
**Treasures of the Lake Zeway Churches and Monastery,
South Central Ethiopia**

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መክብብ ጽሑፍ

የዝዋይ ሐይቅ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም እጅግ ውድ የሆኑ ከታቦታት እስከ ብራና መጻሕፍት፤ ከመስቀሎች እስከ ተለያዩ ንዋያት ቅድሳት የሚያጠቃልሉ የኢትዮጵያ ኦርቶዶክስ ተዋሕዶ ቤተክርስቲያን የመካከለኛው ዘመን ቅርሶችን የያዙ ናቸው። እነዚህ ቅርሶች በ፲ኛውና በ፲፮ኛው መቶ ክፍለ ዘመን በቤተ ክርስቲያኒቱ ላይ በተከሰተው የመከራና የሰማዕትነት ዘመን ምክንያት ንዋየ ቅድሳቱን ከውድመት ለመታደግ በሚል የብስ ላይ ካሉ አብያተ ክርስቲያናት ተሰባስበው ወደ ሐይቁ ደሴቶች የተጋዙ ናቸው። ከቅርሶቹ በአብዛኛው ታቦታት ሲሆኑ፤ በደቡብ ምሥራቅ ኢትዮጵያ የሚገኙ በተለይ ናዝሬት መድኃኔዓለም አንስቶ እስከ ሻሸመኔ ቅዱስ ሚካኤል፤ ከጎልጃ (አርሲ) ቅዱስ ጊዮርጊስ አንስቶ እስከ ኤላ (መቄ ከተማ አጠገብ) ቅዱስ ሚካኤል ያሉ ብዙዎቹ አብያተ ክርስቲያናት ታቦቶቻቸው ከዝዋይ ሐይቅ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም ወጥተው የተተከሉ ናቸው። ይልቁንም በምሥራቅ ኢትዮጵያ በሐረር የሚገኘው የታላቁ የቁልቢ ቅዱስ ገብርኤል ገዳም ታቦት ከእነዚህ የዝዋይ ሐይቅ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም ተወስዶ የተተከለ ነው። በአሁኑ ጊዜ ከእነዚህ ቀደምት ታቦታት የተረፉ ዐርባ ስምንት ታቦታት በሐይቁ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም ይገኛሉ። በብራና መጻሕፍት ረገድ ደግሞ ንግሥት እሌኒና ዐዪ ልብነ ድንግል በአዳል መንግሥት ወረራ ወቅት የጦር መሣሪያ ርዳታ በመሻት ለፖርቹጋል ነገሥታት የጻፏቸው ሁለት የግዕዝ ደብዳቤዎች የተገኙት በእነዚህ በዝዋይ ሐይቅ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም ነው። በተጨማሪም የቅባትና ጸጋ እምነት ተከታዮችን ክርክር ረትቶ በተዋሕዶ እንዲያምኑ ያደረገውን መጽሐፍም ዳግማዊ ዐዪ ምኒልክ ያገኙት በዝዋይ ሐይቅ አብያተ ክርስቲያናትና ገዳም ነው። በአሁኑ ጊዜ የደሴቲቱ አብያተ ክርስቲያናት አርባ አምስት ጥንታውያን የብራና መጻሕፍት ያሏቸው ሲሆን ከነዚህም መካከል ገድለ ቅዱሳን፤ መጽሐፈ ሐኖክና ገድለ ካሌብ በግንባር ቀደምትነት የሚጠቀሱ ናቸው። ሰባቱ የላቲን ፓቴ ቅርጽ የጥንት መስቀሎች፤ ሁለቱ የጥንት ዐውዶች፤ የንግሥት ዘውዲቱ አትሮኑስና የሰማዕቱ አቡነ ጴጥሮስ መቋሚያ በሐይቁ አብያተ ክርስቲያናት የሚገኙ ሌሎች ተጠቃሽ ቅርሶች ናቸው።

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1. Introduction

1.1 Lake Zeway:

An Overview

Lake Zeway is situated in one of the seven Rift Valley Lakes of Ethiopia. It is found at the northern tip of the lakes' region.² It is located at a distance of about 160km, south of Addis Ababa on the main road to the town of Shashemene.³ More specifically, it lies to the east of Zeway town, west of Asella town, south of Mount Bora and north of Mount Alutto.⁴

The Lake is roughly heart-shaped⁵ covering an area of 434km².⁶ Its average depth is 4m and it is the shallowest lake among the seven. In terms of its altitude, however, it is found at the highest elevation in the Rift Valley region located at a height of about 1846m above sea level.⁷

The Lake is fed by two major rivers: Meki and Ketar. The Meki River arises from the Gurage highlands to the northwest and drains into the Lake at its northern edge, while the Ketar river arises from the Arsi plateau to the east and drains into the Lake at its northeastern edge. This inflow is balanced by the outflow of the Bulbula River at the south western edge draining into another Rift Valley lake, 'Abiyata.⁸

The water surface of the Lake is marked by five volcanic islands which are commonly called Gälila, Däbrä Sina, Ṭädəča, Fundurro and Tullu Guddo.⁹ The names of the first two islands are of biblical origin: Galilee and Mount Sinai respectively. While those of the last three are of Oromo origin: Ṭädəča meaning "acacia island," Fundurro meaning "near to the mainland" and Tullu Guddo meaning "big mountain".¹⁰

² Paul B. Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern Christian Outpost and Repository of Medieval Ethiopian Art," *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art* (London: Pinder Press, 1989), p.30; Mäsfən Woldä Marəyam, *An Introductory Geography of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanəna Sälām Printing Press, 1972), p.48.

³ TumaNadamo, "A History of the Zay in the 19th and early 20th centuries," (Addis Ababa University (AAU): BA History Thesis, 1982), p.iv; Täsfaye Edetto, "Socio-economic life of the Zay with special emphasis on the fishing industry," (AAU: BA History Thesis, 1988), p.1; Paul B.Henze, "Lake Zeway and its islands: An Ethiopian Lake where a unique Christian culture has survived since Medieval times," *Ethiopian Observer*, vol. 16, no.2 (1973), p.76.

⁴ Tesfaye, p.1; Tuma, p. iv.

⁵ Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern..." p.32; Paul B. Henze, *Ethiopian Journeys: Travels in Ethiopia, 1969-1972* (Addis Ababa: A Division of Shama P.L.C., 2001), p.111; Tuma, p.iv.

⁶ Mäsfin, p.48.

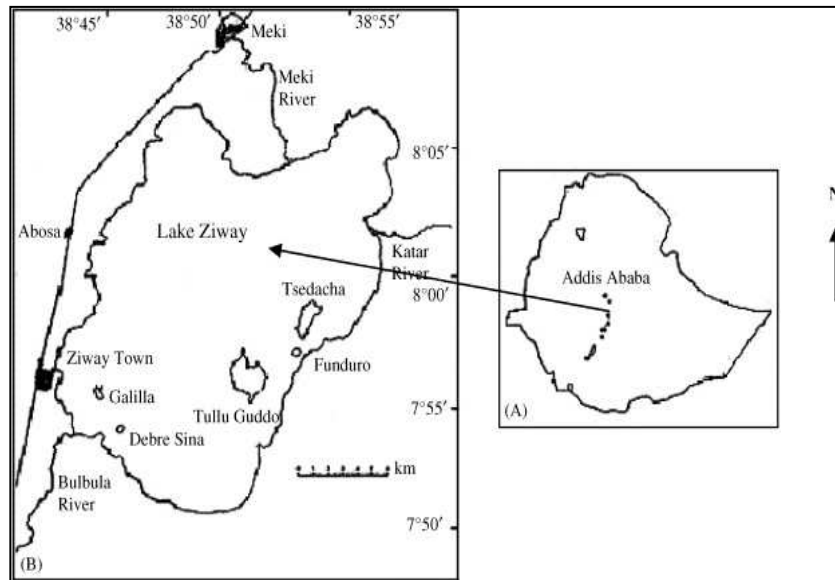
⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Henze, "Lake Zeway and its..." p.76; Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern ..." p.30; Tuma, pp. iv- v; Tesfaye, p.1.

⁹ Von Eike Haberland, *GALLA Sud Ethiopiens* (Verlag W. Kohlhammer GmbH Stuttgart, 1963), p.787; Wolf Leslau, *Zway Ethiopic Documents* (Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden, 1999), p.xvi; Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern..." pp.30-33; Henze, *Ethiopian...* p.111; Tuma, p.v; Henze, "Lake Zway and its..." p.76; Paul B.Henze, "Notes on Lake Zway and its islands, their people, their culture and their history: An illustrated lecture at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES)," *Anthropology Miscellanea I* (1972), p.1.

¹⁰ Henze, "Lake Zway and its..." p.76; Tuma, p.v.

Their original names are, however, Aysut, Famat (Getesemani) and Däbrä Şəyon respectively,¹¹ and unlike the first two original names, the last original name of Däbrä Şəyon is widely used particularly in the spiritual history of the Lake islands,¹² and as its Oromo name proves, the island of Däbrä Şəyon is the biggest of all the five islands in the Lake.¹³



Map of Lake Zeway

Each of the five islands of the Lake houses a single church. The church on Gälila is dedicated to Kahənätä Sämay (The Priests of Heaven),¹⁴ while that on Däbrä şina to Dəngəl Marəyam (the Virgin Mary). The church on ʾTədəča is dedicated to Father Abraham and that on Fundurro to ʾArbaʾetu ʾEnsəsa (Four Beasts of the Apocalypse). The pioneering church at Däbrä Şəyon is dedicated to Şəyon Marəyam (St. Mary of Zion), and it is the site of a monastery unlike the other four churches (which do not have permanent clergy).¹⁵

¹¹ Leslau, *Zeway Ethiopic...* p.xvi; Henze, "Lake Zway: Southern ..." p.31; *Yä Zway Däbrä Şəyon Gädam tarikawi amäṭaṭ ena amäsärarät* (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Press, 1986 E.C.), p.22; *Informants*: Banté Wäldä-Mareyam, Wäldä Amanuʾél (W/Amanuʾél) Mäčīññō, Semé Gäbrä Kidan (G/Kidan), Abunä Natnaʾél, Mälaku Gäbrä Mareyam (G/ Mareyam), Gäbrä Mäsqaḷ (G/Mäsqaḷ) Hirpa and Täsfayé Édätto.

¹² *Informants*: *Ibid.*; Sergew Hable-Sellassie, "Preservation of the Ethiopian Manuscripts in the Ethiopian Church," *Papers Prepared for the Seminar of Ethiopian Studies* (1965), pp.3-4; Sergew Hable-Sellassie, "The Problem of Gudīt," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, vol.x, no.1 (1972), p.117.

¹³ Tuma, p.v; Henze, "Lake Zway: Southern...", p.31; Henze, "Lake Zeway and its...", p.76; *Yä Zway...*p.23; *Spectrum Guide to Ethiopia* (Nairobi: Camerapix Publishers International, 1995), p.159.

¹⁴ Most people usually confuse this name of the Holy Ark with name of the other Holy Ark St. Täklä-Haymanot because of the celebration of the two holy arks on the same date of each month, i.e. on the 24th day of every month according to the Ethiopian calendar.

¹⁵ *Informants*: *Ibid.*, Bädané Tebbéssa, Täsfayé Näbi, Kidanä-Marəyam (K/Mareyam) Dägaga, Aba Asrat Mäkuriya, Bärressa Ago, G/Mäsqaḷ, Wäldä-Mädhen (W/Mädhən) Läta, Zärihun Täklä-Marəyam, Tälafinos Miččo, Aba Läykun Tägäñ, Zäwgä Bädané and W/Amanuʾél; "Bä Iteyopeya yämigäñu abyatäkrestiyānat ena kahenat quter," (A Registration book found in the library of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) patriarch office in Addis Ababa); Henze, "Lake Zway and its...", pp. 78-81; Tuma, p.vii; Tesfaye, p.2; Henze, "Lake Zway: Southern...", pp. 31-33; Leslau, *Zway...* p.xvi; Henze, "Notes on ...", p.1.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Even though it is frequently mentioned in academic literatures that the Lake Zeway churches and the monastery harbor invaluable religious treasures of the EOTC - which were sheltered there during periods of intense persecution in the 10th and 16th centuries, caused by Yodit (also known as Gudit or ʿĪsato) and *Imam* Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al Ghazi (Known as Grañ) respectively -the type and quantities of the treasures harbored in the lake's sacred sites are overlooked, or do not receive much attention in most of the literatures. Even King Sahälä Səllase (1813-47) of Shoa is said to have planned to recover the religious treasures deposited in the Lake Churches and Monastery. His plan remained unsuccessful because of his fear of the Lake hippopotamus. The basic questions upon which the present research was conducted were, therefore, the following:

1. What did the treasures harbor in the Lake churches and monastery consist of (i.e. if possible, their list and quantity)?
2. Which of these treasures are still in existence in the Lake's sacred sites?
3. Which one of the treasures is transferred to other places?

3 Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study is to explore and provide adequate data on the treasures of the Lake Zeway churches and monastery, and to provide documentation which facilitates tracing the historical ownership of the treasures.

Specific objectives are:

- to enumerate and describe accurately the treasures of the Lake Zeway churches and the monastery
- to describe how these treasure are documented
- to indicate where the treasures are transferred to.

1.4 Significance of the study

The present study is intended to provide the following benefits:

- Providing clear and adequate information on the treasures of Lake Zeway churches and monastery, thereby filling the gap in the available historical records regarding the type and quantities of the treasures which were hidden in the Lake churches and monastery since early times.
- promoting wider knowledge of the treasures, thus to stimulate the tourism industry concerning visiting sacred sites of the EOC in general, and the lake's sacred places in particular thereby facilitating the conservation efforts of historical heritage.
- To lay the foundation for further studies on patrimony of the area, especially the Lake's treasures.

1.5 Methodology

In addition to the critical analysis of both archival and literary sources, interviews were conducted individually with 25 selected informants who were considered to be knowledgeable concerning relevant issues, using standardized open ended questions Attempts were also made to make the interviews informal and longitudinal so as to give time and freedom to the informants to thoroughly think over the questions. All information gathered was, therefore, crosschecked carefully by interviewing similar informants, referring to archival sources and reviewing the relevant literature. For controversial issues, informants were interviewed in groups. The same method was used for issues which were no longer well remembered.

2. THE TREASURES

2.1 Holy Arks

Despite the absence of sources providing exact numerical information, a large number of the nearby mainland churches, particularly those stretching from the town of Adama to that of Shashemene and also those around the town of Assela, are believed to have been sanctified by the Holy Arks brought from the Lake Zeway churches and the monastery.¹⁶ The two most widely known of these mainland churches are the Mädhane 'Aläm churches at Adama and Alem Tena,¹⁷ others include Qəddus Mika'él and Qəddus Giyorgis churches at Meki, Qəddus Gäbre'él church at Wäyyo, 'Abunä Täklä Haymanot church at Abosa,¹⁸ Qəddəst Marəyam and Qəddus Mika'él churches at Šašāmāne¹⁹, Qəddus Giyorgis church at Golja²⁰ and the two aforementioned churches of Qəddəst Marəyam and Qəddus Mika'él at Adami Tullu and Bočésa respectively. It is nevertheless, impossible to establish from which of the five Lake churches the Holy Arks of the mainland churches were taken, except for the Qəddus Giyorgis Holy Ark of Meki - Qəddəst Marəyam, the Holy Ark of Adami Tullu and Qəddus Mika'él Holy Ark of Bočésa which were taken from the Šeyon Marəyam church of the monastery of Däbrä Šeyon,²¹ Dəngl Marəyam church of Däbrä Sina and Kahənatä Sämay church of Gälila respectively.

Abba Əsayəyas, a monk from outside this area, is well remembered for having been instrumental in bringing most of the above mentioned Holy Arks to mainland churches from the sacred sites in or around the Lake. He lived in the first half of the twentieth century and used to make frequent visits to the island churches in order to perform spiritual services.²³

Apart from the above mentioned Holy Arks of the nearby mainland churches, one of the most prominent Holy Arks of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church, that of Qulləbbi Qəddus Gäbre'él, also traces its origins to the Lake Zeway churches, specifically to the former – Tabotä Əyyäsus Church of the monastery of Däbrä Šeyon.²⁴ The Holy Ark was brought to the island together with the Holy Ark of the Covenant during the years of destruction wrought by Yodit.²⁵ When the Holy Ark of the Covenant was returned to Aksum, however, the Holy Ark of Gäbrə'él, which was believed to have been engraved by St. Mark the evangelist,²⁶ was left at the island church without being noticed.²⁷

¹⁶ *Informants*: Banté, Semé G/Kidan, Mälaku, G/Mäsqäl, Täsfayé Näbi, Täsfayé Édätto, Zäwgä, Bädané, Bärressa, Fäyiso Féllö, Hinséné Waqé, W/Mika'él Jima, Aba Asrat, H/Giyorgis Asé, K/Mareyam Dägaga, Tadässä Ašé, Zärihun and Tälafinos; ErgätäQal, p.8.

¹⁷ *Informants*: *Ibid.*, except W/Mika'él, H/Giyorgis, K/Mareyam and Tadässä.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, W/Mika'él, H/Giyorgis, K/Mareyam and Tadässä.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, except Täsfayé Édätto, Fäyiso, Hinséné, H/Giyorgis, K/Mareyam and Tadässä.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Täsfayé Édätto, Fäyiso, Hinséné, H/Giyorgis, K/Mareyam, Tadässä but W/Mika'él.

²¹ "Mäšəhafä Genzät," At the same island monastery of Däbrä Šeyon. The church was established in 1932/33.

²² *Informants*: *Ibid.*, W/Mika'él.

²³ *Ibid.* It was the same monk, Aba Isayeyas, who took the above Qəddus Giyorgis holy ark of Meki from the Šeyon Mareyam church of the monastery of Däbrä Šeyon in 1932/33. See "Mäšəhafä Genzät" of the same island monastery.

²⁴ *Informants*: *Ibid.* Abunä Natna'él. Initially, the church at the monastery of Däbrä Šeyon was dedicated to the holy ark of Tabotä Əyyäsus. It was Emperor Mənilk II, who later changed and dedicated the church to the holy ark of St Mary of Zion in the 1890s.

²⁵ Ergätä-Qal, p.8; Dane'él Kebrät, *Yä Bétäkrestiyān Mārəjawoč* (Addis Abāba: Mahebarä Qedusan, 1999 E.C.) pp. 203 and 402.

²⁶ Ergätä-Qal, p.8; *Yä Zway*. . p.31.

²⁷ Dane'él, p.203; Ergätä-Qal, p.8.

Later, a hermit called, *Abba Lewi* was sent from Aksum to return this Holy Ark from the island church.²⁸ The hermit, nevertheless, did not go back to Aksum carrying the Holy Ark; instead he went to Qulləbbi near Härär led by divine providence. He stayed at Qulləbbi until his death keeping the Holy Ark with due respect in a certain cave in the region. On the eve of his death, he left a note on a flat stone close to the cave bringing attention to the existence of the Holy Ark of Gäbrə'él hidden in this area; prophesying concerning the future prominence of the place due to the great miracles which would be wrought by the Holy Ark among the Orthodox faithful.²⁹

The engraved note left by the hermit, *Aba Lewi*, was discovered by a small group of clergymen migrating across the area of Qulləbbi due to the persecution of the forces of 'Adal during the 16th century conflict. They copied the inscription on one of the manuscripts they carried for safekeeping, *Mäşhafä Qäläminṭos*. They finally placed this manuscript in the Lake Zewaymonastery of Däbrä Şəyon from which the aforementioned Holy Ark of Gäbrə'él had been removed.³⁰ When *Ras Mäkönnən Wäldä Mika'el*, founder of the later church, read this manuscript after bringing it from the island monastery, he found the note.³¹ Consequently, he built an abode for the Ark at Qulləbbi and dedicated the building to the Archangel Gäbrə'él on 25th July 1893.³² The Holy Ark had by then been discovered at the Kahənätä Sämay church of Azhägugu in Bulga where it had been taken from its previous location at the cave in Qulləbbi.³³

Despite having lost most of their original deposit of Holy Arks in order to facilitate the foundation of numerous mainland churches as discussed above, the Lake Zeway churches still possess a significant number of Holy Arks. Below is a table representing the number of Holy Arks owned by each of the island sacred places.

Name of the island church	Number of Holy Arks possessed
Gälila Kahənätä Sämay	4 ³⁴
Däbrä Sina Dəngəl Marəyam	14 ³⁵
Däbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Marəyam	18 ³⁶
Fundurro Arba'ətu Ənsəsa	2 ³⁷
Ṭädéča Abrəham	10 ³⁸
Total	48

²⁸ *Ibid.* (Both sources); *Yä Zway*. . . p.31.

²⁹ Dane'él, pp. 203-204; *Ergätä Qal*, p.8; *Yä Zway*... p.31.

³⁰ Dane'él, p.204.

³¹ *Ibid.*; *Ergätä Qal*, p.8.

³² *Ergätä-Qal*, p.8; "Bä lteyopeya Yämigäñu. . ." Seeming typing error, the year in the compiled work of Dane'él is stated as 1892. The month is, however, the same. Dane'él, p.205. The time stated in the published material of the

³³ Dane'él, p. 204; *Ergätä-Qal*, p.8.

³⁴ *Informants*: Täsfayé Näbi and Zäwgä.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Abreham Gäbrä Sellase.

³⁶ *Informants*: *Ibid.*, only Banté, Mälaku, G/Mäsqäl, Zärihun and Tälafinos; "YäZwayDäbrä-Şeyon Qəddəst 37 Marəyam Gädam tarikawi qarsaqersena yäqu'amə nebrät zerzer," (A letter by which the treasures and fixed assets of the island monastery have been transferred to the present *Qesä-Gäbäz*, *Mämər* Mälaku G/Marəyam, and is also found in the hand of the same head of priests).

³⁷ *Informants*: *Aba 'Asrat* and H/Giyorgis.

³⁸ *Informants*: K/Mareyam, Käfäni Ijaro and Tadässä

Of the eighteen Holy Arks found at the main repository of the Şəyon Marəyam Church of Däbrä Şəyon, two are new. They were endowed by the present Archbishop, *Abunä Natna'el*.³⁹

2.2 MANUSCRIPTS

In a similar manner to the numerous Holy Arks, a number of the rare manuscripts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Təwəhədo Church also trace their origin to the Lake Zeway Churches and Monastery. While investigating the treasures of the island churches of Lake Zeway in the late 19th century, Emperor Minilik II found an important book expounding the unity of the two natures: divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ, the principle of Tewahido ("Union").⁴⁰ The chronicler, Geber šellase, remarked that the news of the discovery of this book was heard as far away as the four corners of the country, obliging a large number of adherents of other Christological beliefs: the *šost Lədät/Yä Şäga Lej* ("Three Births"/"Son of Grace")⁴¹ and the *Qəbat* ("Unctionists")⁴² to accept re-baptism in the original faith of *Hulät Lədät* ("Two Births"),⁴³ more commonly known as *Təwəhədo*.⁴⁴

Gäbrä Šəllase further described in another chapter of his chronicle, how the small *Kəbrä Nəgəst* (Book of the Glory of Kings) of Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl, which a certain monk brought from the island church of Lake Zeway (presumably the Şəyon Marəyam church of Däbrä Şəyon because of its accumulation of a great number of the Lake manuscripts), that caused the then King Minilik of Shoa to found his royal camp of Entoto in 1881. This was because the book enshrined the prophesied information about Minilik's rule of the country after Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872- 1889) and the establishment of his capital at Əntofo.⁴⁵

As noted in the discussion above, *Maşəhəfä Qälämənşos*, whose attached short note motivated *Ras* Mekonnen to establish of the *Qəddus* Gäbrə'él Church at Qulləbbi, was also discovered in one of the same Lake Zeway churches, specifically in the Şəyon Marəyam Church of the Monastery of Däbrä Şəyon.

³⁹ *Informants: Abunä Natna'él, Mälaku, Banté, G/Mäsqäl, Zärihun and Tälafinos.*

⁴⁰ *Şihafé Tezaz* Gäbrä-Sellassé, *Tarikä Zämän zä Dagmawi Məniik Nəgusä Nəgəst zä Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1959 E.C.), pp.202-203.

⁴¹ This was the religious principle arguing that the birth of Jesus Christ was thrice as its name indicates: eternal birth from the Father, genetic birth from the Virgin Mary and birth from the Holy Ghost while getting baptized in the River Jordan. It is because it believed that Jesus Christ became the son of Grace when he got birth from the Holy Ghost in the River Jordan that the religious principle was alternatively called *Yä Şäga Lej*. *Aba Gorgoreyos*, pp. 90-91; Sergew, "The Period.....", p.32.

⁴² This was the other religions principle which argued that Jesus Christ became God the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary by "Unction". *Aba Gorgorəyos*, p. 91; Sərgəw, "The Period. . .", p.32.

⁴³ This is the governing creed of the EOTC underlining that the birth of Jesus Christ is twice: eternal birth from the Father without having mother before the creation of the World and genetic birth from the Virgin Mary without having father after the creation of the World. *Aba Gorgoreyos*, pp. 87-92; Sərgəw, "The Period..." p.32; V.C. Samuel, "The Faith of the Church," *The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanenna Səlam Printing Enterprise, 1997), pp.43-51.

⁴⁴ Gäbrä Sellassé, p.203.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 96-97. For Pankhurst's review of this issue, see Richard Pankhurst, *Economic History of Ethiopia: 1800-1935* (Addis Ababa: Haile Sillassie I University Press, 1968), pp.697-698.

Ibid., p.77; Yəlmä Däressä, *Yä Iteyopeya Tarik bə Asrasedestəhaw Keflā Zämän* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanenna Səlam Printing Press, 1959 E.C.), p.119.

The most recently discovered rare manuscripts of the Lake Zeway churches are the two Ge'ez letters of Queen Əlleni and Emperor Ləbnä Dəngəl.⁴⁶ The letter of Əlleni was sent to King Dom Manuel I of Portugal by an ambassador named Mathew in 1509 due to the increasing pressure of the lowland Muslim forces.⁴⁸ The second letter of Lebnä Dengel to King Dom Juan III of Portugal was sent with an ambassador named John Bermudes in 1534/35, it was dispatched following the large scale war of the Adal leader, *Imam* 'Ahmäd ibn Ibrahim.⁴⁹ The central theme of the letters was request for military support against the expanding lowland Muslim forces.

These two Ge'ez letters were presented by Sərgəw Hablä əllase at the Fourth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies held in Rome from 10 to 15 April 1972.⁵⁰ Sərgəw notes, that he found these letters in the possession of the *Qəsä Gäbüz* (Head of the Priests) of the Aksum Şəyon church, Täklä Haymanot Wäldä-Kidan, from whom he similarly collected the Ge'ez manuscripts dealing with the exile of the Holy Ark of the Covenant in Lake Islands area. The *Qəsä Gäbüz* acquired the two Ge'ez letters from the Şəyon Marəyam church of the Lake Zeway monastery of Däbrä Şəyon with the permission of the then Archbishop, *Abunä Luqas II*.⁵¹

Fragments of one or more old gospel manuscripts brought from the same Lake Zeway churches (according to Paul Henze from the Kahənätä Sämay Church of Gälila) were also deposited in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University in the 1950s.⁵²

⁴⁶ *YäZway ...* p. 33; Ergätä-Qal, p.22; Sergew, "The Ge'ez letters ...", p.565.

Sergew Hable-Sellassie, "The Ge'ez letters of Queen Eleni and Libne Dingil to John, king of Portugal," *Accademia Nazionale Dei Lincei: IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Ethiopici* (1974), p.566; Pankhurst, *An Introduction to...*, p.74.

⁴⁷ Pankhurst, *An Introduction to...*, p.74.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.77; Yəlmä Däreśsa, *Yä Ityopeya Tarik bä Asrasedestāñaw Keflä Zämān* (Addis Ababa: Bərhanenna

⁴⁹ Səlam Printing Press, 1959 E.C.), p.119.

⁵⁰ Sergew, "The Ge'ez ..." pp. 547-566; *YäZway...* p.33; Ergätä Qal, p.22.

⁵¹ Sergew, "The Ge'ez ..." p.565.

⁵² Henze, "Lake Zəway: Southern ..." p.37

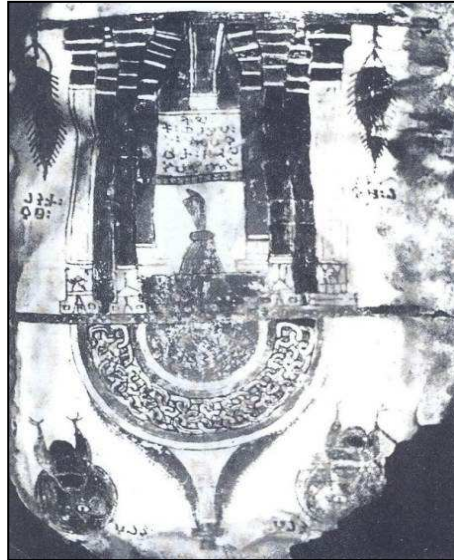


Fig. 6.1. Illumination from one of the Lake Zeway gospel fragments deposited in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies with the identification number of MS IES 2475

After all those were removed for different reasons, the Lake Zeway churches currently possess about 45 bound manuscripts 42 of which are found at the Şəyon Marəyam Church of the Monastery of Däbrä Şəyon. Two of the remaining three bound manuscripts are found at the Däbrä Sina Dəngəl Marəyam church and they are, like the above mentioned fragmented manuscripts, Gospels/*Wängels*.⁵³ While the last manuscript is found at ʾÄdəčča 'Abrəham Church and it is a *Mäşəfafä Gənzät* /Book of Prayers for the Dead.⁵⁴

The list of the 42 manuscripts found at the Şəyon Marəyam Church of Däbrä Şəyon is as follows:⁵⁵

⁵³ Informants: Täsfaye Näbi and Zäwgä.

⁵⁴ Informants: K/Marəyam and Käfäni.

⁵⁵ "Yä ZewayDäbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Marəyam Gädam tarikawi qərsa qərsenna..." (Archive in the hand of the present Qésä Gäbäz, Mämhəre Mälaku).

Name of the manuscript	Quantity
GädläQəddusan	1
Mäşhafä 'Orit	1
Arba'ətuWängel	4
Mäşhafä Qəddase	2
Yä Luqas 'ənnayäYohannəs Wängel	1
Dərsan ZäkämäTäräkbä 'əşä-Mäsqäl	1
Mäşhafä Nägäst	1
Şälotä 'əfan	1
Mäşhafä 'Arganon	1
Gädlä Kaleb	1
'Astäwaşə'otä Qalä-Pawəlos	1
Wəddase 'Amlak	1
Säyfa Şəllase	1
Tä'ammər zä mahəletä 'Əgzi'abəher	1
Yä Zäwätər Şälot	1
Ra'əyā Yoħannəs	2
'A'əmadä Məşfir	1
Mäşhafä Sä'atat	3
Mäşhafä 'Eyyob wä-matusala	1
Mäşhafä Dawit	1
Mäşhafä Mə'raf	1
Mäşhafä Mänəkəsat	1
Mäşhafä Rətu'a Haymanot	1
Mənbab Zäwārha Şom	1
Mäşhafä Gənzät	1
Mäşhafä Kərəstənnā	1
Mäşhafä Tä'ammərä Marəyam	1
Gädlä Hawarəyat	1
Gädlä 'Abunä Gärīma	1
Gädlä samu'el	1
Gəbrä həməmat	1
Goləgota	1
Yä'amätu Sənkəsar	
Şomä Dəgg ^w a	
Mäşhafä Qedär	
Total	42

Source: "Yä Zeway Däbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Marəyam Gädam tarikawi qarsa qərsenna yä qum nəbrat zəzər"

(List of the Treasures and Assets of the Monastery of Däbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Marəyam). *Gädlä Qəddusan* (Hagiography of the Saints) is the most important of all the manuscripts listed above. It is the largest of them all measuring 63.5 centimeter in length and 45.7 centimeter in width.⁵⁶ It is one of the rarest manuscripts of the Ethiopian Orthodox Təwaħədo Church (distinguished by its striking illuminations) discovered at the Däbrä Şəyon Monastery of Lake Zəway.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern ...", p.38. Let 1 inch equates 2.54 centimeter.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37; Sərgəw, "Preservation ...", p.7.

The manuscript was written during the reign of Emperor Dawit (r. 1382-1412)⁵⁸ and it enshrines the account of the lives of nineteen saints.⁵⁹ Each section of the hagiography in the manuscript begins with a carefully painted portrait of the saint whose life is described. Furthermore, the heading of each section is highly ornamented.⁶⁰ Because of the high quality of the manuscript, scholars who have been able to access it through the cooperation of the Archbishop *Abunä Luqas*, regard it as an invaluable source for the study of medieval Ethiopian iconography and paleography.⁶¹

The manuscript was taken to Addis Ababa to be shown to Queen Elizabeth II of England on the occasion of her state visit to Ethiopia in 1965.⁶² It was also taken to Lagos, Nigeria, in 1979, among 80 exhibits displayed at the festival of African Art. It, then, stood first in the art contest due to its high quality and great age; and it won the golden cup for Ethiopia.⁶³ On a third occasion in 1984 it was displayed at the National Library in Addis Ababa during the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Ethiopian Revolution.⁶⁴

Another important manuscript which deserves particular attention from the above list is *Gädlä Kaleb* (Hagiography of Kaleb). It is the Vita of King Kaleb of Aksum,⁶⁵ who spent the twelve years prior to his death leading an ascetic life in the monastery of *Aba Pänjäləwon*, northeast of Aksum.⁶⁶ The manuscript enshrines the account of the mighty naval expedition of this devout Christian king to South Arabia, when the Christians of the country suffered persecution under a Jewish governor. This manuscript belongs to the category of the most endangered texts, such as the *Gädlä Qəddusan*.⁶⁷

⁵⁸ "Gädlä Qəddusan," (Lake Zeway Däbrä Şəyon Marəyam monastery); Henze, "Lake Zəway: Southern..." pp. 37-38; Sərgəw, "Preservation..." p.7.

⁵⁹ *Gädlä Qəddusan*, (Lake Zeway Däbrä Şəyon monastery), Explore the entire pages; *Yä Zəway*... p.32; *Ergätä-Qal*, p.22; Henze, "Lake Zeway and its islands ..." p.80.

⁶⁰ See Fig. 4.2.

⁶¹ Sərgew, "Preservation ..." p.7; Henze, "Lake Zəway: Southern ..", p.38.

⁶² Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern ...", p.38.

⁶³ *YäZəway*... p.32; *Ergätä Qal*, p.22; *Informants*: Banté, Mälaku, G/Mäsqał, Zärihun and Tälafinos.

⁶⁴ Henze, "Lake Zeway: Southern..." pp. 39-40.

⁶⁵ "Gädlä Kaléb," (Lake Zeway Däbrä Şəyon Mareyam monastery)./

⁶⁶ Sərgew, *Ancient and ...* p. 143; *Aba Gorgoreyos*, p.27.

⁶⁷ *YäZəway*... p.32; *Ergätä-Qal*, p.22; *Informants: Ibid., Abunä Natna'əl*.

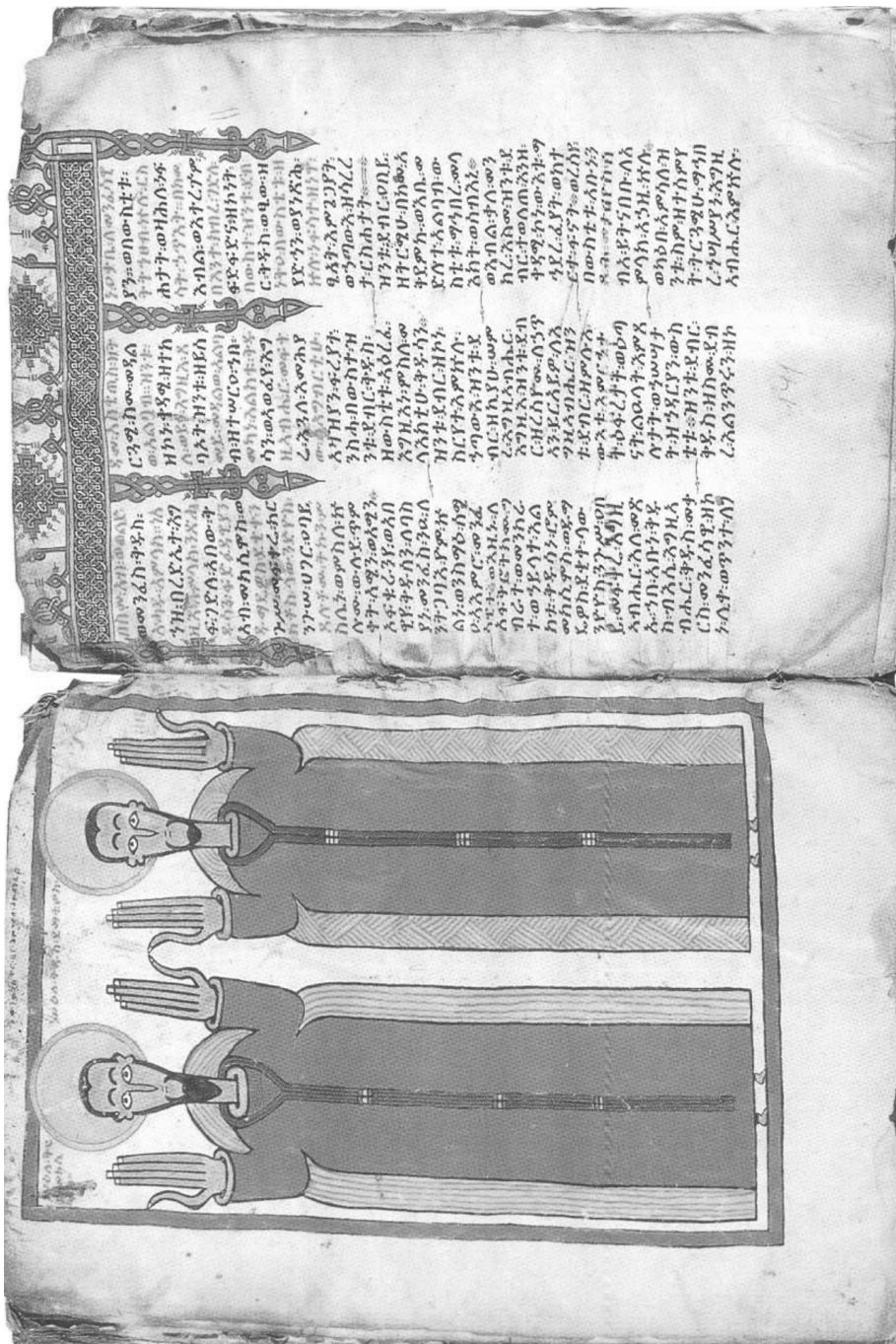


Fig. 6.2. The beginning section of each hagiography in Gädlä Qəddusan

Despite not mentioned in the above list, because only a few of its original pages have been preserved, *Mäṣḥafä Henok* (Book of Enoch) is another invaluable manuscript unique to the Şəyon Marəyam Church of Lake Zəway. It was at this island monastery that the surviving Ge'ez version of this manuscript was discovered for the first time after centuries of disappearance from the World.⁶⁹

The 'Aksumit version of some of the listed manuscripts, particularly *Gädlä Kaleb* and *Maṣḥafä Henok*,⁷⁰ may further testify to the validity of the popular tradition of the transfer of the Holy Ark of the Covenant and other invaluable religious treasures from Aksum to the island church of Lake Zeway during the years of destruction wrought by Yodit.

Mäṣḥafä Gənzät was endowed by Empress Zewuditu on the occasion of her official consecration of the island Church as Monastery. It is in this manuscript that the Empress documented the type and size of the *rəstä gult* wealth which she bequeathed to the officially newly consecrated island monastery.

The other endowed manuscript from the list is one of the two books of *Mäṣḥafä Qddases* (Book of liturgy). It was endowed by *Mämhər* Haylä Marəyam, later *Abunä* peṭros the martyr, during his period of service at the island monastery as *Mämhər* (Administrator).⁷¹

Almost all of the manuscripts listed are bound with wooden and leather by the devoted efforts of *Abunä* Luqas. Thus, these manuscripts are kept in a metal shelf donated by Archbishop, *Abunä* Natna'el.

2.3. CROSSES

The seven oldest crosses of the Latin Patée type⁷² are found in the two churches Lake Zəway: Däbrä Şəyon *Qəddəst* Marəyam and Ṭädéča Abrəham. Five of the crosses are found in the former island monastery, while the remaining two are found in the later island church.⁷³ All of the seven crosses have long handles: five of them have rectangular rings and two of them have a flat rectangular shape at their bases. Within the general designation of Patée cross type, they can be further subdivided into two groups: four of them having flared arms, while the arms of the remaining three are of lozenge shape.⁷⁴

Two of the flared arm Patée crosses are found at the monastery of Däbrä Şəyon, they seem to be Patée crosses of the early period, probably dating from Aksumit times. This is because their flared arms are very thin, unlike the wide flared arms of the other two similar crosses found at the two island sacred places. This widening of the formerly thin flared arms was a new modification introduced in the Patée cross production since the late 14th century.⁷⁵

⁶⁸ Informants: *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Dane'él, p. 402.

⁷⁰ See the two manuscripts at the island monastery.

⁷¹ The attached note on the same manuscript.

⁷² These are crosses whose arms expand outwards getting widened and extended from the arms' intersection. Mario Di Salvo, *Crosses of Ethiopia: The Sign of Faith, Evolution and Form* (Milan: Skira editore S.P.A. 2006), p.23.

⁷³ Informants: *Ibid.*, only Mälaku and G/Mäsqäl, also K/Marəyam and Käfäni.

⁷⁴ See Fig. 1.3 and 1.4.

⁷⁵ Salvo, p.53.

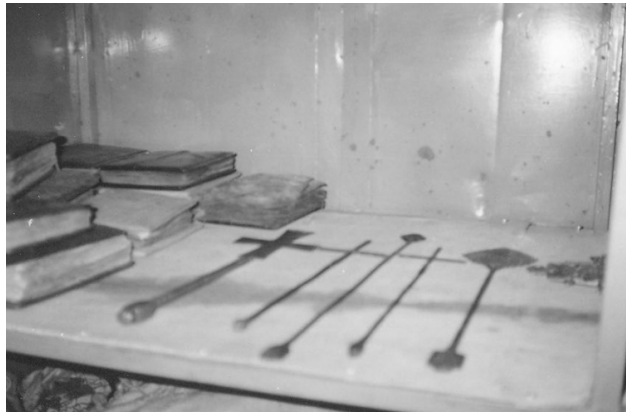


Fig. 6.3. The five Patée crosses at the monastery of Däbrä Şeyon

The two Patée crosses (one flared arm and the other lozenge shape) at Ṭädéča 'Abrəham display a close similarity of shape as well as constituent raw materials to the remaining three Patée crosses (one flared arm and the remaining two lozenge shaped) at the monastery of Däbrä Şeyon. This may be interpreted as proof of the prior existence of the above mentioned two thin flared-arm Patée crosses of the island monastery.⁷⁶ They may have been brought by Amhara Christian migrants of the 16th century, who remained in short term exile at the island of Ṭädéča and hence, possibly gave some of the treasures they carried for safekeeping to the island's church before their departure to Däbrä Şeyon. This may explain why the two Patée crosses of Ṭädéča 'Abrəham are relatively similar to the three Patée crosses of the monastery of Däbrä Şeyon both in their shape and due to the raw materials of which they are made. This conclusion may, in turn support the assumption that the two slightly different flared arm Patée crosses of the island monastery are remnants of the early religious treasures brought to the island together with the Holy Ark of the Covenant, thereby further substantiating the ancient traditions



Fig. 6.4. The two Patée

Ṭädéča Abreham

crosses at the church of

⁷⁶ The two similar flared arm Patée crosses of the two island churches are made up of iron, while the lozenge shape crosses are made up of silver. The two thin flared arm Patée crosses of Däbrä Şeyon are, however, made up of only iron.

There are also two large processional crosses relatively aged crosses in the large treasury of the Şəyon Marəyam Church of Däbrä Şəyon. Both of them were endowed, one of them by a person named Şägga-şllase in 1920/21,⁷⁷ the other by Empress Zäwditu in 1921/22,⁷⁸ after her official consecration of the island church as monastery. Furthermore, the first cross is made of bronze, while the second is of silver.⁷⁹

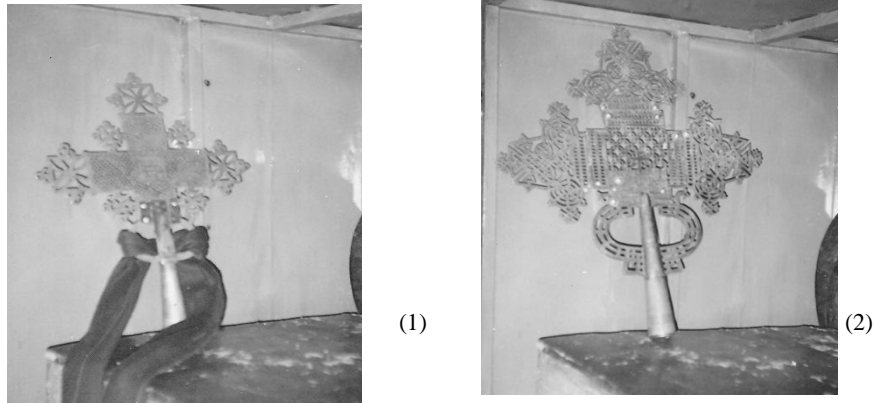


Fig. 6.5. The two large processional crosses crosses endowed by Şägga şllase (No.1) and Empress Zäwditu (No.2) to the monastery of Däbrä Şəyon

6.4. OTHERS

Apart from the above classified Holy Arks, manuscripts and crosses, there are other categories of treasure at the great repository of the Şəyon Marəyam Church of the Monastery of Däbrä Şəyon. Among the treasures to be noted are two old 'Awdəs (big trays used to present the Eucharist to the communicants) made of the same material apparently silver.⁸⁰ They are believed to be among the early treasures brought to the island church by the Christian migrants.⁸¹ It is nevertheless difficult to distinguish to which of the two groups of Christian migrants they should be attributed - the early Aksumits of the 10th century or the later 'Amhara of the 16th century. The absence of sources throwing light on the issue makes it difficult to determine.



Fig. 6.6. The two oldest Awdəs at the treasury of the monastery of Däbrä Şəyon

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Informants: Ibid.*, only Mälaku and G/Mäsqäl; "Yä ZewayDäbrä Şəyon Qəddəst Marəyam Gädam tarikawi qərsa qərs enna..."

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* (Both sources).

⁸¹ *Informants: Ibid.*

The other important treasures to be noted under these various categories are endowments of religious artifacts, these include the *Atrons* (book stand), *Mäq^wamiya* (staff) and *'Arwe Bätr* (bishop's processional crosses on a staff) which were endowed by Empress Zäwditu,⁸² *Mämhär Haylä Maräyam* (the late *Abunä peṭros* the martyr)⁸³ and *Abunä Natna'el* (the present Archbishop) respectively.⁸⁴ The Empress endowed the *Atrons* in 1918/19⁸⁵ - two years before her official consecration of the church as monastery.



Fig. 6.7. The *Atrons* endowed by Empress Zäwditu



Fig. 6.8. The *Mäq^wamiya* endowed by M
HayläMaräyam (the late *Abunä peṭros* the martyr)



Fig. 6.9. The *Arwe Bert* endowed by *Abunä Natna'el*

⁸² *Ibid.*, Banté, Zärihun and Tälafinos; The engraved script on the iron leg of the Book Stand.

⁸³ *Informants: Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, *Abunä Natna'el*.

⁸⁵ The engraved script on the iron leg of the Book Stand.

3. The Conservation Effort and the General Problems

A few decades ago, many of the invaluable religious treasures described above were in very bad condition because of the way they had been deposited in an old thatched church for a long period of time. In particular most of the rare manuscripts were damaged by rain dripping through the thatched roof. While others lost important pages due to poor management. However, thanks to the important conservation measures undertaken by the two archbishops: *Abunä Luqas* and *Abunä Natna'el* the treasures were saved from further deterioration. *Abunä Luqas*, through personal contacts with the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Conservation Unit, facilitated the bounding of the rare manuscripts with wooden covers; and placed all of the treasures in a newly built house. While his successor, *Abunä Natna'el*, constructed the current new building of the monastery of *Däbrä Şəyon* with a room serving as museum at ground level. He then transferred all the treasures to this display area and placed them in a metal shelf for better conservation and exhibition.



Fig. 7.1. The manuscripts at the treasury of the monastery of Däbrä Şəyon Marəyam with their wooden covers inside the standing box made of metal

Nevertheless, there are still limitations in the overall conservation effort and general management of the Lake treasures:

1. The curators of the treasures are not trained professionals, but local clergymen. Hence, the conservation methods are traditional, without clear prohibitions as far as visitors are concerned. As a result, some of the illuminations and even the script of the great manuscripts are fading away due to the intense flashlights of the visitors' cameras, apart from the threat concerning the copyright of the treasures. Moreover, there is no fixed entrance fee for both foreign and domestic tourists. Consequently, the income of the Lake Churches and Monastery from the tourism industry is minimal.
2. The sacred site and its spiritual treasures have not been promoted well as tourist destinations. Hence, it decreased the number of tourists visiting the area

Conclusions and Recommendations

The treasures of the Lake Zeway churches and the monastery are composed largely of Holy Arks and manuscripts, which are significant in number and rare types. Their preservation in the island sacred places constitutes an important aspect of national efforts for the maintenance and expansion of cultural and spiritual heritage. The patrimony of the Island sacred places with their rare historical manuscripts and artifacts is notable as far as Ethiopia is concerned and even on the level of the African continent.

The conservation and the overall management arrangements concerning the treasures are, however, inadequate. Hence, the researcher would like to suggest the following solutions:

1. Either measure should be taken to ensure that the local clergy acting as curators should receive appropriate training which would empower them to exercise their function properly; or trained curators should be employed for the better management of the sacred treasures. In line with this, there should be a clearly stated guideline for visitors including a regular entrance fee with fixed amounts for both foreign and domestic tourists using legal receipts.
2. Adequate efforts should be made to promote the treasures, and create awareness concerning the cultural and spiritual significance of the holy sites. Seminars and workshops should be arranged for both church administrators (ranging from the Patriarchate Office down to the parish community) and concerned governmental and non governmental institutions (including officials of the Ethiopian Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritages, Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, and the various tour operating organizations). Researchers should be encouraged to conduct in depth study on the treasures, and their published research reports should be efficiently communicated to the general public making use of mass media (regional, national and international, TV and radio programs, news papers and magazines) and heritage promoting websites.