



The Letter of an Ethiopian King to King George II of Nubia in the framework of the ecclesiastic correspondence between Axum, Nubia and the Coptic Patriarchate in Egypt and of the events of the 10th Century AD

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Abstract

This article examines the letter sent by an Ethiopian King to King George II of Makouria (Nubia) as well as other letters referring to the dynastic and ecclesiastical crisis in Axum during the 10th Century AD. It presents a “diplomatic” analysis of these documents, thereby completing details, dates and names of Kings who wrote or received the letters. This led to a thorough discussion and study of the decline and final period of Axum, including the role of the Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiyah/Habasha and an assessment of the authority and value of the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria. Historical criticism, supported by *auxilia* such as *diplomatica* and chronology, are thereby used.

Keywords: King George of Nubia, Ethiopia, Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria, The author of the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, Axum.

Introduction

It is beyond doubt¹ that there existed a regular correspondence between the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria and Miaphysite Ethiopia on the one hand, and Miaphysite Nubia on the other hand. This is testified by different Chronicles in Coptic and Arabic, and especially the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*.

Relations between the Nubian Kingdoms and the Ethiopian rulers during the Middle Ages are, however, not well known, although both political zones belonged to Miaphysite Orthodoxy and depended ecclesiastically on the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, who appointed their metropolitans.

Only one letter has survived, albeit in indirect form. During the last quarter of the 10th century AD, a king of the *al-Habasah* (Abyssinians) sent a letter to George (Yorgi, Girgis, Giorgi, Djirjis), king of Nubia, asking him to intervene at the Patriarch of Alexandria for appointing a new metropolitan for Ethiopia. The testimony of the letter’s existence and its content have

¹That a frequent correspondence existed is beyond doubt as far as the correspondence between the Patriarch and the Kings of Nubia and Ethiopia concerns, especially because the Patriarch was the only one, who could appoint the metropolitans, who had to be Copts (in Ethiopia until 1948) (Ullendorff 1960:107-108). Relations between Ethiopia and Nubia are little known and the case of the letter to George appears to be exceptional.



been preserved in the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, which is traditionally attributed to Sawirus († ca. 1000 AD), secretary to the Patriarch of Alexandria and later bishop of Ashmunein. Recent research, however, has doubted that Sawirus was the author/translator of a part of the *History*.²

The letter has regularly been cited by scholars of Nubian as well as of Ethiopian history. In fact, the period under consideration is the one in which occurs the final fall of Axum and the beginning of the Zagwe dynasty. This turbulent period is marked by a paucity of sources and by numerous contradictory tales and legends which greatly hinder the study of the events.

In this article I will examine the letter to George and other letters, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs*, firstly from a diplomatic point of view, thereby also commenting on the content and value of such letters, while correcting where necessary earlier commentaries. I will, where possible, establish dates, names for the kings involved and authors for the letters as well as discuss the authenticity and authority of the mentioned letters. Moreover, the study of the author of the *History of the Patriarchs'* passages will lead to a better appreciation and assessment of the relations between the Coptic Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Miaphysite Churches of Ethiopia and Nubia as well as of the relations between Muslims and Christians in Nord-East Africa³. The authority and value of the *History of the Patriarchs* will also be examined in view of the results of these analyses.

The passages from the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, referring to King George II of Nubia and his intervention between the King of Ethiopia and the Patriarch of Alexandria

Passage 1 (Anderson 2000:34 after Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:223-224):

a. In his (Philotheos') days, the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) sent to the king of Nubia (an-Nfbah), a youth whose name was George (Girgis), and made known to him how the Lord had chastened him, he and the inhabitants of his land.

b. It was that a woman, a queen of Bani al-Hamwiyah, had revolted against him and against his country. She took captive from it many people and burned many cities and destroyed churches and drove him (the king) from place to place.

² Modern scholars, like Vantini and Andersen have considered Sawirus as the author/compiler/translator of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*. They also accepted him as a valuable and trustworthy source. They accepted the tradition, according to which Sawirus Abu-l-Bashar Ibn Al-Muqaffa's work was continued until 1087 by Michael, bishop of Tinis and by Mawhub b. Mufrah (Mufarriġ), and later by other authors until 1740. Only relatively recent, Den Heijer (1989) has not only doubted the role of Sawirus but has in fact completely rejected it. He maintains that collecting the sources and translating them into Arabic was the work of an Alexandrian layman, Mawhūb Ibn Manṣūr Ibn Mufarriġ (11th Century AD). For the traditional opinion and discussion of editions, see Pearce (2005). It is also known that the compiler/translator of the part which contains the biographies of Alexander II, Cosmas I, Theodoros and Michael I (705- 767) is Johannes the Deacon, secretary of Michael.

³ Most of the relations between Muslims and Christians in the period under examination are known from Muslim sources. A more intensive study of the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria is the only Christian source that can be used with confidence (see Conclusions) and illustrates the difficult position of the Christians in Egypt as well as Muslim interference with the Christian Churches inside and outside Egypt proper.



c. *That which befell him was retribution for what the king who (was) before him had done to the metropolitan (mutran) in the days of the father Abba Cosmas (Anba Kuzma) as we have explained earlier, through his [i.e. the king who was before him] falsification and his fraud.*

d. *He (the king) said to him (George) in the letter which he sent to him: 'I desire that thou shouldst help me in the fatigue, for the sake of God and for the sake of the unity of the Faith, and thou shouldst write a letter on thy part to the father, the patriarch, in Misr, to beg him to absolve our lands and to pray for us, that God may remove from us and from our country this trial, and may grant to us that he (the patriarch) may consecrate for us a metropolitan (mutran), as was the custom of our fathers, and that he may pray for us, that God may remove His wrath from us. I have mentioned this to thee, O brother, for fear lest the Christian (Nasraniyah) religion pass away and cease among us, for lo, six patriarchs have sat (on the Throne) and have not paid attention to our lands, but they (the lands) are abandoned without a shepherd, and our bishops and our priests are dead, and the churches are ruined, and we have learned that this trial has come down upon us as a just judgement in return for what we did with the metropolitan (mutran).'*'

e. *When the letters reached George (Girgis), the king of Nubia (an-Nfibah), and he learned about their contents, he sent on his part letters and messengers to the patriarch Philotheos (Filatafis), and he explained to him in them all that the king of Abyssinia (al-Habasah) had mentioned to him, and he begged him to have compassion on his people. He (Philotheos) acceded to his request, and he consecrated for them a monk from the Monastery of Abba Macarius (Abi Makar), whose name was Dani'el (Danyal), and he sent him to them as metropolitan (mutran). They received him with joy, and God removed His wrath from them.*

f. *And He put an end to the affair of the woman who had risen up against them.*

The subdivisions from a to f in the above cited text are these made by Andersen (2000:34), which I shall use in my commentary too.

From a diplomatic point of view, it is remarkable that Passage 1 refers to a number of diplomatic activities and probable documents: (i) the reference to the 'falsification' of letter(s) by some monks and presented to the older son of the Ethiopian King who died in the time of Patriarch Cosmas (921-933) (Andersen's section c); (ii) the mention of the Ethiopian letter to King George, with its contents (section d), (iii) the reference to (other) 'letters' that reached George in section (e); (iv) the mention of a letter (and messengers) sent by George to the Patriarch with a reference to its content in section (e), and finally (v) the appointment of Daniel, who was sent to Ethiopia (also in section e). Moreover, in section (c) of Passage 1, which mentions the falsification of letters, the author of the *History* refers to an earlier part of his work, where more letters and fakes are discussed. This extract is as follows (= passage 2):

g. *A monk from the monastery of Abba Anthony was making a tour round the countries and with him a companion... .. [They both, Victor and Menas] presented themselves to the metropolitan (= Petros) and demanded that ... he endow them both with some of his money.*

h. *Then Satan instructed them that one of the two of them should put on the garments of bishops and that the other should act as his disciple. They wrote counterfeit letters, as if from the patriarch, in which they said: "News has reached us [= the Patriarch] that there has come to you [= the older brother of the King of Ethiopia] an erring man, whose name is Petros, and that he has said about us that we sent him to you as metropolitan and this is not correct, and neither are the letters which (he has) with him from us nor have we consecrated him, but he has counterfeited (as if from us) what*



has reached you through his hands. He whom we really sent is the metropolitan (mutrān) who shall come to you with our letters in his hands. On being informed of this, remove Petros from you and install this (man) Menas (Mīnā) in the see. News has also reached us that Petros seated the younger son of the king on the throne and rejected the elder (one), and this is unjust because the elder has more right to the kingdom than the younger.”

- i. They both went with the letters to the elder son of the king, [who] ... gathered together to him the army and made known to them the letters and what was in them.... ... he banished him (= the younger son, who was king) and the metropolitan also, and installed that monk Menas in his place.*
- j. ... When reports of Menas reached the patriarch and of what he had done ..., he (= Cosmas) grieved exceedingly and he wrote letters and anathematized and excommunicated him (=the elder brother). (Vantini 1975:202-203).*

The subdivisions from g to j in Passage 2 are mine.

Passage 2 mentions: (i) the two monks wrote falsified letters as from Patriarch Cosmas (sections h and i); (ii) the monks' forgery itself refers to the genuine letters of Cosmas, by which he appointed Petros, as being letters that were falsified by Petros himself (section h); and (iii) Cosmas is informed and excommunicates the elder brother (section j).

The diplomatic value and characteristics of the mentioned letters

Three different chanceries are connected with the documents as well as two 'private' forgers. Of the three chanceries two are royal (imperial) ones (Axum, Nubia) and one ecclesiastical (patriarchal). This means that there is a substantial difference between them, but also – and more importantly – a basic similarity between all three of them, because they are to a great extent modelled upon the Byzantine prototype, which is well known (cf. Karayannopoulos, 1972). The three chanceries also belong to one creed, Miaphysite Orthodoxy.

Although the documents, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs*, are far from copies of the originals, and in fact nothing more than mentions, and although the *History* is not a *diplomatarion* or *chartularium*, it is nevertheless possible to determine to which diplomatic group they belong. Historical criticism is hereto the method necessary for every student of archives and the discipline of *diplomatics* in order to assess the value, authority and authenticity of each document (Karayannopoulos, 1972:95-97). Moreover, patriarchal as well as Nubian and Ethiopian royal documents, similar to the ones mentioned by the author of the *History*, have been preserved in the Nubian archives, which may be helpful for the diplomatic discussion of the mentioned documents. Thus, in the context of Nubian-Alexandrian correspondence, a request in Coptic by Moses George, King of Makouria and Alwa (ca. 1158-1199), to Patriarch Markos (Apa Markos) recommending a certain Iêsou for the consecration to a bishopric in Nubia, has been found in a jar in House 177 (archive no. 3 of Quasr Ibrim) as a copy of the original, with one Coptic subscript and two other ones in Greek. Letter and subscripts have been studied by Plumley (1978) and Adams (1996:228-289). Very important are also the preserved documents regarding the consecration of Timotheos as last (?) metropolitan "*Bishop of Phrim and Pakhoras*" by Patriarch Gabriel IV, issued in Cairo in 1371 or 1372. The document consists of two scrolls, one in Coptic and the other in Arabic with the same text. The originals were buried together with Timotheos in the Cathedral of Ibrim (Phrim) (Plumley, 1975 and Adams 1996:229). Moreover, there exists a 14th century bilingual manuscript (Coptic and Arabic) in the *Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* which contains the same



texts, and which can be considered, says Plumley (1975:21), “*as an encyclopedia of the ecclesiastical science of the Coptic Church*”. This, I believe, may have been done as some form of replacement for patriarchal *chartularia* in Alexandria or Misr (Cairo). In Nubia on the other hand, the finding of archives in Ibrim (Plumley, 1975; Adams 1996: 213-252; Browne 1989 and 1991) is proof of the existence of organized Nubian chanceries (Hendrickx 2011: 337-339 and 2011a:40-56). The archives suggest that a difference between official royal or *eparchal* administration, the *eparchos* being the viceroy of Nobadia, and ecclesiastical administration, although the preservation seems to have been done in a less organized way. It is noticeable that the Nubian Church had *chartularioi*, archive officials dependent on bishops or churches and monasteries (Adams 1996:246, 248, 252). The Nubian Church in general and the monasteries in Dongola and Faras, some of them being royal foundations, provided different services for the kingdom, such as handling archival, diplomatic and legal transactions, as well as manufacturing parchments and other materials for writing and wall painting (Edwards, 2004: 241, 245-247).

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the Axumite archives. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:13-14, 18) has correctly observed that “*the Aksumite archives suffered from destructive invasions many times*” and that only correspondence between the Ethiopian emperors and the Coptic Patriarchs which survive in narrative sources can be considered as “*more or less authentic*”. He thereby refers to the letter to George II, which he considers as authentic. Only the Ethiopian Church had -he states -a genuine archive, where important documents were saved.

Abu Salih the Armenian (before 1200 AD), who made use of the Archives of the Coptic Patriarchate gave some important information on the correspondence between the Patriarch and the Nubian and Ethiopian kings: “*The fathers and patriarchs used to write letters to the kings of Abyssinia and Nubia twice in the year; and the last ... who did so was Zacharias the sixty-fourth patriarch [1004-1032]; for Al-Hākīm forbade the practice, which ceased from that time until now*” (Vantini, 1975: 323 and 340). However, Abu Salih also states, that when a king writes to the Caliph in Cairo or to his vizier, the Patriarch is asked to write a reply.

I will now present in chronological order the letters mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs*, including the forgeries, according to the conventions of diplomatic editions and discussions. Note that the names of the Axumite Kings, who received or sent letters, are not mentioned by name, but chronologically differentiated by numbers (i.e. King1, King2, etc.) The names can be completed only after the analysis of the events and sources, and after having taken into account the research of modern authors. The same applies for a number of dates.

1. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT OF METROPOLITAN PETROS BY PATRIARCH COSMAS, SENT TO THE KING OF AXUM (=King1).

-Not preserved letter, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (section h).

-Date: *terminus ante quem* is the death of Cosmas in 933; *terminus post quem* is 921 (when Cosmas became Patriarch).

-Place of origin of document: Misr (Cairo). However, it is not known whether it was at the Residence of the Patriarch or at a particular Church (as was the case with the consecration document of Timotheos, as cited before).

-Author and Addressee: Patriarch Cosmas to King of Axum, no name mentioned (=King1).

-Authenticity: the existence and contents should be accepted, since it was the tradition that the Patriarch appointed and consecrated the bishops for Ethiopia and Nubia. The document of consecration/appointment of Timotheos witnesses to this tradition.

-Terminology in *testimonium*: letters (section h).

-Notes: the mention of letters (plural) may refer to two copies, perhaps in two languages (Coptic, Arabic?) as in the case of the letter of appointment of Timotheos. The counterfeited letter (section h; letter no 2) witnesses of the existence of the original letter of Cosmas.

2. FAKE LETTER BY THE MONKS, MENAS AND VICTOR, PRESENTED TO THE ELDER BROTHER (=KING3) OF THE YOUNGER SON (=KING2) OF THE PREVIOUS KING (=KING1) AS BEING A LETTER OF APPOINTMENT OF MENAS AS METROPOLITAN.

-Not preserved letter, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (sections h and i).

-Date: *terminus ante quem* is the death of Cosmas in 933, and the *terminus post quem* is document number 1.

-Place of origin of document: Ethiopia, place unknown; perhaps Axum.

-Authors and Addressee: Menas and Victor to elder brother, no name mentioned (=King3), before he banned his younger brother [=King2] and metropolitan Petros.

-Authenticity: the existence and contents of the fake letter should be accepted, since the absence of a metropolitan which provoked the ecclesiastical crisis of the 10th Century cannot be explained without this incident. Moreover, falsification of Patriarchal letters are not exceptional in the period under discussion (e.g. in the first half of the 11th Century a certain Abdoun, alias Cyril, forged a letter of the Patriarch and presented himself as metropolitan of Ethiopia [Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972: 243-244]).

Counterfeited letters are – from historical critical point overview – as important for the study of history as genuine ones (Karayannopoulos 1972: 261-264).

-Terminology in *testimonium*: counterfeit letters (sections h and i).

-Notes: The author of the *History* refers to what he himself stated earlier in his own Chronicle (Vantini 1975:203-204), where we read that Patriarch Cosmas had sent a certain Petros as metropolitan to Ethiopia, who had selected the younger son for the throne, when the then ruling King (= King1) was dying. There we also read about the two monks, the falsification of the letters, the exile of the younger brother and Petros, the crowning of the elder brother and the appointment of Menas as metropolitan (sections g to j).

Andersen (2000:37) suggests that the elder brother (=King3) may have jumped on the occasion to seize the throne, created by the “new” (i.e. counterfeited) letter of the patriarch.

Of special importance is the reference in the *History* to the army (in section i), of which the meeting may reflect the earlier existence of the national assembly of Axum, but which in general “were summoned probably only for the declaration of the royal will” (Kobishchanov, 1979:211). In our case, which has been overlooked by Kobishchanov and all other commentators), the elder brother may have used the occasion to claim the throne in a legal way by using the people’s assembly and army.

3. COSMAS SENDS A LETTER OF EXCOMMUNICATION AND ANATHEMA TO THE OLDER BROTHER (=KING3)

-Not preserved letter, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (section j).

-Date: *terminus ante quem* is the death of Cosmas in 933; *terminus post quem* is letter number 2.

-Place of origin of document: Misr (see document number 1).

-Author and Addressee: Cosmas to King of Axum; no name mentioned (=King3).

-Authenticity: there is no doubt about the existence and contents of this letter in the framework of the religious and political crisis in Axum.

-Terminology in *testimonium*: letters.



-Notes: this episode refers also to a letter of excommunication by Patriarch Cosmas. We do not know how Cosmas learned about the episode. There is not any suggestion that this was the result of a letter.

*4. A NUMBER OF PETITIONS BY THE KING OF AXUM (=KING4) OR/AND HIS PREDECESSOR (=KING4) TO COSMAS AND SIX SUCCEEDING PATRIARCHS TO OBTAIN THE CONSECRATION

AND APPOINTMENT OF A METROPOLITAN

-Not preserved letters, suggested in the *History of the Patriarchs* (section d and letter no 5).

-Date: *terminus post quem* is the death of Cosmas in 933 and *ante quem* is the beginning of Philotheos's Patriarchate in 979 or a bit later. - See also Notes and letter no. 5.

-Place of origin of document: Axum ? or Shewa, if the King had fled to that Kingdom? (cf. section a).

-Author and Addressee: Abyssinian king(s) to Patriarchs of Alexandria.

-Authenticity: the existence of such petitions should be regarded as presumable, even probable, in view of the established tradition of appointments by the Patriarch.

-Terminology in *testimonium*: no letters mentioned.

-Notes: The *History* mentions six patriarchs who have not replied to the requests of the kings, but between Cosmas and Philotheos there were only 4 Patriarchs. We obtain the number six only if we include also Cosmas and Philotheos themselves. This has some chronological repercussions for letters nos 5 and 7.

Conti Rossini (cf. Levi 1992: 286, note 12) believes that the monk Victor fled to Egypt and informed the Patriarch about Menas, who consequently sent his letter of excommunication to the elder brother (=King3). There is no evidence for this suggestion.

5. LETTER OF THE KING OF AXUM (=KING4) TO KING GEORGE OF NUBIA , ASKING HIS INTERVENTION AT THE PATRIARCH TO OBTAIN A METROPOLITAN.

-Not preserved letter, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (sections a,d,e).

-Date: *terminus post quem* is the beginning of the Patriarchate of Philotheos (979). While most authors put the letter in that same year, one may doubt this. If the *History's* information on the number of Patriarchs is correct and if therefore one must accept that Philotheos was the sixth Patriarch of the series of Fathers who refused to consecrate a new metropolitan, then we must conclude that Philotheos was originally refusing to do so, and only accepted to send a new metropolitan to Ethiopia after the letter of King George, which must be *after* 979. See also Notes in letter no 4.

The letter to George must have been written after 979, not in 979 itself.

-Place of origin of document: Axum? Shewa? (cf. letter no. 4).

-Author and Addressee: Modern scholars who mention the letter, have almost always misrepresented the letter to George, nor have they paid due attention to the diplomatic information in the texts. Thus, Bombrowski (1983:151, n.20) mentions in his commentary on an Ethiopian chronicle "*einem Brief, den König Delna`ad an König Georg von Nubien im Jahre 979 schrieb ...*". Ullendorff (1960: 60-61) and Sergew Hable Sellassie (1973: 232-233) refer to the letter, and state that Patriarch Philotheos sent the new metropolitan to Ethiopia during the reign of Anbessa Wudem, who restored order in Axum after the death of Queen Gudit. Henze (2000:48-49) writes that "*a letter from an unidentified Ethiopian emperor to King Girgis II of Nubia preserved in the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria reports he*

has been attacked by the Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiyya...". Andersen (2000:31, 35 and 63) states that "*these chronicles [= History of the Patriarchs...] quote a letter written in about A.D. 980 by a certain king of the Habasha to the patriarch of Alexandria*" and further that "*section d [= of his presentation of the text] is a long quotation from the Abyssinian king's letter to George*". The "letter" is, however, neither preserved in the text of the *History of the Patriarch*, nor a long quotation from the letter. Tekle-Tsadik Mekouria (1992:274-275) mixed up the Patriarchs, when he wrote that the Abyssinian King, who was driven out by the Queen of the Banu al-Hamwiya, "*appealed to the Coptic patriarch, Cosmas, through the Nubian king Djirdjis/George*". The same author believes that this Abyssinian king died between 970 and 980, still fighting the Queen. Only Sergew Hable Sellassie and Andersen have discussed the letter in detail, but while the former does not reach a conclusion, the latter had discussed the letter to George in the context of the Gudit episode only, not reaching thereby a final conclusion. The problem will be re-examined in detail further on in this article (Part 4).

The "letter" itself from the Ethiopian King (=King4) is in section (d). Sections (a) and (e) complete the content of the letter.

The background and importance of King George will be discussed further in my section on the facts and circumstances regarding the *dramatis personae* (Part 3 of this article).

-Authenticity: the existence and contents should be accepted in the framework of the events.

-Terminology in *testimonium*: letter(s).

-Notes: although the content of the letter is given, we cannot speak about a *deperditum* (i.e. a lost document of which the content is preserved *verbaliter*), and it is not possible to distinguish the different diplomatic sections of the document. Thus, *in casu* the document is a reconstruction by the *author of the History*, who may have seen the original text, of which he presented an abstract, or who may rely on information by others.

The letter to George is accepted by modern scholars as having been written to King George

II of Makouria, who ruled over Nubia (United Kingdom of Nobadia and Makouria) from 969

to ca. 1002 (Vantini 1981: 116,124). Only Godlewski (2006:111) inaccurately calls the same person George III, while referring to the king's portrait in the Cathedral of Faras, painted between 975, when Petros became bishop of Faras and 1005, and when bishop Marianos took office.

The language in which the documents were written, is probably Coptic, which in religious context, was a *lingua franca* for the Churches depending on the Miaphysite Church of Alexandria. Although gradually Arabic replaced Coptic as the language used by the Egyptian Christians, Coptic (and Greek) as administrative languages were continued to be used in Nubia (Hendrickx 2009:35-44; Adams 1996: 219-224).

6. LETTER(S) OF CREDENCE GIVEN TO THE MESSENGERS BY THE KING OF ABYSSINIA (=KING4)

-Not preserved letters, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (section e).

-Date: *terminus post quem* is the beginning of Philotheos's Patriarchate (979).

-Place of origin of document: Axum? Shewa?

-Author and Addressee: King of Abyssinia to George, King of Nubia.

-Authenticity: the existence and contents should be accepted, since letters of credence were normally given to messengers who were to deliver an official written message, in order to confirm to the addressee their identity and authority.

-Terminology in *testimonium*: letters (plural, thus referring to more than one letter).



7. LETTER OF KING GEORGE II TO PATRIARCH PHILOTHEOS ASKING TO SEND A METROPOLITAN TO ETHIOPIA.
 - Not preserved letter, mentioned in *the History of the Patriarchs* (section e).
 - Date: *terminus post quem* is the beginning of Philotheos's Patriarchate (979).
 - Place of origin of document: probably Dongola, capital of Makouria.
 - Addressee: Philotheos.
 - Authenticity: the existence and contents should be accepted in view of the historical facts of the period discussed.
 - Terminology in *testimonium*: letters.

8. LETTER(S) OF CREDENCE OF KING GEORGE II TO HIS MESSENGERS FOR THE INTENTION OF PHILOTHEOS
 - Not preserved letter, mentioned in the *History of the Patriarchs* (section e)
 - Date: *terminus post quem* is the beginning of Philotheos's Patriarchate (979).
 - Place of origin of document: probably Dongola.
 - Addressee: Philotheos.
 - Authenticity: the existence and contents should be accepted, since letters of credence were normally given to messengers who were to deliver an official written message, in order to confirm to the addressee their identity and authority.
 - Terminology in *testimonium*: letters (plural, thus referring to more than one letter).
 - Notes: The messengers may have been clerics who could speak at least Coptic. Probably George's messengers were Nubians, and not Ethiopians, since contact from Ethiopia with the Patriarch had remained unanswered in the past. George's letter certainly was also written in Coptic.
 - Either George sent his own letters only, either he included the letter of the Ethiopian King (=King4).

- *9. PATRIARCH PHILOTHEOS SENT DANIEL TO ETHIOPIA AS METROPOLITAN
 - No letters preserved. The text of the *History* does not mention any letter.
 - Date: after the beginning of the patriarchate of Philotheos (979).
 - Note: the text of the *History* in this case is not to be considered as a direct testimony for a document. No letters are mentioned here, although it is certain (or at least very probable) that Daniel had his appointment letter with him, since such a letter should prove the veracity of the metropolitan's appointment. Diplomatically such a case is defined as *presumable*.

An asterisk (*) in front of the number of a document or documents indicates that the document(s) is (are) PRESUMABLE, but that there is no absolute proof of its (their) authenticity in the sources.

Dramatis personae and the circumstances of the facts described in the two episodes of the History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria

The *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* has given us historical information without dates and with a minimum of historical names. Therefore, we should try to date the events and identify the persons. Only so we can assess the value of the *History of the Patriarchs'* information for this case and also – more generally - contribute to the evaluation of his authority and credibility as a source.

Firstly, which is the general political, religious and military situation in 10th Century Nubia, Ethiopia and Egypt?



The 10th Century has been considered to be the golden age of the Nubian Christian kingdoms (Jakobielski, 1992 : 111-112). The tenth Century saw some incursions of the Christian Nubians into Muslim Egypt (in 951 and 960) in order to plunder and to warn the Muslims against persecutions of the Coptic Christians and Patriarchate, but in 957 the Muslims had driven back the Nubians until Ibrim (Fadle Hasan 1967:91). In 970 the Fatimids invaded Egypt and took over the government, thereby ameliorating their relationship with the Coptic and Nubian Christians. Around that time the Fatimid leader in Egypt, Jawhar, sent his envoy, 'Abdallah b. Ahmad b. Sulaym al-Aswani with a letter to King George II, demanding that the *baqt*⁴ which was fallen in arrears be paid immediately and requesting that George would embrace Islam (Fadle Hasan 1967: 91-92). George organised a meeting between the Muslims and his bishops, resulting in a counter request that Jawhar would convert to Christianity (Fadle Hasan 1967: 92; Vantini 1981:122-123). However, the *baqt* was paid (Fadl Hasan 1967:91; contra in Jakobielski 1992:111). It was not the first time that the Nubians avoided to abide with the obligations of the *baqt*. It appears that they did so mainly when they were in a very strong position vis-à-vis Muslim Egypt (see e.g. Hendrickx, 2007: 60-72). A time of reconciliation followed. It is probable that the Ethiopians learned about this evolvment and therefore asked George, who became a protector of the patriarchate, to intervene on their behalf with Patriarch Philotheos. This proves that the Nubian Church in that time played a paramount role in the politics of Nubia in Makouria (Jakobielski 1992:111). Welsby (2002:89) and Vantini (1970:76-77) note the probability that the states of Makouria and Alwa were dynastically united with each other as a result of intermarriage between the two royal houses, and that - very possibly - King George II was married to the sister of Alwa's king and that their son, Stephanos, succeeded to the Alodian throne.⁵ If there was already such a union between the two kingdoms, it can help to explain the choice of George by the Ethiopian king to ask George to intervene with the Patriarch.

Unlike for Nubia, the tenth Century was a period of crisis and decline for Axum, which led to its final fall (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:215-237; Kobishchanov 1979:117-121; Tekle-Tsadik Mekouria 1992:270-274; Tekeste Negash, n.d.:1-19). The Rulers of Axum in this century "*had dwindled to insignificant figures*" (Levi 1992:22). However, the details are not clear and different explanations have been put forward. The reasons for the decadence of Axum are multiple and of various: there was a decline in the trade from the end of the 6th Century onward; Axum had lost its Yemenite possessions; a new world power, Islam, was born; the Beja, Agau, Barya and Falasha Jews revolted or broke away; the minting of Ethiopian coins was stopped; there was a movement of breaking away from the Coptic Church and transgression of canon law (Kobishchanov, 1979:118-119; Henze 2000:44-46; Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:205-213). The crisis which struck Axum at the beginning of the 10th Century was both religious and political-dynastic and took place during the Patriarchate of Cosmas (921 – 933). The newly appointed metropolitan Petros was the catalysator for both crises according to the *History of the Patriarchs*.

The dynastic impasse which followed created the religious crisis, when several successive Patriarchs, i.e. Makarios (933-953), Theophanios (953-956), Menas II (956-974) and Abraham (975-979), refused to appoint a new metropolitan. It was a period of anarchy with rulers,

⁴In 651-2 AD, a Muslim Egyptian army led by 'Abdallah ibn Abi Sarh invaded the Christian United Nubian Kingdom of Makouria and Nobatia and intended to capture its capital, Dongola. The Muslims, however, were unsuccessful in their expedition and a *pactum* (known as *baqt*) was made. This agreement was a non-aggression pact as well as a trade agreement (Vantini 1981:65-70; Hendrickx 2007:60).

⁵ Also Moses George (2nd half of 12th Century) is mentioned in inscriptions as King of Makouria and Alwa. (Welsby, 2002:89; Edwards, 2004:237; Lajtar and Van der Vliet, 1998:47-48; Lajtar 2009:89-97).



appearing to oppose each other, catastrophic wars and the rebellion of female ruler, traditionally known as Yodit (Judith, Guditi). The sources refer to the banishing of several kings and finally to the fall of the Axumite (so-called Solomonic) dynasty, the moving of the capital to the south and the usurping of power by the so-called Zagwe dynasty. The names of the ruling kings are questionable as well as the dates of their reign and even the capital cities from where they were reigning.

The sources consist, next to the History of the Patriarchs, of a number of kings lists and a multitude of tales and legends found in several chronicles.

Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:202-203) has selected and published a list of twenty names of kings (emperors) of Axum, of which I repeat the last eight names, having relevance to the periods I discuss; the names are the throne names to which between parentheses the surnames are added, if available:

- Wudemdem (780-790)
- Wudem Asferé (Dimawudem) (790-820)
- Armah (Remha) (820-825)
- Dagnajan (885-845)
- Dagnajan, Gidajan (845)
- Guditi (845-885)
- Ambessa Wudem (Dagnajan) (885-905)
- Dil Ne'ad (905-915)

The same author (1972:240-241) follows up this list with the so-called longer list of Zagwe emperors, previously published in Amharic by Tekle Sadik Mekuria (1951:356). I select here the first three, which are relative to our timeframe:

- Mera Tekle Haimanot (920-933)
- Dil Ne'ad II (Sibuhay) (933—943)
- Meyrari (943-958)

The above dates, cited by Sergew Hable Sellassie, are one century behind the actual dates because of the Ethiopian chronology, and thus need correction (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:236 n.118; cf. for Ethiopian chronology also Andersen, 2000:55-56).

Another problem is that the lists are inaccurate, since all existing lists differ one from the other. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:202) is well aware of this and states that ‘*written sources, Ethiopian or foreign, do not mention the names of the Ethiopian emperors*’, but only refer to the title ‘*King of Abyssinia*’ and that ‘*the number of kings varies from one list to another.*’ The lists as well as many, if not most chronicles, were also subjected to the intervention of the Ethiopian Church and its non-recognition of and hostility to the Zagwe dynasty, resulting in either the chroniclers’ silence on Zagwe kings or incorrect information. Kubishchanov (1979:282) states that the lists of Kings’ names were not recorded before the 14th to 16th centuries and that ‘*the majority of names distorted, the chronological order of their succession is confused, and the years of the reign are nearly always unreliable.*’

The Kings lists may be completed by information from chronicles which contain old legends as well as tales and stories, but which are not (very) trustworthy (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:17-18). Some of the unpublished (and even recently published) manuscripts, based on local traditions, date from the 19th-20th Centuries (e.g. Molvaer 1998:47-58). They should be used – like the old ones, and perhaps more so – with the greatest prudence.



The *History of the Patriarchs* is the only historical source that gives us an authoritative and credible framework of events and chronology, based on the Patriarchs and George II of Nubia.

Scholars have interpreted the sources in different ways and have tried to reconstruct the 10th Century dynastic Axumite history accordingly. It is remarkable that most scholars started with the *History of the Patriarchs*, of which in the course of their argumentation they tended to forget the informative framework. By sticking to the framework of the *History* and the correspondence mentioned in it, I will try to work out who are the four Axumite kings who wrote or received the letters, taking into account the results of previous scholars in order to obtain a consolidated chronological and historical framework.

Chronologically, the first king mentioned in the texts of the *History of the Patriarchs* is the one who ruled when Cosmas was Patriarch, thus before the latter's death in 933. This king himself (=King1) died after Cosmas had sent Petros as metropolitan to Abyssinia and before the death of Cosmas.

There may be some clues in the *History's* text regarding the identity of the king. According to the *History*, the king (=King4) who wrote the letter to King George, was chased from place to place. However, the text (=passage 1) is ambiguous: in sections a and b the impression is given that the king (=King4), who sent the letter to George, was punished in a double way, namely by the rebellion of the cruel queen, who *'drove him [=King4] from place to place'* as well as by the misconduct of the previous king (=king3) against the metropolitan (section c). On the other hand, the meaning of the text strongly suggests that the king who was driven out, was also the predecessor (=King3) of the king (=King4) who sent the letter to George. Were perhaps both kings driven out of their realm? Or killed? This would be probable if Gudit/Yodit indeed was ruling Axum for a (very) long period.

Henze (2000:48 and note 13) has remarked that emperor Dagna-Jan⁶ (*sic*) *"shifted his capital ..."*, but that for kings moving from one capital to another was a practice *"that persisted for the next seven centuries until Gondar became a permanent capital in the seventeenth century"*. Tekle-Tsadiq Mekouria (1992: 274-275) believes that the king, whom he does not name, fled to Shoa (Shewa). Kobischchanov (1979: 163-168) holds that in the decline period of Axum and after its fall itself, Axumite kings *'wandered from district to district, hiding in caves and clefts of the rocks'* and that king Degnaizan (*sic*) made the round of Ethiopia *'from end to end'*. The Soviet scholar connects these "wanderings" with personal royal tax gathering and with the ritual of royal election to the throne. However, this scholar notably ignores most of the decline period of Axum, and his explanation does not hold water for the case of the fall of Axum.

Sergew Hable Sellassie (1973:215-218) mentions that a Coptic MS on Cosmas mentions a name for this Ethiopian king Tabtahadj or Babtaha, who might be Dagnajan. He does not identify the latter with the above mentioned list, which places him in 845 (which date anyway should be augmented with 100 years, as we have seen), but states that he probably ruled from 939 to 950 according to a list of kings attached to the last folio of the unpublished manuscript *Gedle Abreha and Asbeha*, found in Gemad (Tigre) in the church dedicated to

⁶ I have respected in this article the different spellings for the name of this king/emperor as used in different lists and chronicles as well as by modern scholars: Dagna-Jan, Degnaizan, Dagnajan, Dagnayan. There is not such a thing as the "correct" spelling.



those two brothers. Although these dates do not exactly fit in the *History's* framework, they point to the beginning of the 10th Century..

Moreover, some common factors and names, occurring in different traditions can re-enforce the *History's* framework . Thus, Dagnajan is pictured as a strong Christian ruler, keen for missionary work and the spread of Christendom by conquest, which eventually led to his disappearance and death and the destruction of his army in the desert (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:231). This Christian aspect is central in Dagnajan's character/figure and corresponds with the king (=King1)'s good relations with Patriarch Cosmas and metropolitan Petros. The dates of his reign and activities generally point to the first decades of the 10th Century. All these factors provide strong enough evidence to accept that Dagnajan was the ruler in Cosmas's and Petros's time, and that consequently he must have been the recipient of the appointment letter of metropolitan Petros.

After Dagnajan come the two brothers (=Kings 2 and 3). The younger was exiled after the arrival of the monks Menas and Victor and the expulsion of metropolitan Petros. Cosmas then excommunicated the king (=King3), who killed Menas, who had falsely taken the place of Petros, who had died meanwhile (sections c, d, g, h, j of Passages 1 and 2). This means that the two sons of Dagnajan were kings during the reign of Cosmas, thus also before 933, the elder one (=King3 = Gidajan) probably after Cosmas's death too. This also points to the terrible crisis which befell the Axumite Church and Kingdom itself after Dagnajan's death.

The episode of two brothers, fighting each other over the throne often occurs in Ethiopian history. Caroline Levine has remarked that this phenomenon is also present in Hebrew history and texts as well as in the Ethiopian dynastic epic, the *Kebra Nagast* (Levi 1992: chapters 3 and 4). She refers to a number of cases with as theme the disinherited son, e.g. Cain-Abel, Jacob – Esau, Judah – Reuben, Canaan -Shem, Isaac – Ishmael, Adrami – Rohoboam, Menelik – Rohoboam and Gebre Meskel – Esrael. The theme is connected with the theme of legitimacy versus illegitimacy⁷ and Solomonic versus Zagwe dynasty. Kobischchanov (1979: 199-201) has also underlined the legendary aspect of “brother kings”, considering it as a creation by the Syrian-Egyptian clergy, although recognizing the pairs of brothers Aizana and Saizana, Arfed and Amsi and Za Zigen and Za Rema as real and historical brothers who ruled together. One may ask in how far all these references correspond with real facts and if – perhaps- they may be considered, at least in several instances, as (literary) *topoi*. That may be so in the case e.g. of the brother-kings Abreha and Asbeha, who in fact were not brothers at all (Kobischchanov 1979:200).

The story of the brothers as told in the *History* may be correct. Thus, Andersen (2000:49), referring to the most reliable list, which is also presented as such by Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:202-203; see above in paragraph 3.2.), suggests that Dagnajan had two sons, namely Dagajan (the younger one) and Gidajan (the older one), who reigned only for ten months and was probably killed by Yodit in 945 (i.e. the date given by Andersen for the death of Patriarch Cosmas and to be corrected to 933; Andersen 2000:62), hence the dynastic and political crisis. In that case Gidajan would not be a variant for Dagajan, says Andersen, “as generally believed”. Gidajan (=King3), the eldest son of Dagajan, who was excommunicated by the

⁷ Ethiopian history and ideology is based on the “legitimacy – illegitimacy opposition” in the political and religious domains. Thus, the Solomonic dynasty is legitimate versus the illegitimate Zagwe dynasty. The Ethiopian Church supported the Solomonic line, and this is reflected in the *Kebra Negast*, the kings lists and chronicles. As for the brothers, the “legitimacy – illegitimacy opposition” changed several times, given legitimacy to the elder or younger brother according to political circumstances. The sanction of the Church played herein a major role.



Patriarch and who had banned his younger brother Dagajan (=King2) and metropolitan Petros, was thus the receiver of the counterfeited letters of Victor and Menas.

The two brothers, i.e. Dagajan and Gidajan, were succeeded by the king (=King4), who wrote the letter to King George II after 979 (*History*, section d; see above letter no 5). The episode of the two brothers, leading to civil strife, gave the occasion to Gudit/Yodit, whether she was a foreign queen or a local princess (e.g. Falasha, Agau, Hahayle) or even a member of the king's family or clan, to seize power as a result of the chaos created by the incompetent Gidajan (cf. also Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972: 232). Levi (1992:242-243), in view of the resulting civil war, killings and exiles, wonders whether she became the paramount ruler or if "she may only have been one among several prominent rulers". This brings us to two other problems: "who were the final kings of Axum, and where does the Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiyah fit in?". The two questions cannot be separated from each other and must be answered together.

Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:239) is well aware of the contradictions in the sources and states that we find "two references to the move of the capital city ... First, there is the flight of Dil Ne'ad to the south following the rise of Gudit. Secondly there is the reference in Gedle Yesus Mo'a to the arrival of Anbessa Wudem in the region of Haik and the founding of a city there". The author himself (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:232) believes that after the death of Gudit/Yodit, Anbessa Wudem (Anbesa Wedem, Ambessa Widim), who was chased from Axum by Gudit/Yodit and had survived in the kingdom of Shewa, restored order in Aksum, while metropolitan Daniel was sent to Ethiopia during his reign. Consequently, the letter to George II should have been written by Anbessa Wudem. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:202-240) does not give a precise date for the death of Gudit/Yodit, although he appears to accept that Gudit died in or soon after 979. In the same year Anbessa Wudem is considered to have returned from his banishment in Shewa. He is supposed to have reigned as emperor for another 10 years, dying in 910 (i.e. 1010?), which does not fit in the chronology. However, calculating from 979 (death of Gudit) a reign of 10 years brings us to 989/990 when the emperor died, which fits in the framework of the *History*. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972: 232) also writes that in the seventh year after his return from Shewa, the emperor and Daniel laid the foundation of the new palace and the Debre Negoddad church in the vicinity of Lake Hayq as well as of the famous monastery of St. Stephen. That would give the date of ca. 985/6, which also fits. Anbessa Wudem was succeeded by his son, Dil Ne'ad, who built the cathedral of Axum Sion as well as the monolithic church of Michael Amba in Tigre, and it is he, Dil Ne'ad, who moved the royal camp definitively to the lakes (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:233). Thus, Dil Ne'ad was the last king of the Solomonic line in Axum. The final fall of Axum, says Sergew Hable Sellassie, remains obscure.

But then, what is the relationship between Dagajan (=King2), Gidajan(=King3) and Anbessa Wudem (=King4), who all of them are considered to be sons of King Dagnajan?

We should accept that the younger son of Dagnajan (=King1) was called Dagajan (=King2), and that when becoming emperor his throne name became Anbessa Wudem (cf. list of emperors in Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972: 202-203; Molvaer 1998: 53 n. 15)⁸. The spelling

⁸ Two chronicles, not used by Sergew Hable Sellassie nor by Andersen and Levi, also refer to the succession problem and illustrate how contradictory the sources are and how complicated the question of names is. Thus, the *Tanasee 106* (Dombrowski, 1983: 151) considers Dil Ne'ad to be the son of Anbessa Wudem, the son of Gedā'žen (*sic*). Another interesting example is the manuscript by Aleqa Teklé (Tekle-Iyesus) of Gojjam (Molvaer 1998: 47-58). Here, Yodit is Jewish (Falasha), daughter of the Falasha king. She burns Axum down, tries to kill Digayjan (*sic*), son of Dignajan (*sic*), defeats his successor (!) Ambessa Widim and kills Dilnad (*sic*), son of



of the names seems to be crucial, but that is not so, since the names are spelled differently in different sources and sometimes father and son's names (=King1 and King2) have the same spelling! Moreover, this interpretation equalizes our King 2 with King 4 (Dagajan = Anbessa Wudem).

Caroline Levi wrote her pioneering Ph.D. on Yodit with as main purpose to examine how Yodit (Gudit) was used by the Amharans to define their political and legal theory as for the Solomonic myth of the origin of the Ethiopian kingdom (Levi 1992:3). She has also made useful comparisons between Gudit and earlier or later Biblical and non-Biblical queens and heroines of the Near East and the Muslim world (Levi 1992: 189-239, 89-110), and she established that there was a splitting of the Gudit-figure into several female rulers (Levi 1992:77-79, 83-88 and 108). Moreover, she has put the episode of Gudit and the role of the late Axumite kings in the perspective of legitimacy versus illegitimacy.

Andersen⁹ has a quite different story, although he heavily relies on Sergew Hable Sellassie and Caroline Levi. He assumes that Gudit was a legitimate queen of Axum, belonging to the royal family, and capturing the throne from the incompetent king Gidajan, son of Dagnajan. He postulates that she married with Mara Tekle Haymanot, who was not a royal, but a court administrator, and that Dil Ne'ad was their son (- an assertion for which there is no evidence). The latter wrote the letter to King George II and it was he who moved the royal camp to Lake Hayq and built the churches on the island in the lake in ca. 980 (Andersen 2000:41-63; cf. also Levi 1992: 77, 108). It is now generally accepted that Dil Ne'ad, who was accompanied by Abba Salama II, built the famous monastery of Debre Egziabeher near Lake Hayq, which became a centre of evangelization (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:233; Andersen, 2000:63; Hentze, 2000:48). He was the last Axumite king. Andersen has no real solution for who would be the first Zagwe king. He believes that the Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiah, the Bani al-Habasha, Gudit/Yodit, Mäsobä Wärq (legendary daughter of Dil Ne'ad and wife of Mara Tekle Haymanot,) and finally Tirda' Gäbäs (also presented as the wife of Mara Tekle Haymanot [!]) were all one and the same person, connected to the fall of Axum and the exile or killing of kings and members of the royal dynasty. Andersen (2000:51) removes Anbessa Wudem to the 12th Century, based on a note on a MS of the four Gospels in the Mika'el Amba church in Tigray, that states that the church was consecrated by Patriarch Makarios during the reign of Anbessa Wudem in the year 866 of the Era of the Martyrs (i.e. ca 1149/50). However, Andersen's assertion is not without dispute. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:203, n.11) has remarked that the note was possibly copied from an earlier MS. If so, its validity can be questioned.

On the other hand, some authors have accepted that Gudit/Yodit was indeed the Queen of the Bani al-Hamwiah (Hamwiyah), Conti Rossini (1928:286) having equalled the Hamwiah with the pagan Sidama. Today, scholars prefer – correctly I believe – to identify this Queen as the Queen of the Habasha, who ruled in Ethiopia according the 10th Century Arab chronicler, Ibn Haukal (Kramers and Wiet 1944:23, 66; Tadesse Tamrat, 1972: 51; Levi 1992: 243-251; Andersen 2000: 32-33). However, this certainly does not imply that she was a member of the Axumite royal family. Moreover, she might have come from another region than Axum, become then Queen of the Habasha *ipso facto* after her coup. Therefore, Andersen's

Ambessa Widim. This chronicle further states that the son of Dilnad flees to Shewa, where his dynasty survives. All this is supposed to happen in ca. 1000 AD. While the killing of Dil Ne'ad is nowhere confirmed and cannot be accepted as true, the Zagwe dynasty and the clergy later used the last assertion to "prove" that the first king of the "restored" Solomonic dynasty was the descendant of the genuine Axumite Solomonic one.

⁹ Andersen uses the same sources as Sergew Hable Sellassie and Caroline Levi.



hypothesis (2000:63), namely the rejection of her being a foreign non-Axumite queen (e.g. Jew, Beja, Bani al-Hamwiyya, etc.) in favour of seeing her as a “royal Axumite princess” is based on the non-identification of the Bani al-Hamwiyah and on several legends, and is not accepted by all scholars, thus remaining a non-resolved problem. The Queen of the Banu al-Hamwiyah/Habasha was still reigning in the time of the King of Abyssinia (=King4=King2=King Anbessa Wudem Dagajan), who sent his letter to King George (*History*, section b).

The reference to Gudit as a cruel queen, hostile to Christianity and burning cities and churches is wrong according to Andersen, who explains away this characterization as a later story, invented by the clergy, who wanted to discredit the Zagwe dynasty by putting Gudit in a negative light. This explanation, however, does not hold water, because the author of the *Lives of Cosmas and Philotheos* in the *History of the Patriarchs*, who mentions her cruelty, was almost a contemporary of the events he reported about the queen, whether he was Sawirus or Mawhub. Consequently, the story was already prominent in this early time and not a later invention.

Among the lists of the Zagwe rulers, we find almost everywhere Mera Tekle Haimanot as their first ruler, but the lists give different numbers of years for his reign. The most comprehensive list is this of Tekle Sadik Mekuria (1951:356; Cf. Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:240-241), which include also rulers, mentioned in literary works and which according to Sergew Hable Sellassie is the “list that would seem the most accurate”, because it covers the ca 300 years of the duration of the Zagwe dynasty (Sergew Hable Sellassie 1972:241). The dates, however, are not reliable and, even when altered with an augmentation of 100 years, they do not fit in the framework of the *History*.

It is clear that the versions of Sergew Hable Sellassie and Andersen contain many contradictions and lack clarity, while based on arbitrary selections or rejections of sources, without convincing discussion or arguments.

While Sergew Hable Sellassie notes the contradictions, he does not propose solutions or a precise timeframe, Levi's purpose is limited to the study of Gudit/Yodit, mainly in a Jewish context. Andersen's article is quite impressive, and his hypotheses are very original, creating an interesting alternative to earlier theories. They have contributed to our understanding of the complications of the fall of Axum and 10th century Ethiopian history. However, Andersen's interpretations remain unproven. Therefore, I tend to agree with Michael Brett (2013), who writes that Andersen's real valid contribution was to confirm the paucity of sources on the matter. I believe that a new examination of the Gudit/Yodit story needs a new revision, based on a new approach and new insights (such as done e.g. by Shalva Weil: n.d., 1-6 in a popularizing way). This, however, falls outside the framework of this article.

The most **logical** explanation and most probable line of royal successions is the one fitting in the framework of the *History of the Patriarchs*. Our calculations and analyses also comply with the *History's* framework, and the controversial or confusing parts in passage 1 of the *History's* text have been solved or clarified.

As a result of the above diplomatic analysis and the discussion of the *dramatis personae*, we must admit that the actual state of sources does not allow for a final and precise reconstruction of the end of Axum. The following tentative overview of historic facts and diplomatic activity



can now, nevertheless, be proposed, with as basis the 'potted' (as Levi [1992:255-256] calls it) narration and chronological framework of the *History of the Patriarchs*.

1. Patriarch Cosmas (921 to 933) sends Petros as metropolitan to Axum, where King Dagnajan is reigning. Dagnajan dies before 933 and a succession struggle follows between his two sons, Digajan (the younger one) and Gidajan (the older one). Petros is instrumental in the election of the younger son.
2. Still before 933 two monks, Victor and Menas, counterfeit letters which they attributed to Cosmas, claiming that Petros is a fake. They present them to Gidajan, who assembles the army (as a meeting of the people), resulting in the banishing of Digajan and Petros, whom he replaces with Menas. Cosmas learns about this and excommunicates Gidajan, who executes Minas, replacing him with the deceased Petros' assistant, who illegally exercises the function of metropolitan and is not recognized by the Patriarchs of Alexandria.
3. Digajan, whose throne name in the lists is Ambassa Wudem, loses the throne to his elder brother, Gidajan, who reigns only for 10 months (933/934) and is killed by the troops of the rebel queen Guddit/Yodit, who seizes the throne and chases Ambassa Wudem from place to place. The latter finds refuge in Shewa, where probably his son, Dil Ne'ad is born.
4. Meanwhile there is a double crisis in Axum: there is neither a legal king (emperor) nor a legal bishop. It is Anbessa Wudem, who must have contacted the successive Patriarchs of Alexandria requesting a metropolitan, but he was ignored.
5. After the death of Guditi (ca 979), Anbessa Wudem returns to Axum as king (emperor). He or his son, Dil Ne'ad sends a letter to King George II of Nubia asking him to intervene with Patriarch Philotheos (979 – 1003/4) to obtain a metropolitan, after perhaps having already in vain contacted the same Patriarch. King George obliges and sends his own letter. The Patriarch agrees and sends Daniel.
6. Daniel arrives in Axum, where order has been restored by Anbessa Wudem, who dies in ca. 990. It is he, or rather his son, King Dil Ne'ad, who moves the capital to the South and together with Daniel (now known as Abba Salama II) builds the monastery of Debre Egziabeher near Lake Hayq.
7. Dil Ne'ad is the last Axumite King and becomes the first King of the so-called Lastan dynasty, which is better known as the Zagwe dynasty, possibly through intermarriage (?). This remains unclear, as well as the factual role of Mara Thekle Haimanot.

Conclusions

This article clearly shows that the *History of the Patriarchs* is without doubt the only reliable source for the events of 10th Century Axum, and that details, dates and names can be filled in its framework only after a very thorough analysis of the other, mostly dubitable narrative sources and lists. The article has examined the official documents referred to in the *History*, regarding the period under consideration. It has listed and examined them according to the rules of *diplomats*.



The authority of the author of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* as historian has been accepted as generally reliable because of the function of the supposed author/compiler/translator, Sawirus, as secretary of the Patriarch and then as bishop, giving him access to the archives of the Coptic Patriarchate, moreover being a contemporary of the period under discussion. But what if he is not the author?

Mawhūb is also practically a contemporary of the events and he most probably also used archives and documents, since it is accepted that he was in any case – even if Sawirus was the original compiler – for a quite considerable time involved in the *History*. Moreover, he was not the writer of the early Patriarch's lives, but only the compiler/translator, the original texts being written by contemporary Coptic clerics, who had access to the patriarchs and their archives, whatever and wherever they were. So, we know that Johannes the Deacon, secretary of Patriarch Michael wrote the life of four Patriarchs.

As for the lives of Cosmas and Philotheos, whether Sawirus or Mawhūb was the compiler/writer/translator, the continuity of the work does not appear to have suffered. The work refers to documents and other sources, gives details and anecdotes about the Patriarchs's lives and discusses historical as well as theological themes. This does of course not mean that all references to letters and documents should be accepted as correct, but these documents' *existence* is not only very probable, but in general presumable, if not always acceptable without discussion. Sergew Hable Sellassie (1972:14) is so confident that he states that the correspondence between Ethiopian emperors and the Patriarchs of Alexandria, noted in the *History*, is reliable enough and that "*the only thing needed is to make the effort to collect and publish them*". The fact that the author of the *History* does not copy the letters literally fits the medieval way in which chroniclers and clerics worked in medieval times in Byzantium, making abstracts of original documents or selecting sections of them (cf. Karayannopoulos 1972: 259, 316, 317).

Philotheos's role as Patriarch appears to be important and positive in sharp contrast to the role played by Cosmas and his successors, whose attitude towards Ethiopia does not bear witness of any Christian interest or pity with the state and continuity of the Church of Ethiopia. Their attitude is dictated – as the episode with the appointment of a metropolitan for Axum – proves at least regrettable and cannot be ascribed to the Muslim rulers of Egypt. Indeed, we have seen that the *History* itself states that the Muslim governors in Egypt obliged the Patriarchs to reply to letters of the Nubian and Ethiopian rulers and allowed the Patriarchs to take the initiative to write twice a year to the Kings until the reign of Patriarch Zacharias.

On the other hand, King George's role in the episode confirms that he was indeed the leading Christian ruler in Nubia with much influence. The episode strongly confirms the apogee of Makouria in the 10th Century.

Although the episode described by the author of the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* took place during the period of Axum's decadence and final fall, it is noteworthy that this country was still very aware of its role in Christianity and that from an administrative side, diplomatic contact with the Patriarchs and Nubia was maintained. It also appears that existing chanceries were keen to separate falsifications from genuine documents, and while trying to prevent falsifications, they sent messengers, provided with letters of credence.

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