

The Attitude of the Monastic Communities of Däbrä Mägwina towards Some of the Gondarine Emperors: Evidence from Unpublished Manuscript of the Monastery, 1632-1720

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Abstract

This study scrutinizes into the unexplored historical dynamics between the monastic communities of Däbrä Mäg^wina and some of the Gondarine Emperors during the critical period that spanning from 1632 to 1720 in the Ethiopian state. Utilizing previously unpublished manuscripts from the monastery, this historical research uncovers the intricate relationship between the religious and secular dynamics of that time. Amongst the monarchs of the Gondarine period, Emperor Fasilädäs was a significant figure which marked a transition from a Jesuit attempt of Catholicization and Latinization of Ethiopia to the restoration of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church to its statuesque. Däbrä Mäg^wina, renowned for its spiritual and intellectual contributions, held a unique position in the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The manuscripts recorded during the Gondarine period provided a valuable space into the attitudes, interactions, and exchanges between the religious institutions and the imperial court. By analyzing the content of these manuscripts, this study examined the multifaceted interactions between the monastic communities and the monarchs. It explored the various ways in which the monastic orders engaged with the state, from offering moral guidance and spiritual support to potentially influencing or challenging the Emperor's marital affairs. Furthermore, it investigated the impact of these interactions on the broader socio-political landscape of the time. The researcher used historical research methodology. Because it required access to the original events and records that took place in the past as distinct procedure for the investigation. Besides, the researcher consulted both primary and secondary sources. The findings of the research revealed that Däbrä Mäg^wina Monastery has played a significant role in the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly in the Era of doctrinal controversy to bring an end to the factions which has great implication for the unity of the state. It was also the most important monastic cloister that used princes as a reserve political instrument to deal with the divergent political and religious behavior of the monarchs.

Keywords: Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Monks, Monarchs, Manuscripts, Abbot, doctrinal debate, Tāwahədo, Däbrä Mäg^wina

1. Introduction

The relationship between religion and politics is a dynamic and evolving one, deeply influenced by history, culture, and the legal frameworks of each country. Considering the historical perspective, religion and politics have been intertwined throughout human history. Many ancient societies had religious leaders who also held political power, such as pharaohs in ancient Egypt or Emperors in the Roman Empire, and Ethiopia. These essential values of politico-religious interactions lie for many generations (Taddesse, 1972:122). The idea of divine right, where rulers were seen as chosen by a deity to govern, was prevalent in many historical societies. Religion and politics constituted a separate entity but interdependent and mutually reinforcing (Berry, B. LaVerle, 1976:184). In this regard, Däbrä Mäg^wina monastery could be viewed as one of the best examples which are an important pilgrimage centers in the

central Gondar zone in Tač Armačiho. It was founded as villages of monks and nuns separated and these settlements are visible on the mountain. For many Ethiopian Christians, the monastery is a sign of the long suffering and spiritual steadfastness of *Abunā* Absadi and his disciples. The monastic cloisters in general and the abbey of Mäg^wina in particular is a teaching center for both theological and ethical discourses. Of course, monasticism is believed to be a way of life characterized by devotion, self-discipline, and withdrawal from worldly affairs, became increasingly valued and embraced within Ethiopian society (Walddəba, 1993:20; Shayo Christin, 2007:175-176). It is a religious lifestyle where individuals renounce worldly pursuits in order to fully dedicate themselves to spiritual work (Walddəba, 1993:20; Yaregal Abegaz, 2013, 245-246). In that case, the monastic communities of Mäg^wina and surrounding communities are closely associated with the monastery where they conduct spiritual practices, social gatherings such as mediating conflicts with *Šəmgələna* or mediation activities with the guidance of the Abbot of the monastery. Mäg^wina monastery is bounded *Maynəgad*, G^wag^wa *Bälās* and Agäğğa district to the west, Dogaw and Ašäre district to the north, Mount Gedəyon and Bābāw district to the East and *Kaša* district to the south (*Abba* Tesfa Giorgis, 2022). Dābrā Mäg^wina is a mountain monastery founded by *Abunā* Absadi in 1266 where the detailed life of the abbot is available in his contending's or the Gādlā of Abəsadi at the monastery. The famous and isolated site has hardly been mentioned in the scientific literature. Apparently it was not visited by Europeans, except Antoine d'Abbadie, who acquired and made several copies of the Mäg^wina Library manuscripts (EAE III, 2007:653). The monastery is rich in oral sources and traditions. Different versions of oral sources are told by the monastic communities of the monastery. They are intensively narrating the history of the site's foundation before the coming of Christianity to Ethiopia. According to the sources from the monastic communities, Mäg^wina was one of the eight ancient monasteries next to Axum Šəyon Maryam that used as a place of worship during the Old Testament before the introduction of Christianity. Likewise, oral sources of this monastery are strongly supported by most of the written manuscripts available in the monastery today. According to *Abba* Täsfa Giyorgis, today's abbot of the monastery, this place was already the second holy cloister next to Aksum Šəyon, even during the era of the Old Testament (*Abba* Tesfa Giyorgis, 2022). He testified that a huge temple was built there, where a variety of sacrifices and offerings were performed inside the temple. Offerings were made in the form of young cattle and sheep (Ibid). According to this tradition, when the early Aksumite kings Abrəha and Ašəbhā built and preach the New Testament in Aksum and Tādəbabā Maryam in the 330s CE, they began moving to Mäg^wina. After preaching the Nativity of Christ and the New Testament at this site, they built a Church on the former site of the monastery (*Abba* Täsfa Giyorgis, 2018:9). During the Emperor of Aksum, Anbäsa Wədəm, around 852 CE, G^wadit destroyed and burned the monastery of Mäg^wina, which may have been built by Abrəha and Ašəbhā. It was evident that right from early times the Emperors used to build ancient and famous monasteries (Greenfield Richard, 1965: 23). G^wadit was also recognized for plundering many of the heritages of the Churches and monasteries.

Apparently the monastic communities and local people, nobles and priests had the time to hide the arks or tabbotts and some heirs in a cave near Mäg^wina. Obviously the monastery

could have protected itself from its natural rough terrain, which often looked like a fortress. Usually monasteries served as safe haven in time of danger and uncertainty because when any one of the monasteries was destroyed as a result of war, the monks were obliged to disperse and some of them sought shelter in the monasteries which they taught remote and safe (Sergew Hable Sellassie,1972:261). According to the Abbot of the monastery, during this period, the Ark of Mādəhānīalem, the Ark of the Sanctified Virgin Mary, the Ark of the Cross of Iyāsus, and more than three hundred and fifty monastic communities believed to have survived (*Abba Täsfa Giyorgis*,2018:9) Based on the sources available at Mäg^wina Monastery, some manuscripts were donated by Emperor Fasilädäs (r.1632-1667), Emperor Yohännəs I (r.1667-1682) and Emperor Iyasu I (r.1682-1708) at different times of the Gondarine period. According to the informant, all of the above Emperors attended Mäg^wina monastery for their ecclesiastical training prior to their royal enthronement (Qäsis Gäbrä Yohannes, 2023). However, it is also important to note that the monastic communities of Mäg^wina used the princes as a reserved tool as an intimidating factor to influence and control the behavior of the monarchs. For instance, it has been said that Emperor Yohännəs I land donation to compensate for the damage suffered by his predecessor was immense. Additionally, the Emperor believed to have donated the cross of Christ made of copper (Qäsis Šəbabaw Täsfa, 2022). On the other hand, Emperor Iyasu I the Great built a royal house of treasury for the monks called ‘*əqqa bet*’ in the parish of this monastery, including donating royal beds for the monastery. With particular reference to the resource donation to the monastery the abbot of the abbey explained the following:

በ1660፡ ዓ.ም፡ በአእላፍ፡ ሰገድ፡ ዩሐንስ፡ ዘመነ፡ መንግሥት፡ በዓለም፡ ሰገድ፡ ፋሲል፡ ዘመን፡ ስለ፡ ሕገ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ እና፡ ስለ፡ ሃይማኖታቸው፡ ከብርና፡ ፍቅር፡ ሲሉ፡ ለተሰየፉት፡ ቅዱሳን፡ ሰማዕታት፡ አባቶቻችን፡ የደም፡ ዋጋ፡ ወይንም፡ የሕይወት፡ ካሳ፡ ይሁናችሁ፡ ሲሉ፡ ለዚህ፡ አንጋፋና፡ ታሪካዊ፡ ገዳም፡ አስራ፡ ሁለት፡ ርስትና፡ ብዙ፡ ገጽ-በረከት፡ ዓሣውን፡ ካስነሱበት፡ ቅዱስ፡ መስቀላቸው፡ ጋር፡ ብዙ፡ ስጦታወችን፡ ለገዳሙ፡ አበርክተውለት፡ ዛሬም፡ ይገኛል፡፡ ከዚህ፡ ሌላ፡ አእላፍ፡ ሰገድ፡ ዩሐንስ፡ የመምህራን፡ መሾሚያ፡ አንድ፡ ታላቅ፡ የክብር፡ ወንበር፡ አበርክተዋል፡፡ በተጨማሪም፡ የገዳሙን፡ ድንበር፡ ርስትና፡ ጉልት፡ እንዳይደፈር፡ በሁለት፡ ሊቃነ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ በሁለት፡ እጨጌያት፡ በአርባ፡ አራት፡ ኤጲስ፡ ቆጶሳት፡ መንፈሳዊ፡ ሥልጣን፡ አስወግዘው፡ ደንግገውት፡ አልፈዋል(*Abba Tesfa Giyorgis*, 2018:48)

In 1667 during the reign of A’əlaf Säḡād Yohännəs I, in the period of Alām Säḡād Fasilädäs, the holy martyrs of the monastic communities who died for the sake of the rule of God and their faith were remunerated. The payment for the blood price for this ancient and historical monastery includes twelve estates and they offered many gifts to the monastery along with their holy cross through which the greatness[Yohännəs I]raised the fish, which is still available today. Besides, A’əlaf Säḡād Yohännəs has given a great honorary chair for the appointment of the clerics. Moreover, the boundaries of the monastery have been determined by two arc bishops and two *eččäge* and other forty-four bishops in order not to encroach on the boundaries of the monastery.

2. Methodology

The research employed a historical research methodology which is based on a careful examination of both primary and secondary sources. Pertinent published and unpublished works have been consulted, cross-checked and reinterpreted. In addition, several evidences from the Abbots of relevant monastic communities have been interviewed and the oral information they provided has been critically examined.

3. The Doctrinal Position of Däbrä Mäg^wina Monastery with Particular Reference to the Audaciousness of the Monastic Communities towards the Emperor Fasilädäs

Däbrä Mäg^wana Monastery has played an important role in the history of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, particularly in the area of doctrinal debate. The monastic communities of Däbrä Mäg^wana have remained steadfast in their defense of this position, arguing that it is the most faithful expression of the Orthodox faith as it has been passed down through the centuries. The doctrinal role of Mäg^wina Monastery was evident during the reign of Emperor Fasilädäs. Given the social support he garnered after seizing political power, Emperor Fasilädäs made his religious position clear. During this period, the *eččäge* Bätärä Giyorgis, who was abbot of the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos during the reign of Emperor Fasilädäs, asked the monarch to compensate for the bloodshed caused by the Jesuit missionaries (*Abunä Gärima*, et al, *Abunä Samuel*, Radä Asəress Agədäw Rädie, Yared Fänta, Elias Abrəhä, Wäldä, 2008:278). *Eččäge* Bätärä Giyorgis, a monk from Mäg^wina Monastery, was said to have received excellent training in religious lexicon and *Qəne* at the monastery (Qäsis Kassahun Tadesse, February, 2023). *Qəne* is a genre of improved oral poetry originated in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church which historically provided traditional religious education. It can be taken as an effective step taken towards reducing the cost in integrated skill teaching. It has been an Ethiopian style of speech, where one says one thing while implying a different meaning at the same time and in the same sentence. Its origins supposed to go back to the fourteenth century (Donald N. Levine. *Wax and Gold*, 8; Alemayehu Moges, 1966:99; John Binns: 33). Later he was ordained as *eččäge* in the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos. During the reign of Emperor Fasilädäs, the *eččäge* represented the theologians of the Union doctrine and was said to have had a doctrinal debate with the representative of the Uncion theologians during the religious synod held in 1632 at the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos.

በንጉሡ ነገሥቱ በዓለም ሰገድ፡ ፋሲል፡ ዘመነ፡ መንግሥት፡ በንጉሡ፡ አደባባይ፡ የኢትዮጵያ፡ ሊቃውንት፡ አፈ፡ ጉባዔ፡ የነበሩት፡ የካቶሊክ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ መሪዎችን፡ እነ፡ አፎንሱ፡ ሜንዴዝን፡ ተከራክረው፡ የረቱ፡ ከታላቅ፡ አደባባይና፡ ጉባዔ፡ ከዳግማዊ፡ አዘዞ፡ ተከለሃይማኖት፡ ደብረ፡ ሊባኖስ፡ ገዳም፡ ተዋሕዶን፡ ወከለው፡ ታላቅ፡ ሙግት፡ ያደረጉ፡ እጩ፡ በትረ፡ ጊዮርጊስ፡ ለእጩነት፡ የበቁት፡ በደብረ፡ መጽና፡ ገዳም፡ ተምረውና፡ ምንኩሰው፡ ነዉ (Abba Tesfa Giyorgis, 2018:25)

‘During the era of King of Kings of Alām Sägäd, being spokesperson in the Kings municipal before the Ethiopian scholars of an assembly who believed to have argued and defeated Afonso Mendes. In the great square from Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos monastery represented the

Tāwahādo who said to have made a great debate *eččäge* Bātērā Giyorgis, who placed as an *eččäge* became a monk in Dābrā Mogina monastery.’

As a result, the Emperor convened a religious synod to begin a doctrinal debate with the Roman Catholic missionaries, and many of the Ethiopian Orthodox theologians and monastic communities assembled for a religious council at Azāzo Tāklā Haymanot Dābrā Libanos monastery (*Abunā Gārīma, et al, Abunā Samuel, Radā Asəress, Agədāw Rādie, Yared Fānta, Elias Abrəhā, Wāldā Rufael Fātahi, Məkrā Səllasse Gābrā Amanuel, Sāyofā Səllasse, Yohannəs, Bərhanu Gābrā Amanuel and Tāššomā Zārihun. The History of Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwahādo Church, 2008:279*). Among the *Tāwahādo* theologians present were *Abba Zā Michael, Abba Zā krəstos, Abba Yāmanā ab, Abba Həryakos, Abba Qālawadi, eččäge Bātērā Giyorgis, Abba Šāga krəstos, Abba Yohannəs, and Abba Sāfani Krəstos* were gathered at the monastery of Azāzo Tāklā Haymanot Dābrā Libanos (Fətəhā Nāgäst. Azāzo Tāklā Haymanot Dābrā Libanos monastery and Informant Šābate Kassahun Taddesse, 2022)



Figure 1. The participants of the *Tāwahādo* theologians and the place where the religious synod was held in the monastery of Azāzo Tāklā Haymanot Dābrā Libanos. The doctrinal debate took place right under the shade of an African olive or *woira* tree; February 22, 2023: 4:00 PM. (photo taken during field observation)

The *eččäge* Bātērā Giyorgis represented the Ethiopian theologians to debate with the representatives of the Jesuit Catholic missionaries, Afonso Mendes (Fətəhā Nāgəsət Azāzo Tāklā Haymanot Dābrā Libanos monastery, 2022). Mendez's Forwarded the first question to

eččäge Bätärä Giyorgis, "Can you provide any evidence from the Old and the New Testaments that proved "if the character Son of the Father got sick and died and then saved the world?" The *eččäge* said to have replied: "while we were God's enemies, he made us his friends through the death of his Son." Again Afonso questioned the *eččäge*: "Where is the face of God?" The *eččägge* requested a monk to bring him a well-lit wax light and the fire blazed in front of the council, answering Afonso with a question instead of an answer. Where is the face of this fire-light? The *eččägge* explained that like this fire, the face of God is omnipresent in all directions and everywhere. The *eččäge* added, "above all else the face of God is first of all turned toward those who commit sin" (*Abunä Gärima*, et al, *Abunä Samuel*, Radä Asəress, Agədāw Rādie, Yared Fānta, Elias Abrəhā, Wāldä Rufael Fātahi, Məkrä Səllasse Gäbrä Amanuel, Sāyəfā Səllasse Yohannəs, Bərhānu Gäbrä Amanuel and Tāššomä Zārihun. 'The History of Ethiopian Orthodox *Tāwahado* Church, 279). A monk then chanted a spiritual song in Gə'əz language "ረከብናሁ፡ ለበትር፡ ዘያደከማ፡ ለሮም፡ ካቶሊክ፡ ጸሩቤ፡ በንባብ፡ ወቁሩ፡ በትርጓሜ" (We have Zä Bätärä, endowed with knowledge and thoughtful terminology that would be able to weaken Roman Catholic (Mikre Səllassie Gebre Amanuel, Seife Səllassie Yohannəs., Birhanu Gebre Amanuel., & Teshome Zārihun; Tekle Tsadik Mākuria, 2013:140-141) . As a result, the other theologians who chanted to the great crowd followed him and joined them saying "ንሴብሆ፡ ለእግዚአብሔር" ('Nəsebəho Lā Igzi'abiher', 'gratitude to be God'). Consequently, the Emperor and his nobility observed the diligence of fathers in the instruction of Ethiopian youth; their passion for converting people; their eloquence in preaching, their sanctity of life, so needed among neophytes and proselytes, was possessed by the monarch with so much admiration and affection for them.

4. The Jesuit Catholic Missionaries Proselytizing Attempt to Become a Political Force over Conjugal Relationships through Emperor Fasilādās

Initially, the Jesuits have tried to instill and preferred to disseminate Catholicism from top to bottom. For this purpose, they worked intensively amongst the Ethiopian nobility attempting to form alliances with Emperors and governors from above for their plan of swift Catholicization (Merid and Girma, 1962). As a result of the influence of Jesuit missionaries, Emperor Susənyos embraced Catholicism, resulting to his conversion in 1622. However, his conversion met with significant opposition from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the nobility, resulting in internal violent conflict and political instability. Emperor Susənyos was compelled to abdicate the throne, and his successors abandoned Catholicism, resulting in the 1632 expulsion of the Catholic missionaries Jesuits from Ethiopia (Crummey D, 1972:7).

However, it seemed more likely that, the Roman Catholic Church was again striving to become a political force through conjugal relationships once again. According to the traditional oral sources available from Mäg^wina Monastery, Emperor Fasilādās married Zeliha after her baptism according to the canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (*Abba Täsfa Giyorgis*, 2018:25). However, the monastic communities of Mäg^wina opposed the monarch for his involvement of what they assumed a sororate marriage (*Abba Tesfa Giyorgis*, 2018:25). When resistance grew from Mäg^wina monastic community, the monarch sent an envoy to the Abbot of the monastery named *Abba Aməhā Giyorgis* to resolve the issue peacefully and defuse the situation (Ibid). According to oral tradition, an informant stated that

the Emperor sent an offering in the form of incense, candles and also gold laden with two mules (Ibid). Thenceforth an Abbot called *Abba Aməhā Giyorgis* assembled all the members' of the monastic communities at the cloister. After three days of discussion all the members of the monastic communities decided to reject the gift sent from the Emperor (Ibid). In the presence of those delivering the offerings, the monastic communities of Mäg^wina burned and throw off the gold to the Mayədām Cliff near the west side of the monastery (Ibid). During that time, the monks of Saint Yəshāq Monastery, located near Ṭābare in Tāč Armačəho, joined the riots. They declined the offer and said: 'Our gold is Christ. Therefore, we should not accept an offer from the one who blurs the lines of our faith and from the one who violated marital law.' Emperor Fasilādās assembled his court dignitaries and explained the matter (Ibid). The court assembly decided to arrest those who organized the riots against the monarch and in particular to arrest and detain the abbot of the monastery. Some members of the Ğawi contingents were ordered to bring down those who had organized the rebellion against the Emperor (*Abba Tesfa Giyorgis*, 2018:28). Before dispatching the monarchical forces to Mäg^wina Monastery, the Abbot Aməhā Giyorgis brought one thousand two hundred and eighty-three monks to Gondär to confront the Emperor. Most of these monastic communities were retreated during the reign of Susənyos to escape mass killings (*Abba Täsfa Giyorgis*, 2018:28).

During this time, the abbot of the monastery of Saint Markos joined the revolt with his abbot named *Abba Şəge Dəngəl*. This monastery was located in *Maynägad* kebele. The monastic communities of Mäg^wina and Saint Markos monasteries, led by their abbots *Abba Aməhā Giyorgis* and *Abba Şəge Dəngəl* respectively met at the Qurbane River near Kiša area. To get more martyrs, the monks marched quickly and reached the palace of Gondär. Arriving at the palace of Gondär, the first ninety-seven were entered to the palace and supposedly confronted with the monarch. The abbots were arrested and interrogated, and their position of the monarch's affinity based relationship did not please the monarch. Apparently, the monks excommunicated the Emperor. As a result, the monarch ordered the regiments of the Ğawi to take action by which all were martyred. The Emperor ordered the Ğawi contingent to take action, as a result of which ninety-seven monks were martyred. Presumably the other monks would have retreated to their safe haven of Mäg^wina, but the regiment of Ğawi continued their attack. As a result of which many of the monks were killed near a place called Gəm Wəhā. It seemed that this name itself had a deep historical connection to the crisis of the time. The name Gəm Wəhā literally means impure water. Because this name was given when the blood of the murdered monks flowed over the water and mixed with it. In support of the above narrative, the chronicle explained Mäg^wina monastery in connection to that historical scenario of Emperor Fasilādās, who was reported to have sacked the monastery in 1657, some years after the first pro-*Qebat* council of Aringo (Perruchon, 1898:90). During this period the Abbot of Mäg^wina *Abba Aməhā Giyorgis* and *Abba Şəge Dəngəl* were killed and are celebrated as martyrs in some copies of the Synaxarium (Munchen Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. Aeth. 140; EMM 656, fol.14b; cp. GuiIohan:84).

During this time, many people in the city of Gondar joined the uprising and also died as martyrs. As shown below, the manuscript then written and donated by Emperor Fasilādās

himself was available today at Mäg^wina Monastery. As recorded in the manuscript, about nine thousand ninety-nine people are said to have been martyred in the brutal massacres available at Mäg^wina Monastery. Although the above traditional oral sources sound exaggerated and resonate as legend; it was powerful and all socio-political and important historical events and marital affairs were recorded by the monastery's manuscripts. For example, among the seventy-six manuscripts available at the monastery today, under the manuscript entitled: ‘ዝወንጌል: ዘወሃቦ: ለደብረ: ሞጊና: ገዳም: ንጉሠ: ነገሥት: ፋሲለደስ: 1624-1659’, Zəwāngel Zāhābo Lādābrā Mäg^wina Gādam Nəgusā nāgāšt Fasilādās, ‘This Gospel was delivered to Mäg^wina Monastery King of Kings Fasilādās in 1624-1659’. Explained the major socio-political and economic events and happenings of that time.



Figure 2. An open folio manuscript written on behalf of Emperor Fasilādās and offered to Mäg^wina Monastery in 1640. The manuscript explained the whole number of wet martyrs of the monastic communities of Mäg^wina in their uprisings against Emperor Fasilādās. Besides, the manuscript also enumerated the lands granted to the monastery as *Rəst* after the reconciliation with Emperor Fasilādās (January 7, 2022 11:00 field observation Mäg^wina Monastery)

At the request of the survivor monks who stayed behind from the execution, Emperor Fasilādās admitted taking the bodies of *Abba Aməhā Giyorgis* and *Abba Şəge Dəngəl* to Mäg^wina Monastery and buried them honorably and the other martyred monks believed to be buried at the present day the square of Adābabay Iyāsus (*Abba Täsfa Giyorgis*, 2018:42). Later, after all this chaos and devastation, the Emperor himself believed to have become repentant and went to Mäg^wina monastery to apologize the monastic communities (Ibid). Moreover, after the death of Emperor Fasilādās, Emperor Yohānnəs I brought Edā Krəstos from the monastery of Wali which was later called Walddəba and appointed him as an abbot for the monastery of Mäg^wina. Therefore Edā Krəstos was said to have returned all the manuscripts to his former Mäg^wina monastery. Emperor Yohānnəs I gave compensation for the martyred monastic communities of Monastery which offered about twelve thousand hectares of land (Ibid). Later, Emperor Iyasu I the Great added thirty-two *Gulət* for the monastery. Among the thirty-two *Rəsət-Gulət* bestowed on the monastery by the two monarchs comprised: Golgota Giyorgis, Ōsa and Qədus Michael, Kaša Tāklā

Haymanot, Kärəkarit *Abba* Samuel, Tənbuhä bet Mädhanialem, *Abunä* Gäbrämānfäs kəfdus, Huläta Giyorgis, Hämənowuha Qədus Michael, Agäğğa Qədəst Maryam, Endəyäsus Maynägad, Maynägad Qədus Giyorgis, and Qədus Marqos monastery (Ibid).

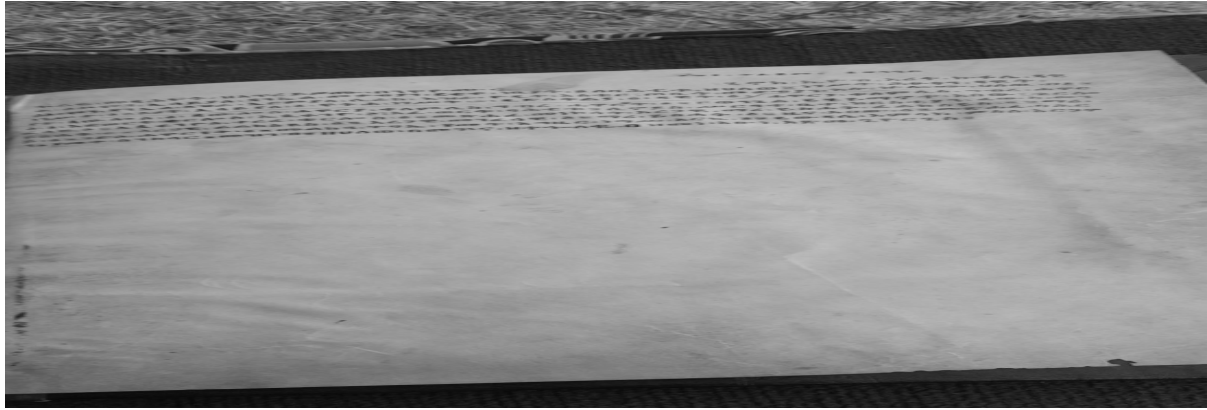


Figure 3. A Manuscript folio written under the orders of Emperor Yohannəs I. The Emperor donated it to Mäg^wina Monastery. The folio lists the lands granted to the monastery Mäg^wina (January 7, 2022 11:00 AM, field observation Mäg^wina Monastery)

Fascinatingly, A'əlaf šägäd Yohannəs I spent three and half years in Mäg^wina monastery attending religious education before he came to power (*Abba* Tesfa Giyorgis, 2018:6). During his reign the monastery was said to have been rebuilt just for the sake of the safety and protection of the manuscripts from the former vulnerable library of Mäg^wina. Since that time Mäg^wina monastery has been an important Unionist or *Təwahədo* center (EAe, Vol. III, and 2007:644). *Abba* Həryaqos, who stayed Abbot of Mäg^wina, was also appointed *māmhar* of Däbrä Libanos and then *eččäge* between 1669 and 1673. During the reign of Emperor Iyasu I, he was confirmed in the two high offices and held them from 1682 presumably until his death in 1691 (EAe, Vol. III, 2007:644; Guid Iohan 9, 62; Beg Cron 55; Bass Et 293; and Domb Chr 217). During the early part of Iyasu I's reign, Mäg^wina monastery was a staunch supporter of royal politics. In 1693, when Iyasu I asked monks to investigate the orthodoxy of the new metropolis of *Abunä* Marqos, he trusted in the competence of the clergy of Mäg^wina along with monks from Waldəbba, Qäntäfa and Q^warata, and other well-known *Təwahədo* monasteries (Guid, Iohan 1905:174). Edä Krəstos was the head of Mäg^wina monastery after *Abba* Həryaqos and from 1678 he became a close adviser to the Emperor (EAe, Vol. III, 2007:644; and Guid Iohan 36-37). He said to have strengthened the monastery and ordered some fifty manuscripts for the monastic literature, and Edä Krəstos may also have commissioned the account of the martyrdoms of *Abba* Aməhä Giyorgis and *Abba* Šəge Dəngəl, first celebrated in 1685 (Guid Iohan, 1905:84; and EAe, Vol. III, 2007:644). Edä Krəstos's successor, *abba* Zäwäldä Maryam, was also to become very powerful over the next three decades. In 1704-05 the monastic communities of Mäg^wina harbored *bəgərond* Iyäsus Mohä, a potential competitor for the throne, but royal power violated the right of asylum and imprisoned him in Wähəni Amba (Guid Iohan, 1905:84)

በ: 1675: ዓ.ም. በአድያም: ሰገድ: አፄ: ኢያሱ: ዘመነ: መንግሥት: ለዚህ: አንጋፋና:

ታሪካዊ፡ ገዳም፡ ልማትና፡ መርጃ፡ እንዲሆነው፡ በማሰብ፡ ሰላሳ፡ ሁለት፡ ርስትና፡ ጉልት፡ ከብዙ፡ የብራና፡ ቅዱሳት፡ መጻሐፍት፡ ጋር፡ ለገዳሙ፡ በመስጠት፡ አበርክተዋል፡፡ በአድያም፡ ሰገድ፡ አፄ፡ ኢያሱ፡ በዝሆን፡ ጥርስ፡ ያጌጠ፡ የመምህራን፡ መሸሚያ፡ አንድ፡ የክብር፡ ወንበር፡ ከሶስት፡ ከታላላቅ፡ የክብር፡ አልጋ፡ ጋር፡ ለዚህ፡ ታላቅ፡ ገዳም፡ አበርክተዋል፡፡ ዛሬም፡ በቅርስነት፡ ተቀምጦ፡ ይገኛል (*Abba Täsəfa Giyorgis* 2018:48).

‘In 1682, during the reign of Emperor Adam Säḡād Iyasu I, donated thirty-two fief land use rights [Rəst and Gult] and many religious manuscripts to the monastery, thinking that this would be the development and support of this ancient monastery. The monarch also donated an ivory-adorned chair of honor with three honored royal beds available at the monastery for heritage.’

At the end of the reign of Emperor Iyasu I, in 1705, another council was held in Gondar in a climate of great instability, testified by the fact that three *eččäge* was dismissed one after the other. As a result, some important figures in the monastic communities of Däbrä Libanos *Tāwahado* found refuge in Mäg^wina monastery (E Ae, Vol. III: 644). In the early eighteenth century, Mäg^wina Monastery retained leadership of the *Tāwahado* monastic communities. For instance, the hard core *Tāwahado* partisans of Mäg^wina protested the decisions of the *Qəbat*-friendly Emperor Tewoflos in 1708. In 1718, when the ambiguous decisions of a Church council in Gondär seemed to validate *Qəbat* views, the entire *Tāwahado* faction led by *abba* Zäwäldä Maryam of Mäg^wina protested. Consequently, the monastic associations of Mäg^wina were persecuted at night when they retired to the *eččäge* residence (Guidi, 1893:603-04). In order to achieve the unity of the country, Mäg^wina Monastery was by and large considered the front line of the Däbrä Libanos *Tāwahado* position to put an end to the religious factions. It is likely to debate that the monastic communities of Däbrä Mäg^wina had a considerable influence on the Emperors of the Gondarine monarchs mainly over Emperor Fasilädäs. The manuscripts indicate that the Emperor sought moral and spiritual guidance from these religious authorities. The influence of the monastic communities on the Emperor suggested a deep and symbiotic relationship between the religious and secular powers during this period.

5. Conclusion

The attitude of the monastic communities of Däbrä Mäg^wina towards the monarchs of Gondarine Emperors principally Emperor Fasilädäs, revealed through the unpublished manuscripts and royal chronicles is a testament to the rich and intricate history of Ethiopia. It demonstrated the coexistence of religious and secular powers, each playing a distinctive yet interrelated role in shaping the destiny of a nation. The investigation into the attitude of the monastic communities of Däbrä Mäg^wina towards those Emperors, as evidenced by previously unpublished manuscripts covering the period from 1632 to 1720, has provided a valuable perspective on the historical and cultural landscape of Ethiopia during a time of mid to late early modern period. The central implication drawn from this study is the significant role played by the monastic communities of Mäg^wina as moral and spiritual advisers to the Emperors of that time. The manuscripts provided compelling evidence that the monarchs

sought the counsel of these religious leaders, relying on them for guidance in matters of morality, ethics, and spirituality. The influence of the monastic orders on the Emperor proved the extent to which religious authorities held a position of moral authority and spiritual guidance in the governance of the state. Simultaneously, the findings also proved the antagonistic nature of the relationship between the monastic communities and the imperial court. The manuscripts reveal instances where the religious leaders challenged the Emperor's authority, chiefly when they perceived actions and decisions as conflicting with religious principles related with political and marital affairs. This tension between religious and secular authority emphasized that the Emperors did not wield absolute control over religious matters, and there existed a system of checks and balances. Because the study showed that the monastery of Däbrä Mäg^wina used princes as a reserve political instrument to deal with the divergent political and religious behavior of the monarchs to bargain their socio-political and their religious interest. The cultural and intellectual exchanges between the monastic communities and the imperial court contributed to the flourishing of socio-political dynamics of Ethiopia during a time of mid to late early modern period.

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