

Royal Imagery and Devotional Spaces in Early Solomonic Ethiopia The Case of Gännätä Maryam

In the third quarter of the thirteenth century, the son of an Amhara nobleman called Yəkunno Amlak led a rebellion against the Zagwes – a line of rulers that had been in control of most of the Christian kingdom of Ethiopia since at least the first half of the twelfth century. According to local written traditions, Yəkunno Amlak killed the Zagwe king Yətbaräk (r. ca 1240–68), whom he had once served, around 1268 CE after a battle near the precinct of the church of St Qirqos in Gayent. Zagwe loyalists rallied around a successor, but despite their opposition Yəkunno Amlak initiated a lineage that would rule the Ethiopian Empire until the twentieth century: the Solomonic dynasty.¹ Apart from these general facts, we know relatively little about the life of the first emperor of the dynasty. Most of what is known about this figure comes from later sources that combine historical information with literary topoi and mythical elements to create narratives that legitimized the ascent to power of the Solomonic rulers and their allies. According to such traditions, for example, Yəkunno Amlak was a prince who descended from a line of kings that had ruled over Ethiopia since Aksumite times. These accounts characterized the Zagwe kings as usurpers and Yəkunno Amlak as heir to the country's legitimate dynasty.

In this paper I hope to contribute to our understanding of Yəkunno Amlak's reign by analysing his only known contemporary portrait, which is located in the church of Gännätä Maryam ('Garden of Mary') in the Bugna district of Ethiopia (Fig. 1). Crucially, the painting is accompanied by an inscription that allows us to identify the figure at the centre as the emperor and the two figures that flank him as ecclesiastical allies. Scholarship has recurrently considered this caption as a source for studying Yəkunno Amlak's reign, as well as the patronage of Ethiopian rulers more generally, and as evidence for dating the paintings in Gännätä Maryam.² However, relatively little has been said about its semantic connection with the portrait, its relation to the iconographical programme of the church and its space, and its broader significance for comprehending the use of the visual by early Solomonic emperors. I hope to show that the

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1 On the history of this period, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Marie-Laure Derat,

Le domaine des rois éthiopiens, 1270–1527. Espace, pouvoir et monachisme (Paris: Sorbonne Editions, 2003), esp. pp. 64–75; and Marie-Laure Derat, *L'énigme d'une dynastie sainte et usurpatrice dans le royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie du XI^e au XIII^e siècle*, *Hagiologia*, 14 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018).

2 Key studies on this portrait include Claude Lepage, 'Peintures Murales de Ganata Maryam (Rapport Préliminaire)', *Documents Pour Servir à l'histoire de La Civilisation Éthiopienne*, 6 (1975), 59–83 (pp. 63–65);



◆ Fig. 1
Ethiopian Painter, Portrait of Yäkunno Amlak, Wall Painting, ca. 1268–85 CE,
Gännätä Maryam (Photo: Michael Gervers, Courtesy of the DEEDS Project).

painting encourages us to ask overlooked but important questions about the balance between secular and religious authority and the history of imperial imagery in early Solomonic Ethiopia.

For example, taking for granted that the emperor provided funding for the church's decoration (his role in its construction remains to be demonstrated and is discussed below), did he have an involvement in its pictorial scheme? How did contemporary viewers react to the presence in a sacred space of a portrait of a secular person, not to mention one who was still living? And would such reactions have been different from those intended by the patrons and makers of Gännätä Maryam? Were imperial portraits of this kind common in the context of Zagwe and Solomonic patronage? By addressing these topics, my aim is to draw attention to the functions of imperial imagery in early Solomonic Ethiopia, while also highlighting the presence of grey areas in our understanding of the relations between viewers and spaces of devotion as well as of the networks of patronage that contributed to their making.

The church of Gännätä Maryam is an east-west oriented, monolithic basilica with a nave and two aisles divided by square piers.³ Similar piers also surround the building on all four

Marilyn E. Heldman and Getachew Haile, 'Who Is Who in Ethiopia's Past, Part III. Founders of Ethiopia's Solomonic Dynasty', *Northeast African Studies*, 9/1 (1987), 1-11; Stanislaw Chojnacki, 'Les portraits des donateurs comme sources de l'histoire politique, religieuse et culturelle de l'Éthiopie du XIIe au XIXe siècle', in *Äthiopien gestern und heute. Akten der 1. Tagung der Orbis Aethiopicus Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung und Förderung der äthiopischen Kultur*,

ed. by Piotr O. Scholz, *Nubica et Aethiopia*, 4-5 (Warsaw: Zaś Pan, 1999), 621-47 (pp. 621-23); Marilyn E. Heldman, 'Gännätä Maryam', in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, ed. by Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Publishers, 2005), II, pp. 692-93.
3 For a plan, see Lino Bianchi Barriviera, 'Le Chiese in roccia di Lalibela e di altri luoghi del Lasta', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 19 (1963), 5-118 (pp. 66-71, pls. 52-53).

sides, a design that is reminiscent of Mādḥane ‘Alām in Lalibāla; the latter church was founded by the Zagwe king Lalibāla and, according to many scholars, was built on the model of the cathedral of Maryam in Aksum – Ethiopia’s most sacred church, believed, within local traditions, to house the Ark of the Covenant.⁴ The church of Gännätä Maryam has been known to Western researchers since at least the 1940s, and a number of articles have been dedicated to its wall paintings and architecture, though it has not been the subject of a monograph.⁵ Likewise, Yəkunno Amlak’s portrait has been often mentioned in discussions of Ethiopian imperial patronage and art, but it has not been the focus of an in-depth study.⁶

The interior and at least portions of the exterior walls of Gännätä Maryam were originally covered with plaster and painted murals.⁷ The exterior paintings of the church, which have not been given detailed scholarly treatment, were probably added at various stages between the late fourteenth and the twentieth century. The interior presents a complex pictorial scheme combining Old and New Testament scenes, such as the Binding of Isaac and the Entry into Jerusalem, with depictions of angels and male and female saints. Most of these paintings were probably executed during the reign of Yəkunno Amlak, though at least those located in the southern side room of the church and datable to the mid-fifteenth century on stylistic grounds belong to a subsequent phase of (re)decoration.⁸

The portrait of Yəkunno Amlak is situated on the eastern face of the central northern pier of the nave (Fig. 1). Since most of the images in Gännätä Maryam are carefully placed in relation to their spatial setting to convey messages that are enhanced by the architectural features of the church, we may surmise that its location is not accidental.⁹ Indeed, the positioning of this effigy of Yəkunno Amlak allows him to perpetually gaze towards the sanctuary where the life-giving liturgy takes place. From this particular vantage point, the emperor could both see and be seen

- 4 On the symbolic and structural connections among these three buildings, see Marilyn E. Heldman, ‘Architectural Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church’, *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22/3 (1992), 222–41. See also David W. Phillipson, *Ancient Churches of Ethiopia. Fourth-Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), pp. 112–18. There have been numerous studies on Mādḥane ‘Alām and the other churches of Lalibāla, including Alessandro Augusto Monti della Corte, *Lalibela: Le chiese ipogee e monolitiche e gli altri monumenti medievali del Lasta* (Rome: Società italiana arti grafiche, 1940); Phillipson, *Ancient Churches*, esp. pp. 153–60; Jacques Mercier and Claude Lepage, *Lalibela, Wonder of Ethiopia: The Monolithic Churches and their Treasures* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2012). For a hypothetical reconstruction of the cathedral of Maryam Ṣayon, see David R. Buxton and Derek H. Matthews, ‘The Reconstruction of Vanished Aksumite Buildings’, *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 25 (1971), 53–77 (pp. 66–76, figs. 19–21).
- 5 For the analysis of the church architecture, see discussions in David R. Buxton, ‘The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia’, *Archaeologia*, 92 (1947), 1–42 (pp. 31–32); and Roger Sauter, ‘Où en est notre connaissance des églises rupestres d’Éthiopie’, *Annales d’Éthiopie*, 5/1 (1963), 235–92 (p. 270). For the wall paintings, the most detailed descriptions and analyses have been published by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, ‘Les peintures murales de l’église rupestre éthiopienne Gännätä Maryam près Lalibela’, *Arte medievale*, 12–13 (1998–99), 193–209; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, ‘The Wall-Paintings in the Sanctuary of the Church of Gännätä Maryam near Lalibāla’, in *Orbis Aethiopicus: Ethiopian Art – a Unique Cultural Heritage and Modern Challenge*, ed. by Walter Raunig and Asfa-Wossen Asserate, *Nubica et Aethiopia*, 10 (Lublin: Marie Skłodowska University Press, 2007), pp. 120–35.
- 6 In addition to the studies in n. 3, see also Marilyn E. Heldman *Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Ṣeyon. A Study in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana*, 6 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Publishers, 1994), p. 86; Claire Bosc-Tiessé and Marie-Laure Derat, *Lalibela, Site Rupestre Chrétien d’Éthiopie* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2019), pp. 101–04.
- 7 For a preliminary report with some details of an analysis of the pigments used in medieval Ethiopian churches, see Blair Priday, Stephen Rickerby, and Lisa Shekede, ‘Saving Tigray’s Painted Churches’, *Minerva* (2021), 32–39. The church is the main focus of the SolZag project directed by Tania Tribe.
- 8 Balicka-Witakowska, ‘The Wall-Paintings in the Sanctuary’, pp. 134–36.

by those officiating priests who benefitted from his patronage and who would have remembered him in their prayers after his death, according to a well-established Christian Ethiopian practice.¹⁰ In fact, Christians in Ethiopia believed that a *täzkar*, a ritual commemoration followed by the consumption of food, helped to 'alleviate the sufferings of the souls of the dead'.¹¹

In addition to providing funds for constructing or lands for supporting churches, Christian Ethiopians could commission manuscripts and artworks to help preserve their memory.¹² There is ample evidence of the existence of such gift-giving practices during the early Solomonic period (1270-1527). For example, the colophon of a large fifteenth-century octateuch donated to the monastery of Däbrä Bizän by its abbot indicates clearly that the book was commissioned to encourage its readers to commemorate him, just as an inscription on a large liturgical icon painted by Färe Şəyon during the reign of Zär'a Ya'əqob (r. 1434-68) solicits its viewers

- 9 For example, see the cases analysed in Tania Tribe, 'The Word in the Desert. The Wall-Paintings of Debra Maryam Korkor (Ger'alta, Tigray)', in *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: Papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Kyoto, 12-17 December 1997*, ed. by Katsuyoshi Fukui, Eisei Kurimoto, and Masayoshi Shigeta (Kyoto: Shokado, 1997), III, pp. 35-61; Marilyn E. Heldman, 'Wise Virgins in the Kingdom of Heaven. A Gathering of Saints in a Medieval Ethiopian Church', *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 19/2 (2000), 6-12; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and Michael Gervers, 'The Church of Yəmrähännä Krəstos and Its Wall-Paintings: A Preliminary Report', *Africana Bulletin*, 49 (2001), 9-47 (p. 26); Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, 'The Wall-Paintings in the Church of Mädhane Aläm near Lalibäla', *Africana Bulletin*, 52 (2004), 9-29 (pp. 11, 16); Jacopo Gnisci and Massimo Villa, 'Evidence for the History of Early Solomonic Ethiopia from Tämben Part II: Abba Yohanni', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* (forthcoming).
- 10 See the discussions in Manfred Kropp, "... der Welt gestorben". Ein Vertrag zwischen dem äthiopischen Heiligen Iyyäsus-Mo'a und König Yəkunno-Amlak über Memoriae im Kloster Ḥayq', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 116/3-4 (1998), 303-30 (pp. 304-05); Claire Bosc-Tiessé and Marie-Laure Derat, 'De la mort à la fabrique du saint dans l'Éthiopie médiévale et moderne', *Afriques [Online]*, 3 (2011) <https://doi.org/10.4000/afriques.1076>; Anaïs Wion, 'Onction des malades, funérailles et commémorations. Pour une histoire des textes et des pratiques liturgiques en Éthiopie chrétienne', *Afriques. Débats, méthodes et terrains d'histoire*, 3 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.4000/afriques.921>; Alessandro Bausi, 'Kings and Saints. Founders of Dynasties, Monasteries and Churches in Christian Ethiopia', in *Stifter und Mäzene und ihre Rolle in der Religion. Von Königen, Mönchen, Vordenkern und Laien in Indien, China und anderen Kulturen*, ed. by Barbara Schuler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Publishers, 2013), pp. 161-186, here 180-81. For research on the contemporary commemorative practices of the Ethiopian Church, see Tom Boylston, 'And Unto Dust Shalt Thou Return. Death and the Semiotics of Remembrance in an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Village', *Material Religion*, 11/3 (2015), 281-302.
- 11 Bausi, *Kings and Saints*, p. 180.
- 12 Without any claim to completeness, see the cases discussed in Carlo Conti Rossini, 'Tre Piccoli Testi Etiopici', *Rivista degli studi orientali*, 23/1 (1948), 46-51; Madeleine Schneider, 'Deux actes de donation en arabe', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 8 (1970), 79-87; Heldman, *Marian Icons*, pp. 80-90; ead., 'Creating Religious Art: The Status of Artisans in Highland Christian Ethiopia', *Aethiopia*, 1 (1998), 131-47; ead. and Monica S. Devens, 'The Four Gospels of Däbrä Mä'ar. Colophon and Note of Donation', in *Varia Aethiopia. In Memory of Sevir B. Chernetsov (1943-2005)*, ed. by Denis Nosnitsin, *Scrinium. Revue de patrologie, d'hagiographie critique et d'histoire ecclésiastique*, 1 (Piscataway, NJ: Georgias Press, 2009), pp. 77-79; Giafrancesco Lusini, 'Scrittura Documentarie Etiopiche (Dabra Deḥuḥān e Dabra Şegē, Sarā'ē, Eritrea)', *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici*, 42 (1998), 5-55; Bausi, *Kings and Saints*; Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia. From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Vitagrazia Pisani, 'Abbā Salāmā and His Role of Commissioner of the Gəbra Ḥəməmət. An Additional Evidence from Two Witnesses from Tagrāy, Northern Ethiopia', *COMSt Bulletin*, 5 (2019), 129-50; Jacopo Gnisci, 'Constructing Kingship in Early Solomonic Ethiopia. The David and Solomon Miniatures in the Juel-Jensen Psalter', *Art Bulletin*, 102/4 (2020), 7-36 (pp. 12-13); Verena Krebs, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 202-03. On the pre-Solomonic character of such practices, see the examples discussed in Marie-Laure Derat, 'Les donations du roi Lalibälä. Éléments pour une géographie du royaume chrétien d'Éthiopie au tournant du XII^e et du XIII^e siècle', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 25 (2010), 19-42; and Getatchew Haile, 'The Marginal Notes in the Abba Gäräma Gospels', *Aethiopia*, 19 (2017), 7-26, which also includes an interesting list of dates for the commemorations of Ethiopian emperors.

to remember its maker in their prayers.¹³ From a study of these and similar cases, it becomes apparent that the maker or patron of an object could hope to gain some benefit not only from the prayers of those who engaged with it but also from the very act of donating it to a church.¹⁴ The inscription above the portrait of Yəkunno Amlak attests that this image possessed similar mnemonic and devotional functions:

In giving thanks to God, it is I who has [this church] built, [I] Yəkunno Amlak, whom God made king by his [good] will. My father, Nəhyo Bākrəstos, was an agent for me to have this church built in the name of Mätta'. May God have mercy upon me in the Kingdom of Heaven with my fathers Mähari Amlak and Nəhyo [Bākrəstos].¹⁵

The text specifies that Nəhyo Bākrəstos – an otherwise unknown ecclesiastical figure – acted as Yəkunno Amlak's agent in the decoration and construction of Gännätä Maryam (originally dedicated to St Mätta') and that through this donation Nəhyo Bākrəstos, the emperor, together with a third clergyman called Mähari Amlak, aspired to improve their own chances of salvation. Close inspection of some of the other images confirms the impression that the church was built to bolster the emperor's soteriological aspirations, since most scenes revolve around the themes of redemption and intercession. For instance, the southern face of the pillar that bears Yəkunno Amlak's portrait features a representation of the Three Jews in the Fiery Furnace: a theme that acknowledges the possibility of divine intervention and deliverance through acts of religious piety.¹⁶ More significantly, most of the portraits of holy men that adorn the church are accompanied by inscriptions of supplication prayers that attest to a belief in the power of intercession. For example, there is an image of St George, located to the emperor's left, that bears the following: 'St George intercede for us; may your prayer embrace us, Amen'; while a portrait of St Cyriacus on horseback is surmounted by a supplication reading 'Holy Cyriacus, martyr of Christ, intercede and pray for us'.¹⁷

Since there has been little interest in how captions were intended to function in medieval Ethiopian churches, it may be useful to look outside this field at recent research on the interplay

- 13 On the octateuch, see Alessandro Bausi, 'I colofoni e le sottoscrizioni dei manoscritti etiopici', in *Colofoni armeni a confronto. Le sottoscrizioni dei manoscritti in ambito armeno e nelle altre tradizioni scritte del mondo mediterraneo. Atti del colloquio internazionale. Bologna, 12-13 ottobre 2012*, ed. by Anna Sirinian, Paola Buzi, and Gaga Shurgaia, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 299 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2016), 233-260 (p. 248); on the icon, see Heldman, *Marian Icons*, p. 25. For another colophon in a fifteenth-century illuminated Ethiopic Octateuch, see Gianfranco Fiaccadori, 'Bisanzio e il regno di 'Aksum. Sul manoscritto Martini etiop. 5 della Biblioteca Forteguerriana di Pistoia', *Bollettino del Museo Bodoniano di Parma*, 7 (1993), 161-199.
- 14 Bausi, *Kings and Saints*. On this topic, see also Neal Sobania and Raymond Silverman, 'Patrons and Artists in Highland Ethiopia. Contemporary Practice in the Commissioning of Religious Painting and Metalwork', in *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Hamburg July 20-25, 2003*, ed. by Siegbert Uhlig, Maria Bulakh and Denis Nossitsin, *Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 65 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Publishers, 2006), pp. 469-77.
- 15 Translation taken from Heldman and Getatchew Haile, *Who Is Who*, 4; on this inscription see also Lepage, *Peintures Murales*, 63-64; Bausi, *Kings and Saints*, 173.
- 16 The votive function of the image is made explicit by its inscription: '[...] the archangel Gabra'el, who [...] his children from the furnace of fire. And [save] also us [from] the evil. Amen'; translation by Vitagrazia Pisani within the framework of the ITIESE project (personal communication 1 October 2021). For a study of this theme in the Ethiopian tradition, see Stanislaw Chojnacki, 'Les trois hébreux dans la fournaise. Une enquête iconographique dans la peinture éthiopienne', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 35 (1991), 13-40.
- 17 My translations into English are based on Balicka-Witakowska, *Les peintures murales*, pp. 200-01.

among the visual, material, and communicative properties of texts.¹⁸ In his study of inscriptions in medieval Georgia, Antony Eastmond distinguishes between those that are meant to be read and those that ‘stand in for individuals’.¹⁹ Arguably, though we have no evidence beyond the inscriptions themselves, the prayers in Gännätä Maryam performed both these functions: they eternalized the faithful’s supplication to God through the intercession of the holy figures with whom they were associated, and they encouraged viewers to sympathetically interact with the church’s decorative programme.

It is open to debate who the intended beneficiaries of these prayers were, that is to say, whether the pronoun ‘us’ should be taken as a specific reference to the patrons of Gännätä Maryam – Yəkunno Amlak, Nəhyo Bäkrəstos, and Mähari Amlak – or as a more generic allusion to the Christian community that gathered within its walls. However, the presence of inscriptions that specifically mention Yəkunno Amlak and members of his family and entourage shows that the emperor and his representatives stood to gain some spiritual advantage for financing the church’s decoration. One such inscription is located above an iconic portrait of a saint on horseback: ‘St Mercurius, martyr of Christ. Pray and supplicate for Yəkunno Amlak and Nəhyo Bäkrəstos, Amen’ (Fig. 2).²⁰

The prayer, like others in the church, is written in a large, though not particularly elegant, script, indicating that it was meant to be viewed and read. The content and legibility of the inscription suggest that literate viewers were called to perform a double role in contemplating it: on the one hand, to silently perpetuate the memory of the emperor in their minds, and, on the other, to activate the intercessory power of the images by directing prayers towards them, reading their inscriptions aloud, and performing devotional activities in the church.²¹ In this respect, it is worth noting that the artists of Gännätä Maryam may have been intentionally ambiguous about the referents of most prayers, since the use of an all-encompassing pronoun like ‘us’ calls beholders into religious action by reminding them that they, too, could obtain blessings through individual and collective worship. If my reading is correct, then the wall paintings and inscriptions of Gännätä Maryam contributed to the creation of a multi-functional space. They recorded and commemorated Yəkunno Amlak’s patronage, thereby incorporating him into what Robert S. Nelson has described, with reference to the Byzantine tradition, as a ‘medieval mechanism for social and spiritual commemoration’; and they incentivized viewers to become at once witnesses, participants, and beneficiaries of the saints’ intercession as well as of their own prayers.²²

18 Such studies may provide a preliminary framework for research on the Ethiopian tradition as long as we do not take for granted that research on other Christian traditions can be transposed onto the context of Ethiopia. See, for instance, the collected essays in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Viewing Inscriptions in the Late Antique and Medieval World*, ed. by Antony Eastmond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

19 Antony Eastmond, ‘Textual Icons. Viewing Inscriptions in Medieval Georgia’, in *Viewing Inscriptions*, 76–98 (p. 94); as well as Paul Dilley, ‘Dipinti in Late Antiquity and Shenoute’s Monastic Federation. Text and Image in the Paintings of

the Red Monastery’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 165 (2008), 111–28.

20 The inscription is discussed in Heldman and Getatchew Haile, *Who Is Who*, p. 7.

21 There has been limited research on visual literacy in Ethiopia, but pioneering research on these topics for other contexts offers a useful starting point for such analyses. See, for example, Michael Camille, ‘Seeing and Reading. Some Visual Implications of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy’, *Art History*, 8/1 (1985), 26–49; and William J. Diebold, ‘Verbal, Visual, and Cultural Literacy in Medieval Art. Word and Image in the Psalter of Charles the Bald’, *Word & Image*, 8/2 (1992), 89–99.

22 Quotation from Robert S. Nelson, ‘Image and Inscription. Pleas for Salvation in Spaces of



◆ Fig. 2
Ethiopian Painter,
St. Mercurius, Wall
Painting, ca. 1268–85 CE,
Gännätä Maryam
(Photo: Michael Gervers,
Courtesy of the DEEDS
Project).



◆ Fig. 3
Ethiopian Painter,
Virgin and Child, Wall
Painting, ca. 1268–85 CE,
Waša Mika'el
(Photo: Michael Gervers,
Courtesy of the DEEDS
Project).

On the basis of what we know about the foundation of churches by wealthy patrons during the early Solomonic period, it is quite possible that Yəkunno Amlak also provided Gännätä Maryam with lands to sustain its clergy and at least some of the furnishings and books it needed to function as a place of worship.²³ Undoubtedly, this was not the only institution that received financial support from the emperor, who is mentioned, together with Mähari Amlak, in an inscription in the nearby church of Waša Mika'el (Fig. 3).²⁴ Moreover, the acknowledgment of Yəkunno Amlak in land grants contained within a Gospel book from the monastery of Däbrä Libanos, in present-day Eritrea, confirms his involvement in such gift-giving activities, which must necessarily have been far more common than the current evidence would suggest.²⁵ We cannot corroborate this for Gännätä Maryam simply because most of the paraphernalia and manuscripts that survive in its treasury, with the exception of some metal works, appear to date from the fifteenth century onwards. If Yəkunno Amlak did in fact donate such objects, these would, in all likelihood, have borne additional devotional inscriptions that mentioned him in order to further cement his links with this institution and help in paving his way to paradise.²⁶ The emperor may well have also provided funds to pay for his commemorations. If he did, then the lively banqueting scene that accompanies a representation of the Wedding of Cana located in the north aisle, close to his portrait, may have been viewed as an antecedent to the feasts held in his honour.²⁷

So far, I have focused chiefly on the devotional goals and spiritual expectations of the founders of Gännätä Maryam, but also worth thinking about is how the church's intended audience(s) might have responded to its visual prompts.²⁸ In order to pursue this line of inquiry, the first point to consider is that the church's founding was imbued in equal measure with political and religious meaning. While there can be little doubt that Yəkunno Amlak funded

- Devotion', in *Art and Text in Byzantine Culture*, ed. by Liz James (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 100–19 (p. 110). More generally, images can also encourage participatory action in church, as illustrated by the cases discussed in Henry Maguire, *The Icons of Their Bodies. Saints and Their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Peter Low, 'You Who Once Were Far Off. Enlivening Scripture in the Main Portal at Vézelay', *Art Bulletin*, 85/3 (2003), 469–89.
- 23 See n. 13.
- 24 For an analysis of this image and its caption, as well as a discussion of other historical figures that are represented here, see Jacques Mercier, 'Peintures du XIII^e siècle dans une église de l'Angot (Éthiopie)', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 18 (2002), 143–48.
- 25 On the Golden Gospels of Däbrä Libanos, see Carlo Conti Rossini, 'L'evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libānos', *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. 5a/10 (1901), 177–219; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, p. 68; Alessandro Bausi, 'Su alcuni manoscritti presso comunità monastiche dell'Eritrea: Parte terza', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 41 (1998), 13–56 (p. 13–23); id., 'Un indice dell'Evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libānos (Šemazānā, Akkala Guzāy, Eritrea)', *Aethiopica*, 10 (2007), 81–91. Most, if not all, churches would have had to hold similar records of their property.
- 26 A study of the church's treasury is a desideratum. Brian Clark, *Landscape Formation Processes and Archaeological Preservation in the Ethiopian Highlands. A Case Study from the Lalibela Region* (doctoral thesis, Rice University, Houston, TX, 2015), p. 13, reports the presence of 'a large Mamluk Period Egyptian platter supposedly gifted to the king from Egypt and inscribed on the back with a dedicatory inscription to Yekuno Amlak and a list of territories under his control' that is being investigated by Tania Tribe.
- 27 The fact that this scene is placed near the exit, possibly in the direction where such commemorations were held, and is dislocated from other Christological scenes in the church, further supports this interpretation.
- 28 For some significant comparable research on the political functions of royal portraiture in other contexts, see, for example, André Grabar, *L'Empereur dans l'art byzantin: Recherches sur l'art officiel de l'Empire d'Orient*, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres de l'université de Strasbourg, 75 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1936); Antony Eastmond, *Royal Imagery in Medieval Georgia* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Christina Maranci, 'Building Churches in Armenia. Art at the Borders of Empire and the Edge of the Canon', *Art Bulletin*, 88/4 (2006), 656–75; Craig Clunas, *Screen of Kings: Royal Art and Power in Ming China* (Honolulu:

its pictorial decoration, we do not know whether he sponsored the construction of the building or whether he took over an existing structure – perhaps one erected with financing from those Zagwe rulers he had just overthrown.²⁹ Whatever the case, as Georg Gerster and others have rightly observed, the decision to either build or appropriate a church that replicated the features of Mādḥane ‘Alām – the most important church in Lalibāla and the religious stronghold of the Zagwes – must have been spurred by Yəkunno Amlak’s desire to consolidate his dynastic ambitions.³⁰ By claiming Gännätä Maryam as his foundation, Yəkunno Amlak was putting himself on par with his Zagwe predecessors and, more significantly, with those rulers of Aksum, the architectural patrons of the cathedral of Maryam Ṣəyon in Aksum, from whom he claimed to descend.³¹

As for Yəkunno Amlak’s portrait in Gännätä Maryam, it seems clear that it, too, served legitimizing functions, since it singles him out as the church’s patron. However, I would argue that this image conveyed additional meaning. At least in the intention of its sponsors, the mere presence of such a picture within a sacred space signalled that this was a ruler who had secured divine favour: just to leave no room for doubt, the inscription emphasizes that we are beholding someone ‘whom God made king’.

The fact that Nəḥyo Bākṛastos and Māḥari Amlak flank the emperor is also significant in several respects, foremost in shoring up the emperor’s sacral authority. Out of the dozens of holy figures that appear in Gännätä Maryam, the vast majority is shown standing, while those that are granted the privilege of being seated or enthroned are comparatively few and of high status: Jesus Christ (Fig. 4), the Virgin Mary, and King David, as well as a third figure, who is identified by an inscription as Təḥrəyännä Maryam (Fig. 5) and who – given the way in which she has been single out, along with further evidence discussed below – was probably a wife of Yəkunno Amlak.³² Even more striking is the fact that, in Gännätä Maryam, the only figure other than Yəkunno Amlak to be shown flanked by two attendants and seated in full-frontal view is Jesus Christ himself (Fig. 4).³³ More generally, as concerns early Solomonic art, the only two personages depicted on a throne and flanked by two or more figures, typically angels, are Jesus and his mother (Figs. 3 and 7).³⁴ While such Christomimetic rhetoric might not have been uncommon for Christian rulers of Byzantium or the Latin West, it is quite startling in the context of Ethiopia where, by and large, portraiture is characterized by some display of humility before God.³⁵

University of Hawai’i Press, 2013); and *Emperors and Emperors in Late Antiquity: Images and Narratives*, ed. by María P. G. Ruiz and Alberto J. Q. Puertas (Leiden: Brill, 2021).

29 As noted, for example, by Phillipson, *Ancient Churches*, p. 188.

30 Georg Gerster, *Churches in Rock: Early Christian Art in Ethiopia* (London: Phaidon Press, 1970), p. 116; see also Heldman and Getatchew Haile, *Who Is Who*, p. 8.

31 See n. 13; on the engagement of Solomonic rulers with their Aksumite past, see also Gnisci, *Constructing Kingship*, with further references.

32 More specifically, the themes are the Annunciation; Jesus Teaching in the Temple; the Wedding at Cana, in this theme, by necessity, the guests are also seated; the Washing of the Feet; and the Appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene. For reproductions,

and a discussion of these themes, see Lepage, *Peintures Murales*, figs. 8, 9, 13, 15, 16, 18; and Balicka-Witakowska, *Les peintures murales*, figs. 5, 6, 7, 15.

33 A related observation about this image appeared, after the submission of this article for publication, in Jacques Mercier, *Art of Ethiopia: From the Origins to the Golden Age (330-1527)* (Paris: Éditions Place des Victoires, 2022), p. 80, fig. 76.

34 For some examples, see the discussion in Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting. Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models, and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century*, *Äthiopistische Forschungen*, 10 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), pp. 171–200; and Jacques Mercier, *Vierges d’Éthiopie* (Montpellier: Archange Minotaure, 2004).

35 On Christomimetic images or rulers in other Christian contexts, see, for instance, Alicia Walker,

◆ Fig. 4 ◆
Ethiopian Painter,
St. Mercurius, Wall
Painting, ca. 1268–85 CE,
Gännätä Maryam
(Photo: Michael Gervers,
Courtesy of the DEEDS
Project).



◆ Fig. 5
Ethiopian Painter,
Kʷələṣewon, Təḥrəyännä
Maryam and a third figure,
Wall Painting,
ca. 1268–85 CE, Gännätä
Maryam (Photo: Michael
Gervers, Courtesy of the
DEEDS Project).



Only a small, albeit meaningful, compositional difference differentiates the Transfiguration scene in Gännätä Maryam from the imperial portrait: in the former the adjacent figures are standing, while in the latter they are seated on foldable chairs, a detail which may be as much a reflection of contemporary practice as a concession to the balance of power of the time. Indeed, as much as the ecclesiastical figures in Gännätä Maryam and in other monasteries would have benefitted financially and gained in power from their association with Yəkunno Amlak – as showcased by their eagerness to create visual and textual matter to record such acts of imperial benevolence – it is equally true that the emperor had to rely on such powerful monastic advocates to secure his throne.

As pointed out by Marylin E. Heldman and Getatchew Haile, a number of 'highly celebrated indigenous monks of the Ethiopian church who flourished in those days were relatives of Yəkunno Amlak on his mother's side'.³⁶ Moreover, several traditions record alliances between the emperor and prominent monastic leaders. The most significant of these accounts is transmitted in a version of the *gädl* (acts) of Iyäsus Mo'a, abbot and founder of Däbrä Ḥayq Ḍstifanos, a monastery in the Amhara region that provided the bulk of Yəkunno Amlak's army.³⁷ According to this text, Iyäsus Mo'a prophesized Yəkunno Amlak's accession to the throne and offered prayers to support the cause of the emperor, who in return appointed the abbot to the most important ecclesiastic position at court, that of 'aqqabe sä'at (keeper of hours), and granted several privileges to his monastery, including a third of the lands of his kingdom; the removal of all lay people and women from the island on which the monastery was located; and the right to offer asylum.³⁸

As someone affiliated with Däbrä Ḥayq Ḍstifanos, the author of the *Acts of Iyäsus Mo'a* had an obvious interest in overstating the role of the founding abbot in the establishment of the dynasty that ruled the country at the time of the text's composition; nevertheless, there seems to be little doubt that this abbot was one of the closest allies of Yəkunno Amlak.³⁹ Other accounts make quite clear that the emperor needed the backing of monastic groups to rally support for his cause. The *Acts of Iyäsus Mo'a* (Fig. 6), the portrait of Yəkunno Amlak with Nəḥyo Bäkrəstos and Mäḥari Amlak in Gännätä Maryam (Fig. 1), as well as the supplication in Waša Mika'el (Fig. 3) are, in a sense, all offshoots of this network of alliances between church and state that legitimized both parties in near equal measure. The subsequent history of the Solomonic dynasty shows that widespread monastic opposition could represent a real and serious threat to the ruler's hold on power.⁴⁰

The Emperor and the World. Exotic Elements and the Imaging of Middle Byzantine Imperial Power, Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries C.E. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 2-3, 13, 52, 158; and Riccardo Pizzinato, 'Vision and Christomimesis in the Ruler Portrait of the Codex Aureus of St. Emmeram', *Gesta*, 57/2 (2018), 145-70.

- 36 Heldman and Getatchew Haile, *Who Is Who*, p. 1.
 37 *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a, abbé du Convent de St-Etienne de Ḥayq*, ed. and trans. by Stanislas Kur, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*, 260, *Scriptores Aethiopicci*, 50 (Louvain: Peeters, 1965), pp. 19-28.
 38 *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a*, p. 25; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, p. 67; Kropp, *der Welt gestorben*; Derat, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens*, pp. 88-110.

- 39 On the use of Ethiopian hagiographies as sources, see Steven Kaplan, 'Hagiographies and the History of Medieval Ethiopia', in *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Ethiopian, The Worlds of Eastern Christianity, 300-1500*, ed. by Alessandro Bausi (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 389-98; on the subsequent history of the monastery, see also Tadesse Tamrat, 'The Abbots of Däbrä-Ḥayq 1248-1535', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 8/1 (1970), 87-117.
 40 Robert Beylot, 'Sur quelques hétérodoxes éthiopiens. Estifanos, Abakerazun, Gabra Masih, Ezra', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 201/1 (1984), 25-36; Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, p. 215; Getatchew Haile, 'The Cause of the Ḍstifanosites. A Fundamentalist Sect in the Church of Ethiopia', *Paideuma*, 29 (1983), 93-119; Gianfrancesco Lusini, *Studi sul monachesimo*

While these monastic groups may have been prepared to endorse an emperor in return for land and prestige, they would just as readily challenge his authority in the face of decisions that were unacceptable or unfavourable to them. We find evidence of the self-assurance and clout of prominent church leaders in a portrait of Iyäsus Mo'a, produced during the lifetime of the depicted likely with the intention of presenting him as a 'saint', in a Gospel book that he donated to his church (Fig. 6).⁴¹ This illumination asserts authority in a manner comparable to the portrait of Yäkunno Amlak. Significantly, on the opposite page (fol. 6r), a note in a secondary hand commemorates the abbot's alliance with Yäkunno Amlak:

After St Iyäsus Mo'a made an alliance with Yäkunno Amlak, so that he may fulfil their will, they banned by the power of Peter and Paul any woman from entering this monastery, and any estate owner and anyone who was not a monk from laying down a house [in the monastery].⁴²

A few pages later, on fol. 12v, another note articulates that even a king should not dare to challenge the abbot's authority: 'In the year of mercy 237, Iyäsus Mo'a, 'aqqabe sä'at of Hayq granted and appointed Hirtä Amlak to Daga Estifanos. Anyone who attempts to take this by fraud, may he be king or anyone else, may be excommunicated'.⁴³

Turning back to the question of how the portrait in Gännätä Maryam would have been viewed, we recognize that, by having themselves represented next to the emperor, Nəhyo Bäkrəstos and Mähari Amlak were showcasing their own eminence as much as his. We can reasonably imagine that those viewers who were most closely affiliated with the emperor's court did not object to such displays of hubris, but what about those monastic groups who backed the Zagwe resistance that opposed Yäkunno Amlak, or those individuals who did not benefit directly from his ascent to power? Surely, these latter factions could have attacked the emperor and his allies for their lack of humility as well as for their nepotistic and clientelist behaviour.

To address this point, let us consider again the aforementioned portrait of Təhrəyännä Maryam, who is shown seated next her son, K^wələşewon (Fig. 5). Given their prominent visual treatment and placement in the church, it is likely that these two figures were respectively a wife and son of Yäkunno Amlak. While some scholars have questioned this identification, since it is not confirmed by other sources, the captions offer convincing evidence of their relationship with the emperor: 'K^wələşewon with his horse, son of the king. His mother [?]

eustaziano (secoli XIV-XV), Studi Africanistici, Serie Etiopica, 3 (Naples: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1993).

41 In an in-depth study of this image, Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Sainteté et intervention royale au monastère Saint-Étienne de Hayq au tournant du XIIIe et du XIVe siècle. L'image de Iyasus Mo'a dans son Évangile', *Oriens Christianus*, 94 (2010), 199-227 (p. 199), remarks that 'il semble tout à fait inconcevable que Iyasus Mo'a se soit lui-même qualifié de saint'. While it remains open to debate whether the image of Iyäsus Mo'a and its accompanying caption were produced during his lifetime, as I suggest, or afterwards, I believe

that the presence of other historical figures in the church paintings considered here (although these are admittedly not identified as saints) shows that it was not an 'inconceivable' practice to blur the boundaries between saints and the living community. I discuss this image in more detail in a study entitled 'Imaging Sanctity in Early Solomonic Ethiopia: The Portrait of "qaddus" Iyäsus Mo'a' which I recently submitted for publication.

42 Translation by Massimo Villa (personal communication, 17 September 2020).

43 Translation by Massimo Villa (personal communication, 17 September 2020).



◆ Fig. 6
Ethiopian Painter, Portrait of Iyäsus Mo'a, Gospel Books of Iyäsus Mo'a, 1280/1281. Däbrä Hayq Ḥṣṭifanos, Ethiopia, s.n. [EMML 1832], fols. 5v–6r (Photo: Michael Gervers, courtesy of the DEEDS project).

◆ Fig. 7
Ethiopian Painter, The Virgin and Child with Emperor Dawit II (left) and beginning of a Miracle of Mary (right), Miracles of Mary of Gəṣān Maryam, late fourteenth to early fifteenth century, Gəṣān Maryam, s.n., fols. ? (Photo: Diana Spencer, courtesy of the DEEDS project).



Təhrəyanna Māryām [who] raised him. This is the image of Təhrəyanna Māryām. [?] the Lord, Amen'.⁴⁴

Surely, the fact that Təhrəyännā Maryam is the only seated woman in Gännätä Maryam, other than the Virgin Mary, and that her son is represented like a saint on horseback must have seemed borderline heretical to some of the emperor's Christian opponents.⁴⁵ We also know that early Solomonic Christian artists were extremely conscious about the importance of showing respect to God in their work. Consequently, in painting of this period Jesus is always distinguished from other figures by virtue of size, position, or attributes. A particularly emblematic case of attentiveness to these issues is offered by several early Solomonic representations of the Washing of the Feet, where – out of reverence for God and in contrast with most other Christian traditions – Ethiopian illuminators refused to show Jesus kneeling down to enact the washing, instead opting to depict him seated on a stool or throne to underscore his divine nature.⁴⁶ As I have argued elsewhere, such features of early Solomonic art demonstrate that Christian Ethiopians were particularly alert to how the visual could be used to signal hierarchy and, accordingly, took deliberate steps to ensure that no figure received more reverence than God.⁴⁷ In view of this, it is highly probable that the Christomimetic character of Yəkunno Amlak's image, perceptible especially in his enthronement, must have been scandalous for some contemporary viewers.

Unfortunately, there are no surviving records of such reactions, and therefore pronouncements on the matter risk amounting to little more than speculation. However, I submit that we possess at least some indirect evidence that the portraits in Gännätä Maryam were met with a degree of opposition. While the loss of a conspicuous portion of early Solomonic art prevents us from reaching definitive conclusions, it is significant that portraits of contemporary figures – whether rulers or holy men – are extremely rare in Christian artworks produced

44 I am grateful to Dr Vitagrazia Pisani for working on this translation within the framework of the ITIESE project (personal communication 1 October 2021). On these images, see also Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, *Les peintures murales*, n. 7; ead., 'The Wall-Paintings in the Church of Mādhane Alām', p. 28; and Bosc-Tiessé and Derat, *Lalibela, Site Rupestre*, pp. 101–04, who offer a detailed analysis of the interconnection between these images. It cannot be ruled out, though it seems less likely in view of the inscriptions that mention Yəkunno Amlak's patronage, that these two figures played an active role in the church's decorative programme to support their own legitimizing agenda.

45 A later, and still little-understood, conflict between Emperor 'Amdā Şəyon I (r. 1314–44) and some of Ethiopia's most influential monastic groups over his polygamy shows that imperial marital and extra-marital relationships were not exempt from religious and moral condemnation, see Tadesse Tamrat, *Church and State*, p. 116. Whereas the case of the Stephanites refusal to bow before images of the Virgin Mary – which admittedly took place over a century after the facts considered here – provides us with some idea of the kinds of religious conflicts

that could erupt over the use and content of images; see Steven Kaplan, 'Seeing Is Believing. The Power of Visual Culture in the Religious World of Aşe Zār'a Ya'eqob of Ethiopia (1434–1468)', *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 32/4 (2002), 403–21; Jacopo Gnisci, 'Cult Images', *Apollo Magazine*, 190/680 (2019), 76–81.

46 Jacopo Gnisci, 'The Liturgical Character of Ethiopian Gospel Illumination of the Early Solomonic Period. A Brief Note on the Iconography of the Washing of the Feet', in *Aethiopia fortitudo ejus. Studi in onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in occasione del suo 80° compleanno*, ed. by Rafał Zarzeczny, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 298 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2015), pp. 253–75.

47 For instance, see Jacopo Gnisci, 'Illuminated Leaves from an Ethiopic Gospel Book in the Newark Museum and in the Walters Art Museum', *Manuscript Studies*, 3/2 (2018), 357–82 (p. 379); id., 'Copying, Imitation, and Intermediality in Illuminated Ethiopic Manuscripts from the Early Solomonic Period', in *Illuminating Metalwork: Metal, Object, and Image in Medieval Manuscripts*, ed. by Joseph S. Ackley and Shannon L. Wearing, *Sense, Matter, and Medium*, 4 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 129–56; id. and Rafał Zarzeczny, 'They Came

in the two centuries that followed Yäkunno Amlak's reign.⁴⁸ Such a noticeable absence calls for an explanation, the most likely one being that the type of portraits produced for Yäkunno Amlak and Iyäsus Mo'a were not seen as successful precedents worthy of imitation. To further support this hypothesis, let us consider a later portrait of Emperor Dawit II (r. ca 1382-1413) before the Virgin and Child, from a manuscript of the *Miracles of Mary* (Fig. 7). The illustration stands out not only for being practically the only other imperial portrait to survive from the early Solomonid period but also for its depiction of the emperor in submission before Jesus and his mother: he gestures adoration while standing beneath them in garments that lack the gold paint used for decorating theirs.⁴⁹ In this way, the portrait adopts a different, and far more humble, approach to representing imperial piety.

In sum, this paper has shown that the imperial portrait of Yäkunno Amlak in Gännätä Maryam was created to support his devotional and political aspirations. It memorializes the emperor as a pious donor in adherence with gift-giving customs of the period, while also signalling his newly acquired status as a ruler – one able to build (or appropriate) monuments on par with those sponsored by his Zagwe predecessors and located near to their political stronghold in Lalibäla. At least in the intention of its patron and makers, the image would sustain the emperor's legitimizing agenda and bolster the standing of the monastic community operative within the church. The portrait is interlinked with the space in which it is situated as well as with the rest of the church's decorative programme. For example, the eastward orientation of the emperor's effigy allows him to gaze in the direction of the sanctuary, while its inscriptions, like those that accompany the other iconic images in the church, entreat acts of reading and commemoration. In this respect, the wall paintings of Gännätä Maryam helped construct a sacred three-dimensional space that enveloped the congregation and brought it into contact with a community of saints. While the church's overall pictorial scheme is ingenious and multi-functional, the decision to show the emperor and some of his family members not as supplicants but as powerful political figures with a right to be visually equated to Christ and the Virgin Mary may have ultimately backfired. This ambitious iconographic solution may have been adopted to meet a need to shore up Yäkunno Amlak's status as a dynastic founder, but the lack of such blatantly panegyric images in the centuries that followed his reign strongly suggests that this representational approach was not met with widespread approval.

with *Their Troops Following a Star from the East*.

A Codicological and Iconographic Study of an Illuminated Ethiopic Gospel Book', *Orientalia Christiana Periodica*, 83/1 (2017), 127-89 (p. 162).

48 The known examples are those discussed in Chojnacki, *Les portraits des donateurs*; to which one should add the cases discussed in Alessandro Bausi, 'Su alcuni manoscritti presso comunità monastiche dell'Eritrea', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 38 (1996), 13-69 (p. 59-62); and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, 'Le psautier illustré de Belën Säḡäd', in *Imagines medievales. Studier i medeltida ikonografi, arkitektur, skulptur, måleri och konsthantverk*, ed. by Rudolf Zeitler and Jan O. M. Karlsson, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Ars Suetica, 7 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1983), 1-46 (p. 21-22). To this list, one should add,

as antecedents, the possible portraits of the Zagwe King Lalibala and his consort described in detail in Claire Bosc-Tiessé, 'Catalogue des autels et meubles d'autel en bois (täbot et manbara täbot) des églises de Lalibäla. Jalons pour une histoire des objets et des motifs', *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 25 (2010), 55-101. There has also been a considerable amount of literature on the significance of portraiture in later periods of Ethiopian history, with some noteworthy contributions such as Earnestine Jenkins, 'Emperor Menilik II and the Art of Manuscript Illumination Politics of Representation 19th Century Ethiopia', *Northeast African Studies*, 18/1-2 (2018), 1-30, which cannot be discussed in detail here.

49 As noted in Gnisci, 'Copying, Imitation, and Intermediality', p. 132.

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