

‘Life’ and ‘Miracles’ of *Abunä* Akalä Krəstos

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‘Life’ and ‘Miracles’ of *Abunä Akalä Krəstos*

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	vii
The Manuscript	vii
The Text	viii
Acknowledgement	xii
Texts and Translations	1
‘Life’ (<i>Gädl</i>) of <i>Abunä Akalä Krəstos</i>	2
‘Miracles’ (<i>Tä’ammər</i>) of <i>Abunä Akalä Krəstos</i>	86
‘Image’ (<i>Mälkä</i> ^c) of <i>Abunä Akalä Krəstos</i>	112
‘Greetings’ (<i>Sälam</i>) to <i>Abunä Akalä Krəstos</i>	128
Notes Related to the Monastery of <i>Abunä Akalä Krəstos</i>	130
Indexes.....	136
Index to the Introduction.....	136
Index to the Text	137
Index to the Translation	140
Bibliographic References	145

Introduction

This volume presents the original text and the translation of the Acts (*Gädl* and *Tä'ammər(at)* or 'Life' and 'Miracles') of *Abba* Akalä Krəstos and his Image (*Mälkə°*), preserved, as part, in the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library (EMML) Project no. 7589 (fols 30r–74v and fols 105r–110r), a seventeenth century manuscript microfilmed by the Hill Museum & Microfilm Library. The authorship of the Acts and Image is ascribed to *Abba* Isayəyyas of the convent of Säyko, a monk who had a good command of Gə'əz and its (monastic) literature. According to the volume's colophon, *Abba* Isayəyyas dictated his composition to Zäkkaryas (fol. 65v). *Abba* Isayəyyas has other works copied in the same manuscript.

The Manuscript

The manuscript, on microfilm, has not yet been catalogued. For now it may be described in this way: 28 x 23.5 cm, 117 fols, 2 cols of 23 lines each. Its major contents are *Nägärä Maryam* (fols 1r–10v); a homily by the same *Abba* Isayəyyas on the three holy days of Mary—conception, nativity and presentation to the temple where she matured—(fols 12r–14r); *Sälam* to Christ, also by *Abba* Isayəyyas (fols 14v–17r); prayer of the author, *Abba* Isayəyyas, asking God to give him the right words for writing the *Gädl* (fols 18r–29v); the *Gädl* and Miracles of *Abunä* Akalä Krəstos edited here (fols 30r–74v); *Gädlä Kiro*s (fols 75r–92v); *Gädlä Gäbrä Krəstos* (fols 93r–104v); and *Mälkə°* of, and *Sälam* to, *Abunä* Akalä Krəstos (fols 105r–110r).

The Acts of *Abunä* Akalä Krəstos are illustrated with pictures on fols 112r, 113v, 114r, 115v, 116v, and 117r. Each of fols 1r–10v, 12r–104v, and 105r–110r are copied in different hands. The text has been proofread by different people, including the copyists. The *Mälkə°* was copied in a not-well-trained hand and its ink has faded in a few places. In the exemplar, too, it was not copied by the scribe or scribes who copied the Acts and the Miracles (see fols 66v–76v). The note, '494 ÄTHIOPISCHE HANDSCHRIFT 1682–1706 (1–4 IX)', stuck on fol. 11r, might indicate that it was one of the manuscripts microfilmed by the team of Ernst Hammerschmidt.¹ If it, indeed, was, it is not among the manuscripts that have been catalogued so far. The saint was the son of Prince Gälawdewos, son of *Aše* Susənyos (1607–1632). When he heard that his uncle, *Aše* Fasil (1632–1667), had his father executed, he fled for his life and took the monastic habit.

1 See the 'Reisebericht' in Hammerschmidt 1973, 43–76.

There is clear evidence, including the marginal notes in the copyist's hand about the *Gädl*, that it is not the original exemplar. But it is not far removed from it either. In fact, it was most probably copied from the first draft directly. Whatever the case might be, the language and the copying are clear, save for in two or three places. I have replaced the few expressions manifesting copying errors and/or grammatical mistakes with what seems to me to be the correct forms, but always showing the erroneous ones in the footnotes. What I believe are missed expressions are supplied in brackets. I get support from the fact that the biblical quotations are not always correct.

Punctuation of the text and paragraphing are mine. Expressions in parentheses—in the translation—are supplied for clarity.

The Text

The Acts and Image of *Abba Akalä Krəstos* are known to me only in EMLL 7589. Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke lists a *gädl* of a saint by the same name who lived during the reign of Emperor ʿAmdä Šəyon (1341–1344),² supposedly also from the convent of Zoga. Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke's information must be wrong because it is highly unlikely that there were two different monastic leaders with the same name who flourished in two different centuries yet gave the same name, *Gädämä Zoga*, to the monasteries they founded.

The *Mälkä*^c was composed, unlike most *mälkä*^c*at*, in the genre of *qəne* poetry whose characteristics are rhyme, rhythm and what is known as 'wax and gold' or '*sämənna wärq*'. Composing in the *qəne* style means that the author does not follow a well defined word order, making it difficult for me in a few places to render the hymns in lucid English. Furthermore, the fact that the text was poorly copied, probably by *Gäbrä Maryam* (fol. 110r), and badly preserved has made it especially difficult to understand a number of passages.

For readers who are not familiar with the genre of *qəne* and its *sämənna wärq*, let me point out that what is expressed in English in the genitive (e.g. 'a storm of demands') is also expressed in *qəne* in apposition or one as an adjective of the other. In English one can say, 'A storm of demands threatened the stability of the government'. The *Gəʿəz* counterpart would be either as in the English or as 'Demands, storm, threatened the stability of the government'. Here is an example, taken from fol. 107v:

2 Kinefe-Rigb Zelleke 1975, 62 (no. 11).

ሰላም ፡ ለከርሥክ ፡ ዘተሰምየ ፡ ተዓጋሢ ።
 እምኃሢሠ ፡ መብልዕ ፡ ትጎርምተ ፡ መጠነ ፡ ኮነ ፡ ኃሣሢ ።
 ቅሩብ ፡ ምኔትክ ፡ ማየ ፡ አካለ ፡ ክርስቶስ ፡ ሙሴ ።
 አዘዙከ ፡ ታውጽእ ፡ እግዚእ ፡ አጋዕዝቲክ ፡ ሥላሴ ።
 እለ ፡ ይትቂደሱ ፡ ዘልፈ ፡ በመንክር ፡ ቅዳሴ ።

Peace to your stomach, which has been called perseverant,
 Because it preferred being a seeker of austerity rather than a seeker of food.

Near your convent, oh Akalä Krastos, Moses, water
 Your Lord of Lords, the Trinity, commanded you to bring forth,
 Who is always sanctified with an admirable sanctification.

Here Akalä Krastos is compared to Moses through ‘wax and gold’ for bringing forth water. Moses is in apposition to Akalä Krastos. In order to make the composition rhyming and rhythmic, the author is allowed to put the word for ‘water’ far from the subjects (Moses and Akalä Krastos) and the verb (‘bring forth’). Another example are the expressions ‘the cow of fiction’ and ‘the wild animal, falsehood’ in *stanza* no. 21 (fol. 107r). These can be taken as typical examples for genitive and apposition relationships.

As all *gädlät* and *tä’ammərat* do, the Acts of *Abba* Akalä Krastos offer some interesting historical information. Most interesting is that on the death of Prince Gälawdewos, the brother of Fasilädäs and the father of the saint. It is widely known that the cause of the prince’s death was political. However, nowhere else we find the details provided in his text.³ The text also testifies to how difficult, if not impossible, it was to move freely in areas controlled by the Oromo during the reign of Aše Fasilädäs. This was also true during the reign of Iyasu (1682–1706).⁴ The text also offers a few clarifications on the local monastic tradition. *Gädam* (‘desert’) was initially the place of the so-called ‘desert fathers’ who pursued the austere and strict ascetic life of coenobitism. Such a monastery is called ‘*mənet*’. Initially, those who lived in a *gädam* and *mənet* seem to have been *baḥətaṣṣyan* (‘hermits’) organized according to the rules of *Abba* Pachomius.⁵ Their head or *liq*, the archimandrite, is called ‘*liqä mənet*, *rə’əsä mənet*, *abä mənet*’ (‘head/father of the convent’). One can surmise from this history of *Abba* Akalä Krastos that the head of any *mənet* is not allowed to perform the monastic rite on someone

³ For details, see Wion 2004.

⁴ Heruy Walda Šellāsē 1980, 38. See also the note related to the convent on fol. 111r.

⁵ For the text, see Dillmann 1866, 57–69. For the translations, see König 1878, 328–332; Schodde 1885, 678–689; and Basset 1896.

who wants to be clothed with monastic garb. He may do so only when his *mānet* is promoted to the next status and his abbotship is appropriately recognized by higher authorities (fol. 52rv):

እምእለ : መጽሐ : ወመድበሉ : ኀቤሁ : ብዙኃን : ሰብእ : ሶበ : ይቤል
 ዎ : ለአቡነ : አካለ : ክርስቶስ : ባርክ : ለነ : ቆብዓ : ወአስኬማ : ወአልብስ
 ነ : አልባስ : ምንኩስና : በእዴክ : ወይቤሎሙ : ውእቱ : አኮ : ዝንቱ : ሊ
 ተ : ለባሕታዊ : ገዳም : ወግሁስ : ውስተ : ጸላእት ። ሑሩ : ኀበ : መምህ
 ሬነ : ደብር : ይግበሩ : ለክሙ : ዘፈቀድክሙ ። እሙንቱኒ : ይቤልዎ : ይ
 ሑሩኬ : እለ : የኀሥሡ : ዘያወርሱ : ወይሁቡ : መምህራን : ደብር : ለደ
 ቂቀ : ጸጋሆሙ ። ንሕነሰ : አልቦ : ዘነኀሥሥ : ዘእንበለ : ጸሎትክ : በቋሂ
 ት : ወስእለትክ : ማኅዩዊት ። ዮምኒ : ኦአባ : ግበር : ለነ : ዘሰአልናክ : ከ
 መ : ይኩንክ : ለእግዚአብሔር : ወአኮ : ለሰብእ ። እስመ : አገበርዎ : ወእ
 መከርዎ : በብዙኀን : ግብር : ገብረ : ሎሙ : ፈቃዶሙ : ወፈጸመ : ስእለቶ
 ሙ ።

በእንተ : ዝንቱስ : ግብር : መጽሐ : ኀቤሁ : መነኮሳተ : ደብር : ዘቅሩብ :
 ለምኔቱ ። ወይቤልዎ : ለአቡነ : አካለ : ክርስቶስ : ኦአባ : ኢተአምርኑ : ዛ
 ቲ : ሀገር : ከመ : ሀገርነ : ይእቲ : ዘተሰብከት : በወንጌልነ : ወተባረከት :
 በመስቀልነ ። ለምንት : ታነውኀ : እዴክ : ኀበ : አልባስ : ምንኩስና : እን
 ዘ : ሀሎነ : ንሕነ ። እመ : አንተ : ባሕታዊ : ዘጸላእት : አግምር : እዴክ :
 ወተገመር : ውስተ : ጸላእትክ ። ወእመ : አኮ : ትፈቅድ : ትኩን : መምህ
 ረ ። አእምር : መጠነክ : በመኑ : ሀገር : ትፈቅድ : ትኩን : መምህረ ። ወ
 ይቤሎሙ : አቡነ : አካለ : ክርስቶስ : ኦአበውየ : ሥረዩ : ሊተ : ወተሠሃ
 ሉኒ : እስመ : አኀዘንኩክሙ : በኢያእምሮትየ ።

[W]hen many of the people who came and gathered by *Abunä Akalä Krastos* said to him, 'Bless the cap and the *askema*⁶ for us and clothe us with the monastic garb by your hand', he said to them, 'This is not for me, a hermit of the desert, and a secluded one in a cell. Go to abbots of monasteries so they perform for you what you want.' They said to him, 'Let those go who want abbots of monasteries who bequeath inheritance and grant [possessions] to their children of grace, but we seek nothing other than your beneficial prayer and your life-giving petition. And now, do for us, oh father, what we beg you, so it may be for you for God and not for men.' He did for them their wish and fulfilled their request because they obliged him and tempted him with much pressure.

6 This is what they call the monastic garb.

Because of this deed, monks of a monastery near his *mānet* ('hermitage') came to *Abunä Akalä Krəstos* and said to him, 'Oh Father, do you not know that this country is ours, preached by our gospel and blessed with our cross? Why do you stretch your hand long, giving monastic habit while we are here? If you are a hermit of a cell contain your hand and be contained in your cell. If peradventure you wish to be an abbot ('*māmhər*'), know your limits; in whose country do you wish to be an abbot ('*māmhər*')?' *Abunä Akalä Krəstos* said to them, 'Oh my Fathers, forgive me and have compassion on me because I have grieved you unknowingly.'

This interesting story might seem to contradict the report on fol. 40v, which provides that the saint has given monastic garb to many, but this happened, apparently, after the promotion of the *mānet* to the next level. *Däbr*, on the other hand, is a monastery where monks live as a community. That the word is related to 'mountain' in meaning is worth noting. Figuratively, a *däbr* is as high as a mountain, even though some such monasteries could be founded in low lands, such as *Däbrä Waldəbba*. The word must be somehow related to the Arabic *ġabal*. The head or *liq* of a *däbr* is called *māmhər* ('teacher') or *nəburä ʿəd*, if he is appointed by the monarch. A *däbr* is a place of worship and learning. We owe to the *däbrat* the literary heritage of the Church. A *däbr* can have daughter monasteries, some of which might be a *gädām* or *mānet*. An example is *Maḥdärä Maryam*, where our saint took the final stage of his monasticism, which is a daughter monastery of *Däbrä Libanos*.

The difference between the several forms of monastic life is unwittingly expressed on fol. 32r:

ባሕቱ ፡ እስመ ፡ እግዚአብሔር ፡ መፍቀሬ ፡ ሰብእ ፡ ይጸውዖሙ ፡ ለኅሩዖኒ
ሁ ፡ በብዙኅ ፡ ምክንያት ፡ እምበሐውርት ፡ ውስተ ፡ ምኒት ፡ ወእምኒት ፡
ውስተ ፡ ገዳም ፡ ለተባሕትዎ ፡ ከመ ፡ ይርከቡ ፡ ንጽሐ ፡ ልብ ፡ እንተ ፡ ባ
ቲ ፡ ይሬእይዎ ፡ በራእይ ፡ መንፈሳዊት ።

But God, the lover of people, calls his chosen ones with various reasons from countries to a *mānet* and from a *mānet* to a desert for solitary life so they may receive purity of the heart with which they would see spiritual vision.

Where life was the severest, according to this *gädl*, seems to be at *Gädāmä Dəbba Zä-ʿƏṣä Wali* ('the monastery of Dəbba at the Wali Tree'), obviously another name of the monastery of *Waldəbba* (fols 41v and 45v). In this *gädl*, the convent established by *Abba Akalä Krəstos* at *Zoga* has never been called *däbr*, but consistently *mānet*. I have translated it as 'con-

vent', even though the dictionaries I consulted do not make clear distinctions between 'monastery', 'convent' and 'abbey'.

The world outside the monastery is called *‘alām*, *bəher* or *hagär*. The meaning of the first word is clear: it means 'world'. People enter a monastery leaving, or abandoning, or rejecting the world. But finding equivalent English words for *bəher* and *hagär* is a challenge. Generally speaking, *bəher* can be translated as 'country' but confusingly in the sense of sometimes an entire country or perhaps a province or even just a district. Which of these it means and when requires political understanding or interpretation. The most challenging of all is the meaning of *hagär*. On the one hand, it is synonymous of *bəher*, but in addition, it means an area populated by people—a city, a village, a hamlet.

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