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Walter Raunig und Prinz Asfa-Wossen Asserate



J.H. Röll

## A preliminary catalogue of post-Byzantine Icons in late medieval Solomonic Ethiopia

Verena Krebs

Scholarship on Ethiopian art has long known about the existence of post-Byzantine icons dateable to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century in Ethiopia. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Diana Spencer first photographed and published on these foreign objects of religious material culture, many of which were located in remote monasteries and churches in Western Goğgam and Amhara Sayənt.<sup>1</sup> Other scholars followed in her footsteps, describing and documenting the existence of other post-Byzantine icons – in some cases as recently as 2010.<sup>2</sup> Due to the lack of a systematic investigation into the number, origin and dating of these objects, Ethiopianist scholarship has long held the belief that only a handful of these foreign icons existed.<sup>3</sup> However, a recent investigation into the matter as part of a larger research project<sup>4</sup> revealed that their number in Ethiopia has been severely

- <sup>1</sup> Diana SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10, no. 2 (1972): 67–95; Diana SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaléon Re-Discovered," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12, no. 2 (1974): 201–20.
- <sup>2</sup> Marilyn E. HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, Dissertationen Zur Kunstgeschichte (Wiesbaden: Harassowitz, 1994); Marilyn E. HELDMAN, "St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia," *Gesta* 44, no. 2 (2005): 125–48. In November–December 2010, Denis Nosnitsin's team photographed a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Cretan icon set in a remarkable, semi-finished faux-triptych in the church of Däbrä Šəyon Qəddəst Maryam Qi'at in Eastern Təgray Zone as part of the European Research Council funded research project Ethio-SPaRe, see below.
- <sup>3</sup> Cf. Stanisław CHOJNACKI, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models, and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1983), 428. Also cf. GETATCHEW HAILE, "A Note on Writing History from Forgotten Documents," *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 1 (1980): 73; ABEBAW AYALEW, "A History of Paintings in East Gojjam in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Study of the 'Second Gondarine' Style of Painting" (Addis Ababa University, 2002), 23; HELDMAN, "St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia," 140; SEIFESELLASSIE YOHANIS, "Holy Images in the Church," in *Ethiopian Church: Treasures & Faith*, ed. Jacques MERCIER and Daniel SEIFEMICHAEL (Paris: Archange Minotaure, 2009), 58.
- <sup>4</sup> My PhD project submitted to the University of Konstanz, Germany, and Mekelle University, Ethiopia, in 2014, which studied diplomatic contacts and foreign religious material culture in Solomonic Ethiopia in the 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century; Verena



underestimated: instead of a mere handful, some twenty-nine post-Byzantine icons dateable to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century are attested in both the material as well as the written record. An in-depth study of the object histories of these foreign icons reveals that they mostly came to Ethiopia before 1530, or rather: prior to the wars between the Solomonic kingdom and the troops of Imam Aḥmad in the second quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

This article offers up a preliminary catalogue of all post-Byzantine icons documented as present in late medieval Ethiopia. The vast majority of these objects was produced in the Eastern Mediterranean, particularly in late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century Crete. Twenty-three of these icons depict the Virgin Mary and the Child on a gilded background. They follow several types of distinct iconography: about half adhere to the so-called *Madre della Consolazione* type – an iconographic representation of the Virgin in bust format holding and indicating the Christ child with her hand. This type is closely related to the much older Orthodox iconography of the ‘Hodegetria’,<sup>6</sup> but modified for a Latin Christian viewership.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the remaining images of Mother and Child are made up of an equal number of icons made for an Orthodox and Latin Christian viewership which follow the iconographic style of the ‘Eleusa’ type: here, the Virgin nestles the infant Christ against her cheek. Lastly, individual icons depict the nursing Virgin – the *Maria Lactans* – or portray the adult Christ, or the biblical figures of Zacharia or St. Sebastian. By their very nature as post-Byzantine icons from the Eastern Mediterranean and Crete, many of these objects follow a highly repetitive iconography and style. Yet, many of these objects were modified in Ethiopia after their arrival – they were set into custom-made, faux-triptych boxes, and adorned in the contemporary local styles favoured by the Solomonic elite. Numerous icons were given names and object histories by the local clergy;

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KREBS, “Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402-1543” (PhD thesis, Universität Konstanz/Mekelle University, 2014). A book that includes my findings regarding these objects and situates them within a larger cultural history will be published within the next year; in short, I propose that these objects were imported by the Ethiopian royal house and court from the Eastern Mediterranean to Solomonic Ethiopia prior to 1530.

<sup>5</sup> See KREBS, chap. 6.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek ‘Hodegetria’ translates to ‘she who points the way’; the iconographic type presents the Virgin Mary holding the Child Jesus at her side while pointing to him as the source of salvation for humankind, her head inclined towards the Child. Jesus, meanwhile, has his hand raised in a blessing gesture.

<sup>7</sup> An iconographic type originally from Italy, but famously introduced into Cretan icon-painting in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. One of its distinctive features is the presence of a white-translucent wimple veil fringing the Virgin’s forehead underneath her *maphorion*, the shaped mantle with a hood worn by the Theotokos or Virgin Mary.



some are documented in early written sources. Taken together, both material culture and written sources allow us to date and locate many of these objects, both in their place of origin in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as their subsequent local Ethiopian social and cultural environment. The following offers a preliminary catalogue of foreign icons present in late medieval Ethiopia. It is ordered by iconographic type and subject matter. Images of the Virgin and Child are abbreviated as 'BM' for 'post-Byzantine depictions of Mary'. All other icons – such as those of Christ and the Saints – are abbreviated as "BC" for 'post-Byzantine depictions of Christ and Others'. A comprehensive table as well as photographs of the icons – where available – are appended to this text.

## I. Icons of the Virgin Mary and the Child

Item BM-01: *Sə'älä Wäynut*, 'the Image of Wäynut'

Located in Däbrä Wärq in Goğgam, Diana Spencer photographed this icon in 1971.<sup>8</sup> It is set as centre panel into a faux-triptych box<sup>9</sup> with painted wings. A post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the Virgin Mary, it is locally called the *Šə'älä Wäynut*, 'the Image of Wäynut' or 'the purple one' (Fig. BM-01). The image follows the *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' iconography, which includes Western-style elements: the Virgin is seated in three-quarter view to the beholder, her right hand extended in a gesture indicating the Christ child on her left arm. She is wearing a deep red mantle, or *maphorion*, lined in emerald green with a dark green robe. Accents of gold on her shoulders and a brooch at her breast adorn her clothing. A white wimple veil is fringing her forehead, and a halo worked in pointillé surrounds her.

The Child is clothed in a dark green tunic patterned with golden stars; he is wrapped in a red mantle with golden accents lined with orange. He extends his right hand in a gesture of blessing and holds a golden orb in his left. A cruciform halo worked in basic pointillé surrounds his head, the hair is curly and dark, and his feet are bare and visible underneath the mantle. The background is gilded and contrasted in red, with two flying angels, one in red, one in deep green with yellow stars, supporting the pointillé halo of the Virgin.

The side panels of the faux-triptych are painted in the style that has previously been called "Italianate" or 'transitional' in Ethiopianist scholarship – a style

<sup>8</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 83.

<sup>9</sup> The icon itself is not a triptych; instead, upon its arrival in Ethiopia it was put in a custom-made shallow box with mobile wings that open up to form a triptych, and otherwise safely enclose the icon.





BM-01: The *Šə'alä Wäynut*, Däbrä Wärq monastery, Goğgam; DEEDS Database.

of painting particularly popular between 1480 and 1530.<sup>10</sup> Here, the side panels are painted with images of St. John and St. Peter. On the left wing, St. John is garbed in red, with a green mantle, a simple yellow halo around his head. His features are marked by a dark full beard and a patterned head wrap, he is holding a cross and a book, with a blue, flowered brooch on his chest. On the right wing, St. Peter is depicted in a mirroring position, with a green tunic and a red, richly patterned mantle lined in deep blue, also with a simple yellow halo around his head. His features are marked by a full grey beard and a patterned head wrap; he is also holding a cross and a book and has a blue, flowered brooch on his chest. According to Diana Spencer's description, the outside of the icon's panels were covered 'with drawings of full-length angels with canopies over their heads'.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On this style, see CHOJNACKI, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models, and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century*; Stanislaw CHOJNACKI and Carolyn GOSSAGE, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Addis Ababa University* (Milan: Skira: Fondazione Carlo Leone Montandon, 2000). Also see KREBS, "Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543," chap. 5.

<sup>11</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 84.





BM-01a and BM-01b: Eskiander-Gospels, Däbrä Wärq monastery, Goḡgam; DEEDS Database.

According to local tradition given to Spencer, the picture was believed by the local monks to have 'been brought from Egypt by Emperor Dawit I',<sup>12</sup> and presented to the Monastery of Däbrä Wärq by *aše* Zär'a Ya'eqob.<sup>13</sup> The paintings on the side-panels offer a clue to the date of the icon's arrival in Ethiopia, as it was set into a custom-made, faux-triptych frame. A specialist for Byzantine art first consulted by Spencer had identified the icon as an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Greek copy of a Cretan workshop of the 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>14</sup> This roundabout dating appears mainly owed to the fact that the same Byzantinist had struggled to identify the Ethiopian-made paintings on the faux-triptych's wings, eventually assigning them an indistinct '18<sup>th</sup> century "Syrian origin"'.<sup>15</sup> Someone more familiar with late medieval Ethiopian art, however, must recognize the direct connection between the *Wäynut's* wings and the full-page miniature illuminations in the so-

<sup>12</sup> Spencer is referring to the late 14<sup>th</sup> and early 15<sup>th</sup> century *näguś* Dawit II; Dawit I is now understood in historiography as the biblical King David of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> Spencer, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 85. The current church had been built by *aše* Gälawdewos.

<sup>14</sup> Manolis CHATZIDAKIS, Director of the Byzantine and Christian Museum in Athens between 1960 and 1975, whom Spencer approached for the dating of the icon; Spencer, 84. I have since consulted numerous specialists for post-Byzantine painting; all date the icon to the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century itself.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. SPENCER, 84.



called *Æskändər* Gospels, also located in the monastery of Däbrä Wärq (compare Figs. BM-01a and BM-01b). While the Evangelists' or Saints' features are slightly different – they are bearded and their hair covered in the faux-triptych – the painting of the faces and hands, as well as the flow of the lines, are the same. Particularly the way in which the hands were drawn – slightly too small – mirrors the *Æskändər* Gospels exactly. Both *Wäynut* and the *Æskändər* Gospels show the saints adorned with the same items: books and small, metal hand crosses presented in each hand. The identical flow of the garments with their crinkling, wavy hemlines, the distinctive structure of the faces, and especially the construction of the haloes not just summarily refute the presumed 18<sup>th</sup> century 'Syrian' origin of the *Wäynut*'s side panels. Instead, they corroborate the assumption that both the *Wäynut*'s wings, as well as the illuminations in the *Æskändər* Gospels, were painted by the same hand.<sup>16</sup> This connection with the illuminations in the *Æskändər* Gospels locates the *Wäynut* faux-triptych firmly in late medieval Ethiopia. It also explicitly dates it to the years surrounding the reign of *Æskändər*, i.e. last decade of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a timeframe moreover consistent with the dating of the post-Byzantine icon BM-01 itself. Lastly, a textual source supports such an assessment: the icon is directly named as one of the objects brought to Ethiopia by the Jerusalem-bound Ethiopian monks *Zəkre* and *Ṕawli* by order of Princess *Marta*, the oldest daughter of 15<sup>th</sup> century *aṣe* *Æskändər*.<sup>17</sup> Textual and material evidence thus support that the icon had been brought to Ethiopia before 1530.

#### Item BM-02: *Sə 'älä Sərgut*, 'the Image of *Sərgut*'

Located in Getesemane Maryam monastery in Goḡḡam,<sup>18</sup> this 'St. Luke' icon was also photographed by Diana Spencer.<sup>19</sup> It is a post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the Virgin Mary locally called the *Śə 'älä Sərgut*, 'the Image of *Sərgut*' or 'the Adorned One' (Fig. BM-02). The *Sərgut* sits in an ornate blue and golden Renaissance frame, which is in turn set in a big faux-triptych wooden case. In its general structure, it mirrors the *Wäynut* of Däbrä Wärq (Fig. BM-01). It, too, is a depiction of the Virgin and Child following the *Madre della Consolazione*

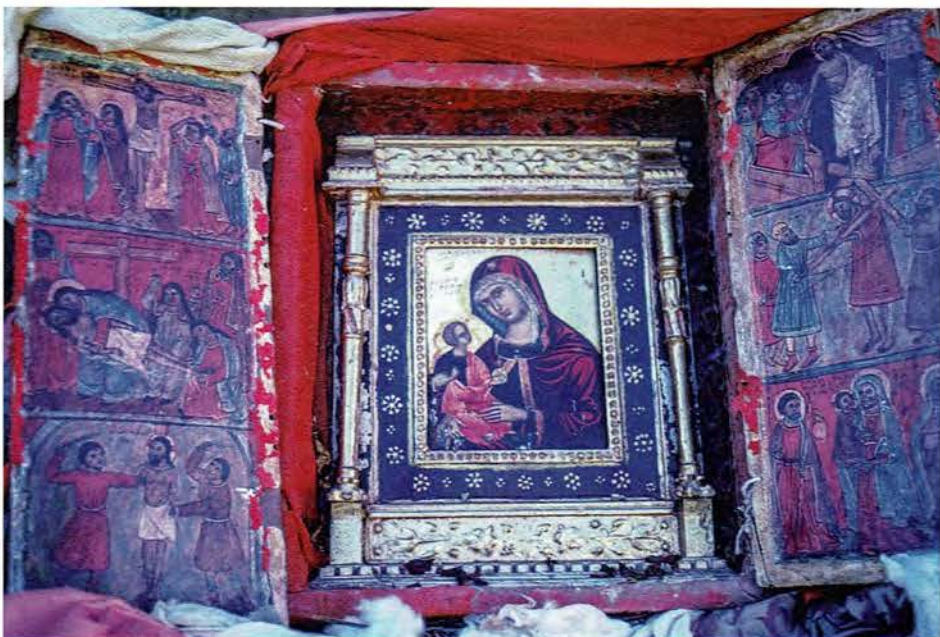
<sup>16</sup> Compare especially Fig. BM-01a of the gospel illumination and the side wing of the triptych.

<sup>17</sup> Codex Vidobonensis Palatinus, Aeth. 16, fol. 13r; transl. in Roger COWLEY, "Zekre and Pawli – Ethiopic Bible Translators or Interpreters?", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, no. 2 (1989): 388.

<sup>18</sup> Stated as also present in Däbrä Wärq monastery in Goḡḡam by Heinrich Kriss, most definitely a confusion; cf. Rudolf KRISS and Hubert KRISS-HEINRICH, *Volkskundliche Anteile in Kult Und Legende Äthiopischer Heiliger* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975), 66.

<sup>19</sup> SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Icons and Brancalion Re-Discovered," 204.





BM-02: The *Śā'alā Sərgut*, Getesemane Maryam monastery, Goğgam; DEEDS Database.



BM-02a: Recent state of the *Śā'alā Sərgut*, Getesemane Maryam monastery, Goğgam; DEEDS Database.



'Hodegetria' type, with its typical Western modifications: the Virgin is seated in three-quarter view to the beholder, but this time, her left hand is extended in a gesture indicating the Christ child on her right arm. She is wearing a velvety, deep red *maphorion* or mantle with rich gold-colour edgings, lined in emerald green above a dark green robe also ornamented with gold accents. Small golden stars adorn her mantle on her head and shoulder, and a small brooch connects her mantle on her breast. A white wimple veil is fringing her forehead, but there is no halo. The Child wears a simple dark green tunic with a red mantle, his right hand is raised, but not fully forming a gesture of blessing; he holds a golden orb in his left. His head, full of blond curls, is surrounded by a cruciform halo. The background is fully gilded.

The icon itself is set in an ornate Renaissance frame; the inner part is richly gilded and surrounded by a blue border featuring star-and-dots ornamentation. The outer part of the frame features a high-relief of a sculptured frieze with flower and ivy twine and two ornamented columns. The icon and the gilded frame, meanwhile, are set in a faux-triptych box lined with red fabric, to which two outer wings attach through a cord hinge. On the wings, six scenes from the life of Christ are depicted: on the left side the Crucifixion, the Deposition, and the Flagellation follow from top to bottom. On the right wing are the Ascension, Christ Carrying the Cross and, somewhat surprisingly, the Flight into Egypt with Mary, Joseph, Salome and the infant Christ. The iconography of the scenes of the Life of Christ on the wings is a remarkable mix of Western and Ethiopian iconography. While, as Spencer rightly remarked, the Deposition was painted in the Western manner 'with the body of Christ clasped in the arms of his Mother',<sup>20</sup> European elements also appear in the white flag held by Christ in the Ascension scene, as well as the long, open flowing hair of the women and the depiction of Western-style garments including leggings, shoes and even boots.<sup>21</sup> The Flight into Egypt, however, follows the Ethiopian tradition, in which the figure of Salome is always included. The outer panels, wholly detached from the *Sərgut* icon itself but specifically customized to house it, thus offer an interesting mix of foreign and Ethiopian iconography. There is a superficial similarity to the panels of the *Wäynut* icon – some of the fringed, wavy hemlines of the figures are reminiscent of the *Ėskəndər* Gospels and *Wäynut* side wings. Upon closer inspection, however, the similarity is owed to the shared 'Italianate' – or, as I would rather term it: *färäng* – style;<sup>22</sup> it was probably produced by a painter wor-

<sup>20</sup> SPENCER, 205.

<sup>21</sup> See the Flagellation scene at the very bottom of the left wing of the faux-triptych.

<sup>22</sup> On terminology, see KREBS, "Windows onto the World: Culture Contacts and Western Christian Art in Ethiopia, 1402–1543," chap. 5.



king in a similar style, but not by the same hand. The faux-triptych thus locates and dates the *Sərgut* icon as present in Ethiopia before 1530.

Together with the *Wäynut*, the *Sərgut* is directly named as one of the icons brought to Ethiopia by the Jerusalem-bound Ethiopian monks Zəkre and Pāwli by order of Princess Marta, the oldest daughter of 15<sup>th</sup> century *aṣe* Ḥskəndər.<sup>23</sup> In the 1970s, priests told Diana Spencer that they ‘believed it had been brought by Emperor Dawit from Egypt’.<sup>24</sup> Local legend also stated that ‘Emperor John I was so moved when he saw the Ikon that he presented his gold crown to be melted down to make the frame.’<sup>25</sup> The frame in question is an original Italian Renaissance frame of exceedingly high quality produced in Western Europe. It is datable to ca. 1500<sup>26</sup> and was made to suit an Italian viewership.<sup>27</sup>

While the imported panel of the *Sərgut* icon BM-02 is iconographically similar to the *Wäynut* BM-01, it originates from a different post-Byzantine Cretan workshop. The painting style of the *Sərgut* BM-02 is both simpler and appears more elegant, with rich, thick folds painted in a velvety manner and intricate ornamentation on the Virgin’s mantle. The foreign modifications of the Byzantine model in the *Sərgut* BM-02, including the custom-made golden Renaissance frame and the blond hair of the Christ, indicate that it was designed for an even more elite Renaissance viewership in Western Europe, and particularly Renaissance Italy. When Diana Spencer saw this icon, she judged it ‘superior in quality to any St. Luke Ikon I had hitherto seen in Ethiopia’.<sup>28</sup> Today, the object regrettably is in ruins: in a recent wet season, the local clergy decided to hide the icon in a cave, to preserve it from theft.<sup>29</sup> The humidity in the cave, however, damaged the icon, its frame, and the painted faux-triptych beyond repair (Fig. BM-02a).

<sup>23</sup> Codex Vidobonensis Palatinus, Aeth. 16, fol. 13r; transl. in COWLEY, “Zekre and Pawli – Ethiopic Bible Translators or Interpreters?”, 388.

<sup>24</sup> SPENCER, “Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered,” 204.

<sup>25</sup> SPENCER, 204–5.

<sup>26</sup> I thank Lynn Roberts of Tunbridge Wells, art historian specialising in the history of Renaissance frames, for her expertise and input on this item. While Roberts also noted that the icons currently appears to have been set upside down into the frame and that the frame was crudely adapted from different parts in the make-up of the two columns set into the frieze, it appears to me that the free-standing columns were instead damaged over the course of time and had come loose, only to be re-inserted upside down.

<sup>27</sup> Compare similar Italian Renaissance frames such as the British Museum, London, Inventory Number 1909,0612.3.

<sup>28</sup> SPENCER, “Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered,” 204.

<sup>29</sup> I thank Susanne Hummel of Hamburg University, who conducted fieldwork in the monastery of Getesemane Maryam in Goḡḡam between 2008 and 2013, for this information.





BM-03: The *Şagge Rāda*, Getesemane Maryam monastery, Goğgam; Spencer 1974.

Item BM-03: *Şagge Rāda*,  
'the Rose Flower'

A virtually identical post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the Virgin Mary called the *Şagge Rāda*, 'the Rose Flower' (Fig. BM-03), is to be found in the same church of Getesemane Maryam.<sup>30</sup> Although Diana Spencer published only a small black/white photograph of the icon, it is easy to discern that the 'Rose Flower' is all but identical to the BM-02 *Sargut* 'St. Luke Icon' in iconography and style (compare Fig. BM-02). It, too, is a post-Byzantine Cretan *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' type icon. While the face, hands

and feet of the Virgin and Christ are drawn in the same manner in both BM-02 and BM-03 after the same *vorlage*, there are very slight variations in the way the shading of the cloth had been executed – the shading of the individual folds appears minimally more pronounced in *Şagge Rāda* BM-03. It stands to reason that these two icons originated from the same workshop, as standard Cretan workshop practices involved the division of individual sections of an icon to be painted by different artists.<sup>31</sup> The major difference between the two imports – which are located in the same monastery – is the gilded, highly ornamental frame of the *Sargut* BM-02 and its faux-triptych setting. In local tradition, the *Şagge Rāda* is not ascribed to the hand of St. Luke,<sup>32</sup> although oral tradition holds that it was 'bought at the same time from Egypt'.<sup>33</sup> It was, however, treated as an intercessory image for the community by the priests, who carried it through the countryside in times of tribulation, so that, in 'times of epidemic sickness or the failure

<sup>30</sup> SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered," 205.

<sup>31</sup> I. e. one painter would work on the face of the Virgin alone, while another one painted only the Christ's face as well as all hands and feet, and a third person would work solely on the clothing sections.

<sup>32</sup> SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered," 205, 208.

<sup>33</sup> SPENCER, 205.



of the harvest, it is the *Ṣägge Rāda*, and not the *Sərgut*, which is carried into the surrounding countryside' to the chanting.<sup>34</sup> Although the *Ṣägge Rāda* was not perceived as painted by the Hand of St. Luke, it has still been bequeathed a moniker by the Ethiopian clergy – a concession stated in scholarship as reserved for 'St. Luke Icons' only.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it is essential to note that the *Ṣägge Rāda* was not only said to date from the same time as the *Sərgut* BM-02 in local oral history. An iconographic comparison reveals that they both most likely originated from the very same workshop and thus at the same time, i.e. the time connected to the lifetime of *nəguś* ʾĪskändər's daughter Marta. Therefore, this icon should also be dated and located as present in Ethiopia before 1530.

Item BM-04: *Ṣə'älä Adhəno*, 'the Image of Salvation'

Located in Tādbabä Maryam in the Amhara Sayənt region of Central Ethiopia is a post-Byzantine Cretan triptych of the Virgin Mary, its lateral panels depicting the archangels Gabriel and Michael. It is locally called the *Ṣə'älä Adhəno*, 'the Image of Salvation' (Fig. BM-04).<sup>36</sup> Though the hinges of the icon are now wired together in a makeshift manner, the icon itself was fashioned as a triptych. The lateral wings are both inscribed in Greek, and their painting style differs very little from the central panel. The central panel of the triptych is a *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' type; starkly similar to the iconography of the *Wäynut* icon (Fig. BM-01), differing only very slightly in style. The position of the figures and face and hands of the Virgin are identical up to the folds of the white veil underneath her red mantle. The brooch and the colours of her dress are alike as well. The shading of the Virgin's tunic and the drawing of the folds was executed in a faintly different manner, and the tunic of Christ appears darker and tinted slightly blue in the *Ṣə'älä Adhəno* BM-04, with longer sleeves covering half of his forearm. The only iconographic difference between BM-04 and BM-01 is that the position of the gold orb and the gesture of blessing have been interchanged. In the *Ṣə'älä Adhəno*, Christ is holding the orb in his right hand, while his left is extended in a gesture of blessing slightly more raised, mirroring the icons *Ṣägge Rāda* BM-03 and *Sərgut* BM-02 in this regard. Like the *Wäynut* BM-01, the background of the *Ṣə'älä Adhəno* BM-04 is gilded. It is also contrasted in faded red, with two flying angels, one garbed in red, one in deep green, supporting a crown above a pointillé halo of the Virgin.

<sup>34</sup> SPENCER, 205.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. the statement in Heldman, "St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia," 125.

<sup>36</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Icons in Ethiopia," 88.





BM-04: The *Ṣə'älä Adhəno*, Tādbabä Maryam monastery, Amhara Sayənt; DEEDS Database.

On the left panel, the archangel Gabriel is identified by a Greek inscription above his head accompanied by the first part of a Greek-letter Monogram of Christ.<sup>37</sup> Against a stark blue and green background, Gabriel is depicted on a red platform in a belted tunic of yellow and gold, with a red cloak fastened by a brooch on his chest. Although barely visible in the available photograph, there is a 'prominent emblem on the left breast, [a] black x on pearl-grey ground'.<sup>38</sup> He holds a spear, and black wings with golden accents fan out behind him. On the right panel, the archangel Michael is also identified by a Greek inscription above his head and the second part of the Greek-letter Monogram of Christ. Michael is standing on a red platform as well, he is wearing a short red tunic and full armour on his chest, with a yellow cloak draped over his right shoulder. Holding his left arm aloft, he has raised his sword, with the empty scabbard hanging loosely at his right side.

According to oral tradition collected by Diana Spencer, the *Ṣə'älä Adhəno* is again a 'St. Luke Icon'.<sup>39</sup> Similarly to the *Şəgge Rāda* BM-03, it is used as an intercessory image. In times of 'fatal epidemic or failure of the crops', the icon would be carried out 'wrapped in silk and borne on the head of a deacon' to be

<sup>37</sup> SPENCER, 72.

<sup>38</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 76–77.

<sup>39</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 72.

'held up, veiled and folded, to face north, south, east and west',<sup>40</sup> accompanied by chants and 41 prayers. Due to the striking similarity of the centre panel of the *Šə'alä Adhəno* BM-04 to the *Wäynut* BM-01, this 'Picture of Salvation' appears to originate and date from the same environment as the *Wäynut*, i.e. a Cretan workshop of the very late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup>

#### Item BM-05: Unnamed Western-style *Eleusa*

Tädbabä Maryam monastery in Amhara Sayənt possesses a second Byzantine icon (Fig. BM-05), also a post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the Virgin Mary. Regrettably, only one poor black/white photograph of the object is available at this point. Set as centre panel into an – unfinished, but snugly fitting – faux-triptych box, is a post-Byzantine icon following the 'Eleusa' iconography with strong Western influences: it shows the Virgin cheek to cheek with Christ, who is sitting on her right arm. Christ is firmly embracing the Virgin, while she is pointing her left arm at his figure. Her tunic appears to be of the same type and style as in the icons BM-01 to BM-04; the only noticeable difference is the absence of a brooch on her chest. Two small flying angels hold the Virgin's halo above her head.

Incomplete drawings are carved in black into the lateral wings of the faux-triptych; they appear to be roughly sketched out and carved starkly into the mostly naked wood – according to Diana Spencer's description, only a bit of the 'blue background of the sky is painted in'.<sup>42</sup> Though hard to discern, the figures are drawn in three-quarter view and appear to be angels, as broad wings stretch out behind them. Above their heads, semi-circular ornamentation with floral motives was carved into the panels; a tiled floor drawn in perspective was moreover starkly outlined in the lower background. Unfinished, the wings of this faux-triptych thus prove most puzzling due to their unusual style and iconography, which show clear Western European Renaissance elements. Thankfully, two other surviving objects – which feature near-identical characteristics and are much better documented in the scholarly record – help shed light onto this initially puzzling object, again placing it in a pre-1530 Ethiopian context.

<sup>40</sup> SPENCER, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Manolis Chatzidakis, the specialist consulted by Diana Spencer in the 1970s, dated it to an unspecified Cretan school of the 16<sup>th</sup> century; SPENCER, 88.

<sup>42</sup> SPENCER, 76. The blue is hard to discern from the black/white photograph alone.





BM-05: Western-style *Eleusa*, Tădbabä Maryam monastery, Amhara Sayənt; Spencer 1972.

Item BM-06: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych

In recent years, the French researcher Jacques Mercier has published “coffee table books” featuring Ethiopian icons purchased from Ethiopia by private collectors. Among them is a post-Byzantine icon of the *Madre della Consolazione* ‘Hodegetria’ style, which is set as centre panel into a custom-fashioned faux-triptych (Fig. BM-07).<sup>43</sup> With minor differences, this centre panel is indistinguishable to the *Wäynut* icon BM-01 from Däbrä Wärq in Gōḡgam. The iconography is the same, the face, hands, feet of the Virgin and Child are near-identically painted, and there is extensive pointillé work in the halo of the Virgin and the cruciform nimbus of the Child on the golden background. Even the folds of the green robe on Mary’s chest are identically drawn, and Christ’s red mantle is just as starkly outlined in black (compare BM-01 and BM-06). The only noticeable difference is that the colour of the robes of the two flying angels supporting Mary’s pointillé halo is inverted: in BM-06, the angel on the left is depicted in green with golden stars, and the angel on the right is clothed in red.

<sup>43</sup> Jacques Mercier, *L’arche Éthiopienne: Art Chrétien d’Éthiopie* (Paris: Paris-Musées, 2000).





BM-06: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych; Byzantine and Ethiopian artists, and Virgin and Child, tempera and gold on panel, late 15<sup>th</sup> to late 16<sup>th</sup> century, private collection; size: 38x57cm; Mercier 2001.

The wings of the triptych box are of striking similarity to the wooden wings attached to the Eleusa icon BM-05. They depict figures of angels – with ‘floating disk’ haloes drawn in perspective – underneath richly adorned, multi-layered canopies framed by ionic columns and vegetal ornamentation above a shaded floor, also outlined in perspective. All lines have been incised in black into the naked wood. The precisely drawn lines on the wings of BM-06 show that these drawings are directly related, and might have served as a *vorlage* for the incisions on the wings of BM-05. With their rich ornamentation, careful shading and Renaissance-style nimbi, the angels on these lateral panels of BM-06 mirror 1490s European engravings. Here, they have been translated upon the medium of wood by what appears to be a genuinely foreign hand trained in painting or drawing, as all lines are drawn with a sure elegance – without hesitation, interruption and or correction – a feat near impossible for an untrained artist. There are several, possibly later, inscriptions on the central panel and the right wing in Ethiopian script, but they are illegible from the photograph.<sup>44</sup> Mercier himself

<sup>44</sup> They also appear to be later additions. Mercier, who published the photograph and a description of the icon, does neither mention them nor does he provide any translation.



was unsure about the dating, providing a rough estimate of anything between the late 15<sup>th</sup> to the early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> In light of the striking similarity of the imported central panel to, among others, BM-01 and BM-04, as well as the style of the unfinished wings, it appears reasonable to date this icon – and its presence in Ethiopia – to the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century, and certainly before 1530.

#### Item BM-07: Byzantine triptych of Maryam Qi'at

A third post-Byzantine Cretan icon set in a faux-triptych with incised wooden wings was recently discovered by the team surrounding Denis Nosnitsin's Ethio-SPaRe project of Hamburg University. Located in the 14<sup>th</sup>-century church of Maryam Qi'at in northern Təgray,<sup>46</sup> it is a post-Byzantine icon of the classical Byzantine 'Hodegetria' style set into a faux-triptych, with unfinished wooden wings also incised in with black outlines of figures (Fig. BM-07). While the basic positioning of the figures is reminiscent of the other icons presented thus far – Jesus is seated on Mary's left arm, her right hand is pointing to his mother – the icon itself does not follow the *Madre della Consolazione* iconography with its Western modifications: there is no white veil underneath the Virgin's maphorion, the brooch on her chest is missing. Furthermore, while Christ has extended his right hand in a gesture of blessing, he is holding an oblong object and not an orb in his left hand. The Virgin is depicted in a deep red maphorion with a green tunic; Christ is clothed in bright yellow with green accents and no mantle. The background of the icon is starkly gilded with no additional lining; two figures were drawn into the upper right and left corners of the image. On the left, John the Baptist can be discerned by his characteristic wild hairstyle, while the right depicts an unspecified Evangelist underneath fragments of Greek writing. This icon was not part of the 'Italian' style of post-Byzantine Cretan icon production; instead, it was aimed at an Eastern Orthodox viewership. Still, the starkly drawn golden accents and particularly the dotted lining of Mary's maphorion are generally considered to reflect some Western stylistic influence – even in Orthodox painting tastes – after the Fall of Constantinople.

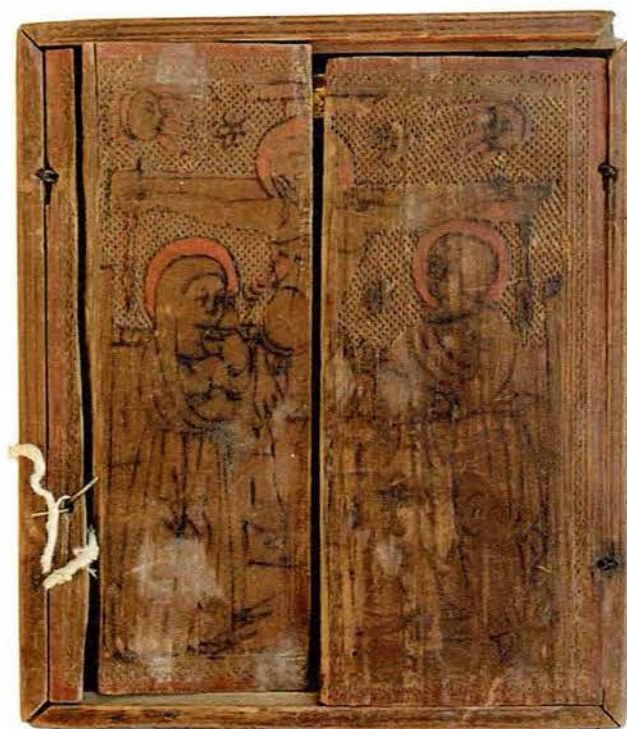
The incisions and tracings on the inner and outer wings of the faux-triptych box, however, show drawings after a Western iconographic and stylistic fashion. On the outside of the wings, a Western-style crucifixion scene drawn in

<sup>45</sup> Cf. MERCIER, *L'arche Éthiopienne: Art Chrétien d'Éthiopie*, 106.

<sup>46</sup> In 1994, Marilyn E. Heldman also published a photograph of this icon, stated as 'present in a small village church in Təgray' but not specifying further. She only stated that the icon was to be dated to the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century; cf. HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 147, fig. 70.



BM-07: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych, Maryam Qi'at church, Təgray; QDS-2 ethio-SPARE database.



BM-07a: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych, Maryam Qi'at church, Təgray; QDS-2 ethio-SPARE database.



perspective is traced in black against the mostly naked wood; only the haloes of Christ, Mary and John the Evangelist have been coloured in red (Fig. BM-07a). On the inner side of the wings (visible in Fig. BM-07), an annunciation in a Western fashion is depicted: the left wing presents Gabriel much like one of the angels on the lateral wings of BM-06. He is pictured with both a 'floating disk' halo and three overarching canopies drawn roughly in perspective. On the right wing, Mary sits under a double canopy in front of a lectern, the dove of conception all but shooting towards her crossed arms from the skies. Her face has been modified at a later date. Overall, the stark lines of the tracings are incredibly similar to the tracings on the wings of the faux-triptych BM-06, and, to a point, BM-05. An interesting and revealing feature is present in the faux-triptych wings of BM-07, however: in addition to the black tracings, much of the background of the inner and outer sides of the wings shows a very distinct fluting. Such fluting, consisting of very regular rhombic punchings into the wood, is usually the first step in the process of gilding the background of an icon: chalk is applied to the fluting to generate a smoother surface, on which the gold colour is subsequently applied. It stands to reason that the panels of naked wood and the incisions and black tracings of BM-05, BM-06 and BM-07 are all preserved in different stages of this same process. For unknown reasons, the steps to complete the gilding process were not completed in all three cases. Taken together, these three objects allow the assumption that the foreign icons were not only to be set into faux-triptych boxes etched in a distinct Renaissance style upon their arrival. Their creators also intended to gild the triptychs' backgrounds locally in Ethiopia. According to the Ethio-SPaRe team, the local priests at Maryam Qi'at had no oral tradition about the icon or were aware of its current, unfinished state. In e-mail correspondence, Alexandra Neubauer of the Ikonenmuseum Frankfurt, Germany, dated the central icon panel to a workshop active in 16<sup>th</sup> century Crete. According to Neubauer, it is a 'typical' example of a small portable 16<sup>th</sup>-century Cretan icon, except for the small depictions of John the Baptist and an Evangelist in the gilded background, which are highly unusual. The style of the lateral wings of the faux-triptychs, however, summarily dates all three icons BM-05, BM-06 and BM-07 as present in Ethiopia in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

#### Item BM-08: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych

This object is located at Tădbabä Maryam and only attested to in one black/white photograph of rather poor quality.<sup>47</sup> It is a post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the

<sup>47</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 93.





BM-08: Byzantine icon in a faux-triptych, Tādbabā Maryam monastery, Amhara Sayənt; Spencer 1972.

Virgin Mary, following the *Eleusa* iconography with Western influences (Fig. BM-08): similarly to the Western-style ‘Eleusa’ BM-05 also housed at Tādbabā Maryam, BM-08 shows the Virgin cheek to cheek with Christ, who is sitting on her right arm and is embracing his mother. The icon is set into a faux-triptych box that seems slightly too large to house the panel; Diana Spencer identified it only as a ‘foreign style’<sup>48</sup> The face of the Virgin, in particular, is drawn in a manner quite different from the previous icons. Regrettably, the quality of the photograph prevents the observation of details. Unfortunately, Spencer did not elaborate on the faux-triptych beyond stating that the Virgin’s clothes are ‘in varying shades of red’.<sup>49</sup> The wings of the faux-triptych are painted with roughly drawn depictions of two angels, presumably Gabriel and Michael, in a late 16<sup>th</sup>-century Ethiopian painting style.

<sup>48</sup> SPENCER, 87. Spencer also believed that the icon was a ‘real’ triptych; however, even the photograph of BM-08 clearly reveals a wide gap between the right side of the central panel and the box in which the panel is sitting.

<sup>49</sup> SPENCER, 88.





BM-09: The *Šə'alä Adhəno*, Wafä Iyäsus monastery, Goğgam; Spencer 1974.

Item BM-09: *Šə'alä Adhəno*, 'the Image of Salvation' Eleusa

A second post-Byzantine Cretan icon called *Šə'alä Adhəno*, or 'the Image of Salvation', is present in the church of Wafä Iyäsus in Goğgam (Fig. BM-09). Regrettably, again only one partial black/white photograph of poor quality of the icon is available at this point.<sup>50</sup> It is a post-Byzantine icon of the classical Orthodox 'Eleusa' style. In contrast to the 'Eleusa' icons BM-05 and BM-08 of Tădbabä Maryam, this icon does not follow a Western

iconography beyond the fact that the Virgin is cheek to cheek with her son. Where in the Western-style BM-05 and BM-08 the Child has his arms wrapped around Mary's neck, the *Šə'alä Adhəno* BM-09 of Wafä Iyäsus shows Christ embraced by the arms of his mother. He is holding a scroll in his lap with both hands. Genuinely Western elements such as the white veil underneath the Virgin's maphorion, and the brooch on her chest, are also missing. The Virgin is wholly wrapped in her mantle, which is drawn in sumptuous folds. This icon was not part of the 'Italian' style of the post-Byzantine Cretan production. Instead, it was intended for an Eastern Orthodox viewership and dates to the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Diana Spencer, local ecclesiastic tradition states that this icon is the 'companion' of another imported icon, a Byzantine depiction of the adult Christ standing in an open grave called the *K'wər'atä rə'əsu* (BC-01, see below). Both objects were said 'to have been brought from Jerusalem or Egypt at the same time' at an indistinct point in time.<sup>51</sup> Although the icon was awarded its own name, the clergy does not count the *Šə'alä Adhəno* BM-09 as a 'St. Luke Icon'. Still, it has been assigned the status of an intercessory image in times of drought

<sup>50</sup> SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered," 208.

<sup>51</sup> SPENCER, 207.



and epidemic – similarly to the icons BM-03 and BM-04, the icon is carried into the surrounding countryside.<sup>52</sup>

Item BM-10: ‘Eleusa’ IES-4231

Nearly identical in both iconography as well as style to the *Šə’alä Adhəno* BM-09 is an ‘Eleusa’ plate now in possession of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Fig. BM-10).<sup>53</sup> According to IES records, the icon came from the region of Bāgemdər in west-central Ethiopia before it appeared on the Addis Ababa art market.

The two icons, BM-09 and BM-10, are for the most part indistinguishable: only the forehead of Christ is drawn in a slightly more slanted fashion with a single lock of hair falling across his brow in BM-09,

while his eyes look directly at the viewer. The shape of the folds of the cloth, which are richly and sumptuously painted in both BM-09 and BM-10, are identical. This suggests both objects shared a pricked cartoon or *anthibolon* – a perforated pattered used for tracing the designs of works for quick and efficient reproductions in Cretan workshops.<sup>54</sup> It appears probable that both BM-09 and



BM-10: ‘Eleusa’ icon set in a wooden frame, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, Nr. 4231, DEEDS Database.

<sup>52</sup> SPENCER, 207.

<sup>53</sup> Unknown artist, Virgin with Child, tempera and gold on panel, late 15th to early 16th century, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, Inventory Number: IES-4231, size: 29x23 (panel).

<sup>54</sup> For this particular workshop practice and its significance see Angeliki LYMBEROPOULOU, “The Noli Me Tangere Icon at the British Museum,” in *Images of the Byzantine World. Visions, Messages and Meanings. Studies Presented to Leslie BRUBAKER*, ed. Angeliki LYMBEROPOULOU (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 185–214. Also see “Will of the Painter Angelos Akotantos”, cited and translated in full in Maria VASSILAKI, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 61–63.



BM-10 are products of the same workshop, and thus products of the same place and time. BM-10 has been dated by the curators of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies to the 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup> Currently, the icon BM-10 is set in a frame with an ornamental semi-circular extension. Though fitted to the icon panel itself, it appears to be a later addition.

#### Item BM-11: 'Eleusa' as part of a diptych

Amongst the items from private collections published by Jacques Mercier is also a post-Byzantine icon of the 'Eleusa' style which was later turned into the right wing of a diptych (Fig. BM-11).<sup>56</sup> While somewhat similar to the Western-style *Eleusa* icons BM-05 and BM-08 of Tādbabā Maryam, this Cretan artwork offers an interesting mix of Western iconography and partially Byzantine style: the Virgin is painted tenderly cheek to cheek with the Child on her right arm, and the Child embraces her with both hands. Mary herself is depicted in a mixed manner – there is a white veil visible underneath her embroidered red mantle and her dark green tunic trimmed in gold, but a significant Western element – that of a brooch adorning her clothing – is missing. The Child is covered in striking orange cloth, with rich, starkly drawn golden accents of folds. While Mary's maphorion drapes around her in softly flowing Western-style folds, the folds in Christ's tunic are starkly set off in geometric lines of gold. On the gilded background, the letters MP and IXCX, as well as ω, are inscribed in red. The engaged frame<sup>57</sup> of this icon as well as holes for binding hinges on both sides indicate that the icon was originally part of a triptych before being re-set as a diptych. It stands to reason that both original triptych wings were lost; instead, a

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The technique was also well-known and well-established in Renaissance Italy from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards: Megan HOLMES, "Copying Practices and Marketing Strategies in a Fifteenth-Century Florentine Painter's Workshop," in *Artistic Exchange and Cultural Translation in the Italian Renaissance City*, ed. Stephen J. CAMPBELL and Stephen J. MILNER (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38–74; VASSILAKI, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete*, 343.

<sup>55</sup> CHOJNACKI and GOSSAGE, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Addis Ababa University*, 172. Also stated in HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 147. This is based on Chojnacki's much older unpublished IES catalogue.

<sup>56</sup> Unknown artists, Diptych with St. George and Virgin and Child, tempera and gold on panel, late 15<sup>th</sup> to late 16<sup>th</sup> century, private collection; size: 12x20cm; Mercier, *L'arche Éthiopienne: Art Chrétien d'Éthiopie*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> An 'engaged frame' denotes that the outer edges of the wood are slightly raised while the main part of the panel is carved out by some millimetres. This prevents damage to the image when a diptych or triptych is closed.





BM-11: Unknown artists, Diptych with St. George and Virgin and Child, tempera and gold on panel, late 15th to late 16th century, private collection; size: 12x20cm; Mercier 2001.

mid-to-late 16<sup>th</sup>-century painting of St. George has been attached to the post-Byzantine icon as the left wing of a diptych. Mercier indiscriminately dates the diptych to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> This dating should be refuted with confidence: after all, the left wing of the diptych was specifically manufactured as a matching side panel to the post-Byzantine icon – as indicated by its exact matching size and binding holes – sometime in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century already. By that point, the original wings of the necessarily older post-Byzantine triptych had already been lost or damaged. This affirms the presence of the icon in Ethiopia by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

Item BM-12: *Šə'al gəbsawit*, 'the Egyptian Picture'

Contrary to its name, the *Šə'al gəbsawit*, 'the Egyptian picture', located at Däbrä Jämädo Maryam in Lasta,<sup>59</sup> is another post-Byzantine Cretan icon of the Virgin Mary. It is the centre panel of a triptych that also features John the Evangelist and John the Baptist on its lateral wings (Fig. BM-12). The centre panel is a post-Byz-

<sup>58</sup> MERCIER, *L'arche Éthiopienne: Art Chrétien d'Éthiopie*, 109.

<sup>59</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 80–81.



antine icon following the 'Galaktotrophousa' or *Maria Lactans* iconography. Some Western influences are traceable: while Mary's head is missing the white veil of the Western fashion, her red mantle is richly adorned with golden stars and golden edgings on her grey-green tunic. The Western element of the brooch is missing. The blond, suckling Christ is sitting on her right arm, grabbing her breast with both hands. He is clothed in a white, star-studded tunic with a red mantle at his feet. On the gilded background, two angels – again richly dressed in gold-patterned green and red clothing – are supporting Mary's pointillé halo.

The icon is set in an engaged frame, and the lateral panels of the triptych are part of the original design of the icon. On the left panel, John the Baptist is depicted on a rich blue background with golden ornamentation. His brown hair is carefully drawn and his face and beard meticulously shaded; a gilded double-nimbus surrounds his head. He is wearing a blue tunic and an orange mantle held by a golden brooch on his chest, partially draped over his right arm. A long processional golden cross is set on his side, and a winding scroll with Greek letters is in his right hand. On the right wing, John the Evangelist is standing against a similarly blue background with golden ornamentation. His grey beard, hair and face are carefully drawn and shaded, and also surrounded by a gilded nimbus. Wearing a simple blue tunic and a rose-coloured cloak, the Evangelist is presenting a book in both his hands. The sumptuous clothing and finely shaded faces suggest a 'Western-style' clientele, just like the white clothing of the blond Christ is synonymous with Italian-Cretan iconography for an Italian viewership. The available photograph does not allow an independent verification, but according to Diana Spencer and several experts consulted by her, the Greek writing on the scroll in John the Baptist's hand is defective. Featuring several spelling mistakes, it 'was clearly intended to read: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Bearer of the sins of the World."<sup>60</sup> While the icon itself is thus adhering to Western styles particularly in demand in the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century, a certain pseudo-Byzantine appearance was added to the painting through this legible but ultimately incorrect Greek writing. This artificiality, where a competently executed post-Byzantine painting features defective or negligently added Greek writing, suggests an origin in one of the Italo-Cretan workshops with a mass-output of post-Byzantine icons intended for a Western European market around 1500.<sup>61</sup>

As the name suggests, the local clergy believed that the *Šā'al gəbšawit* originated in Egypt and was painted by the hand of St. Luke. It was also believed to possess miraculous powers 'similar to those of the Se'el Adheno at Tādbabā Maryam<sup>62</sup> and brought out at the threat of calamity by the clergy.

<sup>60</sup> See note 21 in Spencer, 82.

<sup>61</sup> Compare VASSILAKI, *The Painter Angelos and Icon-Painting in Venetian Crete*.

<sup>62</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 82.





BM-12: *Šā' al gəbšawit*, Däbrä Jämädo Maryam church, Lasta; Spencer 1972.

Item BM-13: *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' of Samu'el Zä-Q<sup>w</sup>oyäša

A post-Byzantine Cretan icon with an extensive inscription was mentioned by Marilyn E. Heldman as present in the church of 'Däbrä Sahel' in Šire in northern Təgray<sup>63</sup> but appears to have been relocated by the clergy to the church of Samu'el Zä-Q<sup>w</sup>oyäša, also in Šire.<sup>64</sup> It is severely damaged, but clearly identifiable as a variant of the *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' depicting the Virgin and the Child, with typical Western modifications: the Virgin is seated in three-quarter view to the beholder, with her head inclined to the left side of the picture, the Child on her right arm. She is wearing a velvety, deep red maphorion with rich gold-colour edgings and a white wimple veil on her forehead above a dark green robe also ornamented with gold accents. A wide red brooch connects her mantle on her breast, and her halo is worked in pointillé technique on the gold background. The Child sports blond curls and is clothed in a bright red mantle over a yellow-brown tunic. He is facing away from his mother, holding

<sup>63</sup> HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Seyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 146; HELDMAN, "St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia."

<sup>64</sup> According to photograph information from the Mazgaba Seelat database; Ref: MG-2000.047:022.



the viewer's gaze at a level. In his left hand, he holds a sizeable golden orb, while the right is extended in a gesture of blessing. The background is fully gilded, and traces of a Greek letter are discernible in the upper right corner. A long inscription runs to the left and right of the head of the Virgin. Although the icon is severely damaged, a portion referring to *aše Ləbnä Dəngəl* as the donor of the icon to the monastery of Däbrä Q<sup>w</sup>oyäša, where it remains to this day, can be identified in the upper right corner.<sup>65</sup> Marilyn Heldman has suggested that the icon is a variant of a type originating at the workshop of Nikolaos Tsafouris,<sup>66</sup> who signed and dated icons of the same iconography in Crete in the 1490s before his death in 1501.<sup>67</sup> It appears to be a faithful copy of Tsafouris' model, albeit at a far smaller scale: most of Tsafouris' *Madre della Consolazione* icons were of a sizeable 73x55cm format, but the icon in Samu'el Zä-Q<sup>w</sup>oyäša measures less than half of that at just 32x23.5cm. The dedicatory inscription of *aše Ləbnä Dəngəl* would suggest a time of arrival of the icon in Ethiopia sometime between the majority of Ləbnä Dəngəl in the mid-1510s and 1529, the year the wars between the Christian Solomonic kingdom and the troops of Imam Aḥmad gained traction.

#### Item BM-14: The miracle-working 'Hodegetria' of Gundä Gunde

Lastly, a post-Byzantine Cretan Marian icon is now in possession of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies under the inventory number IES 7010 (Fig. BM-14).<sup>68</sup> Until 1927, it was the property of the famous monastery of Gundä Gunde. Save for a long vertical break, the icon is a well-preserved, beautifully executed example of the *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' type, with the Virgin holding the

<sup>65</sup> Heldman also stated that the icon was only 'said to have been given to the monastery by the emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl' instead of being inscribed; HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 146. The inscription is also mentioned in Stanislaw CHOJNACKI, "New Discoveries: The Italianate School Reconsidered," in *Ethiopian Art: A Unique Cultural Heritage and Modern Challenge*, ed. Stanislaw CHOJNACKI, Walter RAUNIG, and Asfa-Wossen ASSERATE (Lublin: Orbis Aethiopicus, 2007), 7.

<sup>66</sup> HELDMAN, "St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia," 126.

<sup>67</sup> Nikolaos TSAFOURIS, *Madre della Consolazione*, tempera and gold on panel, 1490s, private collection; size: 73 cm x 55 cm. See [http://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/t/tsafouri/\[01.01.2020\]](http://www.wga.hu/html_m/t/tsafouri/[01.01.2020]).

<sup>68</sup> Also published but not further analysed in HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 129, 145, fig. 75.





BM-13: *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria', Samu'el Zä-Qwoyāša monastery, Šire; DEEDS Database.



*Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria', (detail with royal inscription), Samu'el Zä-Qwoyāša monastery, Šire; DEEDS Database.



Child on her right arm, draped in a red robe with the typical 'Western' iconographic elements. The Child is clothed in richly adorned clothes, wearing a green tunic with golden stars and a red mantle with a floral pattern. He is holding what must have been a big golden orb – the paint now dull and peeled – in his left hand and extends the right in blessing. The background is part-gilded and partially worked as a rich, patterned green canopy of gold pointillé. Two angels in red-coloured medallions are painted onto the upper gilded background, which also features the Greek initials MP and ΘY for *Theotokos*, 'God-bearer'. The icon is first mentioned on fol. 34r of the Acts of Isayyyas, the sixth abbot of Gundä Gunde,<sup>69</sup> whose Acts were composed at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. According to this text, an infertile woman confided her worries to Abba Isayyyas, and 'he gave her holy water which had first been sprinkled on the image of Our Lady Mary, Mother of God, painted in gold.'<sup>70</sup> Having drunk the water, the woman returned home and immediately conceived. As the icon is thus already listed as a famous, miracle-working piece of property of the Gunda Gunde monastery by 1554, it stands to reason that it had been acquired in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and been brought to Gundä Gunde either prior to or during the wars of the 1530s.<sup>71</sup>

Items BM-15 to BM-23 – post-Byzantine icons  
attested to in scholarship and sources

A number of post-Byzantine icons other than the above are also referred to in scholarship and Ethiopian sources yet no photographic images of them are currently available. Among these is an icon called the *Mäñkär hayla* (BM-15), which translates to 'the Power of her Miracle'.<sup>72</sup> According to Seifesellassie Yohanis, the *Mäñkär hayla* is also called 'the Speaking Image' by the local clergy due to its intercessory powers: 'in the past, Our Lady used to speak through her image to

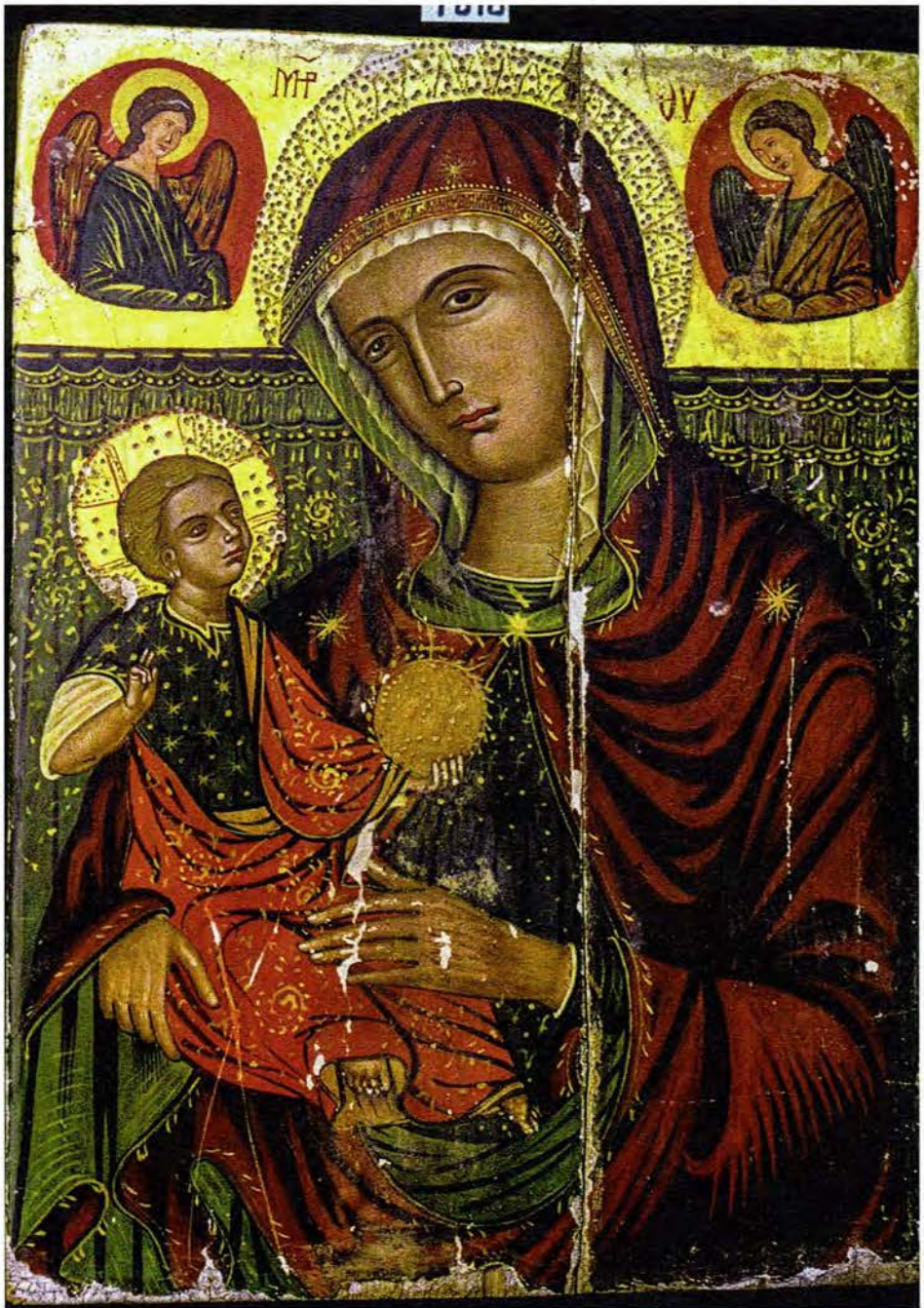
<sup>69</sup> Born 1485 in Ba'ata Qays in Agamé.

<sup>70</sup> "Quand elle eut dit ceci il lui donna de l'eau bénite, en ayant d'abord aspergé l'image de Notre-Dame, Marie, mère de Dieu, peinte en or. Ayant bu cette eau, elle retourna à la maison et conçut immédiatement par la prière de ce vieillard bienheureux qui fut élu par Dieu." Aleksander FERENC, "Les Actes d'Isaïe de Gunda-Gundé," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 10 (1976): 243.

<sup>71</sup> This dating is also supported by Marilyn E. Heldman. See HELDMAN, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Šeyon: A Study of Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, 145.

<sup>72</sup> While the icon was not photographed, for simplicity, clarity and control data purposes, these description-only icons are assigned call numbers like the above.





BM-14: Miracle-working *Hodegetria* of Gunda Gunde, Unknown artist, *Hodegetria*, tempera and gold on panel, ca. 1500, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, Inventory Number: IES-7010; DEEDS Database.



the priests and the believers.<sup>73</sup> He states it as located in the monastery of Wašära Maryam in the Q<sup>w</sup>arit district of Western Goğğam,<sup>74</sup> an old monastery famous as a centre for *qane*-poetry. Similar to the icon of *Wäynut* BM-01, it is described as a *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' icon.

Diana Spencer also described other post-Byzantine Cretan Marian icons she either had heard of or seen, but not photographed, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not photographed by Spencer in Tädbabä Maryam in Amhara Sayənt was a triptych in a 'foreign style of which the left panel [was] missing' (BM-16). According to Spencer's description, it also was a post-Byzantine icon of the *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' type, with the Virgin holding the Child on her right arm, draped in a red robe and crowned, with two angels supporting her halo in the background. 'The Child's right hand is raised in blessing, and in His left hand He holds an orb. On the right panel is the full-length figure of St. Peter in semi-profile'.<sup>75</sup> The painting of St. Peter is stated as similar in style to the side panel the *Šə'algabšawit* of Däbrä Jämädo in Lasta (Fig. BM-12), which can be assigned to a mass-producing Cretan workshop active around 1500.

Furthermore, a post-Byzantine Cretan icon called the *Oho Bāhalit*, translated as 'the (female) One who says Yes' (BM-17)<sup>76</sup> was located in 'the monastery of Jebala' in the 'district of Gojaman' in Eastern Goğğam according to Seifesellassie Yohanis.<sup>77</sup> When Diana Spencer attempted to investigate in 1969, she was told that the *Oho Bāhalit* 'had been burnt with all the treasury 3 years earlier'<sup>78</sup>, i.e. in 1966. This icon, too, was attributed to the hand of St. Luke by the local clergy; moreover, it was intercessory and granted the wishes of the believers who approached it with a 'submissive spirit'.<sup>79</sup>

According to Alessandro Bausi, the monastery of Däbrä Maryam Q<sup>w</sup>äḥayn in Eritrea furthermore listed 'two golden icons' of the Virgin as well as 'other icons' in their inventory list (BM-18 and BM-19).<sup>80</sup>

Abebaw Ayalew states that he saw a so-called 'St. Luke Icon' called the *Emä Məḥrät*, 'the Mother of Mercy' (BM-20) in Yäwäyzzərt Kidanä Məḥrät Church in Q<sup>w</sup>älläla, Eastern Goğğam, Central Ethiopia during his fieldwork there in

<sup>73</sup> See SEIFESELLASSIE YOHANIS, "Holy Images in the Church," 58.

<sup>74</sup> ፈረስ ቤትና ቋሪት; see SEIFESELLASSIE YOHANIS, 58.

<sup>75</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 88.

<sup>76</sup> Claire BOSC-TIESSÉ and Marie-Laure DERAT, "De la mort à la fabrique du saint dans l'Éthiopie médiévale et moderne," *Afriques*, no. 03 (December 27, 2011): para. 38, <https://doi.org/10.4000/afriques.1076>.

<sup>77</sup> See SEIFESELLASSIE YOHANIS, "Holy Images in the Church," 59.

<sup>78</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 85.

<sup>79</sup> SEIFESELLASSIE YOHANIS, "Holy Images in the Church," 59.

<sup>80</sup> Alessandro BAUSI, "Su Alcuni Manoscritti Presso Comunità Monastiche Dell'Eritrea," *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 38 (1996): 36.



2001-02.<sup>81</sup> He subsequently also mentions two other post-Byzantine Cretan icons (BM-21 and BM-22) present in the Monastery of Marṭulä Maryam in Eastern Goḡgam. Both are described by him as depictions of the Virgin with Child, with BM-21 in 'a bad state of preservation' but showing 'great similarity to [...] Wäynut, Sərgut and the Şəgge Rāda' in terms of style – the *Madre della Consolazione* 'Hodegetria' icons BM-01, BM-02 and BM-03, respectively. He describes the iconography of BM-22 in a manner that hints at peculiarities: 'The Child appears to the left of the Virgin. He does not hold an orb. Neither does he give a blessing by a raised hand and pointed fingers [...] his hand rests gently on the left shoulder of the Virgin. His shoulders are naked.'<sup>82</sup> Ababaw moreover describes what is quite clearly a pointillé nimbus on the gilded background; his description concludes by adding that while the object was not believed to be a 'St. Luke Icon' by the local clergy, it was thought to have been 'brought to the church from Jerusalem in the period of Emperor Dawit.'<sup>83</sup> The other foreign icon, BM-22, was reported to be stolen by the church authorities in 2002.<sup>84</sup>

Lastly, the chronicle of the reign of Iyasu II and Iyo'a expounds on a beautiful icon of the Virgin Mary that had been brought to Ethiopia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Interestingly, it is narrated as being much more beautiful than the already-present and famous 'ones that are at Däbrä Səmmuna, Däbrä Wärq, Getesemani, Marṭulä Maryam and Tädbabä Maryam.'<sup>85</sup> As all other listed icons here are *Madre della Consolazione* 'St. Luke Icons' of post-Byzantine origin, it stands to reason that the monastery of Däbrä Səmmuna once also possessed a post-Byzantine icon of the Virgin Mary of Cretan origin (BM-23). It stands to reason that this object would date from the same time as the 'St. Luke Icons' of the other enumerated monasteries – i.e. the late 15<sup>th</sup> or early 16<sup>th</sup> century.

## II. Icons of Jesus Christ and Saints

Item BC-01: *Kʷər'atä rə'äsu*

Also located in Wafä Iyäsus in the Goḡgam region of Central Ethiopia is a triptych locally called the *Kʷər'atä rə'äsu*, 'the Striking of his Head' (Fig. BC-01). A post-Byzantine Cretan icon is set as centre-piece into a faux-triptych; two Ethiopian *färānḡ*-style panels depicting Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea have

<sup>81</sup> See ABEBAW AYALEW, 'A History of Paintings in East Gojjam in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Study of the 'Second Gondärine' Style of Painting,' 24.

<sup>82</sup> ABEBAW AYALEW, 25.

<sup>83</sup> ABEBAW AYALEW, 25.

<sup>84</sup> ABEBAW AYALEW, 26.

<sup>85</sup> Ignazio GUIDI, *Annales Regum Iyäsus II et Iyo'as* (Leuven: Peeters, 1954), 105–6.



been added as lateral wings to the frame of the centrepiece. The inset icon depicts Christ standing in an open grave – his torso is naked and shaded dramatically, white drawers with dark stripes are slung low on his hips. His hands, showing the stigmata of the cross, are crossed low in front of his body, and the Longinus-cut is visible on his right ribcage. Christ's hair is brown, long and flowing in curls on his shoulders. A cruciform nimbus adorns his head. There is no crown of thorns. Behind him, an architectural structure can be discerned, with several panels of varying shades of green leading up to a triangular gilded background underneath a richly patterned, raised curtain. The wooden grave is drawn rectangular and in perspective; arabesque ornamentation adorns its front. Next to Christ's shoulders, the letters IC and XC are written in gold. Above his head, an ornate plate with the Latin letters INRI is visible.

On the left wing, Nicodemus is depicted barefoot against a flat red and green background. He is clothed in a blue tunic with a purple-red mantle, and a bright yellow halo surrounds his head. His beard and hair are drawn in grey curls, his arms cross in front of his body, and a golden orb – evidently his attribute, the box of spices – is held in his right hand. On the right wing, a barefoot Joseph of Arimathea is painted against a flat green and red background. Like Nicodemus, his head is surrounded by a halo; he is dressed in inverted colours of a purple-red tunic underneath a red-blue mantle. His grey beard and hair are drawn straight. His crossed hands hold a bale of transparent white cloth spilling out of an opaque white bundle – depicting his own attribute, the Shroud of Christ.<sup>86</sup>

The post-Byzantine icon appears to be firmly set into a custom-made frame as the centre panel of the triptych. This frame was carefully attached to the side wings, which were undoubtedly custom-fitted to frame this Cretan icon in Ethiopia. The depictions of Joseph and Nicodemus on these lateral wings are products of an artist working in an Ethiopian 'Italianate' or *färäng*-style – the same style found on the wings of the faux-triptychs of the *Wäynut* BM-01 and *Sərgut* BM-02, which dates to the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> century. The status of the icon as a 'St. Luke Icon' was disputed amongst the local priests when Spencer interviewed them on the matter in 1973, but the icon was generally held to be miraculous. It was also believed to have been brought 'by Emperor Dawit from Egypt' while others stated that it had been brought by a certain '*abuna* Asequä Dengel from Jerusalem'.<sup>87</sup> As mentioned above, BC-01 was understood as a companion piece to the *Šə'alä Adhəno*, the Cretan icon of the Eleusa (Fig. BM-09) also present in the monastery of Wafä Iyäsus.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>86</sup> See SPENCER, "Travels in Gojjam: St. Luke Ikons and Brancaleon Re-Discovered," 207.

<sup>87</sup> SPENCER, 207.

<sup>88</sup> SPENCER, 207.





BC-01: The *Kʷərʾatä rəʾäsu*, Wafä Iyäsus monastery, Goğgam; Spencer 1972; DEEDS Database.

Item BC-02: Miraculous Triptych – *Christ Pantokrator*

Located in a small church called Tādbabä Mādhane Alām, on the same escarpment as the monastery of Tādbabä Maryam in the Amhara Sayənt region of Central Ethiopia, is a post-Byzantine Cretan triptych following the Byzantine *Christ Pantokrator* iconography (Fig. BC-02). Of considerable size – Spencer gives its width as 90cm –, the centre panel shows the adult Christ in a richly painted red tunic adorned with golden floral and geometric patterns, a gilded mantle with flowers draped over his left shoulder. He presents a book in his left hand; Gəʼəz writing was presumably added later to the blank pages. His right hand is raised in a gesture of blessing. His face is finely shaded, with long, curly hair and a double-pointed beard, reminiscent of classical Byzantine iconography. Behind Christ in the background are four figures, two on each side, depicted in close proximity with their hands indicating an animated discussion. The head of an angel with the tips of the wings is in the upper part of the top left, on the mirroring right, only the tips of wings are drawn in, leaving the icon not wholly finished. All figures feature haloes worked in pointillé on the gilded background; Christ himself is adorned with a big, cruciform pointillé nimbus.



On the left wing of the triptych, a standing, dark-haired angel in a golden tunic with a blue mantle and multi-coloured wings is depicted against the gilded background; the angel has raised his right hand and is indicating the figure of Christ on the central panel. On the right wing, a mirroring angel is depicted; however, his hand is raised in a gesture above his chest and not pointing at Christ. As the central panel is set in an engaged frame, this object was originally constructed as a triptych. The internal dynamic of the image – with the left-sided angel pointing at the figure of Christ – furthermore suggests that the triptych was intentionally composed in this manner.

According to Spencer, the ‘the wide staring eyes’ would follow the observer ‘in whichever direction one stands’.<sup>89</sup> This indicates an optical illusion technique created through painting the eyes of Christ on the ‘golden mean line’ in a face looking straight ahead. Partially due to this feature, the local clergy credited the icon with miraculous powers, and it was ‘credited in particular with the power of curing the affliction of barrenness’<sup>90</sup> in a similar vein to the previously discussed *Madre della Consolazione* icon BM-14 of Gundä Gunde.

While the icon itself is in its iconography purely Orthodox, the style and depiction of the angels on the lateral wings are highly unusual for a Greek Orthodox icon. The delineation of the face of Christ suggests a Black Sea environment workshop for a Western viewership, as would the very opulent, even exaggerated depiction of Christ’s clothing, with its starkly delineated, vibrant and interlocking patterns that mirror a stylized Western courtly attire.<sup>91</sup> This clothing itself is thoroughly unusual for depictions of the *Christ Pantokrator*; usually, he is painted in a dark or red tunic with a blue mantle draped over one shoulder. The clear-cut and classical garb of the angels on the lateral panels, however, are suggestive of mid-15<sup>th</sup> century Renaissance tastes. Overall, however, this triptych is hard to place in time and origin, as the painter’s style and choice of iconography are most certainly at odds with each other.

#### Item BC-03: *Christ Pantokrator* – Christ in Majesty

Another large post-Byzantine Cretan icon panel depicting a *Christ Pantokrator* (Fig. BC-03) is housed in the monastery of Tădbabä Maryam, not far from BC-02. Measuring some 100x75cm and being thus unusually large, the icon also

<sup>89</sup> SPENCER, “In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia,” 76–77.

<sup>90</sup> SPENCER, 76–77.

<sup>91</sup> A number of art historians I consulted for this icon have suggested a workshop in a Genoese colony in the Black Sea region as a possible point of origin for the icon; I thank Sarah Guérin, Nicholas Herman and Margarita Voulgaropoulou for their expertise.





BC-02: Miraculous Triptych (*Christ Pantokrator*), Tādbabā Mādhane Alām church, Amhara Sayānt; Spencer 1972.

depicts a *Christ Pantokrator* following the uniquely Western ‘Christ in Majesty’ iconography.<sup>92</sup> Regrettably, only one comparatively poor black/white photograph is available at this point. Christ is seated on a richly adorned throne with a wide, circular patterned back. On the base of the throne, two crowned kings are painted as donors. Two figures of angels moreover adorn each armrest of the throne; they bow towards the central figure of Christ. Christ, meanwhile, is holding an open book with blank pages in his left hand. His right is raised in a gesture of blessing very similar to BC-02. His bare feet are visible on what appears to be a footstool or cushion of two circles at the base of the throne; he is richly garbed in dark vestments with golden linings and ornate trimmings. A starkly gilded halo surrounds his head, which is painted in delicate shading, with long, curly hair and a pointed beard. In the background, two Cherubim with their custo-

<sup>92</sup> Opposed to the Byzantine iconography of the *Deesis*, where he would also be enthroned, but additionally flanked by the Virgin and John the Baptist or even other saints and angels. Spencer identified the icon as ‘of the Byzantine style’ but stated that the picture had ‘not yet been identified except as not being from any recognized Greek or Russian school of painting’. The iconography clearly reveals BC-03 as clearly neither Byzantine in style nor of distinct Greek or Russian origin, however; SPENCER, “In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia,” 76.





BC-03: *Christ Pantokrator* / "Christ in Majesty", Tādbabā Maryam monastery, Amhara Sayənt; Spencer 1972.

mary four wings appear to be holding open scrolls; two circular inserts at the top of the panel feature other unidentifiable figures depicted in profile. Although not readily discernible on the photograph itself, Spencer has stated that the two 'crowned figures' on the sides of the throne are looking up at Christ from their lowly base and that the 'picture is painted in elegant shades of red, indigo and green'. Furthermore, on 'either side of His head the abbreviated words Jesus Christ are written in Greek lettering'.<sup>93</sup> An unusual piece in itself, the icon follows Western iconography and includes typical elements – e. g. the two donors; the Greek letters, however, suggest a workshop in the eastern Mediterranean. As three other post-Byzantine Cretan Marian icons (Figs. BM-04, BM-05 and BM-08) are to be found in the same monas-

tory, all dating from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century and originating from similar workshops, it stands to reason that this icon might have been imported at the same time. Furthermore, the Ethiopian Solomonic queen Admas Mogäsa, wife of *aše* Minas,<sup>94</sup> had commissioned a reproduction of the *Christ Pantokrator* icon BC-03 of Tādbabā Maryam already during Minas' reign in the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>95</sup> All would indicate that this icon had reached Ethiopia by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century at the latest.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> SPENCER, 76.

<sup>94</sup> Son of *aše* Ləbnä Dəngəl and *nəguš* of Ethiopia from 1559–1563.

<sup>95</sup> Stanislaw CHOJNACKI, "Geschichte Der Tafelmalerei in Äthiopien Vom 15.–20. Jahrhundert," in *Äthiopien – Christentum Zwischen Orient Und Afrika: Aus Anlass Der Sonderausstellung 'Äthiopien – Christentum Zwischen Orient Und Afrika', 11. Oktober 2002–12. Dezember 2003 Im Staatlichen Museum Für Völkerkunde München*, ed. Girma Fisseha (Munich: Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, 2002), 48.

<sup>96</sup> The copy of this icon could be the one now in the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, München, Inventory Number SMVM 86-307675.



## Items BC-04 to BC-06

Several other 'Byzantine' icons of either Jesus Christ or different Saints are attested to in written sources only. In Tädbabä Maryam, in addition to the three Byzantine Marian icons BM-04, BM-05 and BM-08 as well as the Christ BC-03, another Cretan icon of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is attested to through the accounts of Diana Spencer. This icon, BC-04, shows 'the Murder of Zacharia in the Temple', with Zacharia clothed in a red cloak and flowing hair and beard. Standing behind him is a young man dressed in the clothes of a Roman centurion with his helmet falling off. He is dramatically portrayed in the act of cutting the saint's throat.<sup>97</sup>

Regrettably, no photograph of this rather unusual post-Byzantine icon is currently available. Spencer assumed it belonged to a Cretan school of the 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>98</sup>

In a 1973 article, Stanislaw Chojnacki briefly refers to another 'Greek icon of the 16th century, now in a private collection',<sup>99</sup> which had been found in Ethiopia. It was depicting St. George (BC-05). Again, no photograph is currently available.

During his fieldwork in Goğgam in 2001-02, Abebaw Ayalew also saw and described yet another post-Byzantine Cretan icon (BC-06) in the church of Marṭulä Maryam: it was a 'Lamentation and the martyrdom of St. Sebastian. The body of Christ, the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene constitute the figural composition of the Lamentation. [...] The painting is rendered in perspective'. According to Abebaw Ayalew, the depiction of the body of Christ and St. Sebastian shows a 'deep knowledge of the anatomy of the human body'.<sup>100</sup> He dates the icon, of which he regrettably published no photograph, to the 'Renaissance'.<sup>101</sup>

<sup>97</sup> SPENCER, "In Search of St. Luke Ikons in Ethiopia," 87.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. SPENCER, 87.

<sup>99</sup> Stanislaw CHOJNACKI, "The Iconography of St. George in Ethiopia: Part II: St. George the Dragon-Killer," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 11, no. 2 (1973): 72.

<sup>100</sup> ABEBAW AYALEW, "A History of Paintings in East Gojjam in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Study of the 'Second Gondarine' Style of Painting," 26.

<sup>101</sup> ABEBAW AYALEW, 26.



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