these MTMs, integrating the latter into the local culture.

The hagiographies of the Aksumite saints were initially included in manuscripts also containing foreign hagiographies. The co-presence of new texts alongside those already known for a long time probably aimed at facilitating the circulation and liturgical use of the former. This process of diffusion implied that the foreign hagiographies deeply influenced the local hagiographies on the Aksumite saints, which were created out of the medieval adaptation of late antique traditions. No written evidence about these saints survived from the ancient period, if there were ever any at all. An example of this process is provided by the *Life* of the saint Pāṅṭalewon *zaṣomāʿt*.

The study of the extension of the veneration practices connected to the individual saints in late antique and medieval Ethiopia is only at its beginning. The comparison between the ancient manuscript sources and the observation of the contemporary set of conditions reveals some interesting hagiographic phenomena that need a deeper investigation to be understood in their entire diachronic evolution. (1) For instance, there are saints who were commemorated in the Middle Ages quite extensively – as the spatial distribution of MTMs transmitting their hagiographies reveals – but that nowadays are commemorated only in the areas where the monasteries built in their name are found (e.g. Pāṅṭalewon *zaṣomāʿt*). (2) There are saints who have always been largely commemorated, from the early medieval period till now (e.g. Qirqos). (3) There are saints whose commemoration has never been extensive – their hagiographies, attested only in MTMs, are very rare – and, at a certain point, ceased to exist (e.g. ʾAbākluz, James the Intercisus). (4) And there are saints whose commemoration does not follow a continuum, instead, it is attested in the medieval period and, after a break of several centuries, was revitalised in recent times, becoming pervasively observed (e.g. ʾArsimā). Other examples could be mentioned.

In conclusion, the process of writing, (re-)elaborating, assembling, structuring, copying and performing hagiographic texts within MTMs aims at creating institutional devices, namely, specific kinds of manuscripts, to be used for ritual purposes and conveying evidence of authorised sainthood. These manuscripts collect more hagiographies, each with peculiar characteristics, which offer an

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148 See Brita forthcoming.

exemplary and perfect model of life and behaviour to which it is possible to aspire, through imitation and perseverance. The liturgical use of these MTMs – explained through paracontents – performs a social function: the repetitive ritual reading, listening and experiencing of the saints' charisma make the *exempla* part of the collective self-consciousness and memory and continuously reconfirm their importance for the benefit of the members of the community. The transmission of these manuscripts, thus, provides a complex of shared edifying virtues, builds up a shared moral code among the members of the community, which is instrumental in establishing and perpetrating the religious laws in ritual form, and in safeguarding the social equilibrium.

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### Abbreviations

CAe = *Clavis Aethiopica*. The CAe is being developed in cooperation with the project 'Beta maṣāḥəft: Manuscripts of Ethiopia and Eritrea (Schriftkultur des christlichen Äthopiens und Eritreas: eine multimediale Forschungsumgebung)' <<https://betamasaheft.eu/>> and is available online at <<http://betamasaheft.eu/works/list>>.

E Ae = *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, 5 vols, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000–2014. Vols 1–3 edited by Siegbert Uhlig; vol. 4 edited by Siebert Uhlig [with the collaboration of Alessandro Bausi]; vol. 5 edited by Alessandro Bausi.

## Manuscripts

Asmara,

Biblioteca del Centro di Studi Etiopici, Pavoni Social Center,  
two manuscripts without shelfmark

Collegeville, MN,

Hill Museum and Manuscript Library, Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library,  
4, 5, 208, 430, 1344, 1763, 1934, 1960, 2610, 4002, 7602, 8509

London,

British Library,

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