

Gianfrancesco LUSINI  
Istituto Universitario Orientale  
Napoli

## TRADITIONAL LAND TENURE IN ETHIOPIA

New documents from Dabra Deḥuḥān and Dabra Ṣegē  
(Sarā'ē, Eritrea)

As everybody knows, the Ethiopic documents on traditional land tenure are transmitted in some mss. in form of *additiones*, i.e., of short notes unrelated to the main text, which were originally written on the occasion of land granting and thereby inserted in the blanks of codices already completed. To this typology belong both the legal texts and the copies of documents issued by different authorities, especially the land charters brought forward by the beneficiaries to claim their alleged rights and privileges – texts written in Ge'ez or Amharic and exceptionally in Tigrīñña or Arabic<sup>1</sup>.

In any blank of an Ethiopic ms. *additiones* can be found, but chiefly in the guard leaves it is possible to find series of writings, often dating from different ages, which give primary clues about the relationship of a certain monastery to its own territory<sup>2</sup>. Evidently, in each monastic community mss. were chosen as the favourite containers of these records, so that now they form a sort of documentary body, the codicological study of which, in most cases, is still awaited<sup>3</sup>. These mss. are the real historical archives of both the convents and their territories, as in the exemplary case of the

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<sup>1</sup> PĀWLOS ṢĀDWĀ, "Un manoscritto etiopico degli Evangelii", *RSE*, XI, 1952, pp. 9-28: pp. 23-24; M. SCHNEIDER, "Deux actes de donation en arabe", *AÉ*, VIII, 1970, pp. 79-88.

<sup>2</sup> See now S. UHLIG, "Les *marginalia* des manuscrits éthiopiens", in : *Les orientalistes sont des aventuriers. Guirlande offerte à J. Tubiana*, éd. Par. A. Rouaud, Saint-Maur, Éd. SÉPIA, 1999 (Bibliothèque Peirex, 12), pp. 97-101 ; D. CRUMMEY, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia, from the XIII to the XX century*, Oxford, J.Currey, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> B.M. Or. 481: C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Aethiopica", *RSO* IX, 1921-23, pp. 365-468: pp. 452-455 (15. Un editto di re Zar'a Yā'qob per l'Eritrea); ID, "Tre piccoli testi etiopici", *RSO*, XXIII, 1948, pp. 46-51: pp. 46-47; M. KROPP, "'Das senke das Haupt und gib ihr nicht im Zorn!'. Eine testamentarische Verfügung des Königs 'Amdä-Seyon aus dem archiv de Hs. London BM, Or 481", *OrSuec*, XXXVIII-XXXIX, 1989-90 (pub. 1991), pp. 92-104. B.M. Or. 650: MERID WOLDE AREGAY, "Some inedited Land Charters of Emperor Särṣä Dengel (r. 1563-1597)", *AÉ*, XIII, 1985, pp. 87-101. B.M. Or. 776-778: R. PANKHURST, "Pages from an Ethiopian Historian's Notebook", *QuadStEt*, VI-VII, 1985-86, pp. 84-111: pp. 93-106 (Amharic Documents on Marriage, Adoption, Land Sales and Gifts and Disputes).

«Golden Gospels» (*Wangēlāt zawarq*)<sup>4</sup>: obviously their knowledge is of great moment to Ethiopian studies.

With regard to land charters, the exclusive survival of the copies owned by the beneficiaries is still to be explained, as are the reasons for the systematical wreck of the originals, along with the royal archives in which most probably they were kept. One hypothesis could be issued from the assessment of the special nature of the Ethiopian court, a «moving» one in a State wanting in fixed capital<sup>5</sup>. In these conditions the royal archives had to follow the court in its movements, which recalls the «moving archives» known in the western Middle Ages before the foundation of formal State archives from the Carolingian age up to the XIIth c.<sup>6</sup>. Traces of this way of keeping and transferring Ethiopic documents seem to show in a passage of the *Gadla Marqorēwos*, a saint who lived between the XIVth and the XVth c.<sup>7</sup>, whose «life» was written in the XVIIth c., but on the grounds of more ancient traditions<sup>8</sup>.

Let's write the story of our father *Marqorēwos* who received towns and lands from the hands of our king Dāwit, when he came back from the land of Sennār, having received the Cross of Jesus from the legates of the patriarch, etc.<sup>9</sup>. The King told Ġawār, steward of his

<sup>4</sup> *Gospel of Dabra Libānos*: C. CONTI ROSSINI, "L'evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libānos", *RAL-R*, s. v, X, 1901, pp. 177-219; R. SCHNEIDER, "L'Évangélaire de Dabra Libanos", in: *Proc. of the Eight Intern. Conf. of Eth. St.* (Addis Ababa 1984), ed. by Tadesse Beyene, I, Addis Ababa, I.E.S., 1988, p. 163; A. BAUSI & G.L., "Appunti in margine a una nuova ricerca sui conventi eritrei", *RSE*, XXXVI, 1992 (pub. 1994: sc. 1995), pp. 5-6: p. 31. *Gospel of Hazzegā*: J. KOLMODIN, *Traditions de Tsazzege et Hazzega. Annales et documents*, Upsal, Edv. Berling, 1914 (Archives d'ét. orient., 5. 3), pp. 51-61. *Gospel of Krestos Tasfāna* (Addis Ababa, B.N. A.5): PĀWLOS ṢĀDWĀ, "Un manoscritto", *cit.*, pp. 19-28; bibliogr. in: E. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, *La Crucifixion sans crucifié dans l'art éthiopienne. Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne dans l'antiquité tardive*, Warszawa, ZAŚ PAN, 1997 (Bibl. Nubica et Eth., 4), pp. 10-11, nr. 2 and p. 124, nr. II. *Gospel of Iyasus Mo'a*: TADDESSE TAMRAT, "The Abbots of Dābrā Hayq 1248-1535", *JES*, VIII, 1970, pp. 87-117; bibliogr. in: BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, *Crucifixion*, *cit.*, pp. 9-10, nr. 1 and pp. 123-124, nr. 1.

<sup>5</sup> TADDESSE TAMRAT, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527*, Oxford, Clarendon P., 1972, pp. 268-275; Y.M. KOBISHCHANOV, "The Gafol Complex in Ethiopian History", in: *Proc. of the Ninth Intern. Congr. of Eth. St.* (Moscow, august 26-29 1986), ed. by A. GROMYKO, VI, Moscow, Nauka Pubs., 1988, pp. 99-110; cp. R. PANKHURST, *State and Land in Ethiopian History*, Addis Ababa, I.E.S., 1966 (Mono. in Eth. Land Tenure, 3), pp. 52-53; ID., *A Social History of Ethiopia*, Addis Ababa, I.E.S., 1990, p. 25 and passim; B. Hirsch, B. Poissonier, "Recherches historiques et archéologiques à Meshalā Maryam, (Mānz, Éthiopia)", *AÉ*, XVI, 2000, pp. 59-87, pp. 63-67. (La question du camp royal dans les études éthiopiennes).

<sup>6</sup> C. Paoli, *Diplomatica*, a c. di G.C. Bascapè, Firenze, Sansoni, 1942 (Manuali di filol. e storia, 1.1), pp. 291-292.

<sup>7</sup> On him, see G.L., *Studi sul monachesimo eustaziano*, Napoli, I.U.O., 1993 (St. afr. Ser. et., 3), pp. 110-112.

<sup>8</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, *Vitae Sanctorum Indigenarum. I Gadla Marqorēwos*, CSCO 33 Aeth 16, p. 44, ll.7-23 and CSCO 34 Aeth 17, 1904, p. 57; cp. C. CONTI ROSSINI, *Principi di diritto consuetudinario dell'Eritrea*, Roma, Tip. dell'Unione Ed., 1916, p. 405.

<sup>9</sup> On this famous episode, and the relevant bibliogr., see G. FIACCADORI, "Aethiopica Minima", *QuadUt* VII (13/14), 1989, pp. 145-164: p. 159, note 10; ID., "Prototipi miniati dell'Ottateuco etiopico", *Boll. del Museo Bodoniano di Parma*, VIII, 1994, p. 69-102: p. 72, note 16 on p. 92.

court: "Bring me the document I gave you!" The steward brought the document according to the King's words. The King called the *seyyum* of Śarāwē, Dabāsina Egzi', and in his presence he read the names of the towns, the number of which was 85, and he gave those towns to our father Marqorēwos, saying: "May they be for you and for your sons for ever!". Then he told him: "May their boundaries be a fire for you, their center a garden!". And he sent the players of the horns, etc.<sup>10</sup>

The scene seems to represent a sort of ceremony of grant confirmation by the King, in this case Dāwit I (1382-1413), as the quoted ritual words lead us to think. According to this passage, at least from the beginning of the XVth c., there was a court officer, the *maggabē bet*, «steward of the court, chamberlain», in charge of the preservation of the documents issued by the King. Because of the frequent transfers of the court, in the process of time the original documents got lost and now they are known only by copies owned by the beneficiaries. We ignore when this custom declined, but probably the fixing of the capital in Gondar, at the beginning of the XVIIth c., contributed greatly to that, as well as to the success of some ecclesiastical seats as keepers of official grant registers. The archives of the church of Ḥamara Noḥ in Gondar<sup>11</sup> and those of Māryām Şeyon in Aksum<sup>12</sup> should be considered as the result of this historical change.

The documents presented here are kept in the convents of Dabra Deḥuḥān (Endā Abuna Yonās Tāhtāy) and Dabra Şegē (Endā Abuna Yonās Lā'elāy), in the Eritrean region of Sarā'e<sup>13</sup>. Both monasteries were visited by the present writer in 1992, within the scope of the Italian Expedition to Eritrea (=MIE), designed and directed by Prof. Irma Taddia, funded by the Italian National Research Council and the Department of

<sup>10</sup> On the royal ban, see BAIRU TAFLA, *The 'Awāḡ. An Institution of Political Culture in Traditional Ethiopia*, in *Proc. of the Seventh Intern. Conf. of Eth. St.* (Lund, april 26-29 1982), ed. by S. Rubenson, Addis Ababa, I.E.S., Uppsala, Scandinavian Inst. of Afr. St., East Lansing, Afr. St. Center (Mich. S. Un.), 1984, pp. 365-372.

<sup>11</sup> London, B.M. Or. 508, ff. 277<sup>v</sup>-287, 146 docc.: I. GUIDI, "Gli archivi in Abissinia", in: *Atti del congresso internazionale di scienze storiche* (Roma, 1-9 aprile 1903), III, *Atti della sezione II. Storia medievale e moderna, metodica, scienze storiche ausiliarie*, Roma, R. Accad. dei Lincei, 1906, pp. 651-698.

<sup>12</sup> Paris, B.N. Abb. 152 e 225, 103 docc.: C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Il Gadla Filpos e il Gadla Yohannes di Dabra Bizan", *RAL-M*, s. v, VIII, 1901, pp. 62-170: pp. 164-166; CONTI ROSSINI, *Principi*, *cit.*, pp. 399-403; G.L., *Studi*, *cit.*, p. 109 and notes 86 and 88; BAUSI & G.L., "Appunti", *cit.*, pp. 23-24 and notes 41-43; cp. G. VILLARI, "I gultì della regione di Axum", *Rassegna economica dell'Afr. It.*, IX, 1938, pp. 1-19; C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Donazioni reali alla cattedrale di Aksum", *L'Oriente*, II, 1895, pp. 35-45; ID., *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam I. Liber Axumae*, CSCO 54 Aeth 24 and CSCO 58 Aeth 27, 1909-1910, rist. 1961-62; G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD, *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia*, translated with introduction and notes, Addis Ababa, I.E.S., 1965 (Mono. in Eth. Land Tenure, 1), pp. 29-79; cp. S. STRELCYN, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens de l'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Fonds Conti Rossini et Fonds Caetani 209, 375 376, 377 378*, Roma, Accad. Naz. dei Lincei 1976 (Indici e sussidi bibliogr. della bibl., 9), pp. 133-137, nr. 44 (Documents additionnels pour le *Liber Axumae*).

<sup>13</sup> The documents are edited now in G.L., "Scritture documentarie etiopiche", *RSE*, XLII, 1998 (pub. 1999: sc. 2000), pp. 5-55.

History at the University of Bologna, with the assistance of the Italian Embassy in Asmara and the Italian Cooperation in Eritrea<sup>14</sup>. The aim of the MIE was to supply documentary evidence in order to assess the contribution of Sarā'ē's monasteries to the settlement and the keeping of traditional land tenure, by gathering oral information and transcribing inedited documents found in mss. kept in monastic libraries.

The Eritrean monasteries of Dabra Deḥuḥān and Dabra Şegē lie in two different provinces of the Sarā'ē region, in the Qwoḥayn and the Takalā respectively<sup>15</sup>, but they share the same founder, the monk Yonās (1403-98), a religious and political personality in the history of the XVth c. Eritrea<sup>16</sup>. Although Dabra Şegē, founded in 1455, is the older one, Dabra Deḥuḥān, dating back to 1489, today is the more active convent<sup>17</sup>. Since their origins, both foundations have been subjected to the authority of one single *mamher*. According to tradition, Yonās founded a third monastery, named Dabra Şāhl (docc. MIE 19 I and MIE 22 V) or Dabra Sel (doc. MIE 20 I), referred to in the *Gadla Yonās* too<sup>18</sup>. The evidence of doc. MIE 22 V makes it possible to place Dabra Şāhl in the Qwallā Sārā'ē, Daqqi Tasfā district, the same as Dabra Sinā and Dabra Demāḥ<sup>19</sup>. Doc. MIE 20 I and a short note in EMLL 566, ff. 64<sup>r-v</sup> and 171<sup>r-v</sup> inform that Dabra Şāhl or Sel was still active on the eve of the Italian aggression, but during the expeditions of the MIE we couldn't gather any more data. According to the monks, Dabra Deḥuḥān possesses about 120 mss.: six have been described and four *additiones* transcribed, that were found in a *Gospel* and in two hagiographical codices (mss. MIE 17-19). The fund of Dabra Şegē is believed to include about 70 mss.: five codices have been described, and nine *additiones* transcribed, found in a *Gospel*, in a hagiographical codex, in a *Psalter* and in a *Historia monachorum* (mss. MIE 20-23). The value of these texts is clear if we simply consider that until now only one document relating to both the convents is known: Paris, B.N. d'Abb. 152, f. 59, dated 1519<sup>20</sup>. A tentative chronology of the new documents is the following:

<sup>14</sup> Reports of the MIE and more details are in A. BAUSI, G.L. & I. TADDIA, "Materiali di studio dal Sāra'ē (Eritrea): Le istituzioni monastiche e la struttura della proprietà fondiaria", *Africa* (Roma), XLVIII, 1993, pp. 446-463; ID., "Eritrean monastic institutions as «lieux de mémoire» and source of history", *ibid.*, L, 1995, pp. 265-276; BAUSI & G.L., "Appunti", *cit.*, pp. 5-9.

<sup>15</sup> More information on both the monasteries are in BAUSI & G.L., "Appunti", *cit.*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>16</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Gli Atti di Abbā Yonās", *RAL-R*, s. v, XII, 1903, pp. 177-201 and 239-262; G.L., *Studi*, *cit.*, pp. 118-122.

<sup>17</sup> Data about the ecclesiastical career of Yonās and the origins of both the convents are found in doc. MIE 19 I from Dabra Deḥuḥān and MIE 22 I from Dabra Şegē, the latter partially reproduced by doc. MIE 23 I.

<sup>18</sup> CONTI ROSSINI, "Yonās", *cit.*, p. 253, ll. 4-8.

<sup>19</sup> BAUSI, G.L. & TADDIA, "Materiali", *cit.*, p. 453, note 17; BAUSI & G.L., "Appunti", *cit.* p. 12, note 18.

<sup>20</sup> CONTI ROSSINI, *Liber Axumae*, *cit.*, pp. 29-30 e 34-35; HUNTINGFORD, *Land Charters*, *cit.*, pp. 41-42; CONTI ROSSINI, *Principi*, *cit.*, pp. 407-410; ID., "Yonās", *cit.*, pp. 185-186.

MIE 19 I, first part	1427-28
MIE 17 I	reign of Eskender (1478-94)
MIE 17 II, 19 I, second part, 22 I, 23 I	reign of Lebna Dengel (1508-40)
MIE 21 I	reign of Iyāsu II (1730-55)
MIE 22 V	XVIII-XIXth c. (?)
MIE 18 I	XIXth c., first half
MIE 20 I	XIXth c., last decade
MIE 22 III e IV, 23 II	between XIXth and XXth c.
MIE 22 II	1922-23

### MIE 18 I.

Transmitted in a XVIIth-XVIIIth c. ms. of the *Gadla Yonās*, owned by the library of Dabra Deḥuḥān, doc. MIE 18 I contains a list in Tigriñña of tributes owed by different subjects to an unspecified beneficiary.

(f. 3<sup>v</sup>) Half a qarš of Walda Yoḥannes son of aṣē Kāhśu. Half a qarš of Sā'edu son of Takla Giyorgis guarantor. Half a qarš of Zamuda Ḥāyly guarantor and of Walda Giyorgis son of Takla Šem. 2 qarš of Mikā'el son of Bak<sup>w</sup>eru guarantor become 3. 2 fārgi of Maḥammad Gētā Ali, which is a guarantor, become 3 (...).

The list goes on by filling the whole page. The structure is very simple: the preposition *nāy* (even if not always) + a personal name (included the patronymic) + *wāhs* (if that is the case) + a sum expressed by *qārš* (equivalent to the Amharic *berr*) or *fārgi* and *gerbāb* (measurements for cloth). Documentary writings in Tigriñña are extremely rare: only two are known, dating back to the first half of the XIXth c.: an *additio* on Paris, B.N. d'Abb. 72, f. 179<sup>21</sup>, and the celebrated *Charter* of Loggo Sārdā, written on the guard leaves of an ancient *Gospel* belonging to a church of Ḥamāsēn<sup>22</sup>. On these grounds, we can date to the same age this piece of writing too. In addition to the use of Tigriñña, the presence may be observed of names belonging to both Christian and Islamic traditions. No doubt the document contains a record of tributes owed to the convent by private persons, but we do not know the exact reason why the payment was due. The word *wāhs*, «guarantor», probably refers to the obligation the party underwent on behalf of his lineage. Because of the presence of names of *ḡābarti*, a list of rents for the usufruct of monastery's lands could be hypothesised, written in Tigriñña since Ge'ez is obviously unknown to Ethiopian Moslems.

<sup>21</sup> Ed. CONTI ROSSINI, "Aethiopica", *cit.*, p. 465 (23. Una nota tigrāi in un ms. d'Abbadie).

<sup>22</sup> Ed. C. CONTI ROSSINI, *Ricordi d'un soggiorno in Eritrea*, Asmara, Fioretti & Beltrami, p. 61; ID., "I Loggo e la Legge dei Loggo Sarda", *GSAI*, XVII, 1904, pp. 1-63.

## MIE 21 I.

Transmitted in a XIX c. ms. of the *Mazmura Dāwit*, owned by the library of Dabra Şegē, doc. MIE 21 I contains a contract of sale in Ge‘ez, concerning the lands of the village of ‘Ad Kesād, Q<sup>w</sup>oḥayn, Endā Mosi district<sup>23</sup>, a document dating back to the first half of the XVIIIth c.

(f. 3<sup>v</sup>) This is the document written in the times of king Makālu, while the *seyyum* of Śarāwē was Azmāš Sāmrit. The buyer of Ad Kesād at his own expense was Belēn Sagadē; the sellers of Ad Kesād were the relatives of Zawalda Māryām, Minās and Tēwodros. The guarantors were Bāselyos, son of šum Takla Krestos, and Ḥārnafu, son of šum Taklit: both guaranteed for Ad Kesād with its territory (...).

The document goes on with a long list of witnesses. We do not know who king Makālu is, but Azmāš Sāmrit, *seyyum* of Sarā‘ē, could be the personality known by oral tradition by the name of Aytā Samrēt, who struggled for power during the reign of Iyāsu II (1730-55)<sup>24</sup>. Documentary writings in Ge‘ez containing land sales between private persons are only a few. In addition to doc. MIE 21 I we know of only three cases, which date back to the Sixties and Seventies of the XVIIIth c. and concern the territory of Medra Qalqal, in northern Ḥamāsēn, written on two different mss. kept in ‘Addi Qonşi and Şazzegā<sup>25</sup>. Formally the text exhibits all the elements of a contract: indication of time, identity of buyer, sellers and guarantors; only the list of witnesses is astonishingly solid and out of proportion to the documentation we know. The preservation of a copy of this contract (if not the original) in the library of the convent could be explained by both the authority of the monastery and the nature of the land, maybe originally a *rim*, an «ecclesiastical land which could be bought and sold», in Donald Crummey’s words<sup>26</sup>.

## MIE 17 I-II and MIE 22 V.

Docc. MIE 17 I-II from Dabra Deḥuḥān and MIE 22 V from Dabra Şegē contain two versions of the same land charter in Ge‘ez, the oldest we know referring to these convents. In the first case, the text is divided into two parts, inserted at the

<sup>23</sup> Cp. C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Saggio sulla toponomastica dell’Eritrea tigrina", *BSGI*, LXXIII, 1938, pp. 785-816: p. 806; ID., "Yonās", *cit.*, p. 179; R. PERINI, *La zona di Asmara. Circostrizione storica del Mareb-Mellasc’-Negghiäu*, Roma, E. Voghera, 1894, p. 112; ID., *Di qua dal Marèb (Marèb-mellàsc’)*, Firenze, Tip. Cooperativa, 1905, p. 134.

<sup>24</sup> R. PERINI, *La zona di Asmara. Circostrizione storica del Mareb-Mellasc’-Negghiäu*, *cit.*, p. 73; ID., *Di qua dal Marèb (Marèb-mellàsc’)*, *cit.*, p. 97.

<sup>25</sup> Ed. KOLMODIN, *Traditions*, *cit.*, pp. 71-78; cp. CONTI ROSSINI, "Principi", *cit.*, pp. 338-339.

<sup>26</sup> D. CRUMMEY, "Gondarine Rim Land Sales. An Introductory Description and Analysis", in: *Proc. of the Fifth Intern. Conf. of Eth. St. Session B* (Chicago, april 13-16 1978), ed. by R. Hess, Chicago, Un. of Illinois, 1979, pp. 469-479: p. 472.

beginning (MIE 17 I) and at the end (MIE 17 II) of the codex respectively; this version is the shorter and probably the older one. Doc. MIE 22 V is the longer version, written on the occasion of a renewal of the previous grant, in a period unknown.

## MIE 17 I.

(f. 1<sup>v</sup>) This monastery of abbā Yonās has been founded in holyness, purity and equality. And as for me, Belēn Sagada, ‘aqāṣan of Śārāwē, named Tanṣe’a Krestos, my father Bagada Ṣeyon, my wife Magdalāwit, my mother Sofyā, and my sons Ato Anbassā, Abrehām, Yesḥaq, Yā’qob, Musē Deruy named Yoḥannes, Sāmu’ēl, Sebḥat La’ab, Aron, Tēwodros and Tasfā Ḥeywat, and my brothers Gabra Krestos and Bak<sup>w</sup>era Ṣeyon Sā’elu...

A donation was made to them, to our father Êwostātēwos, to our father Absādi, to our father Musē, to our father Demyānos, to our father Yonās and to our fathers their disciples, novices and monks, in order to build their monastery and to make their tazkār.

In past times I built the holy monastery, in the days of king Zar’a Yā’qob (...). Then, in the days of king Eskender, our father Yonās received Nunā Yemassel (...).

The mention of king Eskender (1478-94) makes it possible to date the older core of the document. The grantor, Belēn Sagada, is the ‘aqāṣan known by other documents<sup>27</sup>, portrayed in a *Psalter* dating to 1476/77: Paris, B.N. d’Abb. 105, f. 89<sup>v</sup>. On the grounds of the data contained in this text, his rule could be dated between 1455 and 1489. He bears the same name as his grandfather, who lived between 1350 and

## MIE 22 V.

(f. 3, col.b) This monastery of our father Yonās has been founded in holyness, purity and equality. And as for me, Belēn Asgada, ‘aqāṣen of Śārāwē, named Tanṣe’a Krestos, my father Bagada Ṣeyon, my wife Magdalāwit, my mother Sofyā, and my sons Ato Anbassā, Abrehām, Yesḥaq, Yā’qob, Musē Deruy named Yoḥannes, Sāmu’ēl, Sebḥat (f. 3<sup>v</sup>) La’ab, Aron, Tiwodros and Tasfā Ḥeywat, and my brothers Gabra Krestos and Bak<sup>w</sup>era Yaṣeyon Sā’elu...

A donation was made to them, to the justs of Dabra Deḥuḥān, to our father Musē, to our father Demyānos, to our father Yonās and to our fathers their disciples, novices and monks, in order to build their monastery and to make their tazkār.

In past times I built Genbā Le’ul, under the reign of our king Zar’a Yā’qob (...). Then, in the days of king Eskender, our father Yonās received Nunā Temassel (...).

<sup>27</sup> C. CONTI ROSSINI, "Studi su popolazioni dell’Etiopia, II. La seconda migrazione agaw dell’Eritrea (Zagwà e Adcheme Melgà)", *RSO*, IV, 1912, pp. 599-651: p. 632, note 1; CONTI ROSSINI, "Yonās", *cit.*, pp. 200-201 e 250-251; R. SCHNEIDER, "Une page d’histoire des Adkama de la province du Seraē en Erythrée", in: *Etiopia e oltre. Studi in onore di Lanfranco Ricci*, Napoli, I.U.O., 1994 (St. afr. Ser. et., 1), pp. 245-254: p. 247.

1370<sup>28</sup>. As to his name, it is to be noticed that the second element appears in one case as Asgada (with the derivative Asgad), meaning «he caused the Bilens to kneel», while Belēn Sagada means «the Bilens revered him»<sup>29</sup>. In oral tradition the same component appears as Säggäd, according to a nominal pattern known in both Amharic and Tigrīñña onomastics (for ex. Mälläs)<sup>30</sup>. The second part of the document seems to be an appendix and a completion of the first one, recognizing the convent of Yonās as a place of refuge and granting the people living in its territory the exemption from tributes. Though it does not contain elements for a chronology, it can be dated during the reign of Lebna Dengel (1508-40). The close relationship between the two parts is confirmed by doc. MIE 22 V, which contains a single text. Some of the lands recorded in both the charters appear in another document: Paris, B.N. d'Abb. 152, f. 59, dated 1519, a grant from Lebna Dengel, but doc. MIE 22 V accords to Dabra Deḥuḥān a territory still wider. This fact allows us to conclude that from the XVIth c. the importance of Dabra Deḥuḥān grew so much that it superseded the authority of the oldest convent of the whole region: Dabra Māryām, founded by Absādi in 1374.

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<sup>28</sup> SCHNEIDER, "Une page", *cit.*, pp. 247-248 and 252-253; G.L., *Il Gadla Absādi (Dabra Māryām, Sarāwē)*, CSCO 557 Aeth 103, p. 83 and CSCO 558 Aeth 104, 1996, p. 60.

<sup>29</sup> Cp. doc. MIE 17 I (Sagada) and MIE 22 V (Asgada and Asgadē).

<sup>30</sup> L. RICCI, "Nomi personali fra genti a lingua tigrina", *RSE*, XXI, 1965 (pub. 1966), pp. 11-161: pp. 120 e 154.