

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Land-Grant Documents and Ecclesiastical Donations of Mändabba Mädhane Aläm Monastery, Northern Shore of Lake Tana, Ethiopia

Getinet Merid Ekimie<sup>1</sup>, Anaïs Wion (PhD)<sup>2</sup> & Sisay Sahile (PhD)<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

The monastery of Mändabba Mädhane 'Aläm, located in the northern part of Lake Tana region, in the present day Dämbäya district, was established in the 14th century A.D. by Abunä Yasay, a son of Emperor Amdä Şəyon (r. 1314-1444). The objective of the study was to analyze land grants of the monastery of Mändabba. The data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources were copied from manuscripts of Wängel Zä-wärq/Golden Gospel and from the archival documents found in the Central Gondar Zone Administration Archives' Centre (CGZAAC). The document copied from Wängel Zä-wärq is also found in the collections of Donald Crummey accessed at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The same texts also existed and were preserved in the manuscripts found in the "Aratu Wämbär Gädamat" of Gorgora monasteries in four copies. The archival documents contain the petition of the monastic community of Mändabba for Bāgemdər-Səmen Tāqlay Gəzat to regain the two qəfāfəs of Şəyā Dābər (Alāfa, Čalga) and Səməra Giyorgis (Dämbiya), which were taken by the fāräsāñoč and alāqa respectively. The study result indicates that the monastery of Mändabba owned lands under the system known as rəst, gwəlt, and rim during the Gondarine period of Ethiopia. This paper also provides an understanding of a wide set of issues concerning the state, monastery, land, and society in the period under study. The implication of land grant documents on the historical dynamics of ecclesiastical lands is useful for studying the development of the religious community and its relationship with political power.

**Keywords:** Alāqa, Archival document, Dābər, Fāräsāñoč, Land grant, and Qəfāfə

## Introduction

Society and the economy in Ethiopia are deeply intertwined with the land. Hence, land tenure has been related to the social structure as well as political power in the country (Bausi, Lusini, and Taddia, 1995,

- 1 PhD Candidate and Lecturer at University of Gondar, Department of History and Heritage Management, Gondar, Ethiopia, E-mail: getinetmerid@gmail.com
- 2 Professor of History, Director of the Institut des Mondes Africains [IMAF], University of Paris1, E-mail: anais.wion@univ-paris1.fr
- 3 Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of Gondar, E-mail: sisaysahle@gmail.com, sisay.sahile@uog.edu.et



This journal is licensed under a creative common Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0. It is accredited to the University of Gondar, College of Social Sciences and Humanities.  
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/erjssh.v12i2.6>

p.267). For this reason, the question of landholding patterns during medieval Ethiopia was an interesting issue. As Merid indicates a plot of land was controlled and exploited by the kings and ruling elites under institutions and relations of hierarchy. The churches and monasteries, which were allies of the royal power, provided Land (1984, p.138).

Historically, land tenure rights in the northern parts of Ethiopia have been vested either in the *räst* system (land-use) rights, the *gʷəlt* system (a right to levy and collect taxes), or *church* land owned by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (Abebe, Mintewab and Zenebe, 2012, p.25). Noting that “*Gult or gʷəlt* is still rendered in many works as fief in spite of Taddia’s correction ten years ago,” Bairu Tafla (1999) defines it as “a royal grant of a piece of land a village or a district to a full-fledged church, monastery, a nobleman or noble lady of merit in order to derive an income from it for a living.” (p. 52). Yigremew (2002) also explains that *gʷəlt* rights over land were given to members of the ruling elite as a reward for loyal service to their lord and religious institutions as endowments (p.5). He stated that the individual or institution that held land as *gʷəlt* had the right to collect taxes from those who cultivated it. *Räst* and *gʷəlt* do not refer to different types of land but distinct and complementary types of land rights. Usually, they are found in the same land. A single estate of *gʷəlt* land, comprising a few square miles, includes within its boundaries tracts of fields held as *räst* by several farmers. The *gʷəlt* holder might also hold some fields as *räst* within his estate of *gʷəlt* land (and outside it as well). Although *räst* holders were not tenants, their hereditary right to use the land was conditional on meeting taxes and service obligations associated with those rights. As Yigremew stated, *gʷəlt* refers to the rights to tribute and rent on land, and it does not extend to ownership of land but is limited only to taxes (2002, p.5).

The *gʷəlt* system was an important economic institution and connection between the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the state. Church *gʷəlt* enabled accumulation in two distinct manners: it established internal hierarchy and defined rights to tributes (Crummey and Shumet, 1991, p.254). The system was essentially a political and economic relation between the State, the Church, and the cultivators. The Church lands were distributed among clergy such as priests, deacons, church leaders, teachers, and laity who supported and protected the interests of the Church at court (Temesgen, 2016, p. 51).

Church land is an essential kind of the Ethiopian clerical land and the socioeconomic structure in the highlands of Ethiopia (Bausi, Lusini, and Taddia, 1995, p.269). Haddis (1992) stated that the wide granting of Church land appeared to have taken place at the time of the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century (p.69). With the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty, Ethiopian monasticism was organized and revived during the period between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hussein, 1994, p.164; and Persoon 2007, p. 242). A text from the abridged chronicle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, translated by Basset, confirms that after the restoration of the Solomonic dynasty, Yəkuno Amlak did not take a long time to reward the church by granting land and properties. The text also indicates that there was a strong relationship of the new king with one of the prominent monk Abunä Täklä Haymanot. It reads, “እንዘ፡ መዋዕሊሁ፡ ለአቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ፲ ወ፭፡ ዓመት፡ ውእቱኒ፡ ይኩኖ፡ አምላክ፡ ተካየደ፡ ምስለ፡ አቡነ፡ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ወወሀቦ፡ ሲሶ፡ መንግሥት፡ ወእምደእዜ፡ ወደሰመደ፡ ዘመነ ዘመነ፡ ኪዳን፡ እስከ፡ በዝየ፡ ንጹልቅ ዕድሜ፡ መንግሥቶሙ” (When the days of Abunä Täklä Haymanot was fifty five years, he, Yəkuno 'Amlak, stipulated with Abunä Täklä Haymanot, and

he gave a third of his government. Ever since, it was named as the time of covenant. And with this, we count the year of their government) (Basset, 1882, pp.9-10).

Many of the medieval Kings including the Gondärine period had close contact with the monasteries, and most of them granted and donated land and manuscripts to the monasteries (Abeselom, 2019, p.34). Solomon noted that the new land distribution was made during reign of Iyasu I (r.1682- 1706). Two-thirds of the land was made up of government property and of these, half given to the Churches (2006, p.8). Habtamu also noted, “The reign of Iyasu I (r.1682- 1706) is a turning point for the beginning of massive grants of *rim* property in the Gondärine kingdom.” *Rimə* means ecclesiastical land property from grants by the rulers to religious institutions and individuals held by the clergy. However, this was restricted to areas in and around the capital city. Habtamu also stated “The introduction of *rim* property around the year 1700 entailed a shift in the peasantry’s relationship to the land and the rise of the power of *rim* holders” (2011, pp.15-16).

The archival documents which were found in Gondar NGZAAC indicated the land grant practiced during the Gondärine period. As the text describes the kings granted and even donated their own land to the church and monasteries by saying; ‘ከፈረሰ፡ ይሻለኛል፡ ነፍሴ’ “I cared more about my soul than about my horse” (NGZAAC; File No. ፭/7/5/28, Date: 19, ፓ፣ [19]56 A.M).The *gʷalt-rim* right gave to the monasteries as a *rim* (services donations, or gifts) from peasants just in return for prayers only occasionally and not on particular dates. Some monasteries could serve as the intermediary between the peasants and the government, and the villages paid tribute to monasteries (Haddis, 1992, p.51). The monastery of Mändabba has been an interesting study area for it has a rich potential for historical analysis since 14<sup>th</sup> century. And it, still, is very important and deeply involved in the Gondärine period [1630s-1860s] and the mid of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Persoon, Balika, and Witakowska, 2007, p.723, and Cheesman, 1968, p.200).

The main purpose of this study is to analyze land grants of the monastery of Mändabba and addressed the interrelation between monastic communities and the domain of political power represented through the ecclesiastical lands in the area for many centuries. This paper explores untapped primary historical sources found in monasteries.

## Study Area

This research focuses on the land grants of the Mändabba Monastery located in what historically known as the province of Dämbəya since the medieval period of Ethiopia, and it has been one of the core Christian settlement areas in northwest Ethiopia during the Gondärine period (Nosnitsin, 2003, pp.75-76). King Amdä Şəyon (r.1314-1344) expanded his territory to Lake Ṭana region and established a Christian community in the area. The King established Christian settlements, built churches, and granted *gʷalt* land to the monasteries and his officials in Lake Ṭana (Pankhurst, 1992, p. 568 and Taddesse, 1988, p. 12). Since then, the Lake Ṭana region has been one of the political and spiritual focuses of the Christian Kingdom, and has many churches and monasteries (Pankhurst, 1992, p. 568). The monastery of Mändabba was founded during the reign of King Amdä Şəyon in the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.D. One of the documents copied from the book of ‘Tamrä Iyäsus Zä Bärgida Maryam’ at the monastery of Bärgida Maryam describes that the monasteries of the northern parts of Lake Ṭana [monasteries of Gorgora] were planted during the reign of King Amdä Şəyon in 14<sup>th</sup> century

A.D. and had their own clerical rules. To quote, “ጽሐፈ: ሥርዓተ: ሕግ: ዘደሴተ: ፃና: ወጐርጐራ: ገዳማት: ማንኸንደባ: ገሊላ: ወብርሂዳ: ወአንጋራ: ዘተሐንፃ: ወዘተወግዛ: በዘመነ: መንግሥቱ: ለንጉስነ: ፃምደ: ጽዮን: : ” (Let us start [writing] the order of the law of the island of Ṭana and Gorgora monasteries Mandäbba, Gälila and Bərgida, and Angara that was built and anathematized during the reign of our *Naguś* Amdä Šayon) (Illinois/IES, 88-X-4, Mandäbba, Wängél Zäwärq). This text indicated that many of the monasteries of the northern shore of Lake Ṭana were planted during king Amdä Šayon. In terms of its size, Mandäbba is the second largest monastery in the Lake Tana following Däga Zṣṭifanos. The monastery is situated at 12°12'3 " N and 37°16'43 " E on the peninsula of the northern shore of Lake Ṭana and is located 70 km south of Gondär and 5 km southwest of Gorgora (Teshager 2019, p.60; and Getachew, 2013, p.40).



Figure 1: Map of Mändabba and Gorgora Area (Source: *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, Vol. II, p.854)

The monastery of Mändabba is believed to have been founded by Abunä Yasay, the son of Emperor Amdä Şəyon (Taddesse 1972, p.96; Bosc-Tiessé 2008, p.44; (Persoon, Balika, and Witakowska, 2007, p.723). The text of *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie* described that Abunä Yasay was the founder of Mändabba, and he was one of the monks traditionally known as Säbatu Kāwakəbt /'the seven stars'/ (1882, p.10). Abunä Yasay was the son of aşə Amdä Şəyon and he was the founder of the monastery of Mändabba Mädhane'Alām (Jager, 1965, p.66; Nosnitsin, 2007, p.32). Some of the local writers also indicated that the monastery of Mändabba was found by Abunä Yasay (Gäbrä Śəllase, 2016, p.5, Zämädkun, 1992, p.219, *Daniel*, 1999, p.448 and 2006, pp.16-20).

### Land-grant and Donation of Mändabba Monastery

Most of the land grant of the monastery covered in this paper is those granted and donated by monarchs and individuals during King Amdä Şəyon (r.1314-1344), Yohānnəs I (r.1667-1682), and Iyo'as (r.1755-1769). The archival documents points out that Emperor Haylä Şəllase I has also strengthened the *rim* land of the

monasteries of Mändabba (Chiari, 2015, p.143). The majorities of the source documents provided several reasons for the donatation and transfer of the land (Haddis, 1992, pp.36-37). Apart the governmental grants, the land donation might privately be endowed for the monastery after its foundation, especially to assure the commemoration of the donor after his death and to get them an ease access to Paradise (Bausi, 2013, p.179). Bausi, Lusini, and Taddia (1995) grouped the monasteries owned land under two categories, *räst* or *gʷəlt* (, p.269). The grants of *gʷəlt* by the early Solomonids to churches and monasteries also offered exclusive jurisdiction over specified territories. The *gʷəlt*-holders possessed jurisdictional authority over the inhabitants residing within their territories (Crummey, 2000, p.39).

The content and context of the documents provide with the understanding of a wide set of issues relating to the state, monastery, land, and society in the period under study. Hence, the land grants documents of the monastery of Mändabba have had historical, political, social, and religious, aspects of the region. The researcher emphasizes such documents on the historical dynamics of the ecclesiastical lands and finds them aslo useful for studying the development of the community and its relationship with religious authority. Apart from building churches and the settlement of the monastic communities, the land documents of Mändabba had described the commemorative services for individuals and church functions, such as the provision of incense or supplies for the daily prayer service. The document outlines the identities and responsibilities of prominent individuals in addition to highlighting the employees who work there. The witnesses for the donation of the lands were priests, *däbtāras*, high officials, and local chiefs. Thus, the presence of high officials and local chiefs during the granting of *gʷəlt* lands as witnesses and a pronouncement of anathema by the monastic clergies was hoped to serve as prevention from violating the ordinance. And it is the essential feature in documents, at times; the record is concluded with an anathema against any possible intervention of these granted and donations.

The land grants of the monastery Mändabba were also preserved in the manuscripts found in the monastery. Some of the documents were photographed by Donald Crummey and kept at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University. In addition to this, Shumet Sishagne inventoried Crummey's photographs and produced a very synthetic catalogue entitled "A Catalogue of Land Tenure-related Microfilm from Churches and Monasteries of Gondar Province Recorded in 1984 and between January and July 1988". The land documents of the monatery are written under the catalogue numbers P88-IX-33-37, P88-X-1-24, and P88-XXXVI-11-13, [Shumet Sishagne, 1988, pp. 20-21] and the text consisted the lands of the monastery, sales, and bequeathals received from Emperors Bäkäffa and Iyasu II (1988, p.5). The majority of the documents were copied on the blank pages of *Wängel Zä-wäraq/ Golden Gospel*, and *Maryam* of Bärägida Maryam.

As indicated above, in return for their services, the clergy received a share of the grant of *gʷəlt* land continued to get economic benefits and retained an exceptional position in the community in which it was situated (Haddis, 1992, p.166). As we will see below from a manuscript in Gə'əz and Amharic that was photographed by Crummey in 1988, many documents state the properties and land grants of Mändabba monastery. The documents describe the monastery of Mändabba, especially the rights over land in terms of *räst*, *gʷəlt*, or *rim* and the clergies excommunicated those who refused to respect the regulation and properties of the monastery.

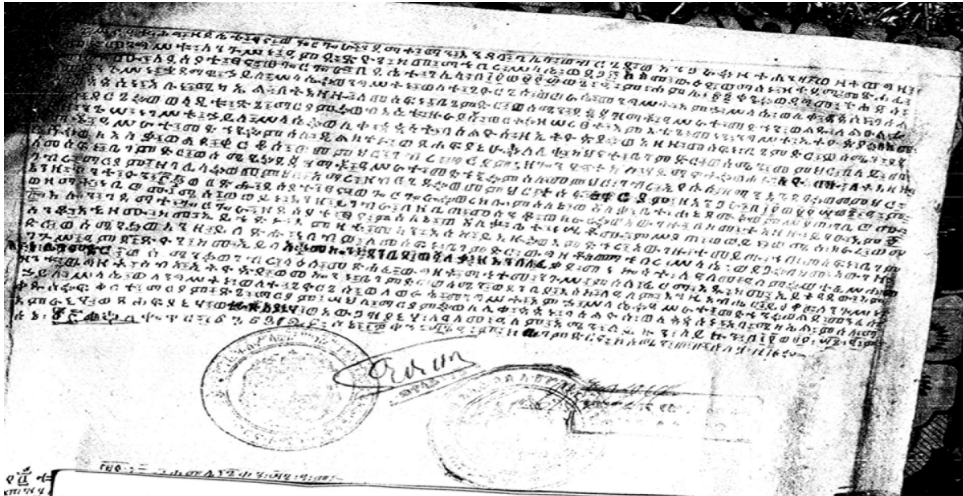
One of the documents copied from the *Tä'amrä Iyäsus* of the church of Bärägida Maryam was written during the reign of Emperor Ḥaylā Šəllase I (r.1930-1974). It describes the land grants of the monastery. The document also provides evidence and legitimizes the historical foundation of the monastery. The text describes that the monasteries of Gorgora established an administration system of “ሬም ሥርዓት” or *rim* custom under the *gʷəlt* system during King Amdä Šəyon under the jurisdiction of “*Aratu Wämbär Gädamat*” /Four Chairs Monasteries. Such *Rim* system was continued in Gorgora until the collapse of the *Solomonic* dynasty in Ethiopia in 1974.

However, the fathers of the monasteries in Gorgora wrote the *rim Sarəʾat* again during the reign of Emperor Ḥaylā Šəllase I and presented it in the book of the Miracle of Jesus in the monastery of Birgida Maryam. As the document stated, King Amdä Šəyon (r. 1314-1344) issued some rules and regulations concerning church lands and *gʷəlt* land administration for the peasants in Gorgora. As a witness for future generations, several copies of the same text were recorded in the manuscripts of Aratu Wämbär Gädamat of Gorgora. The text was written in the following manuscripts and churches: in the margin of the four Gospels in the monastery of Mändabba Mädhaneʾalām; in the manuscript of the *Gabra Hemamat* of Gällila monastery and church of Däbrä Sina Maryam; and in the Miracle of Jesus of the monastery of Bärägida Maryam.

The text describes the first land grants made and anathematized during the reign of King Amdä Šəyon. The miracles of Jesus from the monastery of Bärägida indicated that the *gʷəlt* lands of the four monasteries of Gorgora had also continued to belong to the monasteries during the Gondarine period and renewed during the reign of Yoḥannəs. “እስመ: ውዕየ: ወግሰነ: ዘቀዳሚ: መጽሐፈ: [ወኩሎም] ለደሰዬተ: ገና: ወጐርጐራ: በደሴተ: ገሊላ: ወዳግመ: ተሐድሳ: በትእዛዘ: ንጉሥ: ዮሐንስ: :” (because the first manuscript of all the islands of Tana and Gorgora was burned out and destroyed at Island of Gällila, it has been renewed again by the order of king Yoḥannəs).

The text also confirmed and improved for the third time by Emperor Ḥaylā Šəllase I and renewed such *rim* system in the region of Gorgora. The Emperor ordered that the chief of Dämbəya was not allowed to interfere in the administrative affairs of the regions of Gorgora without the permission of the abbots of the monasteries. The narrative emphasizes that lands are granted and the anathema that is said in front of a long list of royal families, religious authorities, and senior State officials (See document 1 which was written and prescribed to the governor of Bägemdär and Simien on Säné 1937 A.M.with reference No.76368/25).

Document 1, Illinois/IES, Wängél Zäwärq (88-X-4) order of the law of the Island of Tana and Gorgora monasteries



ንዌጥን፡ [ጽሐፊ]፡ ሥርዓተ፡ ሕግ፡ ዘደሲተ፡ ዓፍ፡ ወጐርጐራ፡ ገዳማት፡ ማንእንደባ፡ ገሊላ፡ ወብርሂዳ፡  
 ወአንጋራ፡ ዘተሕንዓ፡ ወዘተወግዛ፡ በዘመነ፡ መንግሥቱ፡ ለንጉሥነ፡ ዓምደ፡ ጽዮን፡ ከመ፡ ማኅበረ፡ ሥላሴ፡  
 ወዳጋ፡ እስመ፡ ውዕዮ፡ ወማሰነ፡ ዘቀዳሚ፡ መጽሐፈ፡ [ወክሎሙ] ለደሰዖተ፡ ዓፍ፡ ወጐርጐራ፡ በደሲተ፡  
 ገሊላ፡ በዐ)፡ ወዓ)፡ ዓ.ም፡ ሐምሌ፡ !7፡ ቀን፡ ወዳግመ፡ ተሐድሳ፡ [በዘመነ፡] ንጉሥነ፡ ቀዳማዊ፡ ኃይለ፡  
 ሥላሴ፡ ወንግሥትነ፡ ወለተ፡ ጊዮርጊስ፡ ወወራሲ፡ መንግሥት፡ አምኃ፡ ሥላሴ፡ ወሊቀ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ ባስልዮስ፡  
 ወጳጳስነ፡ አቡነ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ወእንዘ፡ ይበጽሑ፡ ነበብዎ፡ ለመሥፍነ፡ ቤጊምድር፡ ውግዘተከ፡ ወማኅበረ፡ ሥላሴ፡  
 ወዳጋ፡ ከመ፡ አውገዘ፡ በንጉሥ፡ ዓምደ፡ ጽዮን፡ ስመ፡ ኢይባ፡ መኮንነ፡ ደንቢያ፡ ወሻለቃ፡ ዘእንበለ፡  
 ፍቃደ፡ መኮነሳት፡ ለዓለም፡ ዓለም፡ ወተፈሥሐ፡ በጊምድር፡ ወሰሜን፡ ወገብረ፡ ላዕለ፡ መጽሐፈ፡ ውግዘት፡  
 ማኅተመ፡ ንጉሥ፡ ምስለ፡ ፊርማ፡ እዱ፡ ከመ፡ ኢይትዓደው፡ እም፡ ዝንቱ፡ ውግዘቱ፡ ሰብአ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡  
 ወመኮነን፡ በጊምድር፡ ወሰሜን፡ ወደንቢያ፡ እስከ፡ ለዓለም፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ይዕቀቦ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኃይለ፡  
 ሥላሴ፡ መንግሥትነ፡ ወለተ፡ ጊዮርጊስ፡ ወወራሲ፡ መንግሥት፡ አምኃ፡ ሥላሴ፡ ወዳሥራተ፡ መድኅን፡  
 ውልደ፡ መንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ፍቅርተ፡ ማርያም፡ ጽጌ፡ ማርያም፡ ዝህለ፡ ማርያም፡ ወሊቀ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ ባስልዮስ፡  
 ወሊቀ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ አቡነ፡ ሚካኤል፡ ምስለ፡ መምራኒሃ፡ ወተራዲያኒሃ፡ ወአውግዝያኒሃ፡ ለዓለም፡ ዓለም፡ አሜን፡  
 ለይኩን፡ ለይኩን፡ በዐ)፡ ወዓ)፡ ዓ.ም፡ ሰኔ፡ 03፡ ነቀን፡ በቁጥር፡ 16363/25፡ ሰኔ፡ 08፡ ቀን፡ #6፡ ዓ.ም፡  
 ለጊምድር፡ ወሰሜን፡ ወለቃዘዘመ፡::

Translation

Let us start [writing] the order of the law of the island of Tana and Gorgora monasteries Manädäbba, Gällila and Bärgida, and Angara that was built and anathematized during the reign of our *Näguś* Amdä Şəyon for Mahbäreä Şəllase and Daga, because the first manuscript was burned out and destroyed. Of the Island of Tana and Gorgora monasteries was renewed at the Island of Gällila on Hamle 27<sup>th</sup>, 1937 of the Year of

Mercy during the reign of our King Ḥaylā Śəllase I and Our Queen Wälättä Giyorgis, and the heir of the throne Amḥa Śəllase, during the charge of *liqā Ṗapās* Basəlyos and *Ṗapās Abunä* Mika'el. This anathematized amend under the governor of Bāgemdər and Simien for writing to the Mākwanənt of Bāgemdər and Simien from Mahbārā Śəllase and Daga which was anathematized earlier during the reign of Nəguś Amdä Şəyon under the name of Dämbiya and Śäläqa and everybody cannot pass this without the permission of monks forever and ever. The governor of Bāgemdər and Simien amended the anathematized with the seal and signature of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I. This anathematization was for all the people of Ethiopia, Mäkonän of Bāgemdər, and Simien and Dämbəya forever. God keep Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase and Queen Wolätä Giyorgis, regent Amha Śəllase Asirat Mädḥən, the son of the holy spirit, Fəqirtä Maryam, Şəgə Maryam, Şahlä Maryam, bishop of Ethiopia *Abunä* Basliyos, bishop of *Abunä* Mika'el and all the *māmḥaran* and be anathematized forever and ever Amen. This letter was written and prescribed to the governor of Bāgemdər and Simien on Säné 1936 of the Year of Mercy, with reference No.76368/25.

This anathematized amended under the governor of Bāgemdər and Simien for writing to the Māk<sup>w</sup>anənt of Bāgemdər and Simien from Mahbārā Śəllase and Daga, which was anathematized earlier during the reign of King Amdä Şəyon under the name of Dämbiya and Śäläqa, and everybody cannot pass this without the permission of monks forever and ever.

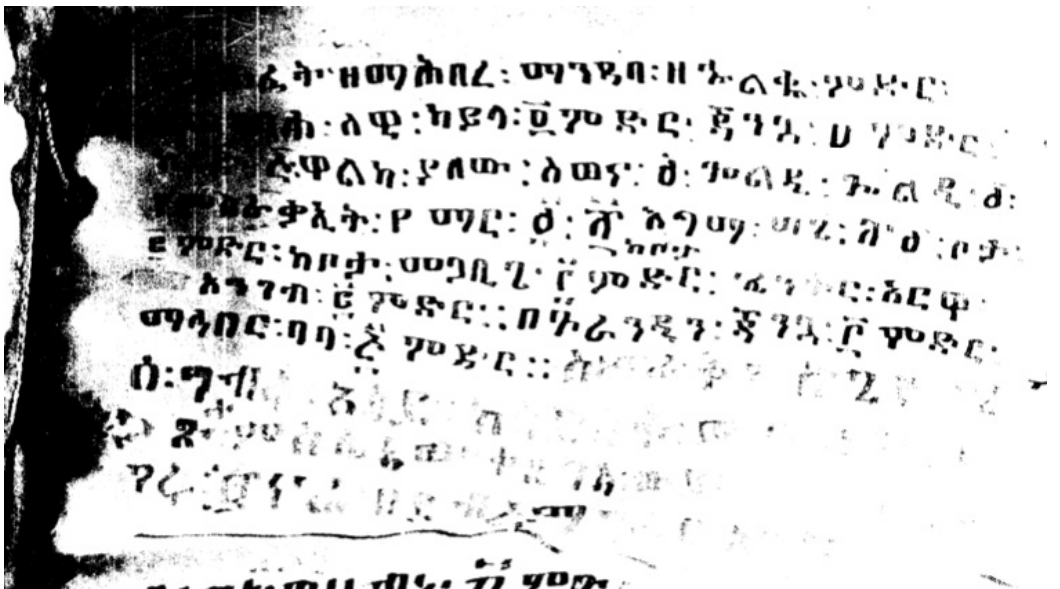
The governor of Bāgemdər and Simien amended the anathematized with the seal and signature of Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase I. This anathematization was for all the people of Ethiopia, Mäkonän of Bāgemdər, and Simien and Dämbiya forever. God keep Emperor Ḥaylā Śəllase and Queen Wolätä Giyorgis, regent Amha Śəllase Asirat Mädḥən, the son of the holy spirit, Fəqirtä Maryam, Şəgə Maryam, Şahlä Maryam, bishop of Ethiopia *Abunä* Basliyos, bishop of *Abunä* Mika'el and all the *māmḥarn* and be anathematized forever and ever Amen. This letter was written and prescribed to the governor of Bāgemdər and Simien on Säné 1936 A.M., with reference No.76368/25.

Gäbrä Śəllase also described the network and the relationships of such Four Chairs Monasteries of Gorgora. He stated that when the clergies of the Four Chairs Monasteries met for liturgy, the clergies of each monastery had their duties. The responsibility of incense was for Bərəgida, preaching for Anəgara, Gospel for Gällila, and the great prayer “*Abunä zäbäsəmayat*” was for Mändabba (2016, pp.56-58). In the culture of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the great prayer of “*Abunä Zäbäsəmayat*” is give for the privileged hierarchical position. This demonstrates how significant was the monastery of Mändabba was in the leading of the Four Chair Monasteries which in turn played a great role in the social, political, and cultural activities of the local people.

Another document mentioned below indicates that the monastic communities of Mändabba also wrote and behold the land of the monastery. Although most of the land grants, as expected, may have mentioned the donors or holders of such lands. Here, a copy of these two land grant documents of Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36a

and Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36b, fails to mention the reign of the kings such lands were registered to the benefit the community of Mändabba. Nevertheless, the name of the monastery appears, which makes it difficult to identify when such lands were registered. The text indicates the name of the land that appears together with the name of the monastery, and the content of the documents is similar. As long as the contents of the documents are similar and obliging to check the accuracy of the text, there are few variations in spelling. For instance, the number of lands from Gorandi to Jangwa was written in the numbers in the text of Illinois/IES 88-IX-36a, whereas in Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36b written in letters. This shows that these texts were copied from different sources.

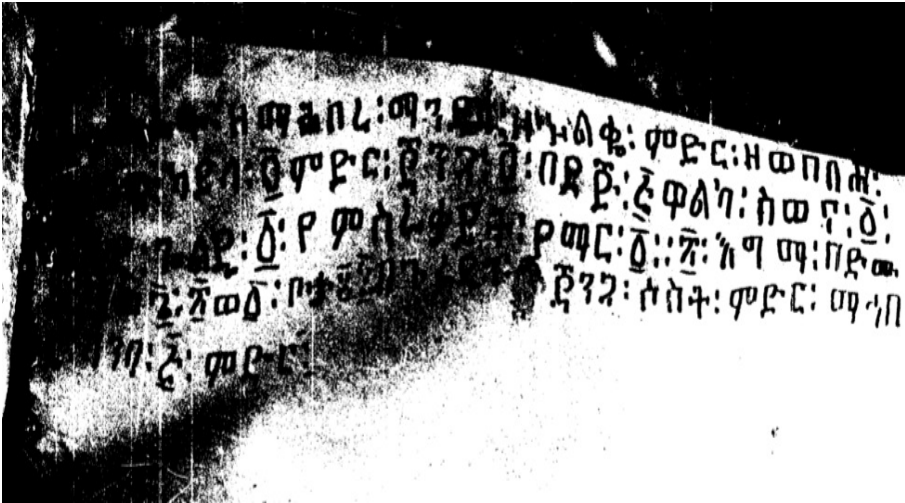
Document 2, Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36a Land register to the monastic community of Mändabba



ጽሕፈት፡ ዘማሕበረ፡ ማንዳባ፡ ዘኑልቄ፡ ምድር፡ ዘወበለሐ፡ ለዊ፡ ካይላ፡ 4ምድር፡ ጃንጓ፡ 9ምድር፡ በደጅ፡  
5 ዋልካ፡ ያለው፡ ስውና፡ 1፡ ጎልዲ፡ ጎልዲ፡ 1፡ ምስራቃኢት፡ የማር፡ 1x□ !xእግማ፡ ፴፮፡ ፳፩፡ ቦታ፡  
፪ምድር፡ ከቦታ፡ መጋቢጊ፡ ፫ ምድር፡ ከቦታ፡ በፈንጥር፡ አርዋ፡ አንገብ፡ 2ምድር፡ በጎራንዲ፡ ጃንጓ፡  
፫ምድር፡ ማኅበር፡ ባባ፡ 5ምድር፡፡

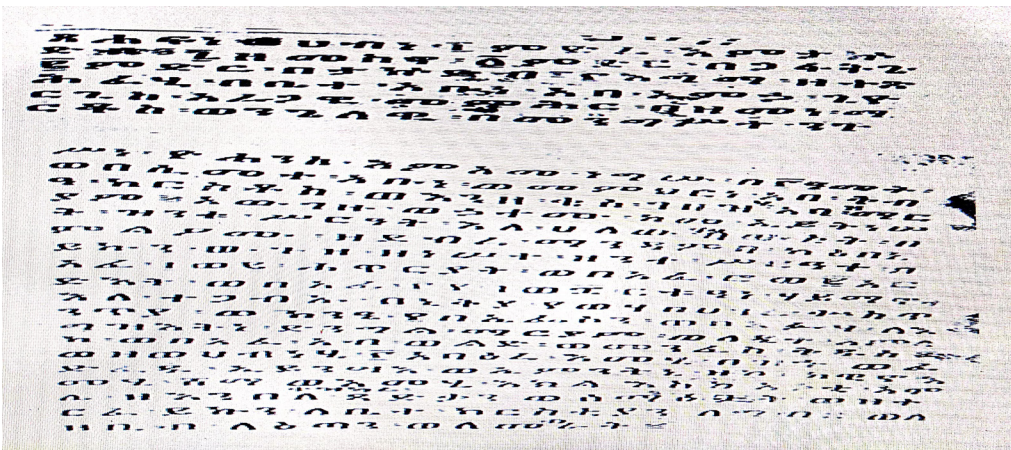
We the community of Mändabba scribed the following number of lands (medr): 4 lands from Lāwé at Kayila, 9 lands at Janigwa, 1 land at Bädāj, 5 lands from Walkä at Sihuna, 1 land at Goldi, 1 from Misraqa'et, 1 land at Yämar, [36, 21] land at Egima, Bädaw, 3 lands and [1] Bota in Mägabigi, 2 lands from Fäntär at Arwa and Angäb, 3 lands from Gorandi at Jangwa, and 5 lands at the community of Baba.

Document 3, Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36b Land register to the monastic community of Mändabba



The following text from crummy collection of Illinois/IES, 88-IX-35 described that the land grant was attributed to the reigns of King Yohannās and almost follows the common style of royal land grants in Ethiopia. However, the texts do not mention specifically in which period of king of Yohannās it happened. In fact, in the Ethiopian history there were four Kings by the name of Yohannās and hence, based on calligraphical evidence the king was probably believed to be Yohannās I (r.1667-1682). The invocation, name of the monastery, the reigning king, lists of clergies, lists of high or local dignitaries as witnesses during the establishment of the grant, and finally, the text concludes with an anathema for protected who claims the land.

Document 4, Illinois/IES, 88-IX-35, land register to the monastic community of Mändabba



ጸሐፊ: ወሀብ: ፲፱፻፳፭: እምታኩድብ: ፯፻፳፱፻፳፱: ፩፻፳፭: በጋፋትጌ: ፪፻፳፭: በታኩድብ: ፫፻፵፱:  
 ዘተጽሕፈሂ: በቤተ: ለአቡነ: አባ: አምፆ: ጊዮርጊስ: አረጋዊ: መምሕር: በዘመነ: ማርቆስ: ወንጌላዊ:

በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ዮሐንስ፡ እምአመ፡ ነግሡ፡ በ፫ዓመት፡ ወበሲመተ፡ አቡነ፡ ወመምህርነ፡ አባ፡ ቅብዓ፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ወእንዘ፡ ቁስ፡ ገበዝሂ፡ አባ፡ ዘማርያም፡ አውገዙ፡ ወኃተሙ፡ ከመ፡ ኢይትነሡት፡ ዝንቱ፡ ሥርዓት፡ እለ፡ ሀለው፡ ቀሳውስት፡ በምልዖሙ፡ ዘደብረ፡ ማንዳምባ፡

ከዕበኒ፡ ይኩን፡ ውጉዝ፡ ዘነሡተ፡ ዘንተ፡ ሥርዓተ፡ በአፈ፡ ፲ወ፪ሐዋርያት፡ ወበአፈ ፪ወ፪ አርድእት፡ ወበአፈ፡ ፫፻፲ወ፳ርቱዓነ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ እለ፡ ተጋብኡ፡ በኒቅያ፡ ፻ወ፶ በሀገረ ቁስጥንጥንያ፡ ወክንዒ፡ ፻ በኤፌሶን፡ ወበአፍሃ፡ ለእግዝትእነ፡ ድንግል፡ ማርያም፡ ወላዲተ፡ አምላክ፡ ወበአፈ፡ አብ፡ ወወልድ፡ ወመንፈስ፡ ቅዱስ፡ ፡ ወዘወሀብነሂ፡ ፫አባዕረ፡ እመሂ፡ በዝኑ፡ ወፈድፈዱ፡ ኢይንግእ፡ ወኢምንትኒ፡ ዘኮነከዊኖ፡ እመሂ፡ ሸማ፡ ወእመሂ፡ እክል፡ እስከ፡ አኃቲ፡ አሞሌ፡ ዘእንበለ፡ ተዝካረ፡ ጻድቃን፡ ወስማዕቃት፡ ወዘተርፈ፡ ይኩን፡ ለቤተ፡ ክርስቲያን፡ ለግብር፡ ወለዘቢብ፡ ለዕማን፡ ወለመብራት፡፡

## Translation

Behold 10 lands at Takudāb, 7 irrigated [lands], and 1 land (*mādr*) in Gafatge, 2 lands (*mādr*) at Takudāb, and 3 [lands at] ʿƏgəma. This was written in the house of our father Abba Amməḥa Giyorgis Arāgawi *mamḥar* in the Era of Marqos the evangelist, during the reign of our *nəguś* Yohannəs on the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of his reign, during the period of office of our father and *mamḥar* Abba Qəb'a Krəstos, and also of *qesā qəbāz* Abba Zämaryam. If anyone violated the ordinance, be anathematized and sealed what we have done all priests of Mändabba. Let whoever violates this [arrangement] be anathematized by the mouth of 12 Apostles, by the mouth of 72 Disciples, by the mouth of 318 Fathers who assembled at the *Council* of Nicaea, by the mouth of 150 fathers who assembled at the *Council* of Constantinople, by the mouth of 200 fathers who assembled at the *Council* of Ephesus, by the mouth of Our Lady Mary mother of Jesus Christ; by the mouth of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It provided and beholds three oxes and all those gave and provided candles, cereal, and up to one bar of salt for a commemoration service for those who were righteous and Martyrs. The remaining will be to church as tax (*gabr*), raisins, incense, and lamps.

In addition to the state's land grants, monastery of Mändabba also benefited from private donations from royal families and religious adherents. The written personal land grants include justifications for the churches and monasteries receiving such land. The most prevalent demand made by those who donated land to the churches and monasteries was to create a memorial for them (Haddis, 1992, pp.184-186). Here the two texts which found in the monastery Mändabba indicate a donation of land to the monastery. The first personal land donation for the monastery found in Illinois/IES, 88-IX-33 written during the reign of Emperor Iyo'as. However, the second text Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36b did not indicate when it was written.

The text Illinois/IES, 88-IX-33 indicated that the *gʷəlt* lands of Wälättä Fəqər and *rəst*-holder Fasikawit at Wäkäč which written and protected by the community of Mändabba.

Document 5, Illinois/IES, 88-IX-33 Wälättä Fəqər and Fasikawit donate lands to the community of Mändabba

ጸሐፍነ፡ ወወሀብነ፡ ሺምድረ፡ እም፡ ወከች፡ በአለ፡ አቀብ፡ ዘማኅበረ፡ መንዳባ፡ በአልተ፡ ጉልትሂ፡ ወለተ፡  
 ጭማህበረ፡ ማንዳባ፡ በአልተ፡ ጉልትሂ፡ ወለተ፡  
 ቅር፡ ወበአልተ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 ገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 መምህርነ፡ አባ፡ ወልደ፡ ትንሳኤ፡ በዘመነ፡ ሉቃስ፡  
 ዘ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ወቀይስ፡ ገበየሁ፡ ሐብተ፡ ወልደ፡  
 አው፡ ገዢ፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 ቅር፡ ወበአልተ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 አው፡ ገዢ፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 ቅር፡ ወበአልተ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡

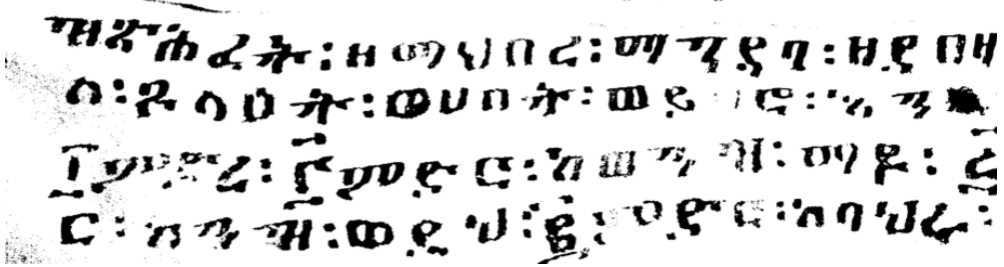
ጸሐፍነ፡ ወወሀብነ፡ ሺምድረ፡ እም፡ ወከች፡ በአለ፡ አቀብ፡ ዘማኅበረ፡ መንዳባ፡ በአልተ፡ ጉልትሂ፡ ወለተ፡  
 ፍቅር፡ ወበአልተ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 መምህርነ፡ አባ፡ ወልደ፡ ትንሳኤ፡ በዘመነ፡ ሉቃስ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ወቀይስ፡ ገበየሁ፡ ሐብተ፡ ወልደ፡ አው፡  
 ገዢ፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡  
 ቅር፡ ወበአልተ፡ ርስትሂ፡ ፋሲካዊት፡ ዘንተሂ፡ ዘተገብረ፡ በመንግሥተ፡ ንጉሥነ፡ ኢየሁዳ፡ እንዘ፡

Translation

We wrote and gave seven land[s] at Wākäč which granted from *gʷəlt* owner Wälättä Fəqər and *rəst*-holder Fasikawit and the community of Mändabba protected them against any other claims. This happened during the reign of our king Iyo’as, under the abbot *Abba Wäldä Tənsa’e*, in the era of Luqas the evangelist, when the *qäys gabaz* was Habtä Wäld. So that those coming after us shall not abolish what we have done and granted; we have ordered under all the priests of the Mändabba, by the mouth of 12 Apostles, by the mouth of 72 Disciples, by the mouth of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and be providing for offering.

One of the texts from Crummey collection describes that *Wäyzäro* Enkuya gave 10 lands to the community of Mändabba from her *gʷəlt*. However, the text is not dated and fails to list witnesses.

Document 6, Illinois/IES, 88-IX-36c *Wäyzäro* Enkuya gave lands to the community of Mändabba



“ዝጽሕፈት፡ ዘማህበረ፡ ማንዳባ፡ ዘደበዛ፡ በአለ፡ ዶላዕት፡ ወሀበት፡ ወይዘሮ፡ እንኮየ፡ ፲ምድር፡ ፫ምድር ከወንዝ ማዶ፡ ፭ምድር፡ ከወንዝ፡ ወዲህ፡ ፪ ምድር፡ ከባህሩ ዳር፡፡” (We the community of Mändabba and Däbäza scribed and behold the 10 lands granted by *Wäyzäro* Enkoyä. The lands found 3 lands across the river, 5 lands since the river and 2 lands from the shore of the lake.)

According to the description of Gebre Silasie also described that a certain woman named *Wäyzäro* Enkoyä came from Gondär at Enkoyä Mäsäk to Däbäza Šallase to set and expand her *gʷält*. She probably was the mother of Bərhan Mogäsa (፻፭፻፱ ማንዳባ ማዶ). She had given tribute to Mändabba, and later she donated a piece of land at Däbäza Bä'alä Šola'et to the monastery. Unlike to the above text, Gebre Silasie indicates that she gave 5 lands to the monastery of Mändabba which found 3 lands across the river and 2 lands since the river (2016, p.65).

Here, we understand on the above two medieval text the women like Wälättä Fəqər, Fasikawit and Enkoyä had a right on land under *räst* and *gʷält* and grants land to the monastery. Habtamu also pointed out, “Women could also hold *rim* lands distributed on behalf of churches by church founders and grantors.” He also described that during the reign of King Iyo'as, the privilege noble women like ፻፭፻፱ ማንዳባ ማዶ and her daughter Wälättä ፻፱፻፱ had an intervention in land grant issues (2024, p.208).

This jurisdiction allowed a *māmhar/abbot* of a monastery to control the judicial process and the fees involved. Local state officials were authorized not to interfere in the exaction of tax and the day-to-day administration of such areas (Haddis, 1992, p.43). As Crummey stated, institutional *gʷält*-holders demanded tribute in grain, honey, cattle, sheep, and horses (2000, p.42). Temesgen also explained that some prominent monasteries had the right to collect taxes the *qəfäfa*. As he statd “Monasteries and churches had the right to collect court fees, marketdues and tax in lieu of tithe from the *qəfäfes* (areas under their jurisdiction). was the main source of income for churches and monasteries and their functionaries” (Temesgen 2016, p.52). The emperors reserved the right to confirm and devote office only to those chosen to head the most important monasteries of the country. Therefore, always a monks, acted as treasurer, being responsible not only for the valuables of the church but also for collecting and allocating all income from gifts, urban properties, farmlands or *rim*, and *gʷält* (Merid, 1985. p. 96).

The monasteries in Gorgora had their territories to rule under the *gʷəlt* and *rəst* system to appoint the nobilities and upper levels of the clergy by giving recognitions with political powers. The **አራቱ ወንበር ገዳማት** “*Aratu Wāmbär Gādamat*” of Gorgora (Mändabba, Angara Tākä Haymanot, Bərgida Maryam and Däbərə Sina Maryam) had full-fledged power over the nobilities and appointed different political authorities for the gentry in Gorgora to administer the *gʷəlt* land and collect revenues from their *rimə* lands to the monastery.

The archival documents from Central Gondar Zone Administration Archives’ Centre (CGZAAC) which were written by the community of Gorgora monasteries describes that the monasteries of Gorgora collected their revenues from the territories under their administrations. Here is an excerpt: “የጎርጎራ፡ ገዳማት፡ በውስጣቸው፡ የሚገኘውን፡ የዳኝነትን፡ የሸማኔ፡ የብረት፡ ስራ፡ የአረቦች፡ ግብር፡ እንድንበላ፡ በተፈቀደልን፡ መሰረት፡ ካርኔ፡ ተቀብለን፡ እየሰራን፡ እንገኛለን፡፡” (We, the monasteries of Gorgora, according to the right vested upon us to live on taxes earned from administrative, weaving, metal work and tanner *gəbir* (/tax/) within our region, we do so by taking receipt.) (NGZAAC; File No. **አ**/1090/2689, Date: 25, tiqimit, 1944 A.M.).

Persoon, Balika, and Witakowska (2007) confirm it as follows, “The monastery of Mändabba had *rəst* and *gʷəlt* including the districts of Sowit, Aläfa and Ṭäqusa” (p.724). In line with their *rim* land, the monastery had various governorate territories under their jurisdiction to collect revenues until the end of Solomonic dynasity in 1974. The governorate territories are known as “*Qəfäfə*” or separated regions. The monastery gave titles to the nobilities and local administrative offices within their territories. The titles are: *Afä Mäməhər*, ‘*Atəbiya dañña*, ‘*Aläqa*, ‘*Çəqa šum*, and ‘*Mägabi* (Gäbrä Śəllase, 2016, pp. 85-94). The following table describes territories under the jurisdiction of Mandabba which were taxed based on the *rəst* and *gʷəlt* system through the officials appointed with the aforementioned titles.

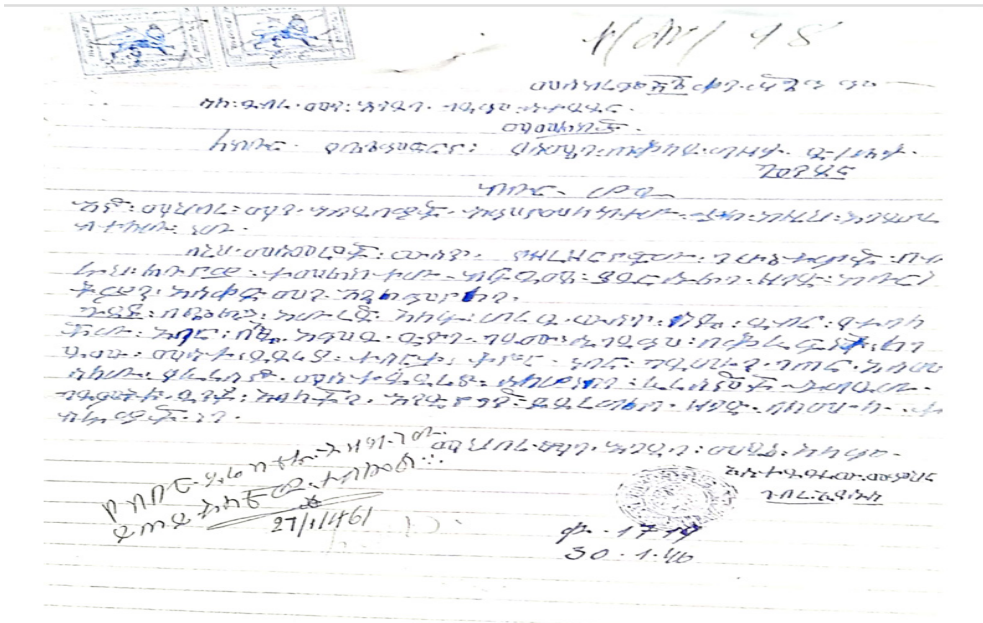
| Names of the Monasteries  | The territories        | Location | Titles of the Administrators |
|---------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------------------------|
| The Monastery of Mändabba | Guranədi Mik’elə       | Dämbiya  | <i>Afä Mäməhər</i>           |
|                           | Gämənəho Giyorgis      | Dämbiya  | <i>Afä Mäməhər</i>           |
|                           | Däbäza Śəllase         | Dämbiya  | <i>Çəqä šum</i>              |
|                           | Täzäba Maryam          | Dämbiya  | <i>Çəqä šum</i>              |
|                           | Səmrä Giyorgis         | Dämbiya  | <i>Çəqä šum</i>              |
|                           | Ačäfärə Mount Yohannes | Goğğäm   | <i>Afä Mäməhər</i>           |
|                           | Ṭäqusa’ Abo            | Ṭäqusa   | <i>Afä Mäməhər</i>           |
|                           | Səyā Däbər             | Aläfa    | <i>Afä Mäməhər</i>           |

Table 1: Territories under the jurisdiction of Mändabba Monastery (Sources: Gäbrä Śəllase, 2016, 85-94)

The archival documents from CGZAAC, which were written on Mäsəkäräm and Ṭər 1946 A.M (A.M. refers to Ethiopian calander which means Amätä Məhrät (Year of Mercy) reveal that the monastery of Mändabba had lands under the jurisdiction known as *qəfäfə*. The text claimed and recalled the land grants of the monastery made and protected under anathematized during the reign of King Amdä Şəyon. The texts are complementary and both were addressed to the same administration, but they concern two *qəfäfas*

in different areas: the first is Səyā Däbər (in Čälga *awraja*, Aläfa *wäräda*) taken by the *farasennoč*, and the second, Səmrä Giyorgis (in Dämbiya) taken by the *alaqa*. In addition to the petition of the monastic community, the local government organ gave response for the petitions by passing a decision that the matter would be checked thoroughly and notify to the concerned body as soon as possible (Central Gondar Zone Administration Archives' Centre (CGZAAC); File No. 98, Date: 27, Mäsəkäräm, [19]46 A.M. and CGZAAC; File No.25, Date: 19, Tər [19]46 A.M).

As can be seen in the documents 7 (below), NGZAAC; File No. 98, the monastic community of Mändabba wrote a petition to Bägemdər and Simien *Täqlay Gəzat* by their Abbot/Administrator, Mämhər Gäbrä İyäsus. The petition highlighted the request to regain the former monastery's *qəfäfa* taken by the Farasennoč. It also described that the *qəfäfa* was bestowed to the monastery when it was established during the reign of Aşé Amdä Şəyon (r.1314-1344). In the text, one can also understand that there was a change in the status of the monastery that wrongly associated it as a parochial role or downgraded to a Däbər (See document 7).



Document 7, NGZAAC; File No. 98, Date: 27, Mäsəkäräm, [19]46 A.M.

ተ/ቁ/98

የጠቅላይ ገዥ ማህተም

መስከረም 7 ቀን #6 ዓ/ም.

ስለ ደብረ መን እንዳባ ገዳም (አ)ስተዳደር

ማመልከቻ

ለክቡር የበጌምድርና፡ የስሜን ጠቅላይ ግዛት ጽ/ቤት

ጎንደር

ክቡር ሆይ

እኛ፡ የማህበረ፡ ማን እንዳባዎች፡ እምናመለክተው፡ ይኸ፡ ከዚህ፡ እንደሚከተለው፡ ነው፡  
በኒህ፡ መስመሮች፡ ውስጥ፡ የዘረዘርናቸውን፡ ሁኔታዎች፡ በብሩህ፡ ልቡናዎ፡ ተመልክተው፡  
ከፍጻሜ፡ ያደርሱልን፡ ዘንድ፡ ክቡርነትዎን፡ አስቀድመን፡ እንለምናለን፡፡

ጉዳዩ፡ በጭልጋ፡ አውራጃ፡ አለፋ፡ ወረዳ፡ ውስጥ፡ ስዬ፡ ደብር፡ የተባለችው፡ አገር፡ በአፄ፡  
አምደ፡ ጽዮን፡ ገዳሙ፡ ሲገደም፡ በቅፈፍነት፡ ለገዳሙ፡ መስተዳደሪያ፡ ተስርታ፡ ትኖር፡ ነበር፤  
ገዳሙን፡ ገጠር፡ አስመስለው፡ የፈረሰኛ፡ ማስተዳደሪያ፡ ስለሆነብን፡ ፈረሰኞቹ፡ ታግደው፡  
ገዳምነቱ ጸንቶ፡ አበላችን፡ እንድናገኝ፡ ይደረግልን፡ ዘንድ፡ ባለሙሉ፡ ተስፋዎች፡ ነን፡፡  
ማህበረ፡ ማን እንዳባ፡ መዳኔ አለም  
የገዳሙ፡ ማህተም

አስተዳዳሪው፡ መምህር፡

ገብረ፡ ኢየሱስ

የክቡር፡ ዳሬክተሩ፡ ትዛዝ፡ ነው

ይጠየቅላቸው፡ ትብሎል፡፡ ቁ.1719

ፊርማ 30.1.46

27/1/46 ዓ.ም

Translation

Ref. N° 98

27, Mäsəkäräm, 46 A.M.

From Däbrä Mändabba Gädam Administration

Petition

To the Honorable Office of Bägemdär and Simien *ፓግላይ ገገገ*

Gondär

Your Honorable

We, the community of Mändabba, have submitted the following petition: We respectfully present the following issues for your consideration and request your honorable attention to address them.

**The Subject:** In Čalga *awraja*, Aläfa *wäräda*, Səyə *Däbər* was nominated as a *qəfäfə* for the monastery of Mändabba when it was established during the reign of Aşé Amdä Şəyon. However, the monastery has been reclassified only to associate the monastery to a parochial role (*däbər*). And the previously allocated *qəfäfə* of the monastery has been given to the *färäsäñoč*. We, hereby, petition and request that the *färäsäñoč*'s claim to our monastery's *qəfäfə* should be proscribed, and the monastery's *qəfäfə* be reinstated to the monastery and getting our annuity (*abälačən*).

Community of Mändabba Mädhäné-Aläm

Administrator, Mämhər Gäbrä Iyäsus

Seal

Bägemdər and Simien *Täqalay Gazat* gave the response for the petition of the community by writing a letter on Mäsəkäräm 30 1946 A.M. with a File No. 1/1 ቁ.1730/25/46 for Čalga *Awraja Gazat*. The letter mentioned the subject of the petition and stated as “መስከረም፡ !6/#6፡ ዓ.ም፡ በተጻፈ፡ ራፖር፡ መምህር፡ ገብረ፡ ኢየሱስ፡ ስላመለከቱ፤ እውነት፡ ከጥንት፡ የገዳሙ፡ ቅፈፍነት፡ ያለው፡ ሆኖ፡ አሁን፡ የፈረሰኛ፡ ማስተዳደሪያ፡ ሆኖባቸው፡ እንደሆነ፡ ምክንያቱን፡ አጣርተው፡ በቶሎ፡ መልሱን፡ እንዲያስታውቁን፡ ይሁን፡፡” (On 27, Mäsəkäräm, [19]46 A.M., the monastic community wrote a petition under their Mämhər Gäbrä Iyäsus and If the earlier *qəfäfə* of the monastery and now it given to the *färäsäñoč* as a livelihood (*matädadärəya*), check the reason thoroughly and notify the response as soon.)

The second petition, written by the monastic community of Mändabba, was found in NGZAAC. It was written on ፲፱, 19, [19]46 A.M and stated that the earlier monastery's *qəfäfə* Səməra Giyorgis (Dämbiya) was taken by the Alaqa. In the text, the monastic communities requested the local governor of Bägemdər and Simien *Täqalay Gazat* that their earlier monastery's *qəfäfə* be restored to the monastery. The text also includes a fascinating idiomtic expression as “ዳሩ እሳት መሐሉ ገነት” “May the edge be fire and the center be paradise.” This expression is deliberately used as an anathema to protect the land who claims (document 7).



Translation

Date: 19, ፓጥ. 46 A.M

Petition

To Honorable Bāgemdār and Simien *Ṭäqalay Gazat Gondär*

Your Honorable

In Gondär *awraja*, Dämbiya *Wäräda*, the land (agär) of Sämra Giyorgis was allocated as a *qäfäfa* to monastery of Mändabba when the monastery was first established, and persist (Yäšäna) under the anathema [that stated], ዳሩ እሳት መሐሉ ገነት “May the edge be fire and the center be paradise.” However, today, in the reign of His Majesty Emperor Ḥaylā Šällase, when the allotment was amended and what was lost was restored (*ya-farasäw sitadäsa yä-ṭäfaw simäläs*), the *qäfäfa* that was previously allocated to our monastery for livelihood (*matädadäräya*) was given to the *aläqa*. Here we have petitioned for the goodwill of His honorable requesting that the *aläqa*’s claim to our monastery’s *qäfäfa* be banned and that the monastery’s *qäfäfa* be restored to the monastery.

Community’s Mandabba principal *mämhar*

For the community of Mandabba

Seal

The High Court Officers (Gondär) gave a response for the petitions of the community by writing a letter on Yäkatit 6 [19]46 A.M. with a File No. ፱/1/ቁ.8904/25 for *Ṭäqalay Gazat* Spiritual congregation office. The letter mentioned the subject of the petition and stated as “ለገዳማችን፡ መተዳደሪያ፡ ተብሎ፡ የተሰራውን፡ የገዳማችን፡ ቅፈፍ፡ የአለቃ፡ መተዳደርያ፡ አደረጉት፡ ሲሉ፡ ጥር 09/፳6 ዓ/ም፡ በተጻፈ፡ ማመልከቻ፡ ስላመለከቱ፡ ምክንያቱ፡ በደም(ን)ብ፡ ተጣርቶ፡ በቶሎ፡ እንዲጻፍልን ከክቡርነታቸው መታዘዙን አስታውቃለሁ፡፡” (Upon a petition written on 19 ፓጥ [19]46 A.M., stating the previously *qäfäfa* of the monastery those used for livelihood (*matädadäräya*) was given and became livelihood of *aläqa*. And hence, I inform that his Honorable ordered that the matter had to be investigated thoroughly and sent to us a letter immediately.)

## Conclusion

This study analyses documents on the land grant donations by monarchs and individuals found in the Mändabba monastery. . The study concluded that the monastery of Mändabba had significant potential for historical analysis and remains important in understanding the Gondärine period. Monasteries contain many untapped primary historical sources that can be used to reconstruct land ownership from a historical perspective. The study also confirmed that the monastery of Mändabba owned land under the *räst*, *gwält* and *rim* systems. As the study indicates, most land grants from the Gondar period contain several copies reflecting their original significance. Most of the documents were copied from manuscripts of the Wangel Zäwarq (Golden Gospel), the Tā’ammärä Maryam and other biblical manuscripts found in the monastery of

Mändabba. Documents produced by institutional figures within the monastery are valuable as they provide a comprehensive insight into monastic life and monastery lands. The study also examined the interrelation between monastic communities and the political power represented by ecclesiastical lands in the area for many centuries. This paper provides definitive translations of the documents and evaluates their importance from a historical perspective. The researchers, therefore, hope to make a small contribution to the history of the area and, at the same time, draw scholars' attention to documents that have not received much consideration.

## Bibliography

### I. Unpublished

#### Archival Documents

North Gondar Zone Administration Center (NGZAAC). (19, Ṭər, 1946 E.C), File No. 25, Letter Written by “Mahebere Mändabba, Lā Kābur Bāgemdər and Simien *Ṭāqlay Gəzat*.

\_\_\_\_\_. (27, Mäsəkäräm, 1946 E.C), File No. 98, Letter Written by “Mahəbärä Mändabba, Lā Kābur Bāgemdər and Simien *Ṭāqlay Gəzat* Ṭäfät Bét.

\_\_\_\_\_. File No. ፩/7/5/28, Date: 19, Ṭər. [19]56 E.C) Letter Written by “Aläqa Siraq Wälädé”, Lā Bāgemdər and Simien *Ṭāqlay Gəzat*.

#### Manuscripts

Illinois/IES, Department of History, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University.

The Golden Gospel of Mändabba Mädhäné-Alām (mf. Illinois/IES 88.X.19-21). 88-IX-33 to 37 and then 88-X-2 to 25.

Tä’ammärä Iyäsus Zä Bərgida Maryam Monastery (Miracle of Jesus of the Monastery of Bəragida Maryam), ET-AM-DY-016-IV012.

#### Thesis and Dissertation

Abeselom Nekatibeb. (2019). “The Chronicle of Bäkaffa (1721-1730): Critical Edition with Annotated Translation”, Ph.D Dissertations, Addis Ababa University.

Getachew Molla. (2013). “Challenges and Prospects of Sustainable Tourism Development in and Around Gorgora, North Gondar, Amhara Region, Ethiopia”, MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University.

Habtamu Mengistie. (2011). “Land Tenure and Agrarian Social Structure in Ethiopia, 1636-1900”, PhD Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Haddis Gebre-Meskel. (1992). “A Survey of Representative Land Charters of the Ethiopian Empire (1314-1868) and Related Marginal Notes in Manuscripts in the British Library, the Royal Library and the University Libraries of Cambridge and Manchester”, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of London.

Minilik Hunegnaw. (2021). “A History of Gorgora from 1314 to 1636”, MA Thesis, University of Gondar.

Shumet Sishagne. (1988). A Catalogue of Land Tenure Related Microfilm from Churches and Monasteries of Gondar Province, January-July, 1988. Microfilm copies of these documents are deposited in two institutions: Illinois/IES, Department of History, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, and Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University.

Sisay Sahile. Tarikā Zä Mədärä Gondär. (2021). “A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Treatise: Tārik Zamädra Gondar (The History of the Land of Gondar) Ph.D Dissertations, Hamburg University.

Teshager Habtie. (2019). "Codicology of Gondärian Manuscripts (ca. 1650 - 1800)", Ph.D. Dissertation, Addis Ababa University.

## II. Published

Abebe Beyene. (2012). Mintewab Bezabih and Zenebe Gebreegziabhe. "Contract Duration under Incomplete Land Ownership Rights Empirical Evidence from Rural Ethiopia", *Environment for Development Discussion Paper Series*.

Bairu Tafla (1999). "The Notion of *Rim* in Traditional Christian Ethiopia" in: *IRMA TADDIA (ed.), Proceedings of International workshop on Rim held in the university of Bologna, 15-17 January 1999= I documenti etiopici Del Fondo Ellero (Torino L' Harmattan Italia)*.

Basset René. (1882). *Études sur l'histoire d'Éthiopie*, Paris.

Bausi, A. (2013). "Kings and Saints: Founders of Dynasties, Monasteries and Churches in Christian Ethiopia." *Stifter und Mäzene und ihre Rolle in der Religion*, 161-186.

Bausi, Alessandro, Gianfrancesco Lusini, and Irma Taddia. (1995). "Eritrean Monastic Institutions as "Lieux de Mémoire" and source of history." *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 50(2), 265-276.

Cheesman, R.E. (1968). *Lake Tana, and the Blue Nile: An Abyssinian Quest*, Frank Cass and Co.LTD.

Claire Bosc-Tiessé. (2008). Les îles de la mémoire: Fabrique des images et écriture de l'histoire dans les églises du lac Tana, Éthiopie, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle. Nouvelle édition [en ligne]. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.

Crummey, Donald. (2000). *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, University of Illinois Press.

Crummey, Donald, and Shumet Sishagne. (1991). "Land Tenure and the Social Accumulation of Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Ethiopia: Evidence from the Qwesqwan Land Register", *the International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 24(2), 241-258.

Daniel Kibret (2014). *Aratu Hayalan*, Addis Ababa.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1999). *Yäbetäkrästiyan Märäjawäč*, EOTC Mahäbärä Qädusan, Addis Ababa.

Fernandez, Victor M. Jorge De Torres, Andreu Martinez D'Alosmoner, Carlos Canete, Alessandro Bausi, and Gashaw Belay. (2015). "Judith and the Dragon: A Jesuit Architectural Relief from Gorgora Iyasus Church, 1626-1632," *International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, Aethiopica, 18, 173-182.

Gäbrä Šellase, Yasay (Abba). (2016). *Yäman Endä Abba Gädam Ena Akababiw Tarik*, Bämenät Matämya Bét, Bahir Dar.

Guebreyesus, Namouna, and Hiruy Abdu, "The Establishment of G'wält and Rim Landholdings in Eighteenth Century Gondärine Churches with a Special Focus on Ḥamärä Noḥ Šälästu Mə'ət Däbr", *Aethiopica* 21, *International Journal of Ethiopian and Eritrean Studies*, 2018.

- Habtam Mengistie (2024). "Women, Property and Inheritance in Ethiopia (mid-18th to Early 20th Centuries)". *History of Women in Ethiopia*, edited by Margaux Herman, Centre français des études éthiopiennes.
- Hussein Ahmed. (1994). "The Cross and the Crescent: State and Culture in Ethiopian History." *OMALY SY ANIO*.
- Jager, Otto, A. (1965). *Antiquities of North Ethiopia: A Guide*, Stuttgart.
- Kaplan, Steven. *The Monastic Holy Man and the Christianization of Early Solomonic Ethiopia*, 2009.
- Merid Wolde Aregay. (1984). "Society and Technology in Ethiopia 1500-1800", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 17.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1985). Some Inedited land Charters of Emperor Särsä Dengel (r. 1563-1597), In: *Annales d'Ethiopie*. Volume 13, année, 87-102.
- Nosnitsin Denis. (2007). "Yasay" In *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* Vol. III, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Pankhurst, Richard. (1961). *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia from early times to 1800*, Lalibela House.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1992). "The Falashas, or Judaic Ethiopians, in their Christian Ethiopian Setting Reviewed work(s), *African Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 365, pp. 567-582.
- Persoon, G. Joachim, Balika Ewa, and Witakowska. (2007). "Mändabba Mädhäné-Aläm" In *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, Vol. III, Harrassowitz Verlag, Wiesbaden.
- Persoon, G. Joachim. (2007). "Ethiopian Monasticism", *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*.
- Solomon Addis. (2012). "Urbanization and the Urban Space in Africa: The Case of Gondar, Ethiopia", *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 45.
- Taddesse Tamrat. (1972). *Church and State in Ethiopia: 1270-1527*, Clarendon Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1988). "Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopian History: the case of the Agäw," *The Journal of African History*, Vol.29, no.1, pp. 5-18.
- Temesgen Gebeyehu. (2016). "Power, Church and the Gult System in Gojjam, Ethiopia," *Journal Asian and African Studies*, 25 (1).
- Yigremew Adal. (2002). "Review of Landholding Systems and Policies in Ethiopia under the Different Regimes", *Ethiopian Economic Policy Research Institute Working Paper*, No.5.
- Zämädkun Bäkälä.. (2000). *Qəddusan Mäkanat Bältyópya*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.