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A War-song on Yoḥannəs IV against the Egyptians, Recited by *Ləğ* Täfäri in Aksum, 1906

Oral tradition is, under many aspects, an important component of historiography. It is extremely rich and still to a large degree unexplored. It does not only consist of the orally transmitted memory of people who witnessed historical events, but also of carefully composed pieces of oral literature which transmit historical records in an ordered way from generation to generation; in a way these records are oral books. Very often this kind of oral historiography, which is of an extremely great importance especially for local historiography, is on the way of getting lost today due to modern education. One well-known example for oral historiography (and in a way the basis for and origin of all oral historiography in the Ethiopian-Eritrean region) are genealogies, which are often combined with knowledge over local land rights[1]. Oral historiography, however, also transmits pieces of veritable literature and traditional poetry. Historic deeds of leaders are often resumed in the form of songs and poems, which transmit a specific interpretation of historic events, and are thus of greatest importance for the understanding of the subjective perspective people assumed in a specific period. Often these texts are transmitted over several generations, as they are sung and re-sung and

[1] Cf. on this Smidt, *EAE* II, 741-45. The most important collection of original oral historiography for the Təgrəññа-speaking area, which includes detailed genealogical accounts, is: Kolmodin 1912; Kolmodin 1915; Kolmodin 1914. Another important work based on oral tradition (but documenting it in Italian language only) is: Perini 1905. During the following one hundred years oral traditions of Təgrəññа-speakers had again and again been documented and used, but not any more to such a large scale.

recited again and again[2]. They contain a wealth of cultural connotations, which might not be transmitted by the classical "dry" accounts of historic events. We are in the happy position to be able to discuss a historiographical song, which had been documented and recorded in the early 20th century already[3]. It is an early example for such kind of oral literature, which most of the time was recorded only much later. This also gives us the chance to compare it with a similar, but much shorter song documented almost two generations later, which reinterprets our considerably older song very expressively[4].

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[2] A few songs praising the earliest Solomonid rulers were preserved in writing and have been published in the 19th to early 20th centuries: Littmann 1914 (see the earlier edition of these praise songs: Guidi 1889; for more literature see Littmann 1914:35). Poems and songs on more recent rulers were published mainly in recent Amharic historiographical literature, see for example the oeuvre of Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya, the modern collection of Kamil 1957and the recent paper on traditional songs on Ethiopian rulers by Molvaer 2006 (see also the above-mentioned documentation of Təgrəññña oral traditions by Kolmodin).

[3] Rainer Voigt was the first one to publish a song from this collection, on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the establishment of permanent diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Germany: Voigt 2004.

[4] This very similar, but much shorter song appears in the famous biography of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs: Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1982 A.M. (1989/90 A.D.):151. See also the chapters on *aṣe* Yoḥannəs in the history of Ethiopia by the same author: Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1947 A.M. (1954 A.D.):50. This song cites a few lines of our song, changes much of the wording, but summarizes the main idea on the "hero" *aṣe* Yoḥannəs in a very expressive way: "Kälay : yäwärrädäw : käṣəyon : mäqdäs : / babbatu : Mikaʾel : bännatu : Səllas : / ʿaččädäw : kämmäräw : yan : yaḫəzab: gäbs ÷ / wäqqaw : däbädäbäw : säṭṭäw : länäfas ⁝ / ʿalimu : näfṭäññña : *aṣe* Yoḥannəs::". Approximate translation: 'He came from above, from the Holy of Holies of Zion, by his father Mika'el, by his mother Śəllas. He cut and harvested the army (the enemies) like crop, crushing them (= like oxen walking on the crop), beating them and throwing them into the wind (like crop), targeting them, [he], the gunman *aṣe* Yoḥannəs.'

1. Provenance and documentation of the war-song

This war-song referring to events of the 1870s to 1880s has been recorded during the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition in Aksum in Təgray by the military surgeon Dr Kaschke between 10 January (the date of arrival of the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition at Aksum) and 1 April 1906[5]. It was recited by the local young noble *ləǧ* Täfäri for the Germans[6]. The original song had been recorded on a wax-roll ("phonogramme"[7]), which is audible still today - even if the tone quality is quite bad. It is kept in the archives of the Musicology Department, Ethnographic Museum Berlin-Dahlem, Germany. The music and songs recorded on wax-rolls are today re-recorded with modern technology on CD thanks to the efforts of the Musicology Department. In addition to the audio documentation on wax-roll it was documented in written by an unknown hand[8]. The text is written in

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[5] Cf. the documentation on this expedition in: Wenig 2006.

[6] The willingness of that noble to collaborate might illustrate the fact that the local nobility supported the German Aksum expedition. The title *ləǧ* shows that he in all probability belonged to the high nobility, thus possibly to the wider family of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs IV. From oral tradition we know a certain *däǧǧazmač* Täfäri (whose earlier title should have been *ləǧ* due to his high descent). He may be identified with this young noble who met the Expedition at Aksum in 1906. He was the grandnephew of Yoḥannəs IV, and had his possessions mainly in the Emperor's town Mäqälä (before the 1930s he was a *šum säläwwa*, governor of a small region around Sämra close to Mäqälä), but this does not exclude that he could have been in Aksum in 1906. His mother was *əmbäytäy* Täkolač, daughter of the well-known sister of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs, *əmbäytäy* Dinqənäš Mərčʼa; the latter was the wife of *aṣe* Täklä Giyorgis, who was not recognized by his brother-in-law Kasa, and who had finally won in battle against Täklä Giyorgis which opened the way to the throne for him; after that she married *ras* Gäbrä Kidan, who became the father of the above-mentioned *əmbäytäy* Täkolač. (Interview on genealogies with *fitawrari* Iyasu Aṣbəha, 86 years, Mäqälä, June 2004).

[7] Cf. Ziegler, *EAE* IV (forthcoming).

[8] All the songs recorded by the expeditions are documented in the list of phonogrammes in Berlin ("Abessinische Phonogramme, aufgenommen von Stabsarzt Dr. Kaschke"). In this list the war-song appears as: "16. Schlacht-

Amharic, but with some aberrations, which give the impression that the text has been documented by someone not fully mastering Amharic.

2. The original document

The coarse handwriting shows that the writer was not perfectly used to writing in the Amharic script. This could let us think of a foreign member of the expedition (e.g., the expedition's leader Littmann himself can probably be excluded[9]). However, also the handwriting of the few words in Latin letters and Arabic numbers ("No. 16") gives a similar impression, which suggests that it was not one of the German members of the expedition. This makes it probable that it was rather one of the translators employed by the Germans. We know one name: Wilhelm Schimper junior, a half-cast Ethiopian, also known as Ǝngdašät[10], was employed as the interpreter of the expedition. Some of the letters translated by him dating from around the same period have been published, which show a more secure handwriting[11]; but still I tend to suggest that it was him who jotted down these songs, as his biography fits into what we observe from the text: a certain Təgrəññа influence on the text, some mistakes rather typical for an "outsider" and at least some knowledge of the Latin script.

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gesang. 'König Johannes gegen die Aegypter' ges. v. Lidsch (Prinz) Tefferi." ('War-song 'King Yohannes against the Egyptians' sung by *ləǧ* (prince) Täfäri').

[9] A comparison with the handwriting of Enno Littmann of a later period (kept in the archives of the Hammerschmidt-Bibliothek, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg), who knew perfectly to write the Gəʾəz script, shows that it is probably not his handwriting.

[10] He was born in Təgray, later was one of the captives of *aṣe* Tewodros II on Mäqdäla and then studied engineering in Germany. On his biography and his employment by the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition see: Smidt 2006:145, 148-53.

[11] See: Smidt 2005.

3. Annotated translation[12]

The text is transliterated line by line, thus reproducing its original composition: a new line in the text corresponds to a new line in the transliterated text. When a new idea starts within the same line, it is separated from the preceding part of the text by a vertical slash (|).

Ḫaṣäy[13] *: Yoḥannəs : abbatu : Mikaʾel : ənnatu : Səllas : /* [14]
Aṣe Yoḥannəs - his father was Mikaʾel and Səllas was his mother

This first line already bears a double meaning: the names do not only refer to his parents, but also to his relation to the spiritual sphere. He is the son of Archangel Michael (i.e. under his protection) and of the Trinity - God is always with him. The allusion to Mikaʾel has a specific connotation related to war: Mikaʾel greatly defeated a demon, he is therefore the perfect patron for a Christian warrior. His parents were in fact *šum tämben* Mərčа Wäldä Mikaʾel[15] and *wäyzäro* Səllas, a quite famous women who is the subject of a num-

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[12] The translation is based on multiple approaches to it. I let several translations made independently from each other by native speakers in order to compare them, especially where they differed. I am especially thankful to Mitiku Gebrehiwot and Yohannes Zerai for their translations. I checked the meaning of every word and name in Kane's Amharic dictionary (1990) and the available historical sources, and in addition discussed the meaning of every word with oral informants, particularly Habtom Gebremedhin, Gebremikael Nguse and Mitiku Gebrehiwot. I had also the chance to discuss the meaning and background of the song with the Təgrayan historian Muluwork Kidanemariam, Mäqälä, to whom I likewise express my deepest thanks. Not every word could be identified with the help of Kane's dictionary, and even not with the local informants. In addition, the interpretation was often particularly difficult. Therefore I apologize for any mistake one might discover - the blame is to be put fully on me.

[13] This title is an indication for Təgrayan/Təgrəñña influence in the song: Yoḥannəs IV was called *ḫaṣäy* in Təgrəñña, but *aṣe* in Amharic.

[14] This line also appears in the short song printed in Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1982 A.M. (1989/90 A.D.). See also: Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1947 A.M. (1954 A.D.):50: "*babbatu : Mikaʾel : bännatu Səllas*".

[15] On his genealogy see: Orlowska, *EAE* III, 932f.

ber of oral traditions[16]. Already in a much earlier praise song for another emperor (seemingly *aṣe* Yəsḥaq), the ruler was called a son of Mikaʾel, certainly bearing a similar connation, and son of Maryam[17]. In addition, as Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya rightly pointed out (ibid. 151), the name Mikaʾel is also an allusion to Yoḥannəs IV' descent from *ras* Səḥul Mikaʾel from Təgray, who dominated Ethiopian politics in the 18th century. In fact, already before his coronation, Kasa, the later Yohannəs IV, was also called "*dagmawi* Mikaʾel", i.e. Mikaʾel II[18], in reference to this ancestor, the first great Mikaʾel.

bälay : yätäqqäba : bä-Mänfäs : Qəddus : / [19]
Protected by the Holy Sprit from Above [God]

This is an idea similar to that expressed by the formula "*səyyumä Ǝgziᶜabher*" ('elect of God'), which is regularly part of the titulature of the king of kings. - These first two lines follow the tradition of Amharic poetry: they end with the same letter, the letter 's', which is also the last letter of the name of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs. One can, therefore, read the first part of the poem as variations on the ruler's name. Also the following lines repeat the end-'s' quite rhythmically.

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[16] She was the sister of *ras* Arʾaya "ᶜabi" (later ruler of Təgray), the niece of *däggiyat* Subagadis and the grand-niece of *ras* Wäldä Śəllase (the latter two early 19th century rulers of Təgray).

[17] Littmann 1914: 21: "Maria sei dir Mutter, / Michael sei dir Vater, Scharen von Engeln dein Geleite!"

[18] See on this epitheton Smidt 2009.

[19] The idea of this line reappears in a way also in the much shorter song documented by Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1947 A.M. (1954 A.D.):50, but considerably changed: "*Kälay : yäwärrädäw : kätṣəyon : mäqdäs*".

šəggəya[20] *: täqoṭṭəto : sigäsägəs : täqäbəlo : säṭṭäw : bamäṭṭaw : / risas : ahido : säṭṭäw : länäfas :* |[21]

My handsome one got angry and responded him (the enemy) with guns[22] brought by himself (i.e. the enemy's gun captured by Yoḥannəs), grinded him (like grain) and he threw him into the wind.

This passage clearly refers to enemies which are crushed by Yoḥannəs, without mentioning the term "enemy" and without mentioning even Yoḥannəs - he is only mentioned as the "handsome one". References to beauty are a very Ethiopian way to express appreciation. The enemy is compared with grain: the vocabulary of the peasantry is used, grain is grinded and after that thrown against the wind[23] in order to separate the good grain from unusable rests. In this case the enemy is thrown into the wind, being useless.

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[20] It seems that this spelling is a mistake of the writer. It should rather be *šäggəye* (from *šägga* = the handsome one, in old Amharic). The writer might not have known the word and taken it for a name.

[21] This third line corresponds to the forth line of the song documented by Täklä Ṣadəq Mäkʷəriya 1947 A.M. (1954 A.D.):50: "*wäqaw : däbädäbäw : säṭṭäw : länäfas*".

[22] *risas* (normally *rəsas*) = bullets, can also be used for guns.

[23] Also this motive is known from ancient praise songs for emperor-warriors, cf. Littmann 1914:33: the Christian leader Gälawdewos fought greatly against the Muslim ruler over Ethiopia, "Grañ", who was thrown by the Emperor "into the wind", "Er fing an mit Grañ zu ringen: Wie Spreu warf er ihn in den Wind."

| asas[24] *: wändu : bäṭəyt : sičärrə /*
s : Alolam[25] *: käzzəya : aškäru : sičärräs : bäläw : ṭaläw : silu : /*
mälʾaku : simäslu : |
While the man[26] destroyed them with a bullet, Alula, his soldier, was saying: "hit him, crash him". He looked like an Angel.

This phrase praises "the man" (*wändu*), a term which underlines the masculinity of the one praised. It is not absolutely clear who this man is. *Azmari* singers often use praising phrases which sound nice with no clear connection to a defined person. The listener might conclude that again the main hero of the song Yoḥannəs is meant, or the action of "the man" is at least compared to his deeds. It is up to the listener to decide. But the following passage reinforces the impression that it is Yoḥannəs: The famous *ras* Alula is called "aškäru" ('his soldier'). Alula, who is usually depicted as one of the greatest warriors, appears here merely as someone who encourages the other to crush the enemy, so this other must be even greater than Alula. "Mälʾaku simäslu" ('he looks like an angel') is added for the rhyming, and underlines further the greatness of the hero. Not Alula is meant, but "the man", who crushes the enemy, i.e. Yoḥannəs. The term "angel" has not the connotations as it has in Europe, i.e. mainly the connation of a peace-bringer. In the contrary, angels are often depicted as great fighters against the evil, role-models for this monarchy of Christian warriors. Mikaʾel fought a demon, Giyorgis killed the dragon - same as Yoḥannəs destroyed his enemies in war. (This reminds again of the first line, where Yoḥannəs indirectly appears as the son of archangel Mikaʾel). - A remark on the poetic style: The

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[24] Unidentified word, perhaps my misreading: is it Agos? That would be the Amharic form of the Təgrəññña name Ḥagos ('Luck'). In fact, Ḥagos was a name of a brother of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs, who, however, died quite young and played only a very reduced role in history. (Interview with his descendant *fitawrari* Iyasu Aṣbəha, Mäqälä, July 2004).

[25] An unusual way of writing the name Alula; perhaps it is a further indication that the writer of the text was a foreigner?

[26] Perhaps "the man called Ḥagos", if the interpretation in footnote 24 is correct.

lines before, the end-'s' alliteration dominated; now it is the end-'u' - *aškäru : ... : silu : mäl'aku : simäslu...*

| käzzəyam[27] *: sətwagga : näbbär : kä-Mätämmam : sətwa / gga : näbbär : kəttät : silu : täbätəno : qärrä : apa*[28] *: /*
Then thereafter, she was fighting at Mätämma, she was fighting, and after you gave the mobilization order[29], he (the enemy) was scattered (in disarray).

This passage refers to the war of Yoḥannəs against the Maḫdiyya state, subsumed under the toponym Mätämma (where the most important battle took place in 1889)[30]. It gives a very nice example for the use of feminine gender in the Ethiopian cultural context even if no female is meant: "She" was fighting means the enemy, whose weakness against the greatness of the king is underlined by the attribution of the female gender. This has a long tradition. Even in today's language female gender is used both in the context of close friendship as in a context where the "male-ness" of the other is disputed. When, for example, Eritrean rebel soldiers spoke of the army of the government in the 1980s, the female gender was employed: "*Məṣi'än*" = 'They (female) came', when they reported about the arrival of the army in their region. In the second line the gender

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[27] The handwriting is again not very clear - one could misread this as "käzəyamo" (a non-existing word).

[28] Again an unknown word - possibly an expression of admiration, or just used as a sound. It might also be read as "aga", which would likewise not give any sense. Or is it an example for some remnants of the secret argot used by *azmari* while singing? Until today *azmari* introduce words in their songs which do not make any sense to the ordinary listener, in order to transmit some hidden messages to other *azmaris* (e.g. telling them to stop soon as not much more payment is expected any more). Even a non-*azmari* may remember and reproduce the song together with such words without understanding these particular elements, which are then just taken as sounds reinforcing the poesy and the rhythm of the song. Cf. on the secret language of the *azmari*: Kawase, *EAE* II, 327f.

[29] The term *kəttät* means 'call for war' (cp. *askättätä* 'to have troops mobilize', see: Kane 1990:1431).

[30] Cf. Smidt, *EAE* III, 86f.

surprisingly again changes into male (*täbätəno*, 'he was scattered'). This might be purely arbitrary, but it might also mean that now it is more appropriate to underline the masculinity of the enemy: First "she" is fighting (= fighting badly), then "he" was submitted (= the one submitted was, however, a man, so it was not an easy thing, which makes the submission greater). But he retreated already upon the mere message of general mobilization, without fighting - only out of fear of what would come!

Awaš : täšaggəräw : bisäddä[dä]waccäw[31] *: əmbi : biyasänawaccäw : / əmbi : käz : wädoqu : əndä :ṭənbi*[32] *: : |*
They crossed the Awaš, neither they were sent away by them, nor they were set free by them, and there they fell down like cadavers.

Yoḥannəs's army crossed the Awaš according to this song (not in reality): This refers to Yoḥannəs's war against the ᶜAfar (whose main river is the Awaš); the toponym "Awaš" stands for troublemakers, which are submitted and thrown away like "cadavers" (useless things)[33]. The ᶜAfar are repeatedly appearing in the tradition of Amharic songs as a people submitted in fierce war by the Ethiopian rulers[34]; the mentioning of ᶜAfar (here: symbolized by the river Awaš) has the function to underline that the ruler is a great warrior and hero. In the passage before, the song refers to the war of Mätämma, which is a general reference, not to the war of Mätämma specifically, but to fighting against Muslims in general. Also the reference to

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[31] Cf. Kane 1990:576f., *säddädä* 'send out'.

[32] The form of this word follows a Təgrəññña paradigm, with the ending -i; in Amharic it is *ṭənb* ('dead body'), while *ṭənbi* would be 'ill-smelling thing'.

[33] Again this motive is very similar to that appearing in a much more ancient praise song, cf. Littmann 1914:33: Praising the victory of Gälawdewos over the Muslim ruler of Ethiopia, "Grañ", the singer says that the Muslim governor Nasraddin was "thrown away like dirt", "Nasraddin, von Maria verachtet, Kam prahlend daher. Den warf er fort wie einen Haufen Dreck".

[34] Cf. Littmannn 1914:23f.: the 14th-century ruler ᶜAmdä Ṣəyon led a fierce war against the "Adal" (ᶜAfar). His praise song dramatically decribes the death of his enemies in Adal: "Wie einer Hyäne, die Gift gefressen, Fielen, als er in Adal erschien, [Den Feinden] die Eingeweide heraus. "

Awaš is certainly to be understood in this way: the Christian ruler fights against the Muslims in the west and in the east.

| Təgrem : tägäzza : bäwäre : /
Šəwam[35] *: tägäzza : bäwäre : Gojjäm*[36] *: tägäzzä : bäwäre: Wälqaytəm : /*
tägäzza: bäwäre : yäqärrä : yälläm : yalä : Moḥammäd : Anfäre : : /
And Təgray was submitted by hearing only [of Yoḥannəs's power], and Šäwa was submitted by hearing only, and Goğğam was submitted by hearing only, and Wälqayt was submitted by hearing only and there was no one left except Maḥámmad Ḥanfaḳé[37].

After having mentioned the Muslim enemies to the west (Mätämma) and to the east (Awaš), the song now comes to the core of Yoḥannəs's Christian territory. It is difficult to translate it exactly into English: "tägäzza bäware" means literally simply "submitted by hearsay", which, however, does not make much sense in English. It means in fact that Yoḥannəs did not need to make war to unify Ethiopia, but the great provinces submitted already after just hearing about his power, obeying him even without war[38]. Only the powerful

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[35] This spelling is unusual. It is in fact the Təgrəñña pronounciation of the toponym Šäwa (in Təgrəñña it is Šəwa). This is one of only very few indications for a Təgrəñña influence in the whole text. It can therefore be that the writer was a Təgrayan or a foreigner influenced by the Təgrəñña pronounciation which he heard in Aksum.

[36] The suffix "-əm" ('and') is missing here. It should be "Šəwam ... Goğğəmən ... Wälqaytəm". This can be a further indication with the writer's problems with writing Amharic correctly, but it might also only be a simplification by the singer in order to avoid the double 'm'.

[37] Sultan (*amoyta*) of the sultanate of Awsa, the most important of the largely independent ᶜAfar sultanates, directly bordering at the Christian Ethiopian kingdom. Cf. Morin, *EAE* III, 647f.

[38] This may be compared with ideas found in the much older praise songs translated and discussed by Littmann - here the might of emperors is regularly described through the terror they cause to their enemies, who prefer to submit out of fear instead of continuing war, or who are killed in great numbers: Littmann 1914:10: the emperor causes terror and fear;

Muslim sultan of Awsa, Maḥámmad Ḥanfaḍé (or "Anfäre", the retroflex consonant ḍ being usually reproduced as r in Amharic and Təgrəñña) did not submit to Christian Ethiopian rule. The peculiar role of the ᶜAfar is mentioned expressively as Təgray was historically closely linked to adjacent ᶜAfar territories, mainly through salt trade. ᶜAfar areas immediately east of Təgray (mainly Ǝndärta) were included into the Təgrayan governorship; Yoḥannəs submitted the ᶜAfar settlement Šäk̲ät (in ᶜAfar called Ab ᶜAla), and even took his wife from there. He had therefore a special relationship to that region. However, most of ᶜAfar never submitted to him, and even Šäk̲ät never fully accepted his rule[39]. Note that Wälqayt is mentioned separatedly from "Təgre" (Təgray). In fact, usually it was politically separated from the other Təgrayan provinces; but even other Təgrayan provinces such as ᶜAgamä or Tämben or Ǝndärta could be mentioned separatedly from Təgray in other contexts, as Təgray proper only included Aksum with ᶜAdwa[40].

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op.cit. p. 11: he blinds the rebels, and cuts their hands, *op. cit.* p. 12: the power of the emperor is told by Goğğam (to others), *op. cit.* p. 15: the fish and even the sea are terrorized by him when he starts war, "Die Welt unterwarf er sich durch Macht, Nicht unterwarf er sie durch Liebe" ('he submitted the world through his power, not through love').

[39] Information on the wife of Yoḥannəs and her ᶜAfar background was gathered by oral informants from the wider family of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs, most notably *fitawrari* Iyasu Aṣbəha and *däğğazmač* Zäwde Gäbrä-Səllase, and also from an ᶜAfar researcher acquainted with the ᶜAfar lineage of this wife in Ab ᶜAla, Yasin Mohammed Yasin, whom I thank very warmly.

[40] Oral information of *fitawrari* Iyasu Aṣbəha, Mäqälä, July 2004, a former governor of Ǝndärta.

bäᶜarba : arat : wəha : täšaggəräw : nəgus : Täklä : Haymano /
*t : täg*ʷ*ä[ttä?]täw : hədu : lä-Dämot : |*
King Täklä Haymanot, after crossing forty-four rivers, fought [?][41] but went back to Damot[42].

This passage refers to king Täklä Haymanot of Goğğam, who tried to rule quite independantly from *aṣe* Yoḥannəs, but was submitted by him[43]. The song evokes 44 rivers - which, in Ethiopian tradition, is a number which means an uncountable or at least a great quantity. This alludes to the several years of skirmishes between 1871 and 1874 during which Adal (the later *nəgus* Täklä Haymanot) fought against Yoḥannəs and his followers.

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[41] Difficult to interpret; *täg*ʷ*ätäw* could be a spelling mistake for *täg*ʷ*ät-tätäw* ('he was pulling'), see: Kane 1990:1996; compare with *täg*ʷ*ätägg*ʷ*ätä* ('to be incited'), Kane 1990:1998.

[42] The name of this ancient kingdom, situated south of Goğğam, may have been used as a metaphor for a particularly remote region; in addition, it is known in tradition for a rebellious king, who fought against *aṣe* ᶜAmdä Ṣəyon, Mote Lämmi (also known under the corrupted form Mətälämmi and similar = certainly *mooti* ['king'] Lami); cf. his appearance as a powerful enemy in two praise songs for ᶜAmdä Ṣəyon: Littmann 1914:26, 30.

[43] Cf. Bahru Zewde 1991:44f. In the early 1870s Adal (the original name of the later *nəgus* Täklä Haymanot) fought a virtual guerilla war against Yoḥannəs. The passage on the 44 rivers and the retreat to Damot might even be an allusion to the guerilla tactics. But this was ended in October 1874 with the formal submission by Adal. In the coming years, he fought against rebellions in the name of Yoḥannəs and finally was even crowned as *nəgus* Täklä Haymanot of Goğğam by him in 1881.

| *Abba : Däññaw*[44] *: Mənəlik*[45] *: täkättä /*
lutt : band : sädäqa : lay : asbälutt : |
and Mənəlik "*Abba Daññaw*" followed him [King Täklä Haymanot], but then ate together [with Yoḥannəs] from one plate (*sädäqa*).

This alludes to an important episode during the reign of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs: the Šäwan king Mənilək conspired for a short time with the king of Goğğam, Täklä Haymanot in 1888[46]. But after a re-appreciation of his power, Mənilək quickly sided again with Yoḥannəs and reconciled with him, according to this song. The conclusion of peace is symbolized by eating together from one plate, i.e. a virtual communion, which creates a strong bond between the two adversaries.

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[44] This is the "horse name" of *aṣe* Mənilək II. In that period, nobles were generally known under a horse name, which referred to their favorite horse; a horse name was a sort of "war name". In this case the favorite horse of Mənilək was called "Daññaw" ('Administer Justice'), therefore Mənilək was called "Abba Daññaw" ('the father of Daññaw'). This horse name - as it was often the case with horse names - bears a double meaning: It did not only refer to the name of his horse, but it also referred to Mənilək's famous sense of justice, Mənilək being the supreme judge (*dañña*) not only by his post, but also by his great capacity as a judge. Cf. Bairu Tafla, *EAE* III, 1130f.

[45] This spelling is not the classical one, but not completely impossible; normally it is Mənilək.

[46] Cf. Bahru Zewde 1991:45, 59. Mənilək submitted to *aṣe* Yoḥannəs only in 1878; he then gave up his usurped title of *nəguśä nägäśt* and was confirmed *nəguś* of Šäwa in the Ləčče Agreement. In 1882 he fought against *nəguś* Täklä Haymanot of Goğğam, who competed with him over the (future) control of the Oromo kingdoms and Käfa in the south. It was much later, that both conspired together against Yoḥannəs, followed by a devastating punitive campaign against Goğğam. History is not so clear about a reconciliation with Yoḥannəs, as this song claims. In reality, Mənilək prepared for a possible attack by Yoḥannəs against Šäwa. Instead, Yoḥannəs turned against the Mahdiyya and lost his life in the battle of Mätämma in March 1889, which in fact opened the way to the throne for Mənilək.

| näčč : käbahər : wäṭṭəto : /
asgäbərutt : kä-Təgre : Märäb : Alağe[47] *: asčänutt*[48] *: : |*
and a white [man] came out of the sea, he [*aṣe* Yoḥannəs] caught him [the white enemy] (made him respectful) and forced him to go away from Təgray, Märäb and Alağe;

The toponym Märäb refers to the Märäb river, but certainly includes also the notion of Märäb Məllaš, i.e. the province 'beyond the Märäb' (today's Eritrean highlands). In November 1875 the Egyptians lost the important battle of Gundät[49] in the Märäb valley against the armies of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs, after having moved towards Təgray, occupying all the Märäb Mellaš starting from October 1875. The fact that the singer also evokes Alağe is quite interesting, as it is an anachronism. It was only about two decades later that the Italian armies went deep into Təgray, reaching even up to Alağe, but were forced to retreat by Mənilək (preceding the famous battle of ᶜAdwa of 1896). The term "Alağe" stands here symbolically for the incursion of the Italians - whites, like the Egyptians - into the territory of *aṣe* Yoḥannəs. But instead of talking of the battle of Dogᶜali of 1887, when *ras* Alula destroyed an Italian force, the singer prefers to mention a toponym better known to his audience of 1906. This is also, one might note here, a clever act of political propaganda: the great battles won by Mənilək against the Italians are overshadowed by the battles fought by his predecessor Yoḥannəs. A battle fought by Mənilək is attributed to Yoḥannəs, Mənilək becomes nothing more than a secondary epigone. This attribution must have worked, as the Təgrayan audience of 1906 certainly remembered that it was really

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[47] This toponym is the third indication for a Təgrəññña influence. In Amharic historiography that mountain is generally known as Amba Alage. The local south-Təgrayans, however, call this mountain Ǝmba Alağe (short form Ǝmbalağe or simply Alağe); in modern Təgrəññña it is mainly known as Amba Alağe, but still the locals of that area stick to the original name Ǝmbalağe, Ǝmba being the Təgrəññña form for Amharic Amba.

[48] See: Kane 1990:2227-28, *čänä* 'to load', 'to oppress', 'to prepare for trip'.

[49] Cf. Ofcansky, *EAE* II, 921f.

first *aṣe* Yoḥannəs who fought against the Italians. The exact toponym does not matter in this context...

| *wändəyäw : /*
gobäz : fana[50] *: ḥarr : siräzzəm : Gondär : yašaggəral :* |
and the strong man enlonged the silk (his hair) which helped him to go as far as Gondär (or: his hair reached up to Gondär).

This enigmatic passage is difficult to understand and extremely interesting. The word *ḥarr* generally means silk, but may in spoken language also metaphorically be used for hair[51]. In this case it is a question of interpretation which one of the two alternatives is preferred. In fact, both possibilities could only be understood metaphorically. If one looks at the context of the song, in which the beauty and the manliness of the king are praised, one may rather think that the first meaning intended is "hair": The long, powerful, wild hair of the king is so long that it reaches up to Gondär! In the same time, "silk" is linked with power. It was only up to the rulers to give silk clothes to their greatest followers, so the idea of silk reaching up to Gondär can also be interpreted - the power of the ruler reaches so far, that in all the regions he can give his silk to his followers. This means, their richness and their honor comes only from him! We can conclude that both possible meanings fit and therefore are certainly both intended. The cultural connotations of long hair in Ethiopia need to be inquired: one may think of the biblical story of Samson, whose physical strength was linked with his long hair. Ethnological research in Təgray, however, suggests that hair is not directly linked with physical strength in tradition[52]. The connection

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[50] Difficult to understand; in Tgn. *fana* means 'morning sunshine', with the connotation of something very beautiful – which does not fit here. In Amh. this word does not seem to exist. One should therefore think a spelling mistake for *fanno* ('pioneer', 'freebooter', 'strong man in his prime', see: Kane 1990:2316).

[51] I thank Mitiku Gebrehiwot, Gebremichael Nguse and Habtom Gebremedhin for this information.

[52] Long hair appears also in local traditions of other Ethiopian regions. Among Gurage, long hair may signify higher rank (according to unpublished ethnographic fieldnotes of Dirk Bustorf, whom I thank warmly for

between power and hair rather seems to be the following: It is well-known from Ethiopia that *šəfta* ('outlaws') let their hair grow, which is an expression of their status as rebels or bandits, who do not accept the ruling law (or the rulership) any more, they are outside or beyond the law. The growing of hair symbolizes that rules of the society are not valid any more for them, hair being strictly linked with obeyance to the society's rules (in Ethiopia it is generally expected that one cuts his hair short). If the long hair of the ruler is praised in this song, it means that he is beyond society, beyond the law; his power goes beyond it, he is in fact a warrior who cannot be checked by anyone, even not by law! Again we can observe here the Ethiopian technique of *sämənna wärq*: The primary meaning is silk, which underlines his kinglieness, his grace and richness. The secondary, more hidden, meaning is: he is a great warrior, wild as a *šəfta*, different from ordinary people.

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this information). Cf. also: Munro-Hay / Frederick Grierson 2001:319, where the name of a famous Himyarite king is linked with long hair: "Der Name 'Dhu Nuwas' scheint 'der Herr der Locke' oder etwas Ähnliches zu bedeuten, und auf den Münzen und Statuen werden die himjaritischen Könige mit langen, in Locken über die Schultern herabfallendem Haar dargestellt".

| bäğäḫarədä[53] *: gorä /*
msa : azmari : sifäkkər : ənе : zəm : alhu : əndälčäwät[54] *: : /*
and while the youthful[55] *azmari* (singer) kept boasting, I kept quiet instead of chatting.

This last line contains a nice, almost ironic play with ideas. The song becomes itself the object of the song - the singer expresses admiration by keeping quiet, which means admiration both for Yoḥannəs IV and for the song itself (expecting praise for himself!). The admiration is expressed by an impressed silence - very well placed at the end of the song, after which indeed silence will follow. The one who keeps silent is the "speaker of the story", who is not the singer himself: a complicated construction which allows that the singer does not directly praise himself. The whole song is perceived here as retelling of an older narrative of the great deeds of the king, told by an *azmari* to the audience, and now retold (by a member of that audience) who repeats what the *azmari* was telling the people. The deeds of the king are so great that the only possible reaction is silence: in fact, when people talk about something very important, it is expected that everyone keeps silent. Silence is submission. In the same way as the ruler submits all the provinces of Ethiopia because they simply hear from his power, also the storyteller is so impressed by his power, that he cannot but fall into silence and just listen to the *azmari*.

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[53] This word is unidentifiable. One may guess that it is a misreading of the original text: it seems probable that the song has first been noted down on an extra paper, and then copied by the writer of this text into the register of songs. While copying, an unclear word may be jotted down with a wrong spelling. One could for example guess that it is *bä[l]ḫärd* (the original [l] being misread by the writer as *ğä*), which would give a sense to the first two particles: "by/in one ...", but still *ḫärd* would not make sense; if it belongs to the preceding passage, it may mean "to reach Gondär by one ... [shoot? throw of a stone?]". Or is it to be read as *bä-Ğäḫardä* ('in Ğäḫardä'), Ğäḫardä being a place name? It would then be the place, at which the *azmari* of this song was singing about the king's deeds to his audience.

[54] "instead of playing (chatting)".

[55] Translation of the word "*gorämsa*", i.e. a young man of about 20 years or a bit younger, who is in the age of boasting and great activity.

4. Conclusion

This praise song is rich of allusions and passages bearing a double meaning, in some cases using the technique of *sämənna wärq* ('wax and gold'). First of all, it is not unimportant, on which occasion this song has been recorded: in Təgray in 1906, i.e. during the height of Mənilək's power, by a foreign expedition (of whites) invited by Mənilək himself. In this context, this song delivers a message not only on the former emperor Yoḥannəs IV, but also on Mənilək himself, and possibly even for the white guests. This song praises Yoḥannəs IV as the one whom even Mənilək had to follow, after a futile rebellion. It is therefore part of a political discourse of legitimacy, within which Təgrayans still insist on the prevalence of Yoḥannəs over Mənilək, i.e. meaning here: Təgrayan autonomy versus the claim of Mənilək to control all of Ethiopia. This idea is reinforced by the praise of the song of major battles fought by Yoḥannəs IV: the battle of the Märäb (i.e. the battle of Gundät) of 1875 stands for Yoḥannəs's victory over imperialist (white) intruders. This makes him as great as Mənilək - or even greater - who managed to push back the Italian invaders at the famous battle of Adwa of 1896. Also the appearance of Alağe reinforces this claim: Alağe was known for the advance of Italians in the time of Mənilək; now it is anachronistically linked with Yoḥannəs (in fact, meaning his clash with the Italians at Dogᶜali in 1887). The song seems to stand for a claim, that the fame and honor to be the defender of Ethiopian independence therefore equally goes to Yoḥannəs. This reading makes the song highly political and an expression of Təgrayan pride, in the framework of a not fully recognized claim of Mənilək to govern over all of Ethiopia, including Təgray. Oral tradition in Təgray is full of stories on reservations against fully recognizing Mənilək's power. In addition, the fact that the song explicitly mentions the defeat of the "white(s)" may even be meant as an indirect warning message to the expedition itself, which was certainly also perceived as a political one by the local population: "Never any foreign intruder will have any chance in Təgray!" This text is certainly also a good example for political

propaganda of the 19th century, when the fame and power of rulers was strengthened by praise songs: Even the backlashes of Yoḥannəs, such as his fatal battle against the Mahdiyya in 1889 (Mätämma) and the rebellion of Täklä Haymanot and Mənilək in 1888, are turned to events demonstrating his power in this song.

It stays unclear who exactly wrote down the text. But even if the text is typically Amharic, there are indications of Təgrəññña influence (the words *ḫaṣäy*, Šəwa and Alağe appear in their Təğrəññña forms), which might mean that the writer was someone living in Təgray. In addition, it is a bit surprising to read the form "Moḥammäd", which is unusual in the Ethiopian context, but similar to the forms used in German. An indication for a German influence on the writer? Both facts together increase the probability that the translator Wilhelm Schimper junior, alias Ǝngdašät, from ᶜAdwa, was involved in the documentation of the text. The singer himself might probably have used a purer Amharic (Təgre is not replaced by Təgray, which would change the rhythm, therefore should belong to the original text); it is not excluded that the unidentified words in the text are remnants of exclamations of the singer, and possibly even of secret words from the *azmaris'* jargon.

The main function of persons, places and territories named is to enhance the impression of Yoḥannəs's power. His parents are mentioned in a way, that one can understand their names as names of an archangel and the Trinity, which means that the highest and most holy powers of the world are with him; the other persons mentioned are the warrior Alula, his greatest follower, the two governors Täklä Haymanot and Mənilək, who both submitted to him, and the ᶜAfar ruler Maḥámmad Ḥanfaḍé, who was the only one to resist. The territories and places mentioned are either the princedoms which he submitted (Təgray, Šäwa, Goğğam/Damot, Wälqayt, Gondär) or against whom he went into war (ᶜAfar/Awaš), and places where he fought battles (Mätämma, Märäb, Alağe) - which symbolize his three great external adversaries, the Maḥdiyya, the Egyptians, and the Italians. They show, therefore, the framework for his internal and external wars. In addition, the personal names, topo- and ethnonyms demonstrate the crucial function of religion in Yoḥannəs's wars:

saints and God Himself are helping him in his wars; Muslims are crushed by Christians, or the Muslims' territories at least devastated by war. Here, Christian religion is a religion of warriors: as the Archangel Michael, the king crushes the evil. The language shows a strong connection with the sphere of the peasantry (which becomes especially clear in the short version of the song known from the 1940s, see footnote 4); the killing of the enemies is like harvesting crop, the emperor is therefore for his state what the peasant is for his land. The song also allows us to get a sort of snap-shot of the self-image of 19th century Ethiopia, when the southward expansion had not yet been integrated into the Ethiopian identity: the Ethiopian kingdom is defined by the territories of Təgray, Šäwa, Goğğam/Damot, Wälqayt and Gondär; the ʿAfar already are outside the borders of Ethiopia proper, Yoḥannəs only makes war on them (in fact, their main sultanate was that of Awsa, which was successively integrated into the realm of Mənilək only between 1896 and 1909). Also on another level we get a very expressive snap-shot of historical Ethiopia - by the cultural and political topoi appearing in the song. A basic principle of rulership are fear and war. Power is admired. A number of expressions refer to the beauty of Yoḥannəs, to him being a "man", and being wild - all these ideas again are directly linked with war, power and strength: he is a hero! This martiality is linked, however, with ideas of inner harmony and the victory of the ruler blessed by God, i.e. of Christianity: the main provinces of Ethiopia submit already without going to war; those governors who rebel are submitted again, peace is concluded by eating together from one plate, which has its parallel in the religious communion[56]. War is therefore linked with the eradication of evil.

[56] In fact, Təgray tradition often regards the act of eating together as an act which assures friendship, or better: an alliance, which is difficult to break, as it creates personal and religious bonds, and in this sense is a parallel to the ritual of communion in the church; only people belonging to one religion can traditionally eat together, religiously pure food being a fundamental element in daily religious practice - conversion is inaugurated by eating together, and similarly peace is concluded by eating together.

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