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**SOME INEDITED LAND CHARTERS OF  
EMPEROR SÄRSÄ-DENGEL (r. 1563 - 1597)**

by  
MERID WOLDE AREGAY

The land charters introduced in this paper are found in an Ethiopic manuscript, Or.650, of the British Library. The land charters were recognized and described as such by W.Wright in his catalogue.<sup>1</sup> The manuscript is in all probability of the second half of the fifteenth century, perhaps one of the original compilations of the miracles of St.Mary. Zär'a-Yaeqob had it written to be donated to a church of St.Mary. The fact that this manuscript survived through the wars of Ahmäd Gragn and the troubled years which followed suggests that the church to which the manuscript was given was one of the court churches which, in times of peace or war, always moved with the emperor. One of these churches was dedicated to St.Mary.<sup>2</sup>

It seems that also in the time of Särsä-Dengel the manuscript continued to belong to this court church of St.Mary. The charters recorded in the manuscript dealt with *gults* scattered between Enarya in the south and Bägemedder in the north. It is curious, however, that none of the charters he granted during his two expeditions to northern Ethiopia were recorded in this manuscript, although charter II does suggest that the manuscript was with the court in 1578, during the emperor's first expedition. This and the fact that most of the officials mentioned in the charters of this paper

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1. W.Wright. *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London, 1877), p.46.
  2. According to F.Alvarez thirteen altar stones or churches accompanied the emperor in his movements. *The Prester John of the Indies*, trans. and ed. C.F. Beckingham and G. W. B. Huntingford (2 vols., The Hakluyt Society, London, 1961), II, 323-324. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, according to Pedro Paez, there were only four camp churches, one of which was a church of St.Mary. *Historia da Etiopia* (3 vols., Oporto, 1945-46), I, 132-136. This is confirmed by the chronicle of Särsä-Dengel which calls the church of St.Mary Gemja-bet Maryam. *Historia regis Särsä Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, trans. and ed. C.Conti Rossini (2 vols., Paris, 1907), text p.98, trans. p.111. Apparently when the court later settled at Gondar a building, called Gemja-bet Maryam, was erected to house the camp altar stone.

do not appear in those charters granted while Särsä-Dengel was in northern Ethiopia suggest a later dating for the northern charters.<sup>3</sup>

The writing of most of the charters of this paper is in very bad condition, probably because each charter was written at the time when the concerned gult was being granted, when the scribes had not with them ink prepared with the usual care. The charters were written in different hands, though there seems some similarity between the writing of II and III.

The charters are here presented not in their chronological order but in the order they are found in the manuscript.

The land charter of Iyasu I is included here partly because it happened to be found in the same manuscript and partly because it is of historical importance.

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3. The northern charters were first published by C.Conti Rossini in the CSCO series under the heading *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam: I. Liber Axumae* (2 vols., Paris, 1909-1910). Conti Rossini's translation being French an English one was made by G.W.B.Huntingford, *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1965), pp.56-59.

A. — Text

I

ተጽሕፈ በትእዛዝ ንጉሥ አዚዝ . . . <sup>4</sup> ንሕነ በዘመንነ ከመ ይኩን ነብር እድነት ወመምህርነት ዘክብራን ለአሀዱ ብእሲ ወኢይሰየም ካልእ ዘእንበለ ዘመንኩስ በደብር ወበወግዕኒ ከመዝ ነበረ ይቤሉነ አእፋግ ። ወንሕነኒ አዘዝነ ከመዝ እንዘ ጸራጅ ማሰሬ አባ ተክለ ወልድ ወቄስ ሐዪ አባ ጊዮርጊስ ወበግራ አዛዥ በኅይለ ሥሉስ ወበ/ቀኝዕ አዛዥ መናድሌዎስ ወግራ ጌታ ዘመዘምራን አባ ዘድንግል ወቀኙዕ ጌታ በትረ ሚካኤል ወቤት ጠባቂ ጌታ አባ ዘሚካኤል ወክፍሌ ወደብተራ ጌታ ተክለ ነቢያት ወዕንቆ ዘግራ ወጎዣም ነጋሽ አቤተኹን ቆዝሞስ ወበድ ሹም ዮሐንስ ወሊቀ መጻኔ ክፍሌ ወቃቂታች በረከት ። ወአዘዝነ ከመ ኢይትአደው መነሂ ዘንተ ሢመተ ክብራን እመሂ መነኮስ ወእመሂ መሃይምን እመሂ በድ ሹም ወኩሎሙ ነገደ አበካቦት ወአውገዙ በትእዛዝነ ቀሳውስት እንዘ ይብሉ/እመቦ ዘዓለወ ዘንተ ቃለ ኢቴጌ አድማስ ሞገሣ ወቃለ ንጉሥ ሠርፀ ድንግል ዘተሰምዮ መለክ ሰገድ ወዘደምሰሶ ለዝንቱ መጽሐፍ ውጉዝ ለይኩን በቃለ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ወበሰይፈ ቃሎሙ ለጴጥሮስ ወጳውሎስ ወበቃለ ፫፻፲ወ፰ ርቱዓነ ሃይማኖት ዘኒቅያ ወበቃለ ቅዱሳነ እግዚአብሔር ሰማያ ውያን ወምድራውያን ወኢይትፈታሕ በምንትኒ እመሂ በቃለ ጳጳስ ወእመሂ በቃለ ሊቀ ጳጳሳት ዘእለእስክንድርያ ለዓለም አሜን ።

II

በረድኤታ ለእግዝእትነ ማርያም ተጽሕፈ ዝንቱ መጽሐፍ በትእዛዝ ንጉሥ ሠርፀ ድንግል ዘተሰምዮ መለክ ሰገድ ንሕነ ንቤ ከመዝ እምአመ ነገሥነ በ፲ወ፯ ዓመት እንዘ ነሐውር ለፀቢዓ ፀርነ ይስሐቅ ወሀብነ ምድረ ጉና ለአባ ብእሴ እግዚአብሔር ወለአባ ለባዊ ክርስቶስ ከመ ይኩነነ ለመድኃኒተ ነፍስ ወሥጋ እንዘ ውስጥ አዛዥ በኅይለ ሥሉስ ወቀኝዕ ጌታ በናድሌዎስ ወግራ ጌታ ሳንኮሪስ ወሊቀ ማዕምራን ነባሬ ማርያም ወሊቀ ደብተራ ፍተ ድንግል ወመዘምራን ጌታ መሎ ወአባ ዘድንግል በትረ ያርክሂ ለሊሁ ጽራዣ ማሰሬ አባ ተክለ ወልድ ወደብተራ ጌታ ጌራ ወተክለ ሃይማኖት ወቤት ጠባቂ ጌታ አባ ዘሚካኤል ወሊቀ መጽዓኔ ማርያም ናዜ ወቃቂታች በረከት ከመዝ ንቤ እመቦ ዘይበውእ ኅበ ይእቲ ምድር እመሂ መኩንን ወሥዩመ በጌምድር አዝማች ወኩሎ ዘተንሥእ በዘመን በረኪበ ገጽ ቅድመ ንጉሥ ወእመሂ መነኮስ ካልዕ ዘንተ ቃለነ ዘተዓደወ ፀርነ ይኩን ወዓላዌ መንግሥትነ ወዓዲ ውጉዝ ለይኩን በልሳነ ጴጥሮስ ወጳውሎስ ወበአፈ ፫፻፲ወ፰ ርቱዓነ ሃይማኖት ብርሃናተ ዓለም ወፈድፋደስ በአፋሃ ለእግዝእትነ ማርያም ወበአፈ ዚአነኒ ውጉዝ ውቁይ ወምቱር ወውጹእ እማህበረ ክርስቲያን ወፍሉጥ ከመ አርዮስ ወንስጥሮስ ወልዮን ወይሁዳ ረሲዕ አሜን ዘደምሰሶሂ ለጽሑፍ ለይኩን ለይኩን ።

4. Illegible words. Hereafter words, phrases and sentences which cannot be read easily are indicated by three dots.

III

ተጽሕፈ. በትእዛዝ ንጉሥ አዚዝ መለክ ሰገድ ጉልተ የወንዶል ዘተጎልተ በመዋዕለ ንጉሥ ዘርእ ያዕቅብ ወካዕበ በመዋዕለ አጽናፍ ሰገድ ንሕነኒ ሐደስነ ውእተ ጉልተ እንዘ ውስጥ አዛዥ በግራ ዕንቆ ወበቀኝዕ መናድሌዎስ እንዘ ሊቀ ደብተራ ዝክሬ ወሊቀ ማእምራን ፍተ ድንግል እመቦ ዘይበውዕ ሸዋ ጸሕፊላም ወቃለባስ ወበድል ውጋ ይኩን ውጉዝ በሥልጣን ጴጥሮስ ወጳውሎስ እስከ ለዓ ለም ዓለም ። እመነኮስ እስከ በአለ ርስት እመሂ ዘሜጠ ወዘነሥአ

IV

በአኩቴተ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ወበበረከታ ለእግዝእትነ ማርያም አመ ዘመነ ንግሥነ ፲፬ ዓመት ንሕነ ዘተሰመይነ በዐጋ እግዚአብሔር ሠርፀ ድንግል ወስመ መንግሥት መለክ ሰገድ ወስመ ንግሥት አድማስ ሞገሳ . . . እስከ ለዓለም እንዘ ሊቀ ማእምራን ነባሬ ማርያም ወሊቀ ደብተራ ፍተ ድንግል ወቄስ ሐፄ አባ ጊዮርጊስ ጸራጅ መአስሬ ተክለ ወልድ ወመዘምራን ጌታ ዘድንግል . . . ሚካ ኤል ወደብተራ ጌታ ዕንቆ ወቤት ጠባቂ ጌታ ዘሚካኤል ወጌራ እንዘ ውስጥ አዛዥ በጎይለ ሥሉስ ወቀኝዕ ጌታ . . . ወግራ ጌታ ሳንኮሪስ ሕዳግ ራስ . . . ራስ ይስሐቅ ወሊቀ መጣኔ ማርያም ዜና ወክፍሌ ወቃቂታት . . . ዘንተ ቃለ ዘሠራዕነ ዘተዓደወ እመሂ ንጉሥ አው ንግሥት እመሂ ጎጉዣም ነጋሽ አው . . . ብእሲ ዘተኃየለ . . . እመሂ መኩንነ ዘመን ዘተንሥአ . . . እመሂ እም ክርስቲያን . . . ኢይባእ ውስተ ይእቲ . . . ለደሴተ . . . ዘቅዱስ ቂርቆስ . . .

V

ተጽሕፈ. በትእዛዝ ንጉሥ አዚዝ መላክ ሰገድ ወይቤሉ ከመዝ ንሕነ ወሀብናሁ ለሰሊክ ምድረ ፈረስ እነዘር ወማንጸር ገደብ ታሕታዊ ወላዕላዊ ገደብ ምድረ ፈረሱ ለብሕት ወደድ ከመ ይኩኖ ጉልተ እንዘ ውስጥ አዛዦች ዕንቆ ወበኃይለ ሥሉስ ኤምርነ ወገብረ ክርስቶስ ። እንዘ ሕዳግ እራስ ዘቀኝዕ አርከዴዎስ ወዘግራ አክሊል እንዘ ቀኝዕ ጌታ መናድሌዎስ ወግራ ጌታ ሳንኮሪስ ። እንዘ ሊቀ ደብተራ ዝክሬ ወቄስ ሐፄ ጊዮርጊስ ወሊቀ ማእምራን መክፈልቶ ወዕራዣ ማሰሬ አቢብ ወአቃብ ሰዓት ወዐሌ ማርያም እንዘ ሸዋ ጸሐፊላም አውሳ ወእንደገብጠን ቃለባስ ሚልኮ ። እመቦ ዘይበውእ ኃቤሀ ኢስዩም ዘሕግ ወኢበድል (ውጋ) በተአድዎ ቃልነ ዝንቱ ይኩን . . . ውጉዝ በአፈ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ወአፈ ጴጥሮስ ወጳውሎስ እምዶእዜ እስከ ለዓለም አሜን ።

VI

በአኩቴተ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ወበበረከታ ለእግዝእትነ ማርያም ወላዲተ አምላክ ። እምአመ አንገሥነ እግዚአብሔር በ፲፬ ዓመት ወሀብናህ ምድረ አሸንክራ ዘነበረ በቋሚ ዘመዐረ ምድርነ ማእከለ በሻ ወማእከለ ጉመር አጎለትነ ለዊዘር ወለተ ነቢያት ወለተ ነቢያት ያዕቆብ ንጉሥ (sic) ምእመነ አምላክ ወወለ ታሂ ሰበነ ማርያም ። ዛቲ ትእዛዝ ወዕአት እምጎበ ንጉሥ መለክ ሰገድ ወበጸጋ

እግዚአብሔር ዘተሰመየ ሰርፀ ድንግል ፤ ወእለ አዘዙሂ ሰብእ እንዘ ውስጥ አዛዢ በጎይለ ሥሉስ ወአዛዢ ማዕተቦ ። ግራ ጌታ ሳንኮሪስ ወቀኝዕ ጌታ መናድሌዎስ ። ጎዳግ እራስ ይስሐቅ ሊቀ ደብተራ አባ ፍተ ድንግል ጸራጅ ማሴሬ አባ ተክለ ወልድ ቄስ ሐፄ አባ ጊዮርጊስ ። ዘቀኝዕ ሊቀ መጻኔ የማርያም ዜና ወዘግራ ቃቄች (sic) በረከት ወዳሞት ጸሕፈላም ተክለ ጊዮርጊስ ። ዘንተ ሠራዕነ ወአዘዘነ ከመ ይኩና ለትውልደ ትውልድ ። እመሂ ዘኔደ ወዘደምሰሰ ዘንተ ጉልት እመሂ ንጉሥ ወአው ንግሥት ወእመሂ ዳሞት ጸሐፈላም ወአው አበገርጋይ ቃጽ ወኩሎሙ ንቡር ቤት ዘዳዊት ወዘኔደ ወዘተዐገለ ይኩን ውጉዘ ከመ መሠርይ ወከመ ይሁዳ ረሲዕ ወከመ ስኩረ ግዘት አርዮስ በሥልጣነ ፲፪ ሐዋርያት ወበሥልጣነ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ውጉዛነ ይኩኑ ለዓለም ዓለም አሜን ።

VII

ተጽሕፈ በትእዛዝ ንጉሥ አዚዝ መለክ ሰገድ ወይቤሉ ከመዝ ንሕነ ወሀብናሁ ለአባ ሐራ ምድረ ድብሪ እንዘ አዛዦች ደቅስዮስ ወጎደራው እንዘ ቀኝዕ ጌታ መና ድሌዎስ ወግራ ጌታ ሳንኮሪስ እንዘ በትረ ያርክ አባ ዘድንግል እንዘ ሊቀ መጻኔ ክፍሌ በቀኝዕ ወቃቄታች በረከት እንዘ ውስጥ ብላቴና አምዶ እንዘ ዳሞት ጸፈላም ተክለ ጊዮርጊስ ወሥዩመ ጎዳ ሐርቤ ። እመቦ ዘይበውእ ጎቤሁ ኢሥዩም ዳሞት ወኢመዘክር በተአድዎ ትእዛዝነ ይኩን ውጉዘ በሥልጣነ ጴጥሮስ ወጳውሎስ ወበቃለ አባ አብያታር መምህር ዘደብረ ማርያም ወበሥልጣነ ቃሎሙ ለፍተ ድንግል ወአቢብ ሊቃውንተ ዛቲ ቤተ ክርስቲያን በዝ ዓለም ወበዝ ይመጽእ ዓለም አሜን ።

VIII

A Land Charter of Iyasu I (r. 1682-1706)

ንሕነ ንጉሥ አድያም ሰገድ ወልደ ንጉሥ ነገሥት አእላፍ ሰገድ ዘበጸጋ እግዚአብሔር ተሰመይነ ኢያሱ ፤ ሠራዕነ ወአዘዘነ ከመ ይኩን ለኪዳነ ምሕረት እንተ ሰመይናሃ ደብረ ዕንቁ፤ ኩሉ ምድረ ቆለላ ወለዊዘሮ ሰብለ ወንጌልኒ ከመ ይኩን ለውሉዶሙ ፤ ወምድረ ሕናጮችሂ ወሰክነ ምስለ ጉልትሂ ዘሀለወ በጉዣም ከመ ይኩን ለመፍቅደ ቤተ ክርስቲያን ፤ ወበዝንቱ ጊዜ ዘነበሩ ፤ ስዩማነ ንጉሥ ፤ እራስ ፋሬስ ወዓቃቤ እሳት (sic) ዘመንፈስ ቅዱስ ፤ ወብላቴን ጌታ ዮሐንስ ፤ ዕራቅ ማሰሬ ዘመንፈስ ቅዱስ ፤ ጽራግ ማሰሬ ኪሮስ ፤ ወሊቄ ማእምራን ማሞ ወቄስ ሐፄ ወልደ ሃይማኖት ፤ ወጸሐፊ ትእዛዝ ሐዋርያ ክርስቶስ ወቄርሎስ ፤ ወአዛዦች አዛዢ ዘመንፈስ ቅዱስ ፤ ወአዛዢ አሞኒ ፤ ሊቃውንትሂ ሊቄ ማሞ ፤ ወሊቄ ዝክሮ ፤ ከመኒ ኢይንሥቱ ዘመጽኡ እምድጎሬነ ሕንፃ ዝንቱ ትእዛዝነ አውገዙ አባ ዮሐንስ ፤ ወይኩን ውጉዘ ወምቱረ እምአባለ ቤተ ክርስቲያን በአፈ አብ ወወልድ ወመንፈስ ቅዱስ ፤ ወበአፈ ፲ወ፪ ሐዋርያት ፤ ፸ወ፪ አርድእት ፤ ወበአፈ አበው ርቱዓነ ሃይማ ኖት ፫፻፲ወ፰ እለ ተጋብኡ በኒ ቅያ ፤ ወ፪፻ እለ በኤፌሶን ፤ ፻ወ፶ በቄስጥንጥንያ ፤ ወአልቦ ዘይክል ፈቲሆተ ዛቲ ግዘት እለ ይትነሥኡ በተዋልጦ አዝማን ፤ ወጽሕፈ ቶንሂ ከመ ኢይፍሐቅ ፤ እመሂ ንጉሥ ወእመሂ ንግሥት እመሂ ጳጳስ አው ኤጲስ ቆጶስ ፤ ወቀሲስሂ ፤ እስክ ፍጻሜሃ ለዓለም ፤ አጽሐፍነ ዘንተ ውስተ ኩሉ አድባ ራተ መጻሕፍት ከመ ይኩን ስምዓ ፤ ለዘይመጽእ ትውልድ ፤ ለዓለመ ዓለም ።

## B — Translation

### I

Written by order of the powerful king... During our reign we [ordained] that the offices of *neburä-ed* and *mämeher* be given to one person, and that no one is appointed to the offices unless he has taken the cloth of a monk at [this] monastery. Elderly people have told us that traditionally it has been thus, and we have ordered that it be so; when the *säraj masäre* was Abba Täklä-Wäld, the *qés hasé* Abba Giyorgis, the *gera azaj* Bähayla-Sellus, the *qän azaj* Mänadléwos, the *bét tabaqi géta* Abba Zämika'él and Keflé, the *däbtära géta* Täklä-Näbiyat and of the left Enqo, the *gojjam nägash* Prince Qozmoz, the governor of Bäd Yohannes, the *liqä mäsané* Keflé and the *qaqétach* Bäräkät. And we have ordered that no one shall violate this constitution of Kebran, be he a monk or a layman, be he the governor of Bäd or be they all the clans of Abä-kabot. By our command the clergy have anathematized, saying: "If anyone violates this word of the *etégé* Admas-Mogäsa and of the king Särsä-Dengel whose throne-name is Mäläk-Sägäd and erases this charter may he be cursed by the word of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and the sword-edged words of Peter and Paul, and by the words of the 318 orthodox in faith of Nicaea, and by the words of the saints of God, those in heaven as well as those on earth; and he shall not be absolved in any manner, be it by the word of the bishop or by the words of the patriarchs of Alexandria". Forever. Amen. (Or.650, ff. 5b-6b.)

### II

With the help of Our Lady Mary this charter is written by order of King Särsä-Dengel whose throne-name is Mäläk-Sägäd. We say thus: In the seventeenth year of our reign, while we are on our way to fight Yes'haq, we have given the land of Guna to Abba Be'esé-Egzi'abhér and to Abba Läbbawi-Krestos that it may be for the salvation of our soul and body; when the *west azaj* was Bähaylä-Sellus, the *qägn azaj* Bänadléwos, the *gera geta* Sankoris, the *liqä ma'emera* Näbaré-Maryam, the *liqä däbtära* Fetä-Dengel, the *mäzämeran géta* Mälo and Abba Zädengel, and the patriarch himself *seraj masäre* Abba Täklä-Wöld, the *däbtära géta* Géra and Täklä-Haymanot, the *bét tabaqi géta* Abba Zämika'el, the *liqä mäsané* Maryam-Nazé, and the *qaqétach* Bäräkät. We say thus:

il anyone enters into this land, be he a judge or governor, or the *azmach* of Bägémeder and all those who, from time to time, may rise to positions of importance by finding favour in the eyes of the king, or be he another monk; whoever violates this our word shall be our enemy and a subverter of our kingdom. Furthermore, may he be cursed by the tongues of Peter and Paul and by the mouths of the 318 orthodox in faith, the lights of the world, and even more by the mouth of Our Lady Mary. May he, by our mouth, be cursed, severed, cut off and excluded from the community of Christians, and ostracized like Arius, Nestorius, Leo and the evil Judas. Amen. Likewise may he be whoever erases this charter. (Ibid., f. 7a.)

### III

Written by order of the powerful king Mäläk-Sägäd. We have renewed the *gult*, the same *gult* of Yäwändol which was granted in the days of Zär'a-Ya'eqob and again in the days of Asnaf-Sägäd; when the *west azaj* of the left was Enqo, and of the right Mänadlewos, the *liqa däbtära* Zekré, and the *liqä ma'emera*n Fetä-Dengel. If anyone enters, be he the *sähafälam* of Shawa or the *qäläbas* or the Bädél-Wega may he be excommunicated by the authority of Peter and Paul forever and ever, from the monk to the holder of the *rest* right, whoever sells or appropriates for himself ... (Ibid., f. 7a.)

### IV

To the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and with the blessings of Our Lady Mary. In the fourteenth year of our reign we who, by the grace of God, are named Särsä-Dengel and our throne-name [is] Mäläk-Sägäd, and the name of the queen [is] Admas-Mogäsa,...forever; when the *liqä ma'emera*n was Näbaré-Maryam, the *liqä däbtära* Fetä-Dengel, the *qés hasé* Abba Giyorgis, the *sära*j *masaré* Täklä-Wäld, the *mäzämeran géta* Zädengel,... Mika'el, the *däbtära géta* Enqo, the *bét tabaqi géta* Zamika'el and Géra; when the *west azaj* was Bähaylä-Sellus, the *qägn géta*..., the *gera géta* Sankoris, the *hedug ras*..., *ras* Yes'haq, the *liqä mäsané* Maryam-Zéna and Keffé, the *qaqé*tat... Whoever violates this charter that we have granted, be he king or be she queen, be he the *gojjam nagash* or ... be he a person who became strong...or be he a person who in future rises to a position of governorship..., or be he from among Christians...he shall not enter into this... island... of St. Qirqos... (Ibid., f. 7a.)



## V

Written by order of the mighty King Mäläk-Sägäd and he said thus: We have given to Sälik the horse land of Enzär, Mansär, lower Gädäb and upper Gädäb, the horse land of the *behet wädäd*, that it may be his *gult*; when the *west azazoch* were Enqo, Bähaylä-Sellus, Emernä and Gäbrä-Krestos, the deputy *ras* of the right Arkädéwos and of the left Aklil, the *qägn géta* Mänadlewos, the *gera géta* Sankoris, the *liqä däbtära* Zekré, the *qés hasé* Giyorgis, the *liqä mä'emeraan* Mäkfälto, the *seraj masaré* Abib, the *aqabé se'at* Wä'alé-Maryam, the *sähafelam* of Shäwa Awssa, and the *qäläbas* of Endägäbtän Mélko. Whoever enters into it by violating our word, be he an official of the law or the Bädel-Wega, may he be excommunicated by the mouth of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by the mouth of Peter and Paul from now forever. Amen. (Ibid., f. 7a.)

## VI

To the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and with the blessings of Our Lady Mary. In the fourteenth year after God made us king we have given and granted as *gult* the land of Ashänkera, between Bosha and Gumar, which in the past was established as our land of honey, to *wizäro* Wälätä-Näbiyat, daughter of the prophet [*sic*] Ya'eqob, king and trustful in God and [to] her daughter Säbänä-Maryam. That [*sic*] order has issued from king Mäläk-Sägäd who, by the grace of God, is named Särsä-Dengel. And the men whom he ordered were the *west azaj* Bähaylä-Sellus, the *azaj* Ma'etäbo, the *gera-géta* Sankoris, the *qägn géta* Mänadléwos, the deputy *ras* Yes'haq, the *liqä däbtära* Fetä-Dengel, *säraj masaré* Abba Täklä-Wäld, *qés hasé* Abba Giyorgis, the *liqä mäsané* of the right Yämaryam Zéna, the *qaqétach* of the left Bäräkät and the *sähafälam* of Damot Täklä-Giyorgis. We have established and ordered this that it may hers from generation to generation. Whoever violates or cancels this charter, be he king or be she queen, be he the *sähafälam* of Damot or the *qas* of Abäjpgay and all the officials of [the court] of David, may he, by the authority of the twelve apostles, by the authority of Peter and Paul and by the authority of the Father, the Son and the Holy Sprit, be excommunicated like a sorcerer, the evil Judas and Arius who was drunk from excommunications. May they be cursed forever. Amen. (Ibid., f. 16b.)

## VII

Written by the order of the mighty King Mäläk-Sägäd and he has said thus: We have given the land of Deبری to Abba Hara when the *azajoch* were Däqseyos and Hadäraw, the *qägn géta* Mänadlewos, the *gera géta* Sankoris, the patriarch Abba Zädengel, the *liqä mäsané* Keflé, the *liqä mäsané* of the right and *qaqétach* Bäräkät, the *west belaténa* Amdo, the *säfälam* of Damot Täklä-Giyorgis and the *seyum* of Goda Harbé. Whoever enters into his [*gult*], be he the governor of Damot or the *mäzäker*, by violating our order may he be excommunicated by the authority of Peter and Paul, by the words of Abba Abiyatar, the *mämeher* of Däbrä-Maryam and by the authority of the words of Abba Fetä-Dengel and Abib, the scholars of that church, in this world and in the world to come. Amen. (Ibid., f. 135b.)

## VIII

### Translation of the Land Charter of Iyasu I

We Adyam Sägäd, the son of Emperor A'elaf-Sägäd, who by the grace of God are called Iyasu, have instituted and ordered that the land of Qolela, all that was in the hands of *wizäro* Säblä Wängel, be for [the church of] Our Lady of Mercy, which we have named Däbrä-Enqu, and we have added to her the land of the Henachoch; and we also ordered that no one undermines the foundation of this our order, whoever may he be that reigns after us. Thus excommunicated with their mouth the bishop *Abunä* Sinoda, the *echague* Abba Yohannes, and many abbots of the Church, because of their steadfast love for Our Lady of Mercy which is Däbrä-Enqu, and that the lands may be *medrä mäsqäl* from this time on [being present as witnesses] *ras* Farés, *belatén géta* Yohannes, *eraq masäre* Zämänfäs Qedus and *aqabé se'at* Zämänfäs-Qedus, and *serag masäre* Kiros and *liqä mämeheran* Mamo, and the *qés hasé* Wäldä-Haymanot; and the *sähafé te'ezaz* Hawarya-Krestos and Qerlos, and the *turq azaj* Zämänfäs-Qedus, *azaj* Amoni, *liqä* Mamo, and *liqä* Zekro. We have caused this charter to be written in the books of all the monasteries that this may be a witness to the coming generation. Forever amen.

Whoever steals this book or erases and destroys the charter of this monastery may he be excommunicated, be he king or queen, by the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, by the power of the Apostles and by the power of Peter and Paul. (Ibid., f. 16b.)

## C — Comments

### I

The first charter is not a land deed but a charter conferring a privilege on the monastery of St. Gabriel of the island of Kebran in Lake Tana. This charter restored to the monastery an old right by which the abbotship was given to a member of its community, who had received his monastic habit in the monastery itself.

While the journal was in press M.R. Schneider kindly showed me a photograph of another, definitely later, copy of this charter, written on a blank folio of the famous Gospel manuscript of the Kebran monastery. The first few lines of this copy read: ተጽሕፈ በትእዛዘ ንጉሥ ሠርፀ ድንግል ወበትእዛዘ ይቴጌ አድማስ ሞገሳ ፤ (አዘዘነ) ንሕነ በዘመንነ ከመ ይኩን ንቡረ እድነት ወመምሕርነት ዘክብራን ለ፩ብእሲ ወኢየሰየም ካልእ ዘእንበለ ዘመንኩስ በደብር ወበግሸኒ ..... Obviously, the copyist had unintentionally substituted the word for 'and in Geshan' in place of the one for 'traditionally'.

Traditionally the abbot or *mämeher* was chosen by the community of monks in each monastery. The emperors reserved the right of confirming and investing into office only those chosen to head the most important monasteries of the country. There is, however, no indication to suggest that the monastery of Kebran was one of these.

If we look at the administration of the monastery of St. Mary of Aksum we find that the office of head or *mämeher* and that of *neburä-ed* were generally separate and assumed by two different men. The *mämeher* of the monastery was almost invariably known as *qésä gäbäz* or just *gäbäz* and, as far as we can know, was chosen by the community of monks of the monastery of Aksum. Therefore, always a monk, he acted as treasurer, being responsible not only for the valuables of the church and for collecting and allocating all income from gifts, urban properties, farm lands or *rims* and *gults*. The *neburä-ed* was rarely a cleric and was appointed directly by the emperor without any consultation of the wishes of the community of monks. He was responsible for the administration of justice in the administrative district of Aksum. As governor he commanded troops and fought in wars. The *neburä-ed* had no authority to interfere in the affairs of the monastery.<sup>5</sup>

5. The existence of these two separate offices was first described by Alvarez. *The Prester John of the Indies*, I, 160.

It appears that *bahr-nägash* Yes'haq was made *neburä-ed* of Aksum by Minas (r. 1559-1563), and this demotion may have been one of the reasons for his rebellion against the emperor.<sup>6</sup> Even Särsä-Dengel assumed the title of *neburä-ed* for a brief time.<sup>7</sup> But Kebran being a small monastery the two offices were exercised by the same person.

The officials enumerated in this charter, as in most charters granted by the emperors, were officials of the court as well as governors of provinces and districts in the which the monasteries were located. Most of these officials are mentioned in the chronicles of Särsä-Dengel. Abba Täklä-Wäld was *seraj-masäre* right up to 1578 when Särsä-Dengel defeated *bahr-nägash* Yes'haq at Addi-Ye' qorro, near Adwa.<sup>8</sup> Manadléwos was one of the grandees of the court beginning from the reign of Minas, the father of Särsä-Dengel. He was, it seems, as important as Hamälmal and Rom-Sägäd. He was executed immediately after the victory over Yes'haq because, the chronicle explains, of supporting Yes' haq and the pretender he had enthroned.<sup>9</sup> Abba Zädengel also seems to have been an important person in the court of Minas.<sup>10</sup> Qozmos seems to have succeeded to the governorship of Gojjam after Täklä-Giyorgis' death in 1578.<sup>11</sup> Yohannes, the governor of Bad, was probably the Yohannes Wäldä-Nägwädgwad who acted as messenger between Särsä-Dengel and Harbo, the restless governor of Dämbiya who had made common cause with Yes'haq against Minas.<sup>12</sup>

Bäd was the district of Gojjam, to the south-west of lake Tana, the district through which the small Abbay passed before entering the lake. Abakabot is the area to the south of the modern town of Baherdar. In earlier times Abäkabot may have included the lands on which the town stands today. From the text of the charter it is

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6. *The Land Charters of Northern Ethiopia*, p.55

7. *Historia regis Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, text p.98, trans. p.111.

8. *Ibid.*, text p.65, trans. p.76.

9. *Ibid.* text pp.3, 75, trans. pp.5, 87.

10. On the important role that he played in order to ensure an orderly succession for Sarsa-Dengel immediately after the death of his father Minas, see *Ibid.*, text p.6, trans. p.8. He was carrying the title of patriarch of Tadbaba-Maryam already at this time.

11. *Ibid.*, text p.100, trans. p.114.

12. *Ibid.*, text p.46, trans. p.54.

not possible to establish whether, at the time when this charter was granted, Abäkabot was the name of a clan or tribe or of the area itself.<sup>13</sup>

## II

Guna is a fair sized district to the east of Däbrä-Tabor in the province of Gondar. Guna's location on the trade route between Enfraz and northern Wällo and which passed through Chächäho and Näfas-Mäwcha must have added to its importance.<sup>14</sup> There is no indication to show whether the monks to whom Guna, or more likely part of it, was given served in any of the churches found in the neighbourhood. Of the two monks, Abba Be'sé-Egziabehér is mentioned in another charter of this period.<sup>15</sup>

## III

It is not possible to identify clearly the location of Yäwändol. But as it was in Shäwa and in a district administered by a governor with the title of *qäläbas* it must have been part of Endägäbtan, a district located south of the Blue Nile and Gojjam and west of Mugar and Gendä-Bärät. The Bädel-Wega was in all likelihood a regiment established near this particular *gult* of Yäwändol. In Endägäbtän or in the near province of Damot (at this time still south of the Blue Nile) was a place called Bädel-Neb, probably from the name of the regiment which was stationed in it.

This charter is interesting because among the individuals who were specifically warned against trespassing or interfering was the *rest* owner. This is very unusual because the *rest* owner was a peasant subject to and under the jurisdiction of the *gult* holder. Equally uncommon is the interdiction against selling the *gult* right. Assuming that *rest* rights cannot be transferred by sale, this charter seems to suggest that *gult* rights, like *rim* rights later, can be sold. It is quite possible that the copyist had intended to write **ዘኑጠ**, in which case the meaning would be something like 'whoever falsely claims and appropriates for himself'.

## IV

The important passages in this charter are unfortunately illegible. It is of interest only because it was written in those rare mo-

13. Today Abakabot is a *meketel warada*. See Ethiopian Government Central Statistical Office, *Statistical Abstract* (Addis-Ababa, 1964), p.192.

14. Cf. Consociazione Turistica Italiana. *Guida dell'Africa Orientale Italiana* (Milan, 1938), p.393.

15. *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam, I. Liber Axumae*, text p.74, trans. p.88.

ments when *bahr-nägash* Yes'haq was at peace with the emperor. Either because of good behaviour or in the hope of keeping him loyal Särsä-Dengel seems to have elevated him to the position of a court minister. There is, however, no indication that he took residence at the court.

The name Yämaryam-Zéna seems to be correctly written here, whereas in the second charter it was Yamaryam-Nazé, perhaps a humorous misplacement of letters.

## V

The lands given to Sälik according to this charter seem to be too extensive to be considered as constituting one *gult*. This charter, the one on Guna and many of those charters of northern Ethiopia published by Conti Rossini show as *gults* areas too big to be characterized as such. The charters, as we find them recorded, may not have been intended to give exact delimitations of lands over which *gult* rights were given. Or, perhaps, charters tried to give more lands or privileges than what emperors and other rulers actually gave. In which case we can raise the question whether charters were written by direct order of emperors at the time when the grants were made, or afterwards just as a precaution by the receivers of the *gults* against the unreliability of royal favours.

The Mansär of this charter is in all probability the Mantera of the *Hegä wä-ser'atä mängest*, a medieval document which among other things lists the provinces and districts of the empire and their contributions to the maintenance of the royal courts.<sup>16</sup>

The lands given to Sälik by this charter were among those reserved for the official who served as *behetwädäd* or chief minister of the court. These lands were therefore connected with an office and not an individual. The horses bred on these lands were not most probably for the personal stables of the *behetwädäd* but for the cavalry regiments that were commanded by him. From the chronicle of Särsä-Dengel and the charters granted by him it appears as if the title of *behetwädäd* was not conferred upon anyone at this time. The breeding of horses may have also been discontinued since the wars of Ahmäd Gagn.

16. J.Varenbergh, "Studien zur abessinischen Reichsordnung" in *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* (Strasbourg), 30 (1915-16), 12.

17. This development is in fact clearly described in the *Hega wa-ser'ata mangest*. Ibid., p.21.

Sälik was a prominent monk of the monastery of Däbrä-Libanos and a companion of its famous abbot Enbaqom. In 1577 Sälik returned from a mission to Egypt, bringing with him a bishop, Abuna Marqos; and in 1583 he completed his translation of the *Mäshafä Hawi*.<sup>18</sup>

The Awssa mentioned in this charter had a chequered career. At the beginning of Särsä-Dengel's reign he was captain of the Giyorgis-Haile regiment and a supporter of Rom-Sägäd, the rebellious governor of Shäwa. He commanded the regiment when it threatened to abandon Shawa which was then being engulfed by the Oromo and to go north to join the troublesome *bahr-nägash* Yes'haq. Even after the emperor placated it by restationing it at Mugar, in north-western Shäwa, it continued to mutiny, once going to the extent of plundering the court, including the tents of the emperor.<sup>19</sup>

## VI

Again the land of Ashankera seems too big to be given as *gult* to one individual. The *Hega wä-ser'ata mangest* enumerates it as one of the districts, together with Bosha, Gumar, Badel-Neb and other regimental lands.<sup>20</sup>

Nothing is known of the recipient of the land. It is possible that the Wälätä-Näbiyat of the charter was daughter of Ya'eqob, son of Emperor Lebnä-Dengel (r. 1508-1540). Ya'eqob died between 1555 and 1557 without, however, becoming emperor. There is no reason why he should be titled *negus* or king. Obviously, there is some confusion in this charter.

## VII

Nothing can be said about the identity of the recipient or of the *gult* granted. It appears that the *gult* of Debri was in a district of Damot called Goda. *Mäzäker* seems to have been a court title, although its exact significance is not clear.<sup>21</sup>

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18. *Historia regis Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, text p.58, trans. p.68, and H.Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiennes de la Bibliothèque Nationale* (Paris, 1877), p.106.

19. *Historia regis Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, text pp.24,26-27, trans pp.28,30-32.

20. J.Varenbergh, "Studien zur abessinischen Reichsordnung", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*, 30 (1915), 12.

21. *Ibid.*, pp.12-14.

## VIII

There are two versions of this charter in the same manuscript, Or.650. The differences, however, are not that important. This charter is included here because it illustrates clearly that *gults* rights, even when granted in perpetuity were constantly revoked, causing not only much dissatisfaction but creating also serious feelings of insecurity among the ruling families and their retainers.

The monastery of Qolela is located in the north-eastern parts of Gojjam. It was one of the important centers of religious education. To weaken its influence the Jesuits, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, established a mission centre there.

*Wäyzäro Säblä-Wängel* cannot be any other but Empress Säblä-Wängel, wife of Lebnä-Dengel and grandmother of Särsä-Dengel. During the reign of her grandson she established her residence at Gojjam, probably in the *gults* that were generally assigned to empresses and were known as *yä'itegue* or *yanegest märét*, which the Jesuits used to call *terras das rainhas*.

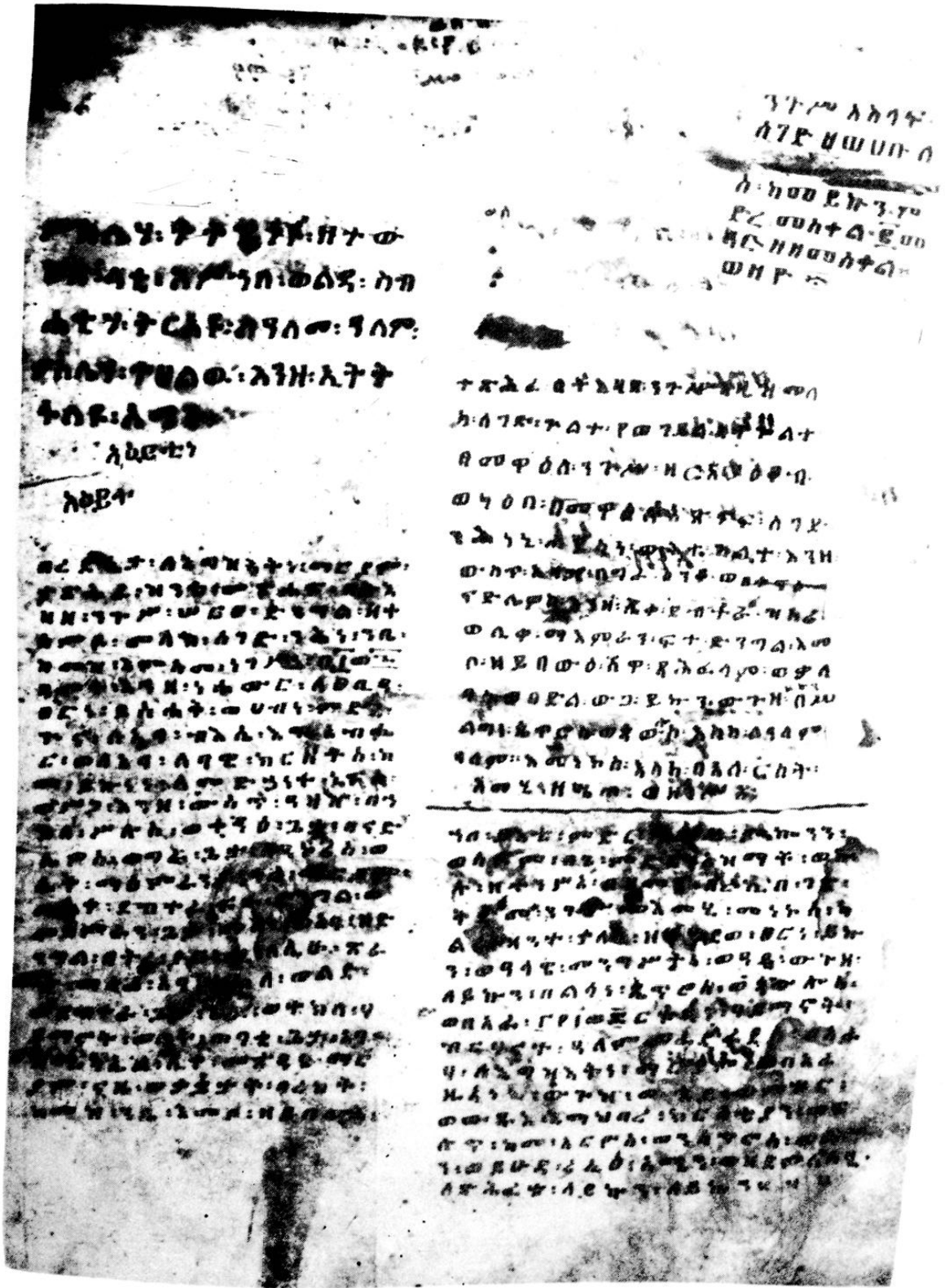
The *gult* holders described as *Henachoch* were definitely descendants of a fifteenth century regiment that was known as Tenach or Henach and Dawit-Harasa. The last name may suggest that the regiment was established by Emperor Dawit (r. 1382-1411). In the time of Zärä-Ya'eqob (1434-1468) it was stationed in Dawaro. It was then transferred to Gojjam for mutinying and trying to desert. The lands in Gojjam where it was settled, and which Iyasu I gave to the church of Kidanä-Mehrät of Qolela, are still known by the name of Henach.<sup>22</sup>

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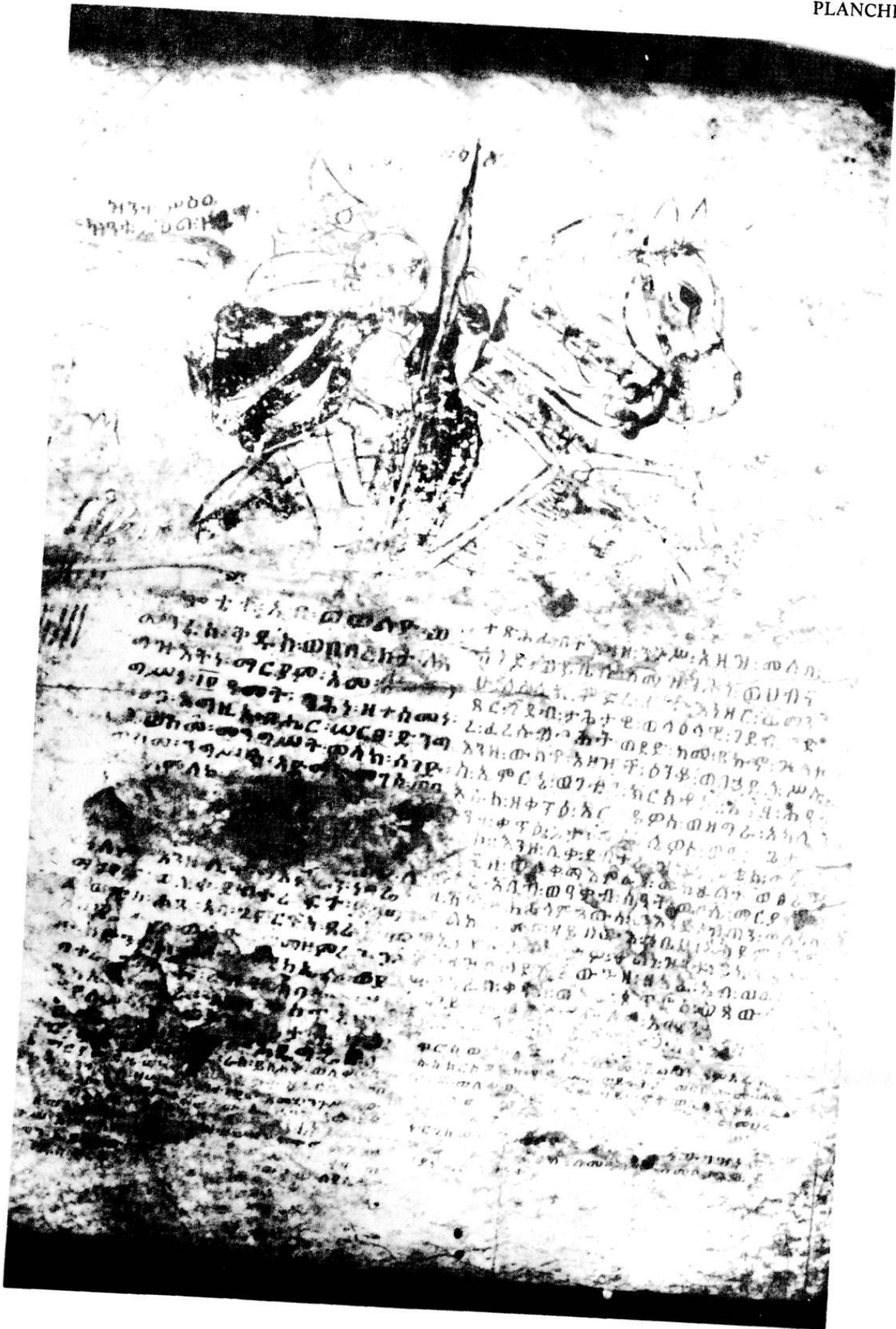
22. Henach is today commonly pronounced as Yenach. The place is a *meketel-wäräda*. *Statistical Abstract*, 1964, p.192.







The Guna and Yawandol Charters



The Qirqos and Sä'ik Charters



