

The Attitude of the Monastic Communities of Däbrä Mägwina towards Some of the Gondarine Emperors: Evidence from Unpublished Manuscript of the Monastery, 1632-1720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 Mägʷina 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 Utilizing previously unpublished manuscripts from the monastery, this historical research uncovers the intricate relationship between the religious and secular dynamics of that time.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 Mägʷina, 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 Mägʷina 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, Täwahedo, Däbrä Mägʷina

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 (Tadesse, 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 Mägʷina 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 *Abunä* Absadi and his disciples. The monastic cloisters in general and the abbey of Mägʷina 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 (Walddēba, 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 (Walddēba, 1993:20; Yaregal Abegaz, 2013, 245-246). In that case, the monastic communities of Mägʷina 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. Mägʷina monastery is bounded *Maynägad*, *Gʷagʷa Bäläs* and *Agägga* district to the west, *Dogaw* and *Ašäre* district to the north, *Mount Gedəyon* and *Bäbaw* district to the East and *Kaša* district to the south (*Abba* Tesfa Giorgis, 2022). Däbrä Mägʷina is a mountain monastery founded by *Abunä* Absadi in 1266 where the detailed life of the abbot is available in his contending's or the *Gädlä* 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 Mägʷina 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, Mägʷina 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* Täfsa 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 Aşəbhä built and preach the New Testament in Aksum and Tädəbabä Maryam in the 330s CE, they began moving to Mägʷina. 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* Täfsa Giyorgis, 2018:9). During the Emperor of Aksum, Anbäsa Wədəm, around 852 CE, *Gʷadit* destroyed and burned the monastery of Mägʷina, which may have been built by Abrəha and Aşəbhä. It was evident that right from early times the Emperors used to build ancient and famous monasteries (Greenfield Richard, 1965: 23). *Gʷadit* 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 tabbots and some heirs in a cave near Mägʷina. 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 Mädəhäniale, the Ark of the Sanctified Virgin Mary, the Ark of the Cross of Iyäesus, and more than three hundred and fifty monastic communities believed to have survived (Abba Täfsa Guyorgis,2018:9) Based on the sources available at Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina 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 Täfsu, 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: በአላፊ: ስንድ: የአንስ: ዘመኑ: መንግሥት: በዓለም: ስንድ: ፫.ለል: ዘመኑ: ስለ: አግዥአብኬር: እና: ስለ: ሂይማኖታቸው: ክብር: ቅቅር: ሌላ: ለተስተካት: ቅድማን: ስማዥታት: አስተዋጅቶን: የደም: ወጪ: ወይንም: የአይዥት: ክሳ: ይህ-ጥቃሁ: ሌላ: ለዘመኑ: እንደኋና: ቅርቡ: እኩረው: ስለት: ሲስተና: በዚ: ገ-በረከት: ዓይዥን: ክስኩብት: ቅድስ: መስቀልቸው: ወር: በዚ: ለጠቃዥቶን: ለጠቅሙ: አበርከተውለት: ዘመኑ: ይጥናል:: ዘመኑ: ሌላ: አላፊ: ስንድ: የአንስ: ዘመኑ: መጥሚያ: እናድ: ቅልቅ: የአብር: ወንበር: አበርከተዋል:: በተጨማሪም: የጥቅምት: ድንበር: ሲስተና: ገልት: እንደይደረጋል: በሁለት: ሌ.ቁና: ድቃስት: በሁለት: አመራሪት: በአርበ: እራት: እሳሰብ: ቅዱስት: መንፈሳዊ: ሥልጣን: አስወግዥ: ደንጋጌት: አልፈዋል(Abba Tesfa Guyorgis, 2018:48)

In 1667 during the reign of A’elaf Sägäd Yohännəs I, in the period of Aläm Sägäd 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’elaf Sägäd 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 *eççäge* 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 Mägʷina Monastery with Particular Reference to the Audaciousness of the Monastic Communities towards the Emperor Fasilädäs

Däbrä Mägʷana 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 Mägʷana 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 Mägʷina Monastery was evident during the reign of Emperor Fäsilädäs. Given the social support he garnered after seizing political power, Emperor Fasilädäs made his religious position clear. During this period, the *eččäge* Bäträ Giyorgis, who was abbot of the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos during the reign of Emperor Fäsilädäs, asked the monarch to compensate for the bloodshed caused by the Jesuit missionaries (*Abunä Gärima*, et al, *Abunä Samuel*, Radä Asəress Agədaw Rädie, Yared Fänta, Elias Abrəhä, Wäldä, 2008:278). *Eččägge* Bäträ Giyorgis, a monk from Mägʷina 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 Fäsilädäs, the *eččäge* represented the theologians of the Union doctrine and was said to have had a doctrinal debate with the representative of the Unction theologians during the religious synod held in 1632 at the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos.

በንተው: ነገሥቱ: በዓለም: ሰንድ: ቁጥል: ከመኩ: መንግሥት: በንተው: አደባይ: የአትዋኑያ: ለቋወንት: እኔ: ጥብቅ: የነበረት: የከተለከ: ምድማኑት: መረጥኑ: እነ: አይንስ: መንድዎን: ተከራካወ: የረቱ: ከታች: አደባይ: ጥብቅ: ከምማማዊ: አዘዣ: ተከለሱማኑት: ደብረ: ለባኑስ: ገዢም: ተዋሕድን: ወከላው: ተለቁ: መግኑት: የደረገ: አጠረ: በተረ: ገዢርሃስ: ለአመነት: የበቃቻ: በደብረ: መግኑ: ገዢም: ተምረዎና: የምንከሳዎ: ነው (Abba Tesfa Giyorgis, 2018:25)

‘During the era of King of Kings of Aläm 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

Täwahədo who said to have made a great debate *eččäge* Bätərä Guyorgis, who placed as an *eččäge* became a monk in Däbrä 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 Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos monastery (*Abunä Gärima*, et al, *Abunä Samuel*, *Radä Asəress*, *Agədäw Rädie*, *Yared Fänta*, *Elias Abrəhä*, *Wäldä Rufael Fätahi*, *Məkrä Səllasse Gäbrä Amanuel*, *Säyəfä Səllasse*, *Yohannəs*, *Bərhänu Gäbrä Amanuel* and *Tässomä Zärihun*. *The History of Ethiopian Orthodox Täwahədo Church*, 2008:279). Among the *Täwahədo* theologians present were *Abba Zä Michael*, *Abba Zä krəstos*, *Abba Yämanä ab*, *Abba Həryakos*, *Abba Qälawadi*, *eččäge* Bätərä Guyorgis, *Abba Şäga krəstos*, *Abba Yohannəs*, and *Abba Säfani Krəstos* were gathered at the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos (Fətəhä Nägäst. Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos monastery and Informant Şäbate Kassahun Tadesse, 2022)



Figure 1. The participants of the *Täwahədo* theologians and the place where the religious synod was held in the monastery of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä 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* Bätərä Guyorgis represented the Ethiopian theologians to debate with the representatives of the Jesuit Catholic missionaries, Afonso Mendes (Fətəhä Nägäst Azäzo Täklä Haymanot Däbrä Libanos monastery, 2022). Mendez's Forwarded the first question to

eččäge Bätərä Guyorgis, "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, Agədäw Rädie, Yared Fänta, Elias Abrəhä, Wäldä Rufael Fätahi, Məkrä Səllasse Gäbrä Amanuel, Säyəfä Səllasse Yohannəs, Bərhänu Gäbrä Amanuel and Tässomä Zärihun. 'The History of Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwahədo* Church, 279). A monk then chanted a spiritual song in Gə'əz language "ዘብኑሁ፡ ለበትር፡ አደረሰም፡ ለርም፡ ካቶ፡ የኑበ፡ ወቀኑ፡ በትርጓም" (We have Zä Bätərä, 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 Zärihun; Tekle Tsadik Mäkuria, 2013:140-141) . As a result, the other theologians who chanted to the great crowd followed him and joined them saying "ናይበዥ፡ ለእግዥአብዕር" ('Nəsebəho Lä 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 Fasilädäš

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 Mägʷina Monastery, Emperor Fasilädäš married Zeliha after her baptism according to the canon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (*Abba Täfsa Guyorgis*, 2018:25). However, the monastic communities of Mägʷina opposed the monarch for his involvement of what they assumed a sororate marriage (*Abba Tesfa Guyorgis*, 2018:25). When resistance grew from Mägʷina monastic community, the monarch sent an envoy to the Abbot of the monastery named *Abba Aməhä Guyorgis* 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 Aməhä 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 Mägʷina burned and throw off the gold to the Mayədäm Cliff near the west side of the monastery (Ibid). During that time, the monks of Saint Yəshäq Monastery, located near ተbare in Täč 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 Fasilädäs 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 Čawi 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 Mägʷina Monastery, the Abbot Aməhä 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 Täfsa Giyorgis*, 2018:28).

During this time, the abbot of the monastery of Saint Markos joined the revolt with his abbot named *Abba Šəge Dəngəl*. This monastery was located in *Maynägad* kebele. The monastic communities of Mägʷina and Saint Markos monasteries, led by their abbots *Abba Aməhä Giyorgis* and *Abba Šəge 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 Čawi to take action by which all were martyred. The Emperor ordered the Čawi 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 Mägʷina, but the regiment of Čawi continued their attack. As a result of which many of the monks were killed near a place called Gəm Wəhä. It seemed that this name itself had a deep historical connection to the crisis of the time. The name Gəm Wəhä 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 Mägʷina monastery in connection to that historical scenario of Emperor Fasilädäs, 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 Mägʷina *Abba Aməhä Giyorgis* and *Abba Šəge Dəngəl* were killed and are celebrated as martyrs in some copies of the Synaxarium (Munchen Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. Aeth. 140; EMML 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 Fasilädäs

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: ‘ዘወንድል፡ ከወያብ፡ ለድ፡በረ፡ ቅዱና፡ ገዢም፡ የጥዬ፡ ካሸም፡ ቁሳለድ፡ 1624-1659’, Zewängel Zähäbo Lädäbrä Mäg^wina Gädam Nègusä nägäst Fasilädäs, ‘This Gospel was delivered to Mäg^wina Monastery King of Kings Fasilädäs 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 Fasilädäs and offered to Mägʷina Monastery in 1640. The manuscript explained the whole number of wet martyrs of the monastic communities of Mägʷina in their uprisings against Emperor Fasilädäs. Besides, the manuscript also enumerated the lands granted to the monastery as *Rəst* after the reconciliation with Emperor Fasilädäs (January 7, 2022 11:00 field observation Mägʷina Monastery)

At the request of the survivor monks who stayed behind from the execution, Emperor Fasilädäs admitted taking the bodies of *Abba* Aməhä Guyorgis and *Abba* Şege Dəngəl to Mägʷina Monastery and buried them honorably and the other martyred monks believed to be buried at the present day the square of Adäbabay Iyäsus (*Abba* Täfsa Guyorgis, 2018:42). Later, after all this chaos and devastation, the Emperor himself believed to have become repentant and went to Mägʷina monastery to apologize the monastic communities(*Ibid*). Moreover, after the death of Emperor Fasilädäs, Emperor Yohannəs I brought Edä Krəstos from the monastery of Wali which was later called Walddəba and appointed him as an abbot for the monastery of Mägʷina. Therefore Edä Krəstos was said to have returned all the manuscripts to his former Mägʷina monastery. Emperor Yohannəs 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 Guyorgis, Osa and Qədus Michael, Kaşa Täklä

Haymanot, Kärəkarit *Abba* Samuel, Tənbuhä bet Mädehanialem, *Abunä* Gäbrämänfäs kəfdus, Huläta Guyorgis, Hämənowuha Qədus Michael, Agägäga Qədəst Maryam, Endəyäsus Maynägad, Maynägad Qədus Guyorgis, and Qədus Marqos monastery(Ibid).

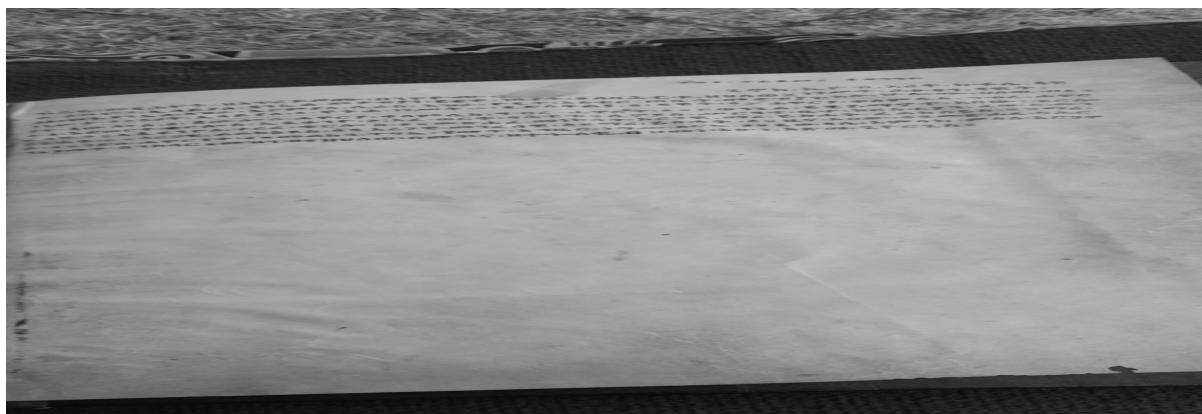


Figure 3. A Manuscript folio written under the orders of Emperor Yohannəs I. The Emperor donated it to Mägʷina Monastery. The folio lists the lands granted to the monastery Mägʷina (January 7, 2022 11:00 AM, field observation Mägʷina Monastery)

Fascinatingly, A'əlaf šägäd Yohannəs I spent three and half years in Mägʷina monastery attending religious education before he came to power (*Abba* Tesfa Guyorgis, 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 Mägʷina. Since that time Mägʷina monastery has been an important Unionist or *Täwahədo* center (EAe, Vol. III, and 2007:644). *Abba* Həryaqos, who stayed Abbot of Mägʷina, was also appointed *mämhər* 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 Dombr Chr 217). During the early part of Iyasu I's reign, Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina along with monks from Waldəbba, Qäntäfa and Qʷarata, and other well-known *Täwahədo* monasteries (Guid, Iohan 1905:174). Edä Krəstos was the head of Mägʷina monastery after *Abba* Həryaqos and from 1678 he became a close adviser to the Emperor (EAe, Vol. III, 2007:644; and GuiIohan 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 Guyorgis and *Abba* Şəge Dəngəl, first celebrated in 1685(GuidIohan,1905:84; and EAe, Vol. III, 2007:644). Edä Krəstos's successor, *abba* Zäwälđä Maryam, was also to become very powerful over the next three decades. In 1704-05 the monastic communities of Mägʷina harbored *bägərond* Iyäsus Mohä, a potential competitor for the throne, but royal power violated the right of asylum and imprisoned him in Wähəni Amba (GuidIohan, 1905:84)

በ: 1675: ዓ.ም. በኢትዮጵያ: ስንድ: አቶ: አ.ሮስ: አመራ: መንግሥት: ለዘመ: አንጻር:

ታርክዋ፡ ገዳም፡ ልማትና፡ መርቻ፡ እንደሆነው፡ በማስበ፡ ለላሳ፡ ሁለት፡ ሁለት፡ ገልቶ፡ ከበት፡ የበረና፡ ቁጥርት፡ መጽሐፍት፡ የር፡ ለገዢሙ፡ በመስጠት፡ እበትታዋል፡፡ በእድያም፡ ሰነድ፡ እኔ፡ እያለ፡ በዘመን፡ ጥርሰ፡ የሆነው፡ የመምህራን፡ መናማያ፡ እናድ፡ የከበር፡ መንበር፡ ከስተት፡ ከታላለቸ፡ የከበር፡ እልጋ፡ የር፡ ለዘመ፡ ተለቸ፡ ገዳም፡ እበትታዋለት፡ ክረም፡ በቅርቡት፡ ተቀምጧ፡ ይገኛል (Abba Täsefa Giyorgis 2018:48).

'In 1682, during the reign of Emperor Adam Sägäd 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 *eççäge* was dismissed one after the other. As a result, some important figures in the monastic communities of Däbrä Libanos *Täwahədo* found refuge in Mägʷina monastery (EAe, Vol. III: 644). In the early eighteenth century, Mägʷina Monastery retained leadership of the *Täwahədo* monastic communities. For instance, the hard core *Täwahədo* partisans of Mägʷina 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 *Täwahədo* faction led by *abba* Zäwälđä Maryam of Mägʷina protested. Consequently, the monastic associations of Mägʷina were persecuted at night when they retired to the *eççäge* residence (Guidi, 1893:603-04). In order to achieve the unity of the country, Mägʷina Monastery was by and large considered the front line of the Däbrä Libanos *Täwahədo* position to put an end to the religious factions. It is likely to debate that the monastic communities of Däbrä Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina 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 Mägʷina 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 Mägwina 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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