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Article

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The “Egyptian Saints” of the Abyssinian Hagiography

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Literally, an “Egyptian saint” – quite apart from the fact that this word can also indicate every kind of “occidental” or “white” Mediterranean person – in the Abyssinian hagiographical texts is one who appears, and who was born, or lived, in Coptic Egypt (or even in “Rom”), so being also part of the hagiographical tradition of that country. So, hundreds of saints “of Egyptian origin” can be found in the Abyssinian tradition, to be elicited from the more than 1000 non-Abyssinian saints quoted in the current editions of the Abyssinian Synaxary, and among the nearly 130 in the Gadla Samā’tāt¹ or similar compositions (not all of these Lives are included in the Synaxary, and anyway they often appear in a different version): our task is to identify not so much those saints who hold a traditionally important place in Abyssinia, but those whose ideological influence was still alive and discernible in this country in a recent past.

A group which can be easily identified is that of Bulà/Abib, Cyrus, Gabra Krestos/Alexius, Latṣūn, Nob, and, for those who act in Abyssinia proper, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Yoḥannes Mešràsqāwī (John the Oriental), and maybe Ṣadīwos of Dabra Bāṭtārwā, Yohanni of Dabra Asā, and some others, to which the Axumite saints must be added.

The clearest indication for such a selection, and such associations, comes from the materiality of the manuscript tradition itself; the basic – and very elementary – assumption is that, if two or more saints are present in the same manuscript, there must be some similarity felt between them by the tradition.

First of all, among the hundreds of saints of Egyptian and Coptic origin, only few in the Abyssinian manuscript tradition have also an independent life, i.e. independent from the big collections of Lives quoted above: they are always included in them, but they can be also extant separately, in mss. which contain other works, and frequently in an enlarged version. Without

¹ Of course understood here only as a kind of text typologically defined; the main mss. are the BL Or 686 = W CCLVII (1755–1769); BL Or 687–688 = W CCLVIII, 18 c.; BL Or 689 = W CCLIII, 15. c.; BL Or 690 = W CCLIV, 15. c.; BL Or 691 = W CCLV, 15. c.; BL Or 682 = W CCLVI, 15. c.; BN Z 131, 13. c.; d’A 92 = N 129, 15. c.; d’A 110 = N 164, 1509; Berl Or. fol. 117 = D 66, 14/15 c.; Var264 (vL), 1362/3; E 141, 1904/5; E 1479, 1459/60; E 1766, 14./15. c.; E 1824, 1414–1429; E 1826, 14./15.s; E 1827, 15. c.; E 1834, 16. c.; E 1840, 1400; E 1844, 16. c.; E 1939, 14./15. c.; E 2514, 1382–1388; E 2796, 14. s.
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aiming at completeness, but only to get some general indications after consultation of many Catalogues, this seems to be the case of:

a. Bulà/Abib, which, outside the Gadla samàʝtàt, is extant at least in:

b. Cyrus, whose Life exhibits a long version (for example the ms. Or 701 of the British Library, the ms. d’Abbadie 103, maybe also the d’Abbadie 123, and others), and a shortened one (frequently made by merely omitting passages of the larger version, at regular intervals). Outside the Gadla samàʝtàt, and without making here a distinction between the long and the short versions, the Life of Cyrus is extant at least in:


3 In the following list the brackets for the final folio mean that, failing the indication by the Catalogue, the folio is that of the beginning of the following work.

4 We also do not take into consideration here, for the moment, the question of the other saints with the same name, like Cyrus and Jean, Cyrus and Julitta, etc.


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C. Gabra Krestos/Saint Alexius, with 15 mss. in Cerulli’s edition,5 to which must be added at least, outside the Gadla samàätät:


d. and possibly Nob, for which a Life much longer than the passages in the Gadla samàätät is extant at least in:


An entirely different situation is that of Tàdèwos of Dabra Bàrtàrwà, for whom only one ms. is known until now,6 that of Yohannes Meśraqàwi,7 who

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does not appear in the great collections, and perhaps of Yoḥanni of Dabra Aṣā, whose relationship with the others Yoḥanni of the tradition is not clear. 

But this criterion is not completely sure. For example, the Life of Lāṭṣun does not appear in the *Gadla samāṭāt*, and it is extant only in ms. E 1939, dated 14/15 c. But what is significant in this respect, and in fact very surprising, is that Gabra Manfas Qedus, who is surely an “Egyptian” saint, does not show any important connection at all: out of nearly 70 codices listed in the Catalogues quoted above, only nine contain also the Life of another saint: BL Or. 701 = W CCLVII, Vet 142 and E 4679 that of Cyrus (see above); BL Or. 711 = W CCLXXXVI that of Abib (see above); BL Add. 16, 198 = D XLVIII that of Alexius (see above); E 1734 and E 3445 (see above) that of Yoḥanni of Dabra Aṣā; d’A 126 = N 174 that of abba Sānuḍyos (Schenute) and Beso; BN Z 137 that Takla Ḥāymānot.

A second phenomenon is that, as far as these saints are concerned, the content of many codices reveals frequent associations with that of others; as it has been said, this testifies to a certain traditional affinity between some of these saints. Many of their Lives appear very frequently in the same manuscript together with some of the others; there is also a connection with “Axumite” saints, many of them, as it is well known, stayed for some time


9 See also the problem of Cyrus and Yohanni above.

in Egypt; besides, some of these saints appear together in the same "malke' or "salām, or in the same illumination, but much more frequently in a "malke' or "salām in a ms. which contains a "malke' or "salām of some of the others, or their entire Life, or viceversa in various combinations. Finally, these texts frequently quote each other: for example, Latṣun is quoted whenever a sinner has to be saved from hell, and many times a pact “given to Kiros” is found, as a model for the pact that the protagonist will receive in the near future. In detail, it is easy to identify a first group which includes the Life of Abib, that of Alexius and that of Cyrus, already quoted above:

D'A 123 = N 175; Vat Cerulli Fr 59; Tānāsee ms. 164 (vol. III ms. 53 = Dağa Eştifanos 53); E 2610; E 4002. One can also add the mss. BN Z 132 (only Abib and Alexius), d'A 103 = N 167 (only Alexius and Cyrus), and Tānāsee ms. 170 (vol. III ms. 59 = Dağa Eştifanos 59; only Alexius and Abib).

In this group, the inclusion of Axumite saints in the same ms. is rare, and it occurs only in the mss. BN Z 132 above (ff. 1r--/14v/ Garimā) and Tānāsee 164 above (ff. 70r--95v Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī); the former contains also the Life of Yoḥanni of Dabra Ąsā (ff. 39r--/43), but in consideration of the extreme rarity of this latter text, this fact could not be very significant.

A second group is made by those mss., which contain only one (two in one case, three in another) of the aforementioned saints, but invariably one or more Axumite saints (usually Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī):

- Abib, Alexius and Cyrus in Tānāsee ms. 164 (vol. III ms. 53 = Dağa Eştifanos 53) above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 70r--95v;
- Abib and Alexius, in BN 132 above, with Garimā and Yoḥanni of Dabra Ąsā;
- Alexius and Cyrus, in E 2504 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 2r--41r;
- Abib alone in mss. BL Or. 702 = W CCLXXVIII above, with Garimā ff. 108r--(143v);
- Alexius alone in mss. BL Or 709 = W CCLXXXV above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 74r--(193); d'A 46 = N 176 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 1r--(34v); Berl Peterm. II Nachtr. 28 = D 71 above, with Garimā ff. 2--67; Preuss. Kult. 77 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 5r--75v; Comb 275 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 2--67, E 612 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. 2r--46r; E 863 above, with Za-Mikā'el Aragāwī ff. qr--51v; E 912

For the sake of brevity cp. P. MARRASSINI, “Vita”, “Omelia”, “Miracoli” del santo Gabra Manfas Qeddus, CSCO 597/598, Sae 107/108, Louvain 2003 (henceforth: GMQ; the pages with the Roman numerals refer to the II volume, those with the Arabic to the I and the II), pp. XXXVIII--XL, and below.

E.g. GMQ, pp. 58/21.
Cp. GMQ, pp. 168/56.

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above, with Za-Mikàʝòl Aragàwi ff. 1r–44v, E 2039 above, with Za-Mikàʝòl Aragàwi ff. 4r–52r, E 2795 above, with Za-Mikàʝòl Aragàwi ff. 3r–55v;
- Cyrus alone in mss. Bayer. 49 = Cod. Aeth. 49 above, with Za-Mikàʝòl Aragàwi ff. 43r–88r, and E 1834 above, with Garimà ff. 11r–15v, 96r–v, 16r–20r.

Nob is completely different, and his Life does not show any significant association: apart from the Gadla samàʝtàt, it appears always with different saints, and in mss., which contain also very different works: with the Acts of Basilides in the BL Or. 706 = W CCLXXXII, with the Acts of Yestos, Aboli and Tawkliyà, but above all with important homilies in the famous d’Abbadie 54 = N 169,14 with the Acts of Abunàfer, and again with important homilies, in the EMML 5;15 with stories and homilies by and on Macarius in the Comb. 290;16 and with a story on the life of the ascetics in the desert, but again with other very different texts, in the EMML 1486;17 so, judging from the associations of his Life in the codices, Nob seems to stay at a different, and maybe more elevated, level than that of the hagiographic texts.

The situation of Tàdèwos of Dabra Bártàrwà is very simple, because there is only one ms. known until now (see above), but also the connections of Yo込んだ of Dabra Aĺà are not very significant, because of the very rarity of the texts about him. He is associated with Gabra Manfas Qeddus in the ms. E 1734 and 3445 (see above), but, perhaps interestingly, he is associated with the Axumite saints (Frumentius, Libànos, the Nine Saints) in E 1763 above (a Homiliary of the 14. c.),18 and, together with Abib and Alexius, in

14 Where it is said that the text had been translated from Arabic thanks to Abbà Salàmà: taʃaʃama ze ya gabl zaburuk abbà Nob watargwamo ‘em’arabi bage’ez ‘ennewàya abuna teruf kokaba kebr berub abuna abbà salàma pàyypù z’si’yopyà bagar. The texts are: Nob, Acts of Yistos, Aboli and Tawkliyà (also translated thanks to Abbà Salàmà), Homily by Johannes Chrisostomus on the Four Beasts, Homily on the Lord, Homily of Basilios on the angels, the divinity and the religion, Acts of John the Baptist and Homily of the Orthodox on him, Homily by the metropolitan Minàs on the Cross. Preceded by a Homily by Athanasius on the assumption of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and followed by the Gadla Abunàfer; by a Homily by Basil of Caesarea for the building of a church for Mary (cp. GMQ p. 67 fn. 286?), and Paenitential Canons from the Mashafa Qedàr; ff. 144, 16. s)
16 Comb 290 Gadla abba Nob “irreperibile; traduzione dall’arabo” (I. Zena abu Maqar; II. Discorsi di S. Macario; III. N; ff. 158, s. d.)
17 EMML 1496, whose contents are very similar to those of EMML 5; the Gadla Nob is preceded by a Homily of Athanasius on the departure of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a Homily by Saint Ephrem on Abraham and Sarah; and followed by a Narrative by Babnuda an the life of the ascetics in the desert, a Homily by Basil of Caesarea for the building of a church for Maria (see above), and the Mashafa Qedàr.
18 With the saints Aşbeha (not Abreha), Minàs, Peter patriarch of Constantinople, Frumentius/abbà Salàma, Stephen, abba Maţà/Libànos, George, the Nine Saints.
BN Z 132 above. Yohannes Mesraaqawi is a complete solitary, in all the four mss. of his Acts.

Outside of the connections indicated above, it is important to note that our saints either do not form other significant groups, or stand alone (i.e. without other saints in the same ms). The Life of Abib is with that of Gabra Manfas Qeddus in BL Or. 711 = W CCLXXXVI (see above); with that of Bagge’u in E 1960; with that of Eustathius in BL Or. 702 = W CCLXXXVIII, in Berl Or. Quart. 1012 = Chaine 43, and in Preuss. Kult. 132; with various compositions on John the Baptist in Vat 32, E 1344, the same E 1960, E 4002; with different works in BL Or 694 = W CCLXX.

Alexius stands with Gabra Manfas Qeddus in BL Add. 16, 198 = D XLVIII (see above); with Takla Hāymānnot in E 2134 and E 4280; with Samu’el of Gadāma Wāli in Privatbesitz 1; he is alone in Orient. Oct. 1270 = Preuss. Kult. 42, E 890, E 1122, E 2266. Cyrus appears with Gabra Manfas Qeddus in BL Or. 701 = W CCLXXXVII, Vat 142, E 4679 (see above); with Takla Hāymānnot in E 3418; with Takla Hāymānnot and Samu’el of Gadāma Wāli in BN Z 136; with Abunāfer and works on Melchisedek in d’A 94 = N 170; with different philosophical and theological works in Berl Orient. Quart.= Chaine 42 = Preuss. Kult. 131.; he is alone in Comb 205 and 206, Preuss. Kult. ms. 60 = Ms. orient. oct. 1288, Ṭanāsee 143 (vol. III ms. 32, Daga Estifanos 32), E 319, E 2017, E 3554, E 4683. Yohanni of Dabra Asā stands with Gabra Manfas Qeddus in E 1734 (see above), and without other saints in BL Add. 16, 230 = D XLVII (see above) and E 4268 (see above). As said, no connections for Yohannes Mesraaqawi.

Much more complicated is the situation as far as hymnography is concerned. Nevertheless, a clear picture seems to emerge which corresponds in part to the groups of the Acts. In the following list we give also a short summary of the contents of the ms, in order to give an idea of the more general affiliation of these saints. Apart from the connections of Gabra Manfas Qeddus, to which a hint has been made in my recent edition of his Life,19 the couples are:

Abib-Cyrus:

BL Or 535 = W CXIII ff. 1r–(3v), 3vv–(5r) Psalter; hymns and prayers; ff. 231, 17. c.; Ṭanāsee 116 (vol. III ms. 5 = Daga Estifanos 5) 26ff. 83v–85v 41ff, 130r–132v Collection of 53 hymns, among which the saints Gabra Manfas Qeddus (x2), Cyrus, Hiruta Amlāk, Martyrs, Saints, Cyriacus, Stephen, George, Basilides, Abib, Iyasus Mo’a, Takla Hāymānnot, Eustatius, Afqaranna ‘Egzi’, Samu’el of Gadāma Wāli; ff. 164, 17. c.?: E 1060:20 ff. 99r–101r 24: ff. 11v–112v Ḥasīra masqal and 37 hymns, among which the saints Takla Hāy-

19 GMQ, pp. LV–LXVIII.
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mānot, Eustathius, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Basilides, Claudius, Mercurius, George, Abib, Cyrus, Qirqos; ff. 153, 17–18. c.; E 1950:44 ff. 100v–102r, 113r–114 r, 119r–122r, 122r–123v Book of Enoch and Collection of 48 hymns, among which the saints Takla Häymānot, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Honorius, Claudius, Malke’a Krestos, Za-Mikä’el Aragawi, Stephen, The 40 Martyrs of Sebaste, Qirqos and Iyyalutā, Abib, Basilides, Mercurius, Cyrus, ff. 49, ... c.;
or Alexius-Cyrus:

BL Or 575 = W CLXXXVII 15: ff. 90v–(96r) 16: ff. 96r–(100r) Gubā’e malke’ with 16 hymns, among which the saints Claudius, Cyrus, Gabra Krestos; ff. 109, 16. c.;
or Alexius-Abib:

Vat 29: III ff. 14v–15v Prayers in a convolute of fragmentary manuscripts; in the same fragment also a salām to Abib; 16.c.

Larger groups are

Abib, Alexius and Cyrus:


or Abib, Cyrus and Latšun, where the insertion of this latter is particularly important, given the rarity and isolation of his Acts:

BL Or 590 = W CXCVI (ff. not indicated) Ṭabība ṣabībān; various hymns to angels, martyrs and the saints George, Basilides, Stephen, Eustathius (x2), Minās, Behnām, Mercurius, Arsimā, Arwā, Cyrus, Abib, Milki, Aaron, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Alēf and Sehmā, Takla Häymānot, Theodore, Claudius, Sebastian, John of Asyūt, Victor, Latun; the 2 Macarii, Antony, Macarius, Anbas, Demetrius, Moses, Theophilus, John the dwarf (ḥāṣīr) ff. 73, 18.c.
The Aksumite saints are connected with

Abib:

BL Or 574 = W CLXXXIX 13: ff. 37v–(40r) 14: 40r–(44r) Gubā’e malke’ with 35 hymns, among which the saints Antony, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Libānos, Philip, Samuel, Eustathius, Takla Häymānot, George, Basilides, Victor and Claudius, Stephen; ff. 140, 17. c.; Chester Beatty Dubl 949 ff. 39v–(41v) 43r–(47r) Gubā’e malke’ with 19 hymns, among which the only saints are Abib, Mercurius and Za-Mikä’el Aragawi, ff. 47, 18.c.; Cambr. Or. 1798 = UW XXVIII ff. 27v–(32r) 32r–(34v) Gubā’e malke’, with 18 hymns, among
which the saints Antony (x2), Takla Háymänôt (x2), Samuel (x2), Eustathius (x 2), Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi; Abîb, other texts; ff. 107, 18.c.

with Alexius, and, three times out of seven, also with a Yohanni who could be that of Dabra Àlà:

BL (not indicated in the Catalogue) = D. XXIX 10: ff. 10–(12) 13: ff. 13v–(14v) 30–31: ff. 30–(32v), 58–59: ff. 465r–(46v) Mawasejet, with 71 antiphones, among which the saints Martyrs, Alexius, Stephen (x2), abâb Yohanni (the fn. refers to ms. XLVII, Yohanni of Dabra Àlà), Minâs, Mercurius, Nagrân, the Infants, Stephen, Maṭâ‘à, George, Garimâ (x 2), Cyriacus; 37 hymns, among which the saints Eustathius, Martyrs, Just, George, Salâmâ, Takla Háymänôt; ff. 103, “recent”; BL Add. 14, 227 = D. XXX 10: ff. 7–(8) 13: ff. 9v(10v) 30: ff. 22v–(23v), 31: ff. 23v–(24v) 56–57: ff. 35r–(35v) 35v–36v) 68: 44–(45) Mawasejet with 71 antiphones, among which the saints Just, Martyrs, Alexius, Stephen (x2), abâb Yohanni (no reference in the Catalogue), Minâs, Mercurius, the Saint Martyrs, the Infants, Stephen, Maṭâ‘à, Libânos (Maṭâ‘à), Congregation of Martyrs, George, Garimâ (x2), Cyriacus, Libânos (x2); ff. (50), s. d.; (BL Or 709 = W CCLI.XXXV ff. 72r–(74r) 180v–(193) in the Acts of Alexius and Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi above, hymns to them; d’A 46 = N 176 ff. 41v–(43v) 43v–(44r) in the Acts of Alexius and Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi above, passages, nearly always with a hymn, on the saints Moses Romanus, Alexius, Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi, Ţârâkwâ; Uppsala 22. A. 8: f. 20r–v 10: f. 21v 15: f. 26v B. D. 29: f. 60v 33: f. 62r–v Mawasejet and Zemniârë, where the saints are the Just (x2), the Martyrs, Alexius f. 21v, Maṭâ‘àLibânos, George (x2), Cyriacus (x2), Stephen, Garimâ, abâb Salâmâ; ff. 67, 18. c.; Uppsala 24:A. 15: f. 25v 21: f. 36v 23: f. 40r 23 (sic) f. 40v 24: f. 40v 37: f. 60v B. 10: f. 82r 20: f. 93r–v C. 23: f. 149v 27: f. 156v Deggwâ; where the saints are Stephen, Eustathius, Pantaleon, Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi, Stephen, Yem’âtà, Abâydo, Yohanni, Minâs, Qozmos, Mercurius; Alexius, abâb Salâmâ (x2), Infants killed by Herodes, Stephen, Maṭâ‘àLibânos, Qirqos (x2), Georges, Yohannes of Hawit(?), Garimâ, Sofyà; ff. 191, 17. c.; (E 612 above ff. 69r–71r hymns to Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi and Alexius); E 4825 ff. 58v–64v 77r–79v Sayfà Ñellàsë; and 21 hymns among which the saints George (x2), Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Alexius, Takla Maṭyâm/Mabâ‘à Şeyon; ff. (140), 20.c.

with Cyrus:

E 3997 ff. 86r–90v 123r–127r Collection of 34 hymns, among which the saints Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Fiqtor (other than Victor), Basilides, Theodore, Claudius, Stephen, Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi, Takla Háymänôt; ff. (189), 17. c.; E 4089 ff. 74r–77v 77v–82r Collection of 19 hymns, among which the saints Takla Háymänôt; Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Cyrus, Za-Míkâ‘el Arágâwi, George; ff. (103), 18.c.
with Abib and Alexius:
Griaule 381:2 ff. 47v–(48r) 48v–(49r) 49r–(50r) Book of the Hours, hymns to the saints George, Basilides, Theodore, Takla Háymánot; Eustathius, Abib, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Libános, Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi, Gabra Krestos and Moses, Afqaranna ‘Egzi’; ff. 121, 18/19. c.;
with Abib and Cyrus:
Bayer. Staatsb. 49 = Cod. Aeth. 49 ff. 38r–41r 88v–93v2 94r–v above, hymns to Cyrus (x2), Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi (x2) and Alexius; E 2637:37 ff. 108v–11r 123v–126v 128r–131r Maśhraja nuzâzé (am.) and 38 hymns, among which the saints Basilides, Stephen, George, Theodore, Ciryacus, Abib, Iyasus Mo’a, Takla Háymânot; Zênä Mârynos, Cyrus, Maqâres, Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi; ff. (131), 18. c.; Bergamo 14 f. 21r–v E” nagsâ with hymns to the Saints, Martyrs, Yohannes of Dabra Bizen, Minäś, Ezra, Victor, Honorius (x2), Sinoda (x2), Eustathius (x2), Barbara and Juliana, George, Mercurius of Rome, Takla Háymânot; Antony, Macarius, Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Iyasus Mo’a, Abib, Cyrus; other texts ff. 78, 20. c.; E 2706 ff. 122r–123v 127r–128v 128v–130r 133r–134r Argânona Wêddâsê; Mazmura feśubân; Mâhlêta segé; Saqoqâwa Dengeł; various hymns in between, and subsequently 21 hymns, among which the saints Claudius, Libânos, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Cyrus, Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi, emperor Yohannes I, Takla Háymânot, Abib, Iyasus Mo’a, Mercurius, Menäś, Cyriacus, Stephen (x2), George; ff. 156, 18. c.;
with Abib, Alexius, Cyrus:
BL Or. 577 = W CXCI 8: ff. 32r–(37r) 9: ff. 37r–(40), 11: ff. 43v–(48r), 12: ff. 48r–(50r) 14: ff. 53v–(59a) 16: ff. 60r–(63r) 17: ff. 63r–(66v) 18: ff. 66v–(69v) 24: ff. 93r–(99r), 25: ff. 99r–(102r) 30: ff. 116r–(117v) Gubâ’emalke’ with 49 hymns, among which the saints Pantaleon, Garimà, Samuel, Salâmà, Cyrus, Madhanina ‘Egzi’, Liqânos, Antony (x2), Libânos, Şêmà, Za-Mikà’él Aragâwi, Sarabamon, Takla Háymânot, Eustathius (x2), Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Abib, Batra Máryâm, Yohannes Kama, Gêrellos, Alexis, The Saints, Stephen, George, Basilides, Claudius, Victor, Theodore, Mercurius, The Martyrs, Sebastian, Cyriacus, Isidore, Arsimà, Aboli, Dioscorus, Jacob Intercisus, Minäś, Behnâm, The Just; ff. 196, 1721–1730; E 2096 ff. 146r–(v), 150r–(151r) 151r–(152r), 152r–(152v) Horologium with 44 hymns, among which the saints Martyrs and the Desert Fathers, Stephen, George, Basilides, Claudius, Theodore, Cyriacus, Mercurius, Libânos, The Desert Fathers of Egypt and Ethiopia (including the Nine Saints), Takla Háymânot, Eustathius, Iyasus Mo’a, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Samu’él of Waldebbâ, Abib, Samu’él (of Wal?) Alexius, Cyrus, Yaľqeranna ‘Egzi’ (x2), Taťamqa Madhen, Mâ’qaba Egzi’, Lessâna Krestos, Walatta PešRos, Arsimà, Za-
Mikä’èl Aragäwì, Lälîbalä; ff.186, 17. c.; (E 2504 above ff. 71r–74v); E 2810 ff. 74r–(75r) 80v–(81v) 88r–(v) 88v–(89v) 99v–(100v) Prayer Book with hymns to the saints Martyrs, Desert Fathers, the Holy women, and in a special section (ff. 72r–108r) Libànos, Gabra Manfas Qeddus; Mattias, Cyrus, Basilides, Claudius, Theodore, Samu’èl of Waldebbá, Za-Mikä’èl Aragäwì, Alexius, Stephen, Minâs, Eustathius, Ciryacus, Theodore, Antony, George, Takla Häymänòt, Abib, Mercurius, Sebastian, Victor, the Innocents, the Fathers of the desert, Prayer of St. Simeone Stilites; ff. 112, 18. c.

with Abib, Alexius, Cyrus, Nob; in one case (E 659) also Yoḥannes Meśrqäwì, and possibly Yoḥanni of Dabra Asä:
d’a 170 = N 89 XXVIII ff. 59r–(61r) LI–LII–LIII ff. 78r–(81r) LIV–LV ff. 81r–(82v) LVI–LVII ff. 82v–(3r) LVIII–LIX ff. 85r–(86v) Gùbä’e malke’ with 49 hymns, among which the saints George (x3), Stephen, Mercurius, Cyriacus, Claudius (x3), Basilides (x2), Theodore, Victor (x3), Minâs, Julius, Filotheus (x2), the sons of Tàwkàdà, Nob (x2), Sebastian (x2), Sarapamon (x2), the Infants (x2), Pílatus (x2), Theodore (x2), the martyrs of Akhmim (x2), Hor (x2), Irây and Abâdir, Aboli (x3), Justus and Thecla, Theodore (2), Abib (x3), Alexius (x2), Cyrus (x2), Za-Mikä’èl Aragäwì (x2); ff. 87, 18/19. c.; E 659:71 ff. 30r–32r 61r–63v 110r–111v 177r–178v 184r–186r 217r–219r Collection of 98 hymns, among which the saints Na’akweto La’âb, Zena Marqos, Libanos, Gabra Manfas Qeddus, Cyrus, Barṣûmà, Victor, Basilides, Claudius, Theodore, Za-Mikä’èl Aragäwì, Alexius, Marbehnâm, Stephen, Yoḥannes (sic) Báhtàwi (Yoḥanni of Dabra Aśā?), Minâs, Walatta Petros, Eustathius, Cyriacus, Yemrehanna Krestos, Antony, George (x3), Takla Häymänòt, Nob, Mercurius, Heđan Mo’a, Abib, Iyasus Mo’a, Eĉa Yoḥannes; ff. 243, 18/19. c.

with Yoḥanni of Dabra Aśā and Alexius:
BL. (not indicated in the Catalogue) = D. XXIX ff. 10r–(12v) 13v–(14v) above; most probably BL. Add. 14, 227 = D. XXX ff. 7–(8) 8–(10); Uppsala L 24 A. 324: f. 40v 37: f. 60v above (where he is preceded by abba Abaydo, 23: f. 40v, his master in the Gadl); a much wider general context should be taken into account (Abib, Alexis, Kiros, Nob, Axumite saints, Eĉa Yoḥannes) if the Yoḥannes (sic) Báhtàwi of E 659 ff. 118r–120r above, is our Yoḥanni.

Of the remaining saints the connections are very poor indeed. Lâtaṣun seems to be connected with Abib and Cyrus in BL Or 590 = W CXCVI only, above (ff. not indicated by the Catalogue). Nob is connected with Abib, Alexius, Cyrus (and Yoḥannes Meśrqäwì) in E 659 only (quoted above); otherwise he seems to be mainly associated with St. George.20 Of no

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20 E 3077 f. 58v; ff. 125, 1813–1847; E 3966 f. 71v; ff. (127), 19. c.; E 4031:20 f. 66r–v; ff. 143, 20. c.
significance at all the hymnography of Tàdëwos of Dabra Bàrtàrwà, completely isolated in its only manuscript, like the corresponding Life,\textsuperscript{21} nor is that of Yoĥannes Meşråqàwì, limited to the same E 659 of Nob.

Common to these groups of texts there are also less significant details, like the presence of rare angels, like the angel Yoňàð, who appears in Gabra Manfas Qeddus bringing three cups and three breads from heaven for three visiting saints,\textsuperscript{22} and in Cyrus, where he brings a cup and a bread from heaven to abba Bàbnuda;\textsuperscript{23} or also the angel Abdelmàkos (or T/Demlàkos and other variants), who is surely less rare, and appears in the Acts of Gabra Manfas Qeddus and Latùzn driving away from the hell those who were pardoned thanks to the intercession of the saint,\textsuperscript{24} and sporadically also in the apocryphal tradition (e. g. in the Apocalypse of Peter),\textsuperscript{25} where he is the guard of the damned (his name comes from Gr. têmeloûchos “guardian”). Another secondary element is the presence of a Mount ëràr, or ëràrà,\textsuperscript{26} of course not the same as the mountains ërìr (with the I order), ërēr (with the V order) or ërārā in Shoa and Tigray. in the Acts of Gabra Manfas Qeddus our mount ërārā is located near the Garden of Eden, it is made of gold and silver, and it drips milk and honey;\textsuperscript{27} in the Acts of Cyrus an old man, who in fact is Jesus Christ (as the text later tells us) declares to come from Mount ërārā, which, he explains, “is not from this earth”, and which Kiros will see only at the moment of his death; at that moment, the text does not mention Mount ërārā, but the soul of Cyrus is transported near the Garden of Eden.\textsuperscript{28}

But if we look for a less formal, and a more substantial definition which could unite in some way these “Egyptian” saints among themselves, and with the Axumite, we have to take into consideration many different elements of content.

First of all, a negative element, if we may say so, i. e. the fact of being Egyptians without being martyrs. In fact, the most striking feature which characterizes an Egyptian saint is perhaps that of being very frequently a martyr; instead, this is almost never the case in Abyssinia; where the

\textsuperscript{21}Ff. 1r–(4r), 59r–(62v), 62v–(63r), 63r–(67r) hymns (meľâbûn) to T. and his nephew Filmonà.
\textsuperscript{22}GMQ, pp. XIX, 88–89/31.
\textsuperscript{23}Gadla Kiros, ms. d’A 123 = N 175, f. 37v ; in ms. BL Or 701 = W CCLXXVII f. 3v the angel is Michael.
\textsuperscript{24}GMQ, p. LX.
\textsuperscript{26}GMQ, pp. LXI–LXII.
\textsuperscript{27}GMQ, pp. 99/34.
\textsuperscript{28}Gadla Kiros, ms. BL Or 701 = W CCLXXVII ff. 34r–v and 43r.
Church has always taken part in the political power, and the martyrs, if any, were the others. So, this feature could not be imitated, or really sincerely felt as a genuine national tradition, in Abyssinia, and we know of very few Abyssian saints who were also martyrs, like the Ṣadeqân or Anânyâ. Instead, in Abyssinia we usually find a process of substitution of the martyrdom by penances or equivalent situations, like the conflict with the emperor, or the punishment of the young saint by the hand of his father, as in Başalota Mika’él. This is the normal process which has also taken place in Europe, when the saint martyr becomes, after the end of the great persecutions, the saint confessor.

This very process has brought a further element, more or less connected with the preceding one, that is the absence, from this type of texts, of the period of childhood. Childhood is a very important period for native Abyssinian saints, whose Acts describe in detail the birth of the saint, his christening, his first years and his precocity, his adolescence and the relationship with his parents, and so on. There is no important place for childhood in the account of the martyrs, because the only relevant element is the martyrdom itself. But also in the texts of our group childhood is not important as compared with the “adult” achievements: Cyrus, Latșun, partly Abib, and in a different context, the Nine and other “Axumite” Saints, have no childhood

32 Cp. the well-known group of the saints against the king (Filepos de Dabra Libânos, Başalota Mika’él of Dabra Gol, Samu’él of Dabra Wağâg, Anorêwos of Şegàgâ, Aron Mankerâtî of Dabra Darêt), and also e. g. the Stephanites, abbâ Sinodâ of Dabra Şemmunâ and Zar’a Buruk.
33 Where the father wants to compel his son to marry: K. CONTI ROSSINI, Vita sanctorum indigenarum. I. Acta Başalota Mika’él et S. Anorêwos, CSCO 28, 28/SAn 11, p. 8: qaddamâ kawina sem’ ba’eda abubu.
The “Egyptian Saints” of the Abyssinian Hagiography

described. The childhood which is present in Gabra Manfas Qeddus and John the Oriental only indicates the insertion of an otherwise common element.

A third element seems also to be typical of this kind of hagiographical production, i.e. the “Roman” origin, or anyway the “Roman” connection. This is part of the general phenomenon of the noble origin of the saint, the so-called “beata stirps”, very accurately investigated for European hagiography. In Abyssinia the Roman origin, or the Roman connection, is typical of the “Axumite” saints: Za-Mikäël Aragäwi is “from the Roman dynasty”, and his first name was Gabra Amlák, according to his mother ʝAbd al-Masi, i.e. Gabra Krestos/Alexis; Garimà is the son of Mesfiyäns, king of Rome; Panṭalèwon’s father was an official of the king of Rome; Libânos was “the son of the kings of Rom”, and his mother’s name was Negesšt; Afṣë was of royal family. The case of Buruk Amlák, who is not “Axumite” but who nevertheless is the son of the king of Rome and of a Milidämä, niece or granddaughter of the king of Chalcedon, is clearly a secondary borrowing. In the case of our “Egyptian saints”, Cyrus, whose original name was Diläsor, is the son of a king Abyä, who in turn was the son of a king Yonän (“Greek”), and he is the brother of the heir apparent Tewodosyos; Gabra Manfas Qeddus is the son of a prefect of the king of Rome, and, by the way, of one Aqlèsyä whose grand-father was of the tribe of Benjamin (and this connects her at the same time with Israel and with Saint Paul); John the Oriental is the son of Diläsor, and this, as we have seen, is the first name

35 GYM, pp. LIII–LVII; Infanzia, cit., pp. 149–155.
40 See now the impeccable edition by A. BAUSI, La “Vita” e i “Miracoli” di Libânos, CSCO 595/596, SAe 105/106.
43 Cp. e. g. ms. BL Or. 701 = W CCLXXVII (quoted above) ff. 2r–v.
44 GMQ, pp. XXXVII–XXXVIII.
of Cyrus; besides, the text indicates him as being "em-zamada nagást.45
Nothing, of course, can be added to the royal ancestors of Alexius.

All these three points clearly indicate the connection existing between
these saints. But this is only the result of a given ideological conception.
What is the cause? Above a hint has been made to the presence of Egypt in
both categories, but this is only an external datum, however important it
can be; there must be some more substantial element of content. Now, the
important “adult” achievement which eliminates the narration of childhood
from the majority of these texts, and approaches them to those of the martyrs, is clear: in the lives of the Axumite saints is the introduction of the
Orthodox faith, but in the case of the others the most important element is
asceticism realized through the presence of the desert.46

Of course, the desert is present in almost every Life of the Abyssinian
saints (a bibliography would be here superfluous), but it appears for rela-
tively short periods, and above all it is flanked by other major activities,
different from mere heremitism. For example, Filmona practises his asceti-
cism and his privations together with his work in several monasteries
(Dabra Mâryâm, Dabra Ta’âminâ);47 immediately after his arrival at Ke-
brân, Za-Yohannes builds a hut, and immediately after he begins to collect

45 GYM, pp. XVI–XVII e 16/17.
46 Among the essays on this topic see at least A. GUILLAUMONT, La conception du désert
des moines d’Egypte, RHR 94 (1975), pp. 3–21; Die Wüste im Verständnis der ägypti-
schen Mönche, “Geist und Leben” 54 (1981), pp. 121–137; afterwards, S.P. BRATTON,
Christianity, wilderness and wildlife. The original desert solitude, Scranton 1993; M.-E.
BRUNET, Das Ideal der Wüstenskuse und seine Rezeption in Gallien ..., Münster 1994;
U. CRISCUOLO, Itinerarium mentis: sulla teoria e la prassi dell’anacoreesi e dell’ascesi nei
désert dans le monachisme chrétien, “Cahiers de l’Université St. Jean de Jérusalem” 8
(1982), pp. 45–70; J.E. GOEHRING, The encroaching desert: Literary production and as-
281–296 (cp. BZ 1996/II, p. 507); Ascetics, society, and the desert: Studies in early Egypti-
an monasticism, Harrisburg 1999 (a collection of essays); R. KIRSCHNER, The vocation
of holiness in Late Antiquity, “Vigihae christianaee” 38 (1984), pp. 105–204; N.
SEVCENKO, The hermit as a stranger in the desert, in: D.C. SMITH (ed.), Strangers to
themselves. The Byzantine outsider, Papers of the XXXII Spring Symposium of Byzant-
ine Studies, University of Sussex ... 1998, Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies,
Publication 8, Aldersot 2000, pp. 75–86; R. TRAINA, L’espace des moines sauvages,
LXXXVII and GMQ, p. XLII.
47 ALLOTTE DE LA FUûE, Filmona, cit, pp. 25–26/24, 37/34 ff.
people to create a māḥbar.\textsuperscript{48} In other words, in the “normal” Abyssinian saints heremitism is never complete, and heretical and coenobitical life are well integrated. This of course corresponds in some way to the development of monastic ideology in Egypt.\textsuperscript{49} Besides, the “desert” is frequently placed at no great distance from a monastery, as in the case of Zènà Māryàm, who lives in a hermitage, but has continuous contacts with the pilgrims, the monastery, and the abbot;\textsuperscript{50} Yàrèd is also retired \textit{wësta gadàmà samèn medra sàllamt}, but this does not prevent him from teaching singing to the local people;\textsuperscript{51} Bāsalota Mikà‘èl practises his ascetic life in the \textit{dabr} of Anorèwos, i. e. Dabra Gol, after a period of loneliness and asceticism;\textsuperscript{52} Takla Hawàryàt goes to Dabra Darbà to meet other monks, in a \textit{menèt} where he again subjects himself to fasting and privations.\textsuperscript{53} In fact, also our translation of \textit{gadàm} by “desert” could be frequently erroneous; it should be translated by “hermitage” or the like, and sometimes more or less by “monastery with particularly rigid rules”.\textsuperscript{54}

On the contrary, the activity of our saints develops only in the desert. This desert is, if I may say so, “absolute”, and pervades their life in its entirety. The main peculiarities of this desert are almost universally widespread:

1. It is a real desert, faraway from monastic communities and, even more, from villages and cities.\textsuperscript{55}

2. This desert is also populated by other monks, who periodically pay a visit to each other, but who otherwise live quite independently. This is of course the same motif of the \textit{desertum civitas}, studied among others by Chitty.\textsuperscript{56}
3. Sometimes this desert may be “fertilized” by the virtuous monk. This is also the case of the so-called desertus floribus vernans found in St. Jerome. An example is found in Gabra Manfas Qeddus. Here, the desert in which the saint had left his teeth smells of musk and frankincense, and in the place in which he had left his bowels and his blood a vineyard grows, on which the hermits feed.

4. This desert is obviously populated by demons, but not in the same way as the other hagiographical texts. In these latter this demonic presence is scattered in several short episodes, frequently with the same demons, which are driven away by the saint each time. Instead, in the “Egyptian saints” the presence of the devil is much stronger, if we may say so, in quality, i.e. in episodes which are much longer and articulated. In the Life of Latson, for example, there is a long episode in which the devil tries to deceive the saint by appearing to him as a beautiful woman, who invites him to a gallant banquet, seduces him, and reveals herself only at the crucial point. In Gabra Manfas Qeddus the fairly common theme of the devil who tries to convince the saint into coming back home, is developed to a length of several folios.

5. Also the presence of the wild beasts is much more marked in this kind of desert. In this case also it is no question of the simple presence of a motif, because it is well known that the relationship (good or bad) with the wild beasts is one of the most classical topoi in Abyssinian and universal hagiography. Here it is again a question of focus and of literary development, up to the case of Gabra Manfas Qeddus, against whom the wild beasts organize themselves in a long struggle, under the leadership of the hyena and of the

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57 GUILLAUMONT, cit., p. 14.


60 MARRASSINI, Latson, cit., pp. 130–132.

61 GMQ, pp. 286–290/86–98.

62 E.g. GUILLAUMONT, cit., pp. 11–12.
hedgehog;63 and this, in turn, has inspired the similar struggle in the Life of John the Oriental,64 in which again the hedgehog plays an important role.

This difference in the conception of the desert is in turn a direct consequence of a different conception of monasticism. In fact, it is clear that we are faced with two conceptions of monasticism which are entirely different: at the risk of simplifying the matter too much, we could say that there is an Abyssinian one, which could be defined as "active", and the "Egyptian", almost entirely "passive". But Abyssinian culture did not accept both conceptions without posing the problem of their contrast. In fact, this problem has been clearly felt, as testified by an important passage in the Life of John the Oriental,65 where the archangel Gabriel says to the saint: "Ur wasebek hàymànota wamegbàra ṣadeq tenbarenu zeya weseṭe gadam jannaωakka 'egzi'abhêr. dà'emu tenger sebhata 'egzi'abhêr wategbay megbay manfa-sawî baqedma kwelû sab'a balasâ kama ye'manu bottu), "go and preach the Faith and the righteous deeds. Has the Lord sent you to stay here inside the desert? On the contrary, to pronounce the praise of the Lord, and to accomplish spiritual deeds before all the people of Balasâ, so that they [can] believe in Him". Of course, to shed more light on this contrast in monastic ideology could be another important task in the study of Abyssinian hagiography.

Summary

It seems possible to isolate a group of saints born in Egypt (or living there for a long time), different from the traditional saints of that country mainly because they were not martyrs, and substituted the martyrdom by penances and absolute asceticism; the presence of the desert is much more pronounced than in the rest of Abyssinian hagiography, and nearly absolute; the activity of the devil is also very heavily marked; almost all of them are of "Roman" birth or connection. They are Bula/Abib, Gabra Krestos/Alexius, Latṣun, Nob, Gabra Manfas Qedus, John the Oriental, maybe Tadjewos of Dabra Bartarwa, Yohanni of Dabra 'Asa, and some others, to which the "Aksumite" saints must be added. The relationship of these saints among themselves is also demonstrated by the codices, in which the "Life" or the hymnography pertaining to one or more of them occur together with those of some of the others, in different combinations.

63 In the Homily, GMQ, pp. 301–305/105–107.
64 GYM, pp. 78–89.
65 GYM, pp. 266–267.