



JIMMA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND HERITAGE MANAGEMENT

**A HISTORY OF MERTULE MARIAM
MONASTERY: FROM ITS FOUNDATION TO
1974**

BY

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November 2017

Jimma, Ethiopia.

**A HISTORY OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY: FROM ITS
FOUNDATION TO 1974**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES OF JIMMA
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DEGREE OF MASTER OF ART IN HISTORY

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis entitled A History of Mertule Mariam Monastery up to 1974 has been carried out by me under the guidance of Buruk Welde –Michael [Main advisor] and Belay Beyene [Co-advisor]. I affirm that all source of materials used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

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Abstract

This research paper is intended to assess a history of Mertule Mariam monastery from its foundation to 1974. The study covers the history of the monastery from the 4th to the mid 20th centuries... The monastery was recognized by its unique architecture, locally produced hand craft materials, and by other essential movable treasures. The architectures of the monastery resemble dominantly indigenous technology. In this research, qualitative research approach was used. Both primary and secondary data sources were utilized. With regard to primary data source, the key informants are selected purposefully and almost by considering the expertise of the participants on traditional education. Church leaders, teachers and students were participated. This research employed individual interviews and focus group discussions as primary data gathering tools. It also used secondary data sources. Unpublished materials of the institutions [monographs] and related books, journals, Archives and Manuscripts were utilized. The data were collected through different techniques and carefully translated analyzed qualitatively and interpretation were made using thematic categorization in open coding system. The findings revealed that the monastery of Mertule Mariam played a significant role in the development of church and modern education

Glossary

<i>Ato</i>	A civil title given to Ordinary people
<i>Aba</i>	Oldest person, priest
<i>Abbahoy</i>	Old father, title for oldestmen
<i>Awraja</i>	Administrative unit of the past Ethiopia regimes
<i>Dega</i>	Temperate climate
<i>Emahoy</i>	Oldest Mother
<i>Kebele</i>	Smallest Administrative unit in Ethiopia
<i>Megabi</i>	A religious title given to teacher of the church
<i>Merigeta</i>	A religious title given to teacher of the church
<i>Qes</i>	Title given to priest
<i>Qolla</i>	Lowland area with high temperature
<i>Reu'se ru'san</i>	Title of Mertule Mariam Monastery administrator
<i>Tsinah</i>	Material made up of metal for church service
<i>Woreda</i>	Administrative unit below Zone and Region
<i>Weyzero</i>	Title of married women
<i>Woynadega</i>	Sub tropical climate condition

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PHYSICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

Mertule Mariam is an ancient historical place located in Amhara Regional State, in East Gojjam Zone in Enebese Sarmider *Woreda*. Mertule Mariam is one of the eighteen districts of East Gojjam Zone with the center at Debre Markos. Mertule Mariam Monastery is found at about 364 kilometers from the capital Addis Abeba. Its distance from the regional capital Bahr Dar, is about 180 kilometers. It is also located 190 kilometers north east of Debre Markos and also situated 28 kilometers south east of *Gundawoyen*, a town with dense forest on the Addis Abeba –Bahr Dar road through Debre worq. The town of Mertule Mariam, particularly the eastern edge where the monastery are now located is found at a flat topped hill over 2600 meters above sea level. This top hill has had an important site in the historical evolution of the town serving as a place where church and the monastery were constructed.¹

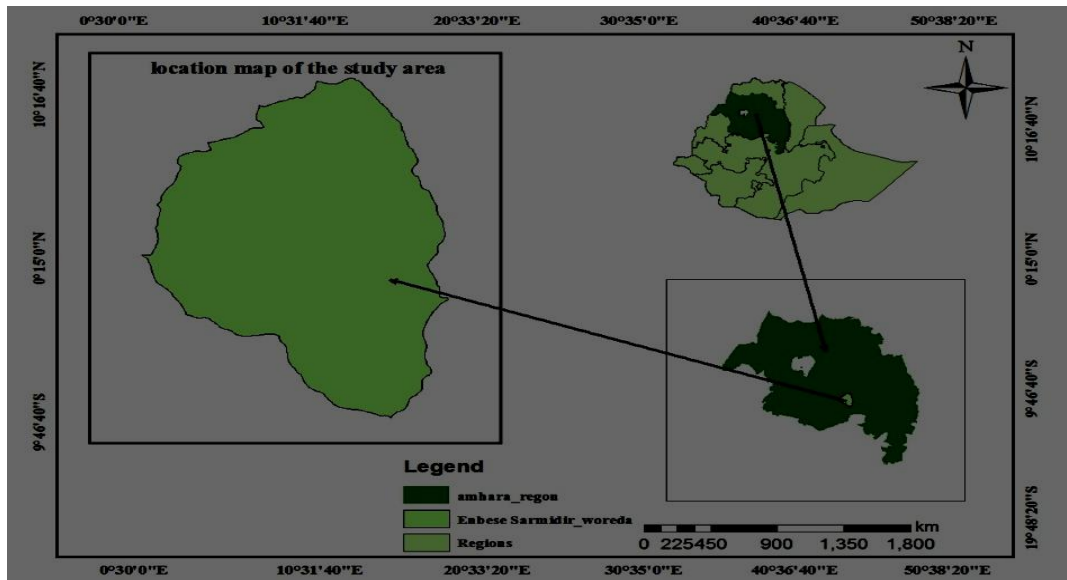
Topographically, Mertule Mariam is found in the climate condition of *Wayna Dega*, an intermediate zone between *Dega* and *Qolla* temperature Zone. In general Enebese sarmider *woreda* is bounded by Wollo province and Abbay river in the east, Enarjienawuga *woreda* in the west, Southern Gonder Zone and Goncha siso enesa *woreda* in the north and the desert of Somma in the South ².

Mertule Mariam is approximately located between 10°42' and 10°45'N and 37°51'E in Gojjam province of northwest Ethiopia, situated at an altitude of 2500 m above sea level. and close to the Choke Mountain Geographically, it occurs on the western fringes of the

¹ Mertule Mariam Town Administrative office and Agricultural center, 2001.

² “Ye Mertule Mariam Ketema Ameseraret Tarik”, from Mertule Mariam Town Administration office, 2000, p12.

Choke Mountain range, the closest point being Motta, about 40 km away from Mertule Mariam town. It is generally a mountainous area, with the terrain consisting of cliffs gorges, undulating slopes, patches of woodland and lowland plateau. Many small streams originate in the mountains.³ The most remarkable feature of these mountains is the virtual absence of native forest.



Map 1 The Study Area Map (source: Ethio-GIS)

Mertule Mariam and its surrounding villages are watered by one principal river system and other smaller tributaries and streams. The principal river, *Guansa* which is found in the eastern fridge of Mertule Mariam town that drained to Abbay, A major River bounded the provience of Gojjam and that made transportation and communication purpose to both Gojjam and Wollo. Mertule Mariam had been a center of the last remote *woreda* of East Gojjam Zone, Enebse Sarmider *Woreda* with no road accessibility to Wollo and Shewa.⁴

³ Prashant.J.Jack ‘Field notes of raptors in and around Mertule Mariam, Gojjam Province, northwest Ethiopia ‘Jack ; Al-Arab Medical University.

⁴ Informants: -Ato Wale Yesigat And Ato Awoke Temesge

In any case, Lewoyehu raised some point regarding the genealogical descent of today's Mertule Mariam people. Accordingly she expressed that around 2000 B C a certain Cushitic people were settled along Abbay River from its source up to its destination. After this these people began to take rest at *Mekanaselam* in Wollo. From there they marched to Gojjam by crossing Abbay river and settled at a place now called Mertule Mariam .⁵

The place is bounded by Abbay and cheye river in the east and west respectively that enabled Mertule Mariam to be choose by the Cushitic people as residential place .After this, these earlier inhabitants named the place as Hagera Egziabher [the country of God] and began to live there by preparing their meal using classical or primitive tools made of stone, wood and bones.⁶

According to unpublished sources from Cultural and Tourism Office of Enebse Sar Mider *Woreda*, the place now called Mertule Mariam played an indispensable role as center of religious practices prior to the advent of Christianity .The place also said to have one of the revere spot of Judism where judic sacrifice had been offered and initially its name called Tserha Aryam.⁷

It is also described that around 4500 B.C, the legendary king of Ethiopia which said to be the founder of the 'solomonic dynasty' Menelik 1 returned to Ethiopia after he had visited his father king Solomon in Israel. on his journey to Ethiopia Menelik said to have escorted by Israelis and he brought the Four manbere Tsion from Israel. These manbere Tsion were Nebureid of Axsum the *Reusa Reusan* of Mertule Mariam, the Patriarchy of Tedbabe Mariam and the Liqa Papas of Tana Qerqos. Giving 2,500 worshipers and believer among the Israelis, Menelik 1 is said to have ordered an Israeli, Ephrem to administer Gojjam and to establish his seat at a place now called Mertule Mariam⁸

⁵ Lewoyehu Moges 'A History of AbrehawoAtsebha Secondary School From its Establishment to 2007' BA Thesis Submitted to Dilla University to Department of History.2014,p.2.

⁶ Informant:-*Merigeta* Fentaye and Solomon Mamo

⁷ *Ye Abreha wo Atsebha Firesrash Gimb*[The Ruins of Abreha and Atsebha] from Cultural and Tourism Office of Enebse Sar Mider Woreda,2008,pp,3-4.

⁸ Ibid

According to parchment manuscript Ephrem on his part ordered and appointed Israelis among his follower as administrator of Enesa, Enebra, Sisso Enesa and Hulet Eju Enesa. Ephrem did so for the sake of protecting his strong hold, Mertule Mariam from any possible assault and dangers in relation with bandits who lived in the Shore of Abbay River.⁹

1.1. THE HISTORICAL FOUNDATION OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

Although Ethiopian tradition attributes the introduction of Christianity to the country to the Apostle Philip and his encounter with an Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-29), most scholars believe that this story refers to the kingdom of Meroe and not to the ancient Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum. More firmly documented is the conversion of the Axsumite ruler Ezana which tookplace .330A D¹⁰

Christianity was introduced in to Ethiopia through the missionary work of fremnatos in the early Fourth century AD. According to Marilyn E. Heldman, Fremnatos made captives by Aksum In the Red Sea, during his return from India and taken to the capital where they held an Administrative position at the court of Ella Almedia and played pivotal role in teaching the king sons; Ezan and Saizana. Fremnatos was the first bishop of Ethiopia. He preached Christianity with the name of Abuna Selama. King Ezana [320s-350s] adopted Christianity towards the end of his reign however; it does not mean that there were not Christians before him because Christianity already embraced in the main gates like Adulis and Aksum.¹¹

⁹ The Hagiography of Abreha And Atsebha From Mertule Mariam Monastery. There Are Two Parchment Manuscripts The oldest dated to the 19th Century and has 90 folios t It Is Not Inventoried by the Ministry of Culture. The second one has 70 folios and not Inventoried by the Ministry of Culture.

¹⁰ Steven Kaplan, Dominance and Diversity: Kingship, Ethnicity, and Christianity in Orthodox Ethiopia. Brill .Vol. 89, No. 1/3,2009 ,p,225.

¹¹ Marilyn E. Heldma, St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia .Chicago .Vol. 44, No. 2,p, 125.

The fourth century A D was a period when Abreha and Atsebha gave the name of Mertule Mariam [in Amharic Yemariam Adarash][the hall of Saint Mary] .Ezana and Saizana [Abreha and Atsebha\ were the two brothers who expand Christianity in Ethiopia in the Fourth century A D. These two religious and political figures together with a bishop Fremnatos enter in to the site through Debre *Medihanit*, *Tenta* and *Enese kebele* and preached the peace of Christ¹².

According to the sources in the Monastery of Mertule Mariam, Aksum Tsion was the first church in Ethiopia. However, when Christianity expanded in to different part of Ethiopia church began to develop in to an important religious center and it was founded in 341 AD and later on following the establishment of monastic life in Gojjam around the 5th century the church was flourished in to Monastery. Moreover, Mitiku Demila, in his unpublished material mentioned that, Abreha and Atsebha with the bishop Freminatus blessed the place of Mertule Mariam after they held praying in different area of Mertule Mariam such as Selamge, Abini, Haddisge and Abrehi. Abreha and Atsebha based on the willing of the God they begun the foundation stone of Mertule Mariam Monastery which received miraculous appreciation for its magnificence and enchantment building style and decoration of art by gold¹³. But, even if the Monastery have been a long history and rich with tangible and intangible heritages, Ethiopian writers did not looked and studied well mainly due to lack of accessibility.

¹² Esuyawkal Moges, A History of Abreha wo Atsebha primary school..BA Thesis Submitted to Debre Markos University to Department of History, 4.

¹³ Mitiku Demila, Mertule Mariam Ena Tarikua, 1995, P, 39.

1.2. THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

According to Melakegenetlebeza Alemu, Monasticism means a form of leaving the world, in order to discard in solitude all desires and their temptations and then devote oneself to pursuing inner perfection. This type of withdrawal from society is not exceptionally particular of Christianity; one can also find it in other religions for instance a specific form of inner life, emerging spontaneously, and not in the way of gradual development from some prior, more general form of spiritual life..¹⁴

Monasticism was first begin in Egypt in the early 4th century A D. Strict follower of the God commenced to lead the ascetic life in the Egyptian desert with Saint Anthony, who was engaged initially in Monastic way of life in the Egyptian desert .His follower began to increase in number and this led to the formation of Monastic Community in the early 300s A D under Saint Pachomius who was the second religious leader in Egypt desert Buruk accordingly expressed, it was from Egypt that Monastic life begun to introduce in to different part of the world in the late 5th century A D¹⁵.

Finneran clearly mentioned that the Ethiopian monastery has historically served as a vital and powerful socio-cultural and economic node within the historic Christian landscape of the Ethiopian highlands. The concept of Christian monasticism by which we mean the establishment of physical spaces within the landscape that are specialized areas of Christian learning and living by a dedicated community of monks is a phenomenon that reaches the Aksumite Kingdom of Ethiopia through the so-called Syrian "Nine Saints" around the sixth century, and thus post-dating the development of Christian monasticism in adjacent eastern Christian areas, such as Egypt, Nubia, and the Levant¹⁶

¹⁴ Informant:- Melakegenet lebeza Alemu, who was the head of East Gojjam Zone *Hagere Sibket* at Debre Markos: Emahoy zewudie Ejigu

¹⁵ Buruk wolde Michael. 'A History of Lake Zeway church and Monastery: 1941 to Present', [MA Thesis, Addis Ababa University, department of History.2009],p,1.

¹⁶Finneran, Niall. Hermits, Saints, and Snakes: The Archaeology of the Early Ethiopian Monastery in Wider Context. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Boston. Vol. 45, No. 2, 2012 ,p,27.

The arrival of these Saints to Ethiopia laid the foundation for the establishment of monasteries and gave to the spiritual life of the church to the present. This is because of the education value of monastery life to those worldly groups who in pursuit of worldly honor and wealth humiliate human being in exploitation, injustice and violence. The nine Saints were preached Gospel in the north part of the country, established and promoted monastic life and translate many books in to Geez.¹⁷

Name	Monastery	Commemorative day
Aba Alef	Bihazan	March 11
Aba Aregawi	Debre Damo	October 14
Aba Afetsia	Yeha[yoha]	May 12
Aba Liqanos	Debre Qonatsel	November 21
Aba Gerima	Medera	June 17
AbaGuba	Geralta	May 29
Aba Yemata	Geralta[He also]	October 23
Aba Pentaleon	Around Aksum	October 6 and 21
Aba Tsehma	Dedenya	January 21

Table 1:- Shows the Trend of Monastery in Ethiopia before the 16th century.

Source: Aba Gorgoryos, Archi-bishop of Shewa, 2007, 16.

The “Nine Saint” came to Ethiopia during the late 5th century A D and they took the lion share in the expansion of Christianity to different part of Ethiopia. Beside to this, they also contributed a lot for the development of Geez literature by introduced terms and

¹⁷ Aba Gorgoryos,pp, 14-17: Informant; Merigeta Mamo Hailu

vocabularies in to Geez in the one hand and translation of books of Greek in to Geez on the other hand .The “Nine Saints” were outstanding in relation with the development of art in Ethiopia . The translated passage of Psalms, the Ascetic rules of Pachomius, the life of Saint Anthony are mentionable among their vivid imprints that left to Ethiopia Orthodox church.¹⁸

Among the ‘Nine Saint’ who come from Syria a to Ethiopia by the end of 5th century Aba Yemata ,Aba Alef and Aba Ze Michael were said to have stayed at Mertule Mariam for about three years . As they did in many region of Ethiopia, these saints were well known in Mertule Mariam for their construction of monasteries and teaching of religious life.¹⁹



Fig 1, a monk in Mertule Mariam Monastery

Source: Culture and Tourism Office of *Enebse SarMider Woreda*

¹⁸ Asnakew,p, 8. : Informant, *Merigeta* Debekulu Damtie , *Qes Fenta* Abiye

¹⁹ Esuyawkal, p,4

According to Aba Gorgoryos, it was during the reign of *Atse* Kaleb that Christian persecution began to flame in Yemen. During this period, the king of Constantinople, Yostinos had dispatched message to a bishop Temotiwos to make possible solution against Christian persecution in Yemen. Thus Kaleb firmly equipped his force and marched to Yemen and vanquished the anti-Christian king in Yemen. Kaleb after pacified peace among Yemenian Christians there and, appointed a wise man who was called Abreha to keep their security, with ten thousand soldiers.²⁰

After the death of Kaleb, *Atse* Gebremesqel came to the throne. During his period the monastery of Mertule Mariam had strong foreign contact, particularly with Eskienderia. At the same time religious feeling of his people began to strengthen and prominent monasteries were established in different parts of the country and gain land what we commonly said *rest gult*. It was during Abreha and Atsbeha, Gebre mesqel and Anbessa Wedem lands purportedly given to the Monastery of Mertule Mariam and this continued until 1974, a period when the rest-gult was terminated and the monastery began administered in what is called *Sebeka gubae*, a fee for church and monasteries from the departure families which was practiced since 1974²¹



Fig2 Prayer service in the Monastery of Mertule Mariam

Source: ye Enebe Sarmider Woreda Bete Kihnet, under Mertule Mariam Monastery.

²⁰ Aba Gorgoryos, p,19

²¹ Stuart Munro-Hay, Axsum An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity, 1991, p, 176 See Appendix 10

1.3. THE RISE OF YODIT

It is obvious that Ethiopia had been confronted internal and external challenges in different time. The Monastery of Mertule Mariam had subsequently faced by challenges in different circumstance. The rise of Yodit, invention of Ahmed Gragn ,Italian Occopation period ,and the campaign of Derg government were the most destructive in the history of Ethiopia in general and the Monastery of Mertule Mariam in particular. Nevertheless, when Menilik I visited his father he returned to Ethiopia with Israeli [Felashi]. These Felashas preached and expand Judism among Ethiopia people and begun to make marriage alliance with the local community. When Christianity introduced in to Ethiopia in the 4th century A D some Felashas embraced it, however other remained Judaism. During the 10th century A D, the ruler of Aksum died and his Son Ambesa Widem assumed power. Ambesa Widem, when he comes to power he was young and unable to administer the country.²²

It was during this period Yodit came to Aksum being recruited as Jewish Army from Gonder and Wolkayt The nobilities feared her and migrated to Shewa to secure them but, she did not refrain from her horror action. She destroyed and burnt churches and monasteries in Aksum and then Gojjam. When R e'usaRusanu and the people of Mertule Mariam heard the coming of Yodit they decided to conceal the Monastery heritages at a place where covered by forest.²³

Although with the objective of burning and disappearing the monastery, opposition forces stood up with time against the town of Mertule Mariam in general and the Monastery inside the town in particular. Some individuals also attempted to confiscate the churches properties. In Ethiopia history the 10th century, sometimes regard as the Dark age, a series of civil wars were fought between the Ethiopia Jews known as the Felasha under their

²² Ea-wallis Budge, The Queen of Sheba and her Son Meneyelek [Kibre Negest] p, 205

²³ Sergew hableSelassie,. The Problem of Gudit. *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Institute of Ethiopian Studies Journal of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. 10, No. 11972, pp, 115-119.

commander Yodit and the Christian kingdom of Axsum under the leadership of Dannajan and his son Anbesa Wudem .²⁴

Probably the religious difference between them and the refusal of the Falasha to pay tribute to Axum were the two factors which provoked the civil wars. When Danaajan died fighting against Yodit, his Son and successor Ambesa Wudem was very young to rule. By taking this situation to her advantage, Yodit marched to Axsum along with her town along Semen and Wogera as well as Seqota followers. She reduced Axsum to rubble and destroyed many monuments, churches and monasteries in and around Axsum.²⁵

After looting and burning the monastery of Axsum Tsion and Tedbabe Mariam Yodit ensued her campaign to Gojjam to create a nadir to the remarkable church and Monasteries there. Mertule Mariam which is believed to be the fifth dsacred spot of Christianity in Ethiopia next to Axsum Tsion, Tana Qereqos, Tedebabe Mariam and Berber Mariam, was one of the principal targets of Yodit negligible act²⁶.

The inhabitants of Mertule Mariam who heard the advents of Yodit mobilized their force along with the invaluable properties of the church including Menbere *Newaye Kidesats* to a cave called *ShebreAmba*, about six kilometers west of Mertule Mariam Monastery²⁷. When Yodit arrived Mertule Mariam, she never got even a single person except one blind man who live in the church. Alarmed by this unprecedented occurrence, she sent her soldiers in to the town to make possible hunting of human beings. In general Yodit was successful in burning half part of the church..²⁸

²⁴ ; Mitiku ; 26

²⁵ Ibid: Informant:- Kaletsedq Abebe Tadege,

²⁶ Mitiku, pp 22-27

²⁷ Ibid, Informant:-Ato Temeye Getia

²⁸ *Ibid*



Fig. 3. Mertule Mariam Monastery window

Source: East Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Office.

However this was done by relaying on the information acquired from disable personalities in the church who suffered a lot from the harassment act of Yodit soldiers that there is a need of using wax to burn the church whose wall was made up of stone and whose roof was covered with gold and silver.²⁹



Fig 4.Arctechutural design of Mertule Mariam monastery

Source, *Enebse SarMider Woreda* Culture and Tourism Office, 2008

²⁹ Ibid, Informants:-Megabi Ambel Alema And Melakehayl Biazn Derese



Fig 5 the Monastery of Mertule Mariam Which has been renewed in different time by the then rulers of Ethiopia

Source: *Enebse Sarmider Woreda Hageresibket*”Mertule Mariam”



Fig 6, Saint Gabriel and Trinity Church, built by Emperor Haile Sellasie in 1935 inside the Monastery

Source: *Enebse Sarmider Woreda Hageresibket*”Mertule Mariam”

1.4. THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM DURING THE EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIOD

As Ferenc David Marko noted the history of Ethiopia from the Axumite period to the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the development monastic way of life in Ethiopia may be said to have been marked by the southward expansion of the estate. From the fourth century A.D the Ethiopian Orthodox Church also expanded in the same direction along with the state. Following the transfer of power from the Zagwé to the Solomonic dynasty, this process of expansion was further speeded up. .³⁰

Parchment manuscripts and disorganized literatures tell us east Gojjam was Christianized since the coming of Abreha and Atsebha during the fourth century and the churches and monasteries soon developed into prominent educational centers However, East Gojjam was incorporation to the Christian kingdom in the early thirteenth century This was followed by the establishment of several churches and monasteries. ³¹.

³⁰ Ferenc David Marko, Ethiopian Nationalism: Honorary Europe? MA Thesis Submitted to Central Europe University, Hungary Nationalism Studies Program, 2010, pp, 16-20

³¹ Tadesse Tamrat, Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527. Oxford, pp, 199-203: The Hagiography of Abreha and Atsbeha



Fig 7 shows religious activities that practiced in Mertule Mariam Monastery

Source: Photography by the Esuyawkal Moges May 2017

The greatest influence of monasticism appears to have come hundreds of years later when a series of monastic movements arose in the period between the mid-thirteenth and mid-fifteenth century. During this period, the 'Solomonic' kings expanded the border of their kingdom through conquest and reduced previously autonomous regions to vassal status³²

It was Gojjam province which first came under frequented religious practices in the region next to Axsum, and it is there that we first witness an important development in Church history, the rise of monastic movements. Monastic clergy played a vital role in this regard. Gojjam clerics associated with the monastery of Mertule Mariam appreciated gifts from the emperor and denounced the right of the kings to intervene in the internal

³² Ferenc,PP,16-13

affairs of monasteries. However, the local rulers of Gojjam gave some protection to the monks living in the monastery³³

According to Fentahun Alemu, the earliest attempts at Christian expansion in Gojjam probably came from Dima and Mertule Mariam. This is fairly well confirmed by manuscripts that are found in eastern Gojjam churches which refer to a period since the reign of Abreha and Atsebha. However the most interesting element in these traditions is that they represent the new directions of Christian activities in Gojjam, from Begemdir in the north (across the Nile) Since the reign of King Dawit these communities on the eastern edge of the Gojjam plateau definitely represented the deep advancement of Christian expansion into the entire Gojjam .³⁴

Nevertheless, the movement seems to have been considerably promoted by some Christian families beginning to settle in Gojjam. Apart from the monastic leaders themselves, we also have some indications that secular Christian families were settle in the area from the beginning. These early settlements ushered in a vital process which would soon accelerated Christian evangelical activities further³⁵

According to Abebaw Ayalew, the Solomonic one in general and the accession of Emperor Amda Tsion (1314-1344) to the Solomonic throne in particular were important events in the history of Christianity in East Gojjam. The dynastic transfer of power was followed by the shift of the political center from the Lasta area to Gonder and then to Shewa. As a result East Gojjam, which had been in the periphery of the Ethiopian state in Axsumite times, became more exposed to the overall influence of the new power group more than ever.³⁶

³³ Mitiku,p,32,Informant:-Ato Temye Getie: *Megabi* Ambel Alema

³⁴ Fentahun,p,23

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ Abebaw Ayalew, “A History of Painting in East Gojjam in the 18th and 19th century”[.MA Thesis , Addis Ababa University,History,2002],pp,5-8: Ferenc,pp,13-15

It was in the reign of Emperor AmdaTSION that the political authority of the Solomonic state was established in Gojjam. This opened the way for further evangelical activities. Though some churches in East Gojjam trace back the date of their foundation to the early fourth century A.D, namely to the period of Emperors Abreha and Atsbha, firm evangelical activity in the region seems to have been that of Abba Bakimos who later came to be known as Tekeste Berhan. His evangelical activities in East Gojjam seem to have preceded the Church of Dima Giyorgis, after an initial firm pagan resistance. His activities in East Gojjam and those of ZeYohannes in the area to the south of Lake Tana which also faced a strong resistance from the non-Christian local communities were some of the expedition of Emperor AmdaTSION in 1316.³⁷

In Medieval period some of the churches such as Dabra Warq Mertule Mariam and Dima Giyorgis were developed into important monasteries and educational centers. They played an important role in the expansion of Christianity further into the western parts of the region. There are several churches in Eastern Gojjam which have traditions that their tabots were brought from Dima Mertule Mariam and Debre work.³⁸

Since ancient time, the old building of the Monastery made Mertule Mariam well known and as an important religious and historic center. However, different writers put their argumentation regarding the time for the foundation of Mertule Mariam Monastery. Foreign writers believed that the Monastery of Mertule Mariam was founded in the medieval period by Queen Elleni in 1510. Accordingly she was a Hadiya Muslim woman but later on she converted to Orthodox Christianity and became devoted Christian till her death. In 1527 A.D. Almedia visited Mertule Mariam and claimed that the church had been built by Queen Elleni in 1647 where as Stephen Bel described that the temple of Mertule Mariam was completed in 1510.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid ,Ferenc,pp,13-15

³⁸ Abebaw,p ,7

³⁹ Mitiku,p, 65

Another foreign scholar, Ceruli mentioned that Italians influenced in the construction process of the Monastery while Bek said that the Monastery was decorated by gold and diamond. According to Ethiopian scholar professor Tadesse Tamrat, Gojjam was Christianized in the 15th century completely and Queen Elleni built the Monastery in the 16th century. He also raised that Gojjam was altered to Amharic speaking people during the 16th century. However, most of scholars agreed that Mertule Mariam Monastery was built around 1497. However, mythological sources corroborated that the monastery was built earlier in the 4th century AD.⁴⁰

Moreover, European travelers and missionaries who visited the area in the 16th and 17th century wrote that the monastery had been built during the reign of Emperor Susenyos. Actually, before the advent of Christianity, the place had once been the stronghold of Judaism where Judaic sacrifices had been offered, but the monastery had been built by Abreha and Atseba.⁴¹

The hagiography offered proof of Mertule Mariam's ancient foundation and therefore seniority gives substance to the church's foundation myth, as in the following:

አደው፡ ፈለገ ፡ ጊዮን ፡ ወበጽሐ፡ ብሄረ ፡ ጉዳዮቹ ወረከብዎሙ ለከሉሙ ሰብእ ፡ እንዘ ፡ ይገብሩ ፡ ሥራዮ
 ፡ ወይቀትሉ፡ ከሉሙ ሰብእ ፡ ወአስተጋብኡ፡ ማርያን ፡ ወይቤልዎሙ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ እስኩ፡ አርእዩ
 ነ ፡ ዓቢያ ፡ ኃይለ ፡ ዘይገብር ፡ አምላክክሙ ወወአተ ፡ ጊዜ ፡ አምጽኦ ፡ ጣዖታቲሆሙ ወሶበ ፡ ቀርቡ ፡ ኅቤ
 ሆሙ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሃ ፡ ወድቁ ፡ ጣዖታት ፡ እሙናብርቲሆሙ ወተቀጥቀጥኖ ከሙ ብርዕ ፡ ወደንገገጽ ፡ ከ
 ሉሙ ማርያን ፡ ወዓቀብተ ፡ ሥራይ ፡ ርእዮሙ ዘንተ ፡ መንከረ ፡ ወይቤሉ ፡ ኦነገ ሥሕ ፡ ህሩያን ፡ ግበሩ ፡ ላ
 ዕሌነ ፡ ከሉሙ ሥናያተ ፡ ወአብኡነ ፡ ወስተ ፡ ሃይማኖትክሙ ርትዕት ፡ ወአምኑ ፡ ከሉሙ ወተጠምቁ ፡ በይእ
 ቲ ፡ ዕለት ፡ ወመጠዎሙ እምሥነር፡ ቅዱስ ፡ ወፈነ ወዎሙ ይእትወ ፡ ወስተ ፡ አብያቲሆሙ በፍስሐ ፡ ወበሰ
 ላም ፡ ወእምድኅረዝ ፡ ፈቀዱ ፡ አብርሃ ፡ ወአጽብሃ ፡ ከሙ ይሕንጽ ፡ መቅደስ ፡ በህየ ፡ ወሐነጽ ፡ ማህደረ ፡
 ሰናይተ ፡ ወገብሩ ፡ አረፋቲሃ ፡ ዘወርቅ ፡ ወዘብሩር ፡ ወሣሙ ካህናተ ፡ ወዲያቆናተ ፡ ወአስተሣካዩ ፡ ከሉ
 ፡ ሥርዓተ ፡ ወሣሙ ርአሰ ፡ ርአሳን ፡ ዘወእቱ ፡ ሊቀካህናት ፡ ወሰመደዎ ፡ ለይእቲ ፡ መቅደስ ፡ መርጠል ፡ ማ
 ርያም፡

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, the hagiography of Abune Selama and Abreha and Atseba
⁴¹ Informant: Qes Fenta Abiye: *Aba Mekchaw Atnafu*, J, Hespler, 'A Stone Stories The Portugal's Influence in Culture and Architecture of Highland Ethiopia. [1593-1634], forwarded by Richad Panchrest, 2011, pp82-85

They [Abreha and Atsbeha] crossed the Giyon River [Blue Nile] and came to the land of Gojjam. They gathered the people and the witches and instructed them to bring out their idols before them. The idols fell from their throne and shattered into pieces like silver when they were brought before Abreha and Atsbeha. The witches and idolaters trembled in fear when they saw this great miracle and said: “O, chosen kings, please do the right thing for us and convert us to the orthodox faith.” They were all baptized and became believers in a day, and the sacred mystery was revealed to them. They sent them to their homes with joy and in peace. After this, Abreha and Atsbeha wanted to build a temple and they built a splendid structure and made its pillars from gold and silver. They settled priests and deacons and established all its rules and appointed the *ruse r’usan* [head of heads] as leader of the clergy. They named this temple Mertule Mariam⁴²

1.5. THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM DURING THE 16TH CENTURY INTER-STATE CONFLICT

After the foundation of Yekunno-Amlak's 'Solomonic' dynasty, his kingdom never suffered any serious reversals of fortune until the dramatic successes of Imam Ahmad Ibn Ibrahim, Gagn, during the years 1531-43. The Ethiopian state system built up over the preceding three hundred years underwent the most traumatic experience. Yet, in the overall chaos and confusion which would engulf much of Ethiopia and the whole of the Horn of Africa until the nineteenth century.⁴³

In polar opposition there existed a persistent and mixed legacy of suspicion, superiority, fear, hatred and even demonization of Islam. It could be dubbed the “Ahmad Gagn syndrome,” deriving from the vivid, ever-recycled memory of the sixteenth-century destruction of the Christian kingdom by Muslims. Ahmad Gagn was a holy warrior from the local town of Harar who was inspired and helped by Arab scholars and Ottoman commanders in Arabia and the Middle East and managed to unite the Muslims of the Horn of Africa. The fear of such an Islamic reunification that would lead to the end of

⁴² Mertule Mariam monastery, the Hagiography of Abreha and Atseba, folio 54 r-54 v

⁴³ Ran Ha Cohen, *Kebra Nagast: The Ethiopian National Epic* (Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2009) See also P. Marrasini, "Kebra nagast," in *EAE* (Hamburg: Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2007), vol. 3, pp. 364-368.

their hegemony in their country, and perhaps to their destruction, has remained engraved in many Christians' minds. It has also remained combined with some contempt and a sense of moral superiority.⁴⁴

In any case, different scholars raised that Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim Alghazi did not entered in to Mertule Mariam and assumed to put his influence. After his defeat in 1543 his crown cloth was brought to Mertule Mariam Monastery. Accordingly, he did not enter into Gojjam but his followers come to Mertule Mariam to return the crown cloth of Gragh Ahmed and attempt to destroy and burn the Monastery⁴⁵.

Actually just as the destructive wars that encountered the Monastery of Mertule. Mariam in the 10th century against the Felasha, the highland Christian kingdom fought several wars against the Muslims of eastern Ethiopia in the 16th century. Though it had religious cover, the cause that leads the Muslims and the Christian fight each other was overlapping interest to control the trade route from Zaila to the interior of Ethiopia. The conflict reached its peak with the rise of charismatic Muslim leader known as Ahmed Ibn ibrahim al gehazi who commonly known as Ahmed gragn in 1527.⁴⁶

Like many towns and cities in Ethiopia, Mertule Mariam experienced the invasion of Ahmed gragn who embarked a fourteen years war against the Christian highland kingdom until his death in 1543. Literature, however, did not assert the invasion of this historical town by Ahmed himself. Rather his follower migrated to Gojjam and settled at Islamo, a mountain area about six kilometers north east of Mertule Mariam Town. From there, the former guardian of Ahmed gragn named Eyaqem went to the town at night and attempted to burn the Monastery, but in vain, the urban dwellers immediately woke up

⁴⁴ . Tadesse Tamrat, The Process of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in Ethiopia History, the case of Agew, vol, 29, no, 1, pp, 135-137: Mitiku, pp, 54-55

⁴⁵ Fentahun, p, 29, J, Hespler, p, 84

⁴⁶ Enebe Sarmider Woreda Culture and Trusim Office, 2008, p, 18, Mitiku, p55

and pursued him to Islamo where his colleagues camped. Thus, Ahmed did not pose any serious challenge on Mertule Mariam.⁴⁷

According to local tradition, however a big rectangular stone erected on the eastern said of the church is believed as a stone thrown by Ahmed Gagn to Saint Mery church. A certain large coat called Ahmeds over coat and brought to the church in 1545 by king Gelawdewos and now found in the church. Gelawdewos was said to have claimed that saint Mary helped him during his struggle against Ahmed Gagn. It was likely that Mertule Mariam church gained additional name that is *Yebragn Emebet* [to mean the Queen of Ahmed Gagn] at this crucial year .⁴⁸

Nearly two century and a half after the war of Ahmed Gagn, an army led by a man called Guangul come from the direction of Sudan through Dega Damot to Mertule IMariam .Guanguls army camped at a place called Debre Akom at sesso enese woreda in 1798. The urban residence and the clergy immediately moved to the place and forbade Guangul from entering in to Mertule Mariam. However, Guangul ridiculed them and kept his march to the Monastery. But due to the unexpected death of Guangul around *Shotel* River, about five kilometers' west of Merule Mariam, his plan of confiscating the church remained not more than a dream.⁴⁹

Similarly, in 1812 an individual named Asefa Hailu came to Mertule Mariam towtn from Basilo area in Wollo across Abbay river to laundering the church of saint Mertule Mariam. When he reached *Betemider*, a village about four kilometers east of Mertule Mariam Monastery. Assefa Hailu was asked by the urban inhabitant to return to his original homeland, Baselo. Nevertheless, the small river between Betemdir and the town of Mertule Mariam is said to have become a natural barrier there by aborted Asefas blueprint⁵⁰

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ Fentahun, p,33,Informant:-kaletsedq Abebe Tadege: Aba Desta Atnafu

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ Fentahun, p,33,Informant:-kaletsedq Abebe Tadege: Ato Temiye Getie

Different writers debated on the destruction of Mertule Mariam Monastery. Some writers argue that the church was built by Queen Elleni and burnt by Ahmed Ibn Ibrahim al gehazi. Other writers disagreed with this idea and ignored the destruction of the monastery by Gagn Ahmed. Di Almedia wrote that Gagn Ahmed was attracted by the heritage of Mertule Mariam Monastery and to end his dream he tried to loot and burned the Monastery in 1535. Some writets also claimed that the Monastery of Mertule Mariam was burned by Eyaqem, guardian of Ahmed Gagn ⁵¹

The Monastery of Mertule Mariam was looted by local thief's .In 1960s two local thief's come to a place called Zagey, ten kilometers east of the monastery and they successfully looted the monastery heritages. However, the local communities who live near the monastery exposed the thief's and the heritages were returned. But immediately the thief's were killed by the communities.⁵²

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² Informants:-*Ato* Adane Fenta and *Merigeta* Mamo Hailu

CHAPTER TWO

THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM FROM THE LATE 16 TH –LATE 20 TH CENTURY

2.1 THE LEGACY OF CHRISTIAN HIGHLAND KINGDOM

Though some Ethiopian Emperors attempted to rebuild the monastery of Mertule Mariam beginning from Gudit invasion, it could not regain its original shape and splendor. Nevertheless, Emperor Bedea Maryam renewed the monastery of Mertule Mariam in 1468 after he had completed Atrones Mariam in Wollo. The Amhara National Regional State Culture, Tourism and Information Beurea noted that Portuguese missionaries and writers Pedro, Manuel Almeda and Alvarez wrote about the contribution of Emperor Zera Yaeqob wife Queen Elleni to Mertule Mariam monastery. Accordingly she gave the vestment and erected a certain church in the place.⁵³

According to the information from East Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Beurea, Emperor Susenyos also rebuild the monastery towards the conclusion of his reign . Since it was a site in which he took the throne forcibly before his official coronation in 1608, Emperor Susenyos had a special honour to the Monastery of Mertule Mariam.⁵⁴

Therefore, it was probably because of this reason that European travelers and missionaries who visited the area in the 16th and 17th centuries wrote that the ancient monastery of Mertule Mariam, whose ruins are seen still now, had been constructed during the reign of Emperor Susenyos and had a reflection of Gonderian architectural

⁵³ Informants:-*Merigeta* Mamo Hailu and *Ato* Kassahun Asres: The Amhara National Regional State Culture, Tourism and Information Beurea ‘Beamhara Kilel Ser Yalu Yemeshib Botawoch,2008.

⁵⁴ East Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Beurea, ‘Mertule Mariam”, 2008.

art. However, *Ras* Haylu of Gojam remembered for his contribution by giving gifts and granting lands to the monastery in the 19th century⁵⁵

According to Debre Markos and Mertule Mariam town elders, Gojam in general and the monastery of Mertule Mariam in particular during the era of Princes [1769-1855] and the subsequent reign of Emperor Tewodros II [1855-1868] had been under the Administration of one big regional lord, Dejjazmach Goshu Zewede. It also said that Emperor Tewodros II and his wife Tewabech gave several gifts to Mertule Mariam monastery⁵⁶.

In 1881 Emperor Yohanes IV [1872-1889] made Adal Tesema as *Negus* Tekle Haymanot and entrusted him to govern Gojam and Kaffa to counter balance the Southward expansion of *Negus* Menelik of Shewa. In 1888 six year after his defeat at Embabo by the cavalry fighter of *Negus* Menelik, Tekle Haymanot creat a mutual front with Menelik against the Emperor. Alarmed by this act Emperor Yohannes devastated the land of Gojam⁵⁷. Thus Mertule Mariam faced a formidable attack .As *Negus Tekle* Haymanot was one of the rival of Emperor Yohannes IV, his *son Ras* Haylu , chief contender for power against Emperor Hayle Sellasie due to his political and economic motive, *Ras* Haylu faild to accept the 1931 Constitution that reduced the status of Gojam in to a puppet province. Haylu wanted to maintain his hereditary rule over Gojam through taxing them and by integrating Gojam as an autonomous region.⁵⁸

In Mertule Mariam *Ras* Haylu had a plan of renewing the castle of Abreha and Atsebha which experienced a series of challenges in different period. Probably because he was born there from his father Tekle Haymanot and his mother Wosen, *Ras* Haylu had a special favor to Mertule Mariam monastery. *Ras* haylu to reconstruct the building of Mertule Mariam prepared 60,000 Maria Theresa for the project and brought architects from abroad ⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Informant: Kaletsedq Abebe Tadege'Abahoy Wondifraw Abeje and Grazmach Sahle Kidane

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ Bahru Zewde, p, 45.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p,143.

⁵⁹ East Gojjam Zone Culture and Tourism Beurea, 'Mertule Mariam', 2008

However, the accumulated money of *Ras* Haylu to rebuild the monastery was taken by Haileselesie soldiers and reached to his hand but he did not retained from accused Haylu in charge of exploited the peasants through land alienation and heavy taxation. Hayle Selassie in return to appease the people of Mertule Mariam, he constructed saint Gebreal and Trinity inside the monastery compound. But my informant tell us, it is said to have that Addis Ababa Saint Trinity cathedral plan was a plan to construct cathedral at Mertule Mariam , but Hayle Sellasie up fold its plan in Addis Abeba, this was done probably the Emperor had disappointed the people of Mertule Mariam in relation with *Ras* Haylu.⁶⁰

2.2 THE TREND OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY

In the late 19th century there was misunderstanding between the church of Dima and Mertule Mariam are located in the northwestern Ethiopia provience of Gojjam.The dispute was concerned precedence and rank, ecclesiastical office and the right of entering the royal court and banquet halls first on state and public events such as banquet and commemorative feasts. The clergy of churches regarded to be the oldest were entitled by reason of their antiquity and custom, to enter the royal court and commemorative feasts held at the house of kings and princes.Within Gojjam Dima found in early 15th century held and enjoyed such rights and privileged in peace up until 1897. However, the clergy of Mertule Mariam monastery petitioned to have the right of precedence be given to them, claiming that our church was the oldest in Gojjam land.⁶¹

The clergy of Mertule Miariam monastery was highly eager to prove their monastery antedated their rivals, Dima clergies. The clergy of Mertule Mariam spuriously regressed

⁶⁰ Informants:- Melakehayle Biazen Derese and Aba Hayle Mariam

⁶¹ A Letter kept in a manuscript of the Taarike Negest at the church of Debre Markos. It is addressed by Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, copied on 4 July 1897. Letter 2 is kept in the church of Mertule Mariam, addressed by Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, and copied on 5 February 1897

the date of its foundation to the fourth century AD and appropriated the mythical twin – kings Abreha and Atsebha as founder Dima reject Mertule Mariams case as false and argued that Dima has an older foundation than the clergy of Mertule Mariam they claimed. Eventually the dispute was aired at a judicial hearing overseen by Emperor Menelik and his noblemen at Addis Abeba.⁶²

After reviewing the case presented to them and hearing the argument of litigants, Menilek together with his noblemen who were presented at his court brokered a negotiation settlement between the disputed churches. The clergy of Dima dropped their challenge to Mertule Mariam claim of ancient origin and accepted its antiquity, but Dima was left intact with all the privileges it had traditionally enjoyed. The clergy of Mertule Mariam in turn, satisfied with its newly recognized primacy and elevated and ecclesiastical status⁶³

In addition Mertule Mariam clergy were able to successfully deploy a hagiography dedicated to the mythical twin-royal saint and king Abreha and Atsebha to put forward a claim for precedence. According to the informant who informed me a lot of information about Mertule Mariam Monastery from Debre markos saint Gebreal church, Hagiography is a complete fabrication of religious book in which it prepared to strengthen its case, their dispute over precedence before the judicial assembly oversaw their case. According to him the hagiography illuminate how powerful tool writing was to those who wielded it to impact legal decisions and defend and legitimize social and economic rights and privileges in the 19th century⁶⁴

The cases offer us an insight in to how hagiographic writing could be used to readapt and reposition the past to meet the social and economic need of the present and the future. The dispute records can also be mind for information concerning the cultural and

⁶² Mertule Mariam Monastery, Gedle [hagiography] of Abreha Atsbeha. There are two parchment manuscripts of hagiography this l at Mertule Mariam. The oldest dates to the late 19th century, has 90 folios, and measures 31x 26 cm. It is inventoried by the Ministry of Culture as G1-IV-53.

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid ; Informant: *Ato* Dinku Bedasa and *Merigeta* Tibebe Dargie

religious mindset that shaped the understanding of people against forgery in the period. It was there for fitting to reconsider Ethiopians textual practices, especially the writing of hagiographic text and the administrative and legal function of written text in the 19th century in light of the court case under investigation.⁶⁵

The history of Mertule Mariam has been studied by some historians and non-historian alike during the last two centuries. Because this background is so important for understanding the dispute between Dima and Mertule Mariam in the 19th century, an overview of the early phases of their history is presented here. Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the 4th century CE, yet it was not until the 14th century that it spread into the region of Gojjam. The 15th century in particular had witnessed a flurry of monastic foundations in Gojjam of which Dima and Mertule Mariam were notable examples. Some historical sources concerning Dima's history reach back to the 15th century.⁶⁶

In the case of Mertule Mariam, Some European travelers and missionaries wrote that its founder was Queen Elleni (1522), widow of King Zar'e Ya'eqob (1434–1468) and a luminous figure in late medieval Ethiopian history. While others claimed it was during Emperor Menelik. However, in this regard the exact date of Mertule Mariam's foundation is obscure and from this stand contemporary accounts show that the church was firmly established by the early 16th century. But the hagiographies and historical heritages which are found in the monastery asserted its foundation date back to the 4th century⁶⁷

For several centuries after her death in 1522, Elleni was celebrated by her church for the purity of her soul and piety, her exemplary Christian life and character, and the generosity of her benefaction. In a devotional text dedicated to eulogizing her life and

⁶⁵ C. Beke, "Description of the ruins of the church of Martula Mariam, in Abyssinia", *Archaeologia*, 1847, p. 38-58

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Among the earliest known historical references to Dima are those found in the hagiographies of Täekeste Berhan and that of his mentor and spiritual father, Filipos, originally written in the 15th century.

achievement found at Mertule Mariam, Elleni is extolled as ‘the house of holiness,’ ‘the queen of kings’ and the equal of the eminent historical figure Saint Helena in moral worth and achievement.⁶⁸

Later in the 19th century, however, Mertule Mariam radically rewrote its history and claimed the mythical twin-kings of Abreha and Atsebha as its founders. This origin myth struck hard at the heart of the long-held traditions about and feeling of gratitude owed to Queen Elleni. Long recognized by Mertule Mariam to be its patron and founder, the church disowned Elleni, who is now hardly remembered. The origin and context of the church’s origin myth deserves a detailed examination in a separate study. Here suffice to say that at the root of the myth was the great rivalry between Dima and Mertule Mariam over precedence. As noted in the beginning, in the late 19th century, Mertule Mariam claimed ancient origin and the rights of precedence for itself thereby challenging Dima’s position as a senior church in Gojjam.⁶⁹

Naturally, Dima strongly (and persistently) rejected Mertule Mariam’s claim throughout the late 19th century. Mertule Mariam had venerable past and hagiographical materials to back it up and defend its claim for seniority. Contrary to Mertule Mariam, Dima lacked a credible ancient past and written material to support it, which proved to be a serious deficiency in its quest for preeminence. But if Dima ancient origin was questionable for lack of written evidence, then it was only natural that the church remedied the gaps in its records by means of forgery. Mertule Mariam’s origin myth and the writing of the hagiography of Abreha and Aşbeha in the 1890s must therefore be understood in this context.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Beckingham, C.F., Huntingford, G.W.B., 1961, *The Prester John of the Indies. A true relation of the lands of the Prester John being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520* written by Francisco Alvares, Cambridge, Hakluyt Society.

⁶⁹ Mertule Mariam, Monastery Gedle [the hagiography] of Ewositawos, The document reflects the conventional features of devotional texts called melk (literally “image”) and is copied on the front flyleaves of the gädl.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

Dima and Mertule Mariam appear to have been engaged in a heated debate over the issue of precedence throughout the last half of the 19th century. The Gojjamé historian Tekle Iyasus, writing in the early 20th century, tells us that such dispute broke out between the clergy of the two churches over order of precedence during the celebration of *Dejjach* Tedla's commemorative feast at *Bichena* in the mid-1860s.⁷¹

Finally, the question of Mertule Mariam's antiquity was brought into dramatic focus in 1897, when a royal court presided over by Emperor Menilek II heard the case. After reviewing the evidence presented to them and hearing the argument of the disputants, Menilek II and his courtiers arranged a negotiated settlement between the two parties. A summary of the judicial assembly's judgment and the terms of the dispute settlement are given in Menilek II's letters addressed to King Tekle Haymanot of Gojjam. Both letters are the official record of the same proceedings and deserve to be quoted and published in their entirety.⁷²

Letter of Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, in 1897, *Tarique Negest*, Debre Markos.

Letter 1

ሞገስ፡ አንበሳ፡ ዘእምግደ፡ ይሁዳ፡ ዳግማዊ፡ ምኒልክ፡ ሥዩሙ እግዚአብሔር፡ ንጉሠ፡ ነገሥት፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ፡ ይድረስ፡ ከንጉሥ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ርቱዓ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ወልዳ፡ ለቅዱሥ ማርቆስ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ፡ ወንድሜ እጅጉን፡ እንዴት፡ ነህ፡ እኔ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ይመግን፡ ደኅና፡ ነኝ፡ ዲሞቶንና፡ ማርቆስ፡ ማርያሞቶን፡ አጋጥሜ ነገራቸውን፡ ጨስሁላቸው፤ ነገሩም፡ እንዲህ፡ ነው፡ ዲሞቶ፡ ማርቆስ ማርያሞቶን፡ በአብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ አልተተከላችሁም፡ ይሏቸው፡ የነበረውን፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ ተክለዋችኋል፡ ብለው፡ ተፈጸሟቸው፡ ነገርግን፡ ቀድሞ ስለተተከላችሁ፡ ሹመትም፡ ቡራኪምም፡ እቤተ፡ መግሥትም፡ እተስከርም፡ ቀድሞ መግባት፡ ለኛነው፡ ከጃችን፡ ወጥቶ፡ አያወቅም፡ አሏቸው፡ ማርቆስ ማርያሞቶንም፡ በአብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ መተከላችንን፡ ካመኛችሁልን፡ ቡራኪምም፡ እቤተመግሥት፡ መግባትም፡ ፈጽመኛችሁ፡ ልቀቁልን፡ አሏቸው፡ በዚህ፡ ተፈረዱ፡ ፍርዳ፡ ግን፡ ማርቆስ፡ ማርያሞቶ፡ ቀድሞ ሥለተተከሉ፡ ቡራኪምም፡ እቤተ፡ መግሥትም፡ ቀድሞ መግባት፡ በዲሞቶ፡ እጅ፡ እስካሁን፡ ከኖረ፡ ዲሞቶ፡ ይርቱ፡ ተብሎ፡ በመንገቱም፡ ቃል፡ በፍትሐ፡ ነገሥትም፡ ተፈረደ፡ በዚህ፡ ቃል፡ አረታተን፡ አፈጣጥመኛቸዋል፡ አሁንም፡ ማርቆስ፡ ማርያሞቶ፡ በአብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ አልተተከሉም፡ እየተባለ፡ ተጽፎብናል፡ በደብሩ፡ ብለዋልና፡ ከየደብሩ፡ የተጻፈው፡ ይፋቅላቸው፡ ቡራኪና፡ እቤተ፡ መግሥት፡ ቀድሞ መግባት፡ እስከ፡

⁷¹ Tekele Iyesus Waqgera, *The Gojjam Chronicle*, edited and translated by Girma Getahun, Oxford, 2014, p. 125.

⁷² Tekele Iyesus, p. 126.

አሁን፡ በዲሞቶ፡ እንደሆነ ፡ ይጽና። ይህን፡ አያፍርሱ፡ ብለው፡ ልክው፡ በሰኔ ፡ ብጁኒ ፡ ቀን ፡ በደብረ ፡
 ማርቆስ ፡ ከተሜ በ፲፰፻፹፱ ፡ ዓመት ፡ ምክረት ፡ በንጉሥ ተክለ ፡ ሃይማኖት ፡ ፈቃድ ፡ ተጻፈ ፡ ታተመ ፡ ከ
 አጼ ፡ ምኒልክ ፡ የመጣው ፡ ማህተም ፡ ከዲሞቶ ነው።

The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed. Menilek II, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia. May it reach King Tekele Haymanot, follower of the true faith, son of Saint Mark the Evangelist. How are you, really, my brother? I, thank God, am well. I brought the clergy of Dima face to face with the clergy of Mertu Mariam and resolved their court case. Herewith are [their respective] arguments. Having dropped their challenge to Mertule Maria am’s claim of ancient] foundation by Abreha and Atsbeha, the Dima clergy then accepted their Mertule Mariam’s foundation by Abreha and Atsbeha. They said to them “even if you were the first to be founded, *shumetburake* the Saying of benediction, the right to enter the royal court first to partake in state ceremonials and memorial banquets belong to us. We have never lost possession of these rights previously.” The clergy of Mertule Mariam replied to them: “If you acknowledge our [church’s] foundation by Abreha and Atsbeha, then you must entirely relinquish to us the right to enter the royal court first and *burake*.” They judged one another [in these terms] over the case. However, the judgment rendered according to the *Fetha Negest* and the vote of the nobility is that, “although Mertule Mariam was the first to be founded, if the rights to enter the royal court first and the Saying of benediction have been hitherto in the possession of Dima , let them [the clergy of Dima] win the case.” This is the term by which we arbitrated the disputants and concluded the case. Since the clergy of Mertule Mariam have said that there are records in church [collections within Gojjam] which assert that Mertule Mariam was not founded by Abreha and Aṣbeha, let such writing in churches be deleted. Since the rights of saying benediction and entering the royal court first were in the hands of Dima, let them be confirmed to hold them as before. Let them not violate this decision. This was sent by [Menilek II] and copied and authenticated by seal on the 27th day of Sene at the town of Debre Markos 1889 Year of Mercy [4 July 1897] with the permission of King Tekle Haymanot. The seal brought from Menilek is found in Dima Giyorgis.⁷³

⁷³ Letter of Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, in 1897, *Tarika Negest*, Debre Markos. Letter 1

A Letter from Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, 5 February 1897, Mertule Mariam.

Letter 2

ሞገስ፡ አንበሳ፡ ዘእምን ደ፡ ይሁዳ፡ ዳግማዊ፡ ምኒልክ፡ ሥዩሙ እግዚአብሔር፡ ንጉሡ፡ ነገሥት፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ፡ ይድረስ፡ ከንጉሥ ተክለ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ርቱዓ፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ወልዳ፡ ለቅዱሥ ማርቆስ፡ ወንጌላዊ፡ ፡፡ ወንድሜ እንዴት፡ ሰንብተሃል፡ እኔ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ይመጣን፡ ደኅና፡ ነኝ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ማይያሞች፡ እና፡ ዲሞች፡ በቀደምትነት፡ የተጠሉትን፡ እናት፡ በሌለው፡ በሐዲስ፡ ማርቆስ፡ አስረቱን፡ በሌኝ፡ እናት፡ የሌለው፡ ሐዲስ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ምስክር፡ አይሆንም፡ ብለን፡ ነበር፡ አሁን፡ ግን፡ ትግሬ፡ ላይ፡ ገደለ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ አሮጌ፡ ማርቆስ፡ ተገኝቶ፡ ሁላችንም፡ ብናየው፡ ለማርቆስ፡ ማይያሞች፡ ማስከረላቸው፡ ማርቆስ፡ ማይያሞች፡ ቀደምትነታቸውን፡ በዚያው፡ በማርቆስ፡ ረትተዋልና፡ የቀደምትነታቸውን፡ ነገር፡ እንግደጃ፡ አንተ፡ እንደእውቀትህ፡ አድርግላቸው፡ በጥር፡ በ፡ ፳፰፡ ቀን፡ ባዲስ፡ አበባ፡ ከተማ ተጻፈ፡ በ፲፰፡ ፲፱፡ ዓመተ፡ ምስረት፡፡

The Lion of the tribe of Judah hath prevailed. Menilek II, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia. May it reach King Tekle Haymanot, follower of the true faith, son of Saint Mark the Evangelist. How have you been, my brother? I, thank God, am well. In the dispute between Mertule Mariam and Dima Giyorgis over precedence, when they [the Mertule Mariam clergy] said that “you let us [use the evidence of a] recently copied manuscript [lit. “Motherless new book”] and lose the case, we said [to them], “a newly copied manuscript cannot be adduced as evidence.”Lately an ancient manuscript of *Gedele [hagiography]* Abreha and Atsbeha has been found in Tigre and when we all inspected it, it substantiated the claims of the Mertule Mariam clergy. Since the clergy of Mertule Mariam have won the case with the evidence of the book, please deal with the matter of their precedence as you see fit. Written in the city of Addis Ababa on Ter [January]28. 1889 E.C [5 February 1897] ⁷⁴

The use of the hagiography by Mertule Mariam to claim right of precedence can also provide a further clue to its dating and the sources from which the writers drew upon—and thus to its social context. As mentioned above, there are two copies of the hagiography at Mertule Mariam. The discussion below is based on the oldest extant manuscript dated to the late 19th century. In the extant text at Mertule Mariam and other records at the church, there is some direct and indirect evidence that shows that the church of Abreha and Atsbeha in Gemad was the provenance of the manuscript of the hagiography that was inspected by the royal councilors in 1897. Moreover, the hagiography at Abreha and Atsbeha was very likely the basis of the copy of the hagiography at Mertule Mariam

⁷⁴ Ayichesh Berihun, she is helping me in Translation Amharic and Geez language in to English. A Letter from Emperor Menilek II to King Tekle Haymanot, 5 February 1897, Mertule Mariam.

.The oldest extant manuscript of the hagiography is noted in an inventory of the manuscripts of the church in the early 20th century.⁷⁵

The text of the hagiography itself does not include much paleographical information. There are only two letter additions to the text which provide a few meager clues about the date of its copy. On the hagiography penultimate folio is the genealogy of King Tekle Haymanot (fol. 87v).

The second addition reads like a colophon and contains some facts about the circumstances in which Mertuleä Mariam came to acquire the manuscript. The passage of the second addition is brief and is quoted the colophon of the manuscripts as.

“ዝሙድሐፍ፡ ዘመርጠላ፡ ማርያም፡ ዘወሀባ፡ እራሰ፡ አረአያ፡ አሀወ፡ እሙ ለንጉሠ፡ ነገሥት፡ ዮሐንስ፡ ዘሰረቆ፡ ወዘፈሐቆ፡ ወዘተአገሎ፡ በስልጣኑ፡ ጳውሎስ፡ ወጳጥሮስ፡ ወበስልጣኑ፡ ዚአየሂ፡ ወጉዝ፡ ለይኩን፡ ብለወ፡ አበኅ፡ አትናቴዎስ፡ ጳጳስ፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ፡ አወግዘዋል፡ ከመርጠላ፡ ማርያም፡ እንዳይወጣ፡ ገዝተዋል፡ አበኅ፡ አትናቴዎስ፡”

This book was donated to Mertule Mariam by *Ras* Araya, who is brother to the mother of King of Kings Yohannes. *Abune* Atnantiwos, Bishop of Ethiopia, has pronounced a curse, saying: “He who steals it, deletes it, and damages it shall be cursed by the power of Paul and Peter.” Bishop Atnantiwos has pronounced this curse so that it may not be removed from Mertule Mariam⁷⁶

....ዝሙድሐፍ፡ ዘራሰ፡ ጉግሣ፡ ወስመ ጥምቀቱ፡ ወልደ፡ ጊዮርጊስ፡ ወአበሁ፡ ራሰ፡ አረአያ፡ ሥላሴ፡ ወልዱ፡ ለዮሐንስ፡ ንጉሠ፡ ጽዮን፡ ንጉሠ፡ ነገሥት፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ፡ ዘወሀበሙ ለአብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሐ፡ ነገሥት፡ አክሱም፡ ዘሀገረ፡ ገማድ፡ በዘመነ፡ መንግሥት፡ ለንግሥትነ፡ አስካለ፡ ማርያም፡ ወእንዘ፡ ጳጳስነ፡ ማቴዎስ፡ ሊቀ፡ ጳጳሳት፡ ዘኢትዮጵያ፡ ከመገኘቱ፡ መድኃኒተ፡ ሥጋ፡ ወነፍስ፡ ስብሐት፡ ለእግዚአብሔር፡ ለዘአብጽሐኑ፡ እስከ፡ ዛቲ፡ ሰዓት፡ ወለወላዲቱ፡ ቅድስት፡ ደንግል፡ ማርያም፡ ወለዕሌነ፡ ይኩን፡ ሣህል፡ ወምህረት፡ ለዓለም፡ ወለዓለሙ አሜ፡ ዘሠረቆ፡ ወዘፈሐቆ፡ በስልጣኑ፡ ጳጥሮስ፡ ወጳውሎስ፡ ወጉዝ፡ ለይኩን፡ በ፲፱፻፲፯፡ ዓመተ፡ ምህረት፡ ተጻፈ፡

⁷⁵ The Gospel manuscript of Mertule Mariam monastery. The inventory was written during the tenure office of Aba Esheta, who lived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

⁷⁶ Mertule Mariam, Monastery, the Hagiography of Abreha and Atsebha. This note is written in the front flyleaf of the Hagiography.

...This book belongs to *Ras* Gugsä, whose baptismal name is Wolde Giyorgis, son of *Ras* Araya Sellasie, son of Yohannes, King of Tsion, and King of Kings of Ethiopia. He gave it to [the church of] Abreha and Atsbeha, [which the] kings of Aksum [built] at Gemad, during the reign of Queen Askale Mariam [Empress Zewditu, r. 1916–1930] and during the tenure of office of Matewos, Archbishop of Ethiopia, so it may be a salvation for his body and soul. Glory to God for bringing us to this hour .And may the mercy and prayer of His Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, be upon me. Forever and ever Amen. Whoever steals or deletes [this book], may he be cursed by the authority of Peter and Paul. Written in 1917 EC [1924–25]⁷⁷

The Abreha and Atsbha redaction is precisely dated to 1924–25. For reasons discussed above, it is obviously based on an older extant text found most likely in the same church. The manuscript Colophon from Abreha and Atsbeha represents a common genre in Ethiopian texts. Colophons conventionally mark the completion of the production of a manuscript. Usually written by scribes, colophons contain information about the date when the writing of the text of a manuscript was completed, the names of the scribe and the commissioner of the manuscript, a request for prayers and God’s blessing for the scribe and commissioner, and cursing and condemnation of those who might steal the manuscript or delete its content.⁷⁸

The attribution note makes a number of assumptions. First, it assumes the existence of spiritual connections between Araya and Mertule Mariam. Second, the note presupposes that Atnatiwos and Araya were together when the manuscript was produced. Third, it presupposes the existence of a firm, local, popular tradition or a cult about the mythical twin brothers at Mertule Mariam already before the writing of the hagiography and Araya’s or the writer’s awareness of it. There are many notable anachronisms and improbabilities in the above note.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Mertule Mariam, Monastery, the Hagiography of Abreha and Atsebha. This note is written in the front flyleaf of the Hagiography.

⁷⁹ Ibid

On closer inspection, one discovers that the ascription to Araya Sellasie as the source of the donation of the manuscript is spurious. To begin with, besides that suggested by the hagiography, I have found no hard evidence, even speculation, about a spiritual friendship between Araya and Mertule Mariam to account for his gift of the manuscript, thus rendering the donation note suspect. Not only is there no indication that Araya had any link with the clergy of Mariam Mariam, but also his uncle, Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872–1889), was known to have openly bad relations with churches such as Mertule Mariam. Conversely, the emperor had a rapport with Mertule Mariam’s rival in precedence, Dima.⁸⁰

The note provides imprecise chronological information about the acquisition of the hagiography by Mertule Mariam. Bishop Atnatiwos came to Ethiopia in 1869 and died in 1876. Thus, the manuscript would have been written between 1869 and 1876. But this is unlikely. In between 1869 and 1878, *Ras* Araya was governor of Akkele Guzay, a troubled region to the north of Tegray. Then he was appointed as governor of Dembya in 1878, two years after the death of Atnatiwos. The physical presence of Atnatiwos at Araya’s residence in Akkele Guzay is undocumented. Atnatiwos was in Yohannes’s court, whose residence was at Adwa throughout the 1870s⁸¹

In short, the anathema pronounced by Atnatiwos and Araya’s donation of the manuscript to Mertule Mariam was almost a historical impossibility. What then is the function of the reference to Atnatiwos and Araya? It is my guess that Atnatiwos was mentioned to reinforce the authority of the message of the attribution note. Moreover, since Yohannes IV had bad relations with Mertule Mariam, attributing the donations to Araya Sellasie would make the hagiography credible.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid, Informant: *Merigeta* Fentaye and *Ato* Temye Getie

⁸¹ S, Rubenson, Correspondence and treaties 1800–1854, *Acta Aethiopica*, Vol. 1, Evanston, 1987, p. 322, and p. 341.

⁸² S, Rubenson, Correspondence and treaties 1800–1854, *Acta Aethiopica*, Vol. 1, Evanston, 1987, p. 322, and p. 341

Whatever the nature of the link between Araya and Mertule Mariam, there is nothing whatsoever in the manuscript itself to support it. Araya’s name is mentioned in the following

“ጸሎቶቻቸው ለሰዎች ሃሎም ለፍቅር መቅር አያ ሥላሴ ወምነ ለአቡ ሁድምጸ መላኮ ትወምነ ለእመታብ ተመኔ ወምነ ለጸሐይሁኃይ ለአያ ሰሰ ለዓለም ለምጋ ለምጋ፡ አሜን።” This literally means, “may their [Abreha’s and Atsbeha’s] prayer and blessing be with their friend Araya Sellase, his father Demṣe Melekot, his mother *Tabote* Musie and the writer Hayle Iyesus forever. Amen.”⁸³

Araya appears in a similar formulaic passage of the hagiography (fol. 16v) alongside one Wolde Maryam, who is identified as “Araya’s *liqu*,” a term of uncertain meaning. In yet another formulaic passages, he is mentioned alongside his spiritual father called Abisa (fol. 82v). Toward the end of the text (fol. 83), Araya is mentioned alongside one *Megabie Wolde* Maryam and his spiritual father *Abune Wolde* Maryam, and the writer of the manuscript named *Qeses* Hayle Maryam. If we take all this to be genuine, then there were two writers of the *gädl* and two spiritual fathers of Araya Sellase, which is clearly erroneous.⁸⁴

There was only one clearly recognizable hand writing, adding to doubts about the authenticity of the attribution note. As suggested earlier, a phrase like “May their prayer and blessing be with their friend Araya Sellase” may be regarded as purely formulaic and therefore mere verbiage. Such a phrase cannot be given any weight because it could be just as easily employed when the person described was dead. This was indeed the case with Araya Sellasie’s parents, who surely were already dead at the time when the manuscript was allegedly and donated.⁸⁵

There were other compelling reasons to cast doubt on the authenticity of the donation and anathema note quoted above. If Araya in fact did hand over the hagiography in its current

⁸³ Mertule Mariam, Monastery, the Hagiography of Abreha and Atseba, fol. 10v.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*

⁸⁵ *Ibid*

form to a church with which he had no recorded connection, it means that Mertule Mariam’s clergy had no hand in its writing. If that had been indeed the case, then we may ask who initiated Mertule Mariam’s origin myth. What served as a source for the story concerning Mertule Mariam in the hagiography? As indicated above, no earlier text than the hagiography confirming the existence of the cult of the royal saints has been found at Mertule Mariam. The records of the legal battle between Mertule Mariam and its rival reviewed above show that the cult of Abreha and Atsbeha was in its infancy even during the 1890s⁸⁴. Could Mertule Mariam’s foundation myth have been invented in Tigray and *Ras Araya* was responsible for bringing the myth to public notice at Mertule Mariam? I am skeptical, however, that Mertule Mariam would accept such an extraordinary myth invented elsewhere at a stroke and radically rewrite its history. Instead, I suggest that Mertule Mariam was responsible for the creation of its origin myth and was involved in the composition of Abreha and Atsebha hagiography. The assertion of ancient origin, the generation of the hagiography, and the propagation of the origin myth before the final legal Mertule Mariam, or someone from Abreha Atsebha who knew Mertule Mariam’s history and was in close contact with its community, included the church’s origin myth.⁸⁶

The strongest and the best evidence available in Mertule Marriam Monastery is the letter written by the church of Abreha and Atsebha to Mertule Mariam. The letter does not contain explicit chronological information, but it can be dated to the 1897 court litigation, or shortly before. The letter is practically the only surviving source containing reference to the origin myth and the controversy on the antiquity of Mertule Mariam. It thus adds another piece to our picture of the dispute between Dima and Mertule Mariam and deserves to be published in its entirety:

መልዕክት፡ ዘ ማህበረ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ ዘሀገረ፡ ገ ማድ፡ እንተ፡ ይእቲ፡ ማህበረ፡ ነገ ሥቃት፡ ወጳ
 ጳሳት፡ ይድረስ፡ ሀበ፡ ማህበረ፡ ማርብ፡ ማርያም፡ ርዕሠ፡ ርአሳን፡ አድባር፡ ወእሙ ኣህጉር፡ አበይ
 ት፡ እንደምን፡ አላችሁ፡ ማህበሩም፡ ማህበሩም፡ አሉ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ አክሱምን፡ ማርብ፡ ማር
 ያምን፡ አልተከሏትም፡ የ ሚችሁን፡ ሁሉ፡ እንኳን፡ በከብት፡ በአንገት፡ ተወራረዳበት፡ ሲሆን፡ ዕርቀ
 ተ፡ ሀገር፡ ነ ወ፡ እንጂ፡ እኛ፡ የምንቆምበት፡ የነበረ፡ አለዚያ፡ ደግሞ፡ እለአንተ፡ አትሰንፉበትምና
 ፡ ተወራረዳብት፡ ግድ፡ የላችሁም፡ እኛም፡ አለንላችሁ፡ አብርሃ፡ ወአጽብሃ፡ አክሱምን፡ ማርብ፡ ማር

⁸⁶ Mertule Mariam, Monastery, the Hagiography of Abreha and Atsebha, fol. 10v

ያምን፡ ተደባበ፡ ማርያምን፡ ፃና፡ ቂርቆስን፡ ደብረ፡ ሳንን፡ እንፍራንዝን፡ እኒህ፡ ከተተከሉ፡ ፲፮፻
 ወ፲፯፡ ሆኗልና፡ እለአንተን፡ እበልጣሁ፡ በአባት፡ የሚል፡ ክርስቶስ፡ ሰው፡ አልሆነም፡ ሥጋ፡ አለበ
 ሰም፡ ማለት፡ ነው፡ ሃይማኖት፡ ነው፡ አትልቀቁ፡ ሰላሙ እግዚአብሔር፡ ይጠበቃችሁ፡ በአይነ፡ ሥጋ፡
 የምትያይበት፡ በአካል፡ ተገናኝተን፡ የምንጫወትበት፡ ጊዜ፡ ይኖራል፡ አትርሱን፡ በጊዜ፡ ፀሎት፡ እ
 ኛም፡ በአቅማችን፡ ወንድማችንን፡ አባቶቻችንን፡ አንረሳም፡ አንድ፡ አካል፡ ስለሆነ ።

A message from the community of Abreha and Atsbeha, land of Gemad, cemetery of kings [and] bishops. May it reach the community of Mertule Mariam, which is the head of heads of churches and high-ranking countries? How have you been? The community and the leader said: “you should wager with your lives, let alone with your cattle, in the case against those who deny the foundation of Aksum and Mertule Mariam by Abreha and Atsebeha. Were it not for the remoteness of our dwelling, we could have stood for the case [on your behalf]. Otherwise, since you are diligent [and persistent], [we ask] that you participate in a judicial wager. There is no harm [literally “never mind”], and we will stand by you. It is 1687 years since Abreha and Aṣbeha founded [the churches of] Aksum, Mertule Mariam, Tedebabe Mariam, Tana Qirqos, and Enfranz, and for anyone to claim [historical] precedence over Mertule Mariam is tantamount to saying that Christ was not born in the flesh and did not become human. Since it is a serious matter [literally “religion”], did not give up easily. May the peace of God protect you all? There will come a time for us to see each other in the flesh and meet and converse with one another. Please do not forget us in your daily prayers. As much as we can, we will not forget our brothers and fathers [in our daily prayers] because we are one body⁸⁷

The letter is currently held at the church of Mertule Mariam inscribed in its monastery in *Dersane Ura'el*. What can be said, if anything, about Abreha and Atsebeha’s motives for writing this strongly worded letter? The simplest explanation is that providing support for Mertule Mariam’s cause was the impetus behind the letter. The clergy of Abreha and Atsebeha were obviously aware of the controversy between Dima and Mertule Mariam. In this letter they proceeded to add further support to the credibility of Mertule Mariam’s origin myth. It is worded in a way that left no room for speculations about Mertule Mariam being the foundation of Abreha and Atsebeha. The letter is clearly hostile to Mertule Mariam’s opponents, whose claim is dismissed as unreasonable and unjustified.

⁸⁷ Guidi, I., , *Annales Iohannis I, Iyyasu I et Bakaffa, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Aethiopicum, Series Altera*, vol. 5, Paris. 1903, p, 71

It quite forcibly states that for anyone to deny Mertule Mariam ancient foundation amounts to denying the historical existence of Jesus Christ. The challengers to Mertule Mariam's ancient origin do not even merit having their name explicitly mentioned and recorded.⁸⁸

2.3. THE REST- GULT OF THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM

Churches and monasteries in Mertule Mariam have strong socio-political and cultural ties with the Christian highland kingdom. Thus churches and monasteries in Mertule Mariam are rich in the legacy of Christian highland kingdom even if they faced threats in different period from Yodit, the Adal warriors and threats from Italian occupation⁸⁹

It is apparent that the Gult was one of the main features of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The church was the beneficiary of the *gult* system starting from the Reign of Abreha and Atsebha, Gebremesqel and their successor⁹⁰. The state as the repository of rights over land and the emperor as a dispenser of such rights granted land as gult to the church. Such processes and acquisition of land by churches and monasteries went back to pre-Aksumite times⁹¹

According to Temlesgen Gebeyehu, Emperor Menilik I, who crowned in 950 BC., upon his return from Israel, declared the land of the kingdom to be distributed to different entities. In the fourth century, King Ezana continued the tradition of granting land to Churches and Monasteries. In such a way, Ethiopian emperors had made a great deal of land grant to churches and monasteries. The tradition was more observed after the fall of the Zagwe Dynasty in 1270 when Emperor Yekuno–Amlak, with the help of

⁸⁸ Marrassini, P., “ *Gedle* Abreha and Atsbeha: Indicazioni preliminary”, *Miscellanea Aethiopica* Stanislas Kur = *Warszawskie Studia* ,, 1999, p.159-179. Mertule Mariam, the hagiography of Abreha Atsebha fol. 54v-55v.

⁸⁹ Stuart Munro-Hay, *Axsum An African Civilisation of Late Antiquity*, 1991, p, 176

⁹⁰ Aba Gorgoryos, p, 17

⁹¹ *Ibid*

AbuneTekle-Haymanot, head of the Monastery of Debre-Libanos, overthrew the last Zagwe king, Nakuto-Lab and restored the Solomonic dynasty. Yekuno-Amlak, allowed the church to have one-third of the land of the empire for the contribution it played in the restoration of the Solomonic Dynasty.⁹²

Temesgen raised that the relation between the Gojam Kings and the churches was essentially expressed in terms of land .Land was the main source of income for churches and monasteries and the relations were smooth and interdependent until the 1974 revolution which made a fundamental change in the tenure relation as well as in the church-state relation. The Ethiopian revolution ended the *gult* system. The land became the property of the state and the people.⁹³

The church land in Gojam and Begemder were allocated as, the part given to soldier was of two kinds with different type of tenure. The first type paid salt tax on the estimated produce of the holding. In the second type of a fifth of the produce was paid to the soldier. In this description half of two-thirds of land in Gojjam was given *gebbar*, infavor of the church and half was given to the soldiers.⁹⁴

Until 1974, the Monastery of Mertule Mariam had a section of land granted through kings starting from the reign of Abreha and Atsebha, and Ambesa Widem. Its land estimated to reach 4- 6 *Gasha* and produced almost 38-45 *kuntal* of Teffs and wheats. In any case, the year 1974 was amajor land mark in the monastery of Mertule Mariam because the rest-gult had ended ones and for all and the monastery begun to adminster in *Sebeka Gubae*⁹⁵

2.4. MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY DURING ITALIAN I INVASION

⁹² Temesgen Gebeyehu, "Power, Church and Gult System in Gojjam", *Ethiopia.Asian and African Studies*, 2016.Vol.25, no.1,p,62

⁹³ Ibid,p,69.

⁹⁴ Shiferaw Bekle An Economic History of Ethiopia, vol,1,1995, p,65

⁹⁵ Informant : Megabi Ambel Alema: Archival source from Dmu,fill no 1954/64:fol 156

The Italians after their humiliating defeat at Adwa in 1888, for more than 46 years pacify their force and come to Ethiopia ones again in 1935 to erase their shameful defeat at Adwa. Initially the Italians were successful in occupied some part of the country, but later on the people of Ethiopia begun to fight Italian force. In 1936 when the Italian entered deep in to Gojam and attempted to control the area along Motta , the people at Mertule Mariam with a slogan *Yemariam Lolle [the servant of Saint Mary]* encircled them at Qega Marefia , four kilometers northwest of the monastery of Mertule Mariam. On the engagement that ensued the local people defeated the Italian and captured many weapons.⁹⁶

Nevertheless, the other Italian stationed force in Motta heard the defeat of their counterpart at a place called *Qega Marefia* and determined for help. However, it was at the battle of *Atalele* in Sesso enese *Woreda* in 1936 that both group of the Fascist army were vanquished by the local people who equipped solely guns and other traditional weapon. In the battle many Italians were killed and captured. Since the local fighters were familiar with the topography they fought their enemies successfully. The Italian soldiers who survived the battle of *Qega Marefia* and *Atalele* were also defeated by the force of Belay Zeleke at a battle of Ayelefush near Debre Work. In the battle Belay killed many Italian and snatched many types of artillery.⁹⁷

The Italians army who faced subsequent defeat in east Gojam districts dropped over thirty-seven bombs in Mertule Mariam town and monastery. In their reprisal act of the Italian two monks and three deacons were killed, many of the residents also burned their home and exposed to plights.⁹⁸ In 1938 the Italian army under General Malati fought the people of Enese and Enebse, at place called *Zeneo*, in the eastern edge of the monastery. At the same period bloodiest war fought between the Italian force and the courageous people of Enebse in a place called *Yibsana*, in the battle many Italian were killed and forced to withdraw from the area⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Seltene Seyoum. “Review of the Literature on Ethiopian Resistance with Particular Emphasis on Gojjam”: 1936-1941, *Institute of Ethiopian Studies*. Vol. 36, No. 2, 2003, pp, 37-38

⁹⁷ Fentahun Alemu, pp, 37-38

⁹⁸ *Ibid*

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p, 42, Informant ; Ato Temye Getie and Ato Adane Fentie

CHAPTER THREE

THE ADMINISTRATION OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

Churches and Monasteries under Ethiopia Orthodox religion has their own administration since ancient time. However, the title and hierarchy may differ from one institution to another. For instance the title *Neburead*, an administrative system of Axsum Tsion, for Tana Qerqos, Liqane Kahinat , where as Tedebabe Mariam and Mertule Mariam

administered in the title of Patriarch and *Re''use Reusan* respectively. However, When Mertule Mariam Monastery become under the Administration of Mota *Awuraja*, the monastery had not vice- *woreda* Administration. Archival sources assured that the monastery of Mertule Mariam had given the right to administers itself since the imperial regime in segregation from Mota keraleon Debre Genet church¹⁰⁰.

Although *Re''use Reusan* is the head and have the highest prestige; there are also other hierarchical structures under the monastery of Mertule Mariam. This herarchical structure includes *Qes Gebez Megabi*, *Qegn Geta*, *Gera Geta*, *Liqe Diakon*, *Liqe Abew* and *Yechiqashum* are the most prominent positions in Mertule Mariam monastery¹⁰¹.

In the Monastery of Mertule Mariam *Re''use Reusan* is the highest head elected from the cleargy and monks. The election system was fair and talked in to consider his wisdom and ethics. In addition, he must be among the monk and single men and in firstly he was assigned by the patriarch and finally the pope approved and ratified his positions¹⁰².

The second top administrator of the monastery is held by *Qes Gebez*, served as the top official in matter related with secular affairs. *Qes Gebez* organized the priests to operate praying service and made supervision in favor of preaching. While the *Megabi* just as *Qes Gebez* worked in organizing the Priest to performing praying services appropriately and he provide counseling service for them¹⁰³.

Gera Geta in his side shares the responsibility of administration of the tributary Debres. *Gera Geta* is responsible to Adminster the tributary Debres which is located on the right of the monastery. *Qegn Geta* also responsible to adminster tributary *Debres* located in the left side of the monastery¹⁰⁴.

¹⁰⁰ Getnet Tamene , “Features of The Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the Clergy” Institute of Oriental and African Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, Slovakia, 1998,p,101, DMU Archive fil,1955.fol no 149/σ

¹⁰¹ *Ibid* , Informant: Ato Temiye Getie and Aba Mekchaw Atnafu

¹⁰² Mitiku Demila,p ,43.

¹⁰³ Fentahun, P,47.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*

Nevertheless, the monastery of Mertule Mariam since its foundation had ruled by different *Reuse Reusans*. These *Reuse Reusans* played their crucial role in relation with the development of Mertule Mariam monastery. Among them I would like to attend his traditional or church education at Mertule Mariam monastery. He administered the monastery from 1932- 1950s¹⁰⁵.

My key informant Aba Melake Birhan Biazen told me as after the death of *Reusan* Tsehay felate, *Reuse rusan* La`eke Mariam Ayele ruled the monastery from 1960s- 1965. According to the information from my informants the *Re`use rusan* La`eke Mariam also served a few years to Gofa saint Gabriel in Addis Ababa¹⁰⁶. The *Reusan* La`eke Mariam also motivated the community and built the corner of the monastery. In addition he decorated the Qene Mahilet, interested Christian sacred place in the monastery of Mertule Mariam which is commonly said to have Temple¹⁰⁷

After *Reusan* La`eke Mariam, *Reusan* Aba Hayle Iyesus was appointed to administered the monastery of Mertule Mariam in 1965. According to the informants, *Reusan* Hayle yesus lacked administrative tactics and he faced a conflict between the ruler and the ruled. As a result he hatred the material world and dedicate to live as monastic life and he reported to the patriarch of Ethiopia, Abune Tekle Haymanot hand he deposed from power¹⁰⁸

3.1. The *Senbatie* [Sunday Celebrating Association]

The *Senbaties* were indigenous voluntary associations established primarily to provide mutual aid in burial matters and also to address other community concerns. Households become members of the associations and pay fixed contributions monthly. Whenever

¹⁰⁵ Informant: *Ato* Asefa Mulu and megabit Ambel

¹⁰⁶ Informants: *Aba* Melake Birhan Biazen and Megabi Ambel

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, *Qes* Fenta Abiye and *Merigeta* Debekulu

death occurs among members, the association raises an amount of money and handles the burial and related ceremonies.¹⁰⁹

Community based organizations such as *Senbaties* were among the most important mechanisms for the successful implementation of the multi-sectoral response to the problem, as they are strategically placed to facilitate community involvement. However, since *Senbatie* contribute money whenever a member or member family dies, increased mortality obviously creates financial strains.¹¹⁰

The *Senbatie* was a religious order in the Ethiopia Orthodox Christian by which the religious people formed an association in order to celebrate their Sabbath day. The *Senbatie* is one of a range of indigenous voluntary organizations and associations involved in self-help and other social activities in Mertule Mariam, the celebration including the preparation of feasts and active participation of all members¹¹¹. Each member of the *senbetie* turn by turn prepared mostly bread and *Tela*, traditional alcohol in Mertule Mariam and its surrounding.

The main objective of the Sunday celebration association in Mertule Mariam was to bring religious, social and economical integration among the community which strengthen their way of life based on respecting their common values and costumes until 1974. For instance, when emergence happened among the society each member made delightful cooperation so as to condolence from his or her unpleasant happening¹¹².

In any case in Mertule Mariam there are four known Sabbath celebration association by which the communities established to bring remedial for religious and socio-economic

¹⁰⁹ Alula Pankhurst and Damen Haile Mariam [The "Iddir" in Ethiopia: Historical Development, Social Function, and Potential Role in HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Northeast African Studies, New Series, Vol. 7, No. 2, Special Issue: HIV/AIDS in Ethiopia, Part II: Community-Based Organizations, Prevention, Patient Care, Research Aspects, and the Epidemic in the Diaspora (2000), pp. 35-57 Michigan State University Press, p, 36

¹¹⁰ Informant : *Ato Dires Tesfaw and Abahoy Chekol Fentie*

¹¹¹ Alula Pankhurst and Damen Haile Mariam , p, 37.

¹¹² Ibid,p, 38. Informant: *KaleTsedeq Abebe Tadege*

aspect of their life. Each Sabbath celebration association in Mertule Mariam encompasses more than twelve members¹¹³

The main function of *Senbatie* is to help members during bereavement; other functions have at times included establishing and maintaining good relations among members, coordinating members for community sanitation and crime prevention, and organizing and carrying out development projects. In addition, some *Senbatie* help unemployed members. These associations have long been a focus of interest for researchers and policymakers because of their potential role in financing other community activities¹¹⁴.

The *Senbatie* was important to mobilize communities for certain political and cooperative activities, as these associations have proved to be very strong in recruiterative activities, as these associations have proved to be very strong in recruiting community members to participate in any sort of activity they are involved in. Their influence is so strong that a person who does not belong to member of *Senbatie* was usually considered an outcast and a disgrace to his or her family¹¹⁵.

This associations may therefore possess both techniques of enforcement and appropriate incentives for applying them, vital qualities with regard to considering the involvement of indigenous institutions in socio-economic development. On the other hand, some informants argue that the potential for "informal" organizations to be involved in development may have been constrained in the past, and that there are dangers in interfering with them as their autonomy, informality, and flexibility maybe undermined should they become partners in development activities with government and nongovernment organizations¹¹⁶.

¹¹³ Informant: Yididiya Solomon [She serve in the monastery.

¹¹⁴ Alula Pankhurst and Damen Haile Mariam , p 38

¹¹⁵ Alula p,45 Kumilachew Siferaw “The Socio-economic Roles of Religion,” [MA Thesis, Social Anthropology Addis Ababa ,2015], p, 54

¹¹⁶ Kiros Habtu “, Classifying Informal Institutions in Ethiopia”[Wageningen University , 2012] P, 16.

It is voluntary and mutual aid community (religious) associations peculiar to Orthodox religion followers. The members gather together at church or in one of the member's house so as to pray together to get blessing from God and saint and discuss their problems and further share information. In doing so, the members bring food and drinks to church to feed the poor and themselves and discuss matters of common interest¹¹⁷.

3.2 .THE CHURCH EDUCATION IN MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

In the Christian highlands of Ethiopia, the monastery of Mertule Mariam constituted the main guardian of traditional culture and provided the only schools in the country for many centuries. Not only did it preserve its ancient tradition with tenacity and convey it to future generations but it also secured remarkable continuity that has lasted to the 1974¹¹⁸.

The church education in Mertule Mariam monastery has been the instrument that has preserved the traditional learning and conveyed it faithfully to succeeding generations. The priests and Church scholars who are the bearers and propagators of traditional learning have themselves been formed in the church school system and had teaching almost 50-60 students in each year¹¹⁹. In spite of the inevitable changes taking place in Mertule Mariam with the rapid expansion of modern secular education in the late century, Mertule Mariam monastery played an active part in the educational scene that took place there¹²⁰.

According to Kidanemihret Getahun, higher traditional schools, namely Music school, Poetry school and *Metsehaf Bet* which again had different steps., however the Reading School \was the first stage of the traditional schools in Mertule Mariam, where primary

¹¹⁷ Ibid, P, 17

¹¹⁸ Solomon Belay Faris ,”Restoring Local Spiritual and Cultural Values In Science Education: The Case of Ethiopia” [MA thesis, Department of Curriculum, University of Toronto,2012],p,p, 27-29

¹¹⁹ Informant :Qaletsedq Abebe Tadege and Temye Getie

¹²⁰ kidane Mariam Getahun, *Tintawi Yekolo Temari*, 1980, P, 23.

instruction was given.. It was a one-teacher school, with instruction given by a priest or layman with church education ¹²¹

The Reading School in the monastery of Mertule Mariam had almost 50 pupils in each year. In any case, in the monastery of Mertule Mariam children started their traditional school between the ages of 5 and 7, when they were traditionally considered ready to learn. Theoretically, both boys and girls and members of all ethnic groups and classes were eligible to enroll in church schools. However, in rural districts, parents generally discouraged the education of girls, since their function is to be housewives, and for this role no formal education was felt to be necessary. Non-Christian families were reluctant to send their children to the reading School because it was closely integrated with the church. Therefore, the reading School and the church schools as a whole can not be considered to serve the entire population, but only members of the Orthodox Christian Church¹²².

In Mertule Mariam the main function of the reading School was to teach children to read religious books, practically all of which were in Geez. Instruction in the reading School consists almost exclusively of reading. Children master the Geez syllable, and were trained the art of good reading. Traditionally writing was not taught, since this was not needed in everyday life, unlike reading which was necessary for daily prayers and participating in the church service¹²³.

In Mertule Mariam town and the nearby countryside mainly due to the large number applicants and to an insufficient number of schools, parents, especially those who do not need the labour of their children, are obliged to send their children to the Reading School as a first step to enrolment in a modern government school ¹²⁴

¹²¹ kidane Mariam Getahun, P, 45.

¹²² Sergew, Hable Selassie, and Tadesse Tamerat, *The Church of Ethiopia - A panorama of History and Spiritual Life*. Addis Abeba, Ethiopia: Berhanena Selam, 1970, p.69

¹²³ Aba Isqael, *Yekolo Temari*, from Mertule Mariam Treasury house, 1991.

¹²⁴ Ibid, EOC, *The Church of Ethiopia "The panorama of History and spiritual life.*, 1970, pp, 1-7.

The first subject of study for the child in Mertule Mariam monastery was the set of Ge'ez letters, known as the *Fidel*. In earlier times the letters were written on a roll of parchment, which the pupil carried with him. When they studied a particular part of the *Fidel* the student unrolled the parchment and fixed the two-ends of the roll on a wooden stick with a piece of cloth or string. Beginning from the 1950s children use a printed table of letters, was used in a single sheet of cardboard. This was available for about 50 cents in every market place in the country. As a result the traditional parchment was disappearing¹²⁵.

The process of learning the letters was held by the teacher or a monitor, touches with a straw each letter from left to right of the table and names the letter in a loud voice.. Usually the child learns the whole set of letters in sequence by heart, and therefore that in reality they were not able to distinguish the letter rudimentary. As a next step to help them distinguish individual letters and he led to pronounce each letter reading from right to left and then from top to bottom. This process was known as learning by counting each letter¹²⁶.

The large number of characters with the differences and irregularities of the related sets are not easily grasped by the beginner. To help the child distinguish the different characteristics of the alphabet another table has been prepared. On such tables the number of the letters and the forms in the seven orders remain the same, but the place of the characters is changed or mixed up, so that the child cannot depend only on his memory and the sequence in which he has memorized the characters¹²⁷.

In some extent when the pupil knows the letters, they start to practice reading a text. In Mertule Mariam monastery the child was uses four methods to practice reading this text known as *Fidel Hawaria* or the first Epistle of Saint. John; first they pronounced every letter of the word pointing at each letter with a straw or counting methods.. When they

¹²⁵ Informant: Merigeta Fentaye Ato Tanashe Wudneh

¹²⁶ Informant *Aba* Desta and : *Merigeta* Fentaye

¹²⁷ Sileshi Mengistie, "The History of Dima Giyorgis Monastery from Foundation to 1974" (B.A. Thesis Addis Ababa University, 1998), pp,42

distinguished the letters they passed to the next training known as Ge'ez, the beginning of reading¹²⁸.

According to the informant Aba Bitew the student attempted to put the letters together in a chanting form and read them as a word. The same process was repeated for several days or even months. When the teacher feels that his pupil had mastered that stage, and they leads him to *Wurdnebab*.. However, the final stage known as *Kum Nebab* said to have simple, if the student become well-mastered¹²⁹.

The exercise of reading can be quite difficult for the beginner, particularly because the text was in Ge'ez, a language no longer spoken and therefore far from the experience of the child. With this stage the pupil was introduce to the art of reading Ge'ez, and his *Fidel* lessons were therefore completed and can then practice reading different religious texts¹³⁰.

According to Haile Gebriel Dagne traditionally, teachers in different areas select any text for reading and the following texts were known to had been used in different areas: Gabata Hawaria, the selected epistles of Saint Paul, Saint.James and Saint. Peter;the Gospels, usually the Gospel of Saint. John is used as a text for exercise; Arganon: praises of St. Tamara Mariam: the miracles and wonder of Saint. Mary; Paulos: the epistles of Saint. Paul; Tamara Iyasus: the miracles of Jesus and the Acts of the Apostles.. Pupils need not understand the texts of these books, but they was able to read them well, since thee were the books read in the church service, where young boys served as readers, deacons, and later on as priests. The methods of practicing the reading were those described under the *Fidel Hawaria*, namely, counting Ge'ez, *Wurdnebab*, and *Nebab*.¹³¹

¹²⁸ *Ibid*

¹²⁹ Haile Gebriel Dagne, *The Ethiopian Orthodox Church School System: A publication of the EOTC*, Los Angeles [ethiovirginmary.org/./c.- THE ETHIOPIAN –ORTHODOX- CHURCH- SCHOOL- S.], Informant : *Aba Bitew*

¹³⁰ Archbishop Yisehaq A Brief History of The Ethiopian Church, Addis Ababa, 27th February 1954.[www.ethiopian orthodox church.org/orthodox-history-1..htm /

¹³¹ *Ibid*, Haile Gebriel Dagne ,Christine Chaillot.,*The Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Church Tradition. Life and Spirituality* .Paris: Inter Orthodox Dialogue, 2002, pp. 83-92

The pupil had able to read a text, they started a new lesson known in Amharic as *Yemata Timhirt*, an evening lesson, or *Yeqaq Timhirt*, memorization]. Every evening had to memorize the daily prayers. In the evening the pupils come to the house of the teacher, which is also at the same time the school itself. All stand around the teacher while the lesson is given. The teacher or an advance student recites to the pupil sentence by sentence or verse-by-verse the standard prayer the child has to memorize. The pupil then repeats the sentence till they know it well. This exercise was repeated for months or every a couple of years, until they knows the main prayers by heart¹³².

In some cases the Ethiopic catechetical book, the *Aemade Mestir* (Columnae Mister), particularly *Mistere Sellassie* (on the Trinity), was taught in Amharic. All other texts were in Ge'ez. Since the pupils did not understand the texts, the memorization trainings were very exacting in energy and time. When the teacher was convinced from his daily observations that his pupil had mastered the reading exercises, they started to learn the reading of the Psalms¹³³.

The pupil then begun learns to read the psalms well, the most important devotional book of Ethiopian Christians. The method they used was the chanting from and the *Wurdnebab* reading process. After repeating the entire book of Psalms several times using *Wurdnebab* and they continues reading for months, even over a year, using the *Kum-Nebab* reading method. If the student has already read different books as described above, the student of the Psalms is not too difficult¹³⁴.

In some cases students were made to memorize the texts of the Psalms. This was particularly important for those students who plan to continue on the higher learning, since passages from the Psalms were used frequently in the hymns and poems of the church. Gradually the pupil masters the art of good reading. The teacher normally did not

¹³² EOC, The Church of Ethiopia "The panorama of History and spiritual life. , 1970, pp, 1-7

¹³³ Ibid , Informants : Aba Bitew and Merigeta Solomon Alelign

¹³⁴ *Ibid* ,Ato Temiye Getie

set a formal examination to judge the work of the pupil. However, they followed the progress of their students daily.¹³⁵

When the teacher was convinced that the pupil has reached the level of knowledge traditionally required at this stage of learning, they indicated that the time had come when they leave the *Nebab Bet*. This was considered one of the most important events in the life of the pupil. It was also an occasion of joy for the family, and the parents usually organize a feast to mark the event¹³⁶.

A reader of the psalms enjoyed certain privileges as one of the elite in their village. At certain ceremonies they recite prayers, if no the priest was available. The girls from traditional families who have attended the school usually marry before or shortly after they complete the lessons in the House of Reading¹³⁷.

Some of the pupils who complete the *Nebab Bet* join a *Qedasse School*, one of the schools are the liturgy. A teacher specialized in Qedasse or the Mass was to be found in practically all the main churches. A teacher specialized in this branch of the liturgy teaches the *Diquna* and *Qissina*, the functions of deacon and of a priest in the liturgy. Children of the clergy, who use church lands usually enter such schools in order to become deacon or priests in a church and thus keep their church land in the hands of the family.¹³⁸

The office of a priest was particularly attractive to tenants or landless peasants, because a priest in his area enjoyed privileges, and his office entitles him to possession of the land known as *Semon land*. The function of an altar priest was limited to carrying out the rituals of the Mass and the Sacraments. For this purpose scanty training suffices. A

¹³⁵ Richard, Pankrust ,. The foundation of Education, printing, news papers, books, production, libraries and literacy in Ethiopia Ethiopian Observer VI no 3 , 1962, pp, 240-44., Ato Temiye Getie

¹³⁶ Ibid, Informants *Ato Abiye Alelign* and *Ezanawit Solomon*

¹³⁷ Christine Chaillot, *Traditional Teaching in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Trondheim, 2009

¹³⁸ Ibid, EOC, *The Church of Ethiopia "The panorama of History and spiritual life.* , 1970, pp, 1-7

Qedasse teacher normally teaches only the hymns which a deacon or a priest had to use in the liturgy of the Church¹³⁹.

The rest, including the teaching the traditions and service of the Church, was learned through daily experience in the parish itself. Usually a candidate for his training is attached to a priest or monk to whom he gives certain services, accompanying him on visits of families, festivals, and ceremonies in and outside the parish. Through observation or day-to-day practice and instruction by his priest-master, the boy learns the Church activities and functions of a deacon and of a priest. The activities of the priest, therefore, are limited to the rituals, which do not usually demand the understanding of the Scriptures. Thus relatively little education is expected from a young man to be ordained an altar priest¹⁴⁰.

The leading teachers and scholars of the church, known as *Debtera*, are trained in the higher school. A *Debtera* was a general term given to all those who have completed one of the higher schools of the church. Theoretically, priests and monks had also characterized as *Debtera*, if they completed studies in one of the higher schools. In practice however, few fall into this category, and these few were not usually known as *Debtera*¹⁴¹.

With the spread of modern education and a modern school system this institution was declining. Fewer young people were motivated to study in the higher church schools. One of the main reasons for this change was that the graduates of the church schools have lost their traditional elite status in the social order¹⁴².

These were instruments used at various occasions of church hymns and spiritual dances performed by *Debteras* (chanters) a choir through a special tone accompanied by three traditional instruments with a large portion of children and its followers. The aim of establishment of traditional education was to teach children and other church

¹³⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, Informant; Ato Temiye Getie, Ato Adane Fentie

¹⁴¹ Dagnachew, The Church of Ethiopia "The panorama of History and spiritual life. 1999, p, 6

¹⁴² *Ibid*

personalities with the theological dogma of Christianity religion and traditional culture of the country¹⁴³.

The Ethiopia Orthodox Church contributed civilization with in the field of art, architecture, music, education, poetry, literature, law, theology, philosophy and medicine. The church educational school in Mertule Mariam monastery primarily established in order to satisfy the need of the church Priesthood, Deacons, *Debtras*, Monks and other church functionaries. The monastery of Mertule Mariam followed teaching and learning methods of Ethiopian Orthodox Church as it is a part of it¹⁴⁴.

The major subjects that were given in this monastery included *Nibab Bet* (House of reading), *Zema Bet*, *Qine Bet* (Poetry), *Kidasse Bet* (Liturgy), *Triguame Bet* (Exegesis old and new testament), *Diagua* (Song books), *Aquaquam* (Hymnody) are the most dominant. This was done in order to transfer the teaching of Ethiopia Orthodox Church to new generation¹⁴⁵.

The education system was implemented and guided by the decisions of the national church assembly. According to informants, there was no fixed age limit for the admission of students. The number of the year needed for the completion is determined by different factors such as health, interest, scarcity of facilities for the students and others affect the number of students in the traditional church education. In the *Nibab Bet*, Fidal or Alphabet, Apostle of Saint John and psalms David are main contents of the learning. In this level students taught the Geez Fidal (alphabet) with all their character.¹⁴⁶.

Moreover, they are not promoted to the next stage until they identified the characters in any sequence. After they mastered the alphabet, they were allowed to take up the course of reading texts. Here the fact of apostle, the message of Saint John and psalm are the most important text widely used by the students. In addition, the students were also

¹⁴³ Informants: Ato Befikadu Getie and Qes Getachew Aychile

¹⁴⁴ Diacon Yeshewas Ayalew, *Yebetkristian Tarik*.1999,82-87

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, Informant: Ato Gebyaw Abebaw'

¹⁴⁶ Diacon Yeshewas, p, 55

learned *Ye Qal Timhirt* (Literary meaning, learning by heart) that usually conducted in the evening includes *Wudase Mariam* and *Anketse Birhan* (literary prayers of Mary and others). As one of my best informant, Qaletsedq Abebe Tadege told me that students performed to have completed the primary school when they successfully mastered all characters of Geez Fidal and reading skill. After they completed the primary level, students are allowed to choose fields which they like to master.¹⁴⁷

Most of the time many students in Mertule Mariam monastery attended the school of *Kidase* to be either priest or deacon. Few brilliant students were chosen the school of *Zema*, *Qinie*, *Akuakuam* and *Diagua*. In *Kidase Bet* student learn *Diquna* and *Qesena* (literary meaning the function of deacon and function of priest). In Mertule Mariam monastery the students were learn the hymns that they expected to use in the liturgy of the monastery. Most of the time students in *Kidassie Bet* wanted ordination after having spent only short time in this school and they want become *Somegna* (those who serve the church weakly, literally meaning).¹⁴⁸

The school of Music, *Degua*, *Zema Bet*, *Aquaquam* was the main fields of study in the monastery of Mertule Mariam. The *Metschaf Bet* was also another school of taught this school deals with details inter position and commentary on the holy scriptures such as new and old testament, *Metshafe Likawunt* (book of church scholars) and *Metshafe Menekosat* (monastic literature). The students were learning about tradition, history and theology of Ethiopia Orthodox Church. According to my informant, in Mertule Mariam monastery, students were trained in *Kine Bet*. Because *Kine Bet* teaching-learning process allowed the students to evaluate everything that learn and criticize freely in an intellectual manner¹⁴⁹

Qene Bet was the only schools that have creative capacity of the students was highly challenged the instructors of the *Qene* teachers, Geez vocabulary, grammar and syntax. In

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p, 44.

¹⁴⁸ Informants: Abahoy Chekole Fentie and Emahoy Muluye Temesgen

¹⁴⁹ Informant : Merigeta Tibebu Darge and Ato Solomon Mamo

this level following the example of teacher, the students are supposed to compose their own Qene. A man who composed Qene should strictly observed linguistic rules, being careful in his selection of word and expresses himself accurately. Students compose their own Qene to magnify and elaborate an idea of Samena Warq (Wax and Gold) ¹⁵⁰ .

Tradition education in Mertule Mariam monastery had contributed a lot for the society in the area. The student who attends the traditional education of the church was to prepare priest, deacons and other church functionaries to serve in the church, to preach gospel in order to make the people to keep the law of God. This monastery plays a vital role to the general development of our country and particularly for Mertule Mariam communities.. The monastery of Mertule Mariam served as the symbol of unity, spiritual activities since its establishment¹⁵¹

The *Eka Bet* registered almost all properties of both the modern and ancient properties .These *Newayate Kidusan* (church objects) and vellum books are the most valuable church properties and became under the protection of *Eka Bet Tebaki*¹⁵² . However ancient monastery objects were distracted during Yodit Gudit and during the war of Ahmed Grahagn. But many materials were left from that accident by people hide in caves. According to informants the ancient manuscripts found in monastery in the form of papers or books were *Metsaf Kidus* (Bible), *Metsaf Qidassie* (book of liturgy), and Gospel of Saint. John, *Tamre Mariam*(book of miracle of saint Mary), *Tamere Iyesus* (the book of miracle of Jesus), *Hadis kidaneBeGeez* Ena Ba amarigna(new testament in Geez and Amharic), *Metsafe Senk Sar*(dealing with the christology), *Metsafe Gebre Himamat* (book of passion of christ), *RaeyMariam* (the book of revelation of Saint.Mary), *Metsafe Diuga* (dealing with church song¹⁵³ ..

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, Aba Desta Leku

¹⁵¹ Informants: Megabi Fenta Ayalew and Ato Dinku Bedasa

¹⁵² Informants ; Aba Qaletsedq Abebe Tadege and Megabi Ambel

¹⁵³ Ibid, Ato Yalew Admamu

3.3. THE RELATION OF THE PEOPLE WITH THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM

The population of the monastery of Mertule Mariam includes monks and nuns, deacons and priests, guard student who attend the church education, and others. People who did not have supporters made their living in and around the monastery in Mertule Mariam. The number of population in the monastery in the final year of the Imperial regim was decreasing as a result of shortage of income more than ever. In the last few decades there were around 300 populations of whom Nuns, 20 Monks, 140 students and 10 teachers and 80 elderly fathers were living in the. Monastery¹⁵⁴

The population performed many spiritual and non-spiritual activities. However ,in the monastery of Mertule Matriam praying was one of the most spiritual practices. The time of praying was divided in to three groups: *Kidan*, Liturge or a set form of public worship and Serke. *Kidan* was performed around 5 AM; it was started by the ring of the bell. All people in the monastery prayed together. The liturgy was performed at the coast of the time between 5 to 7 AM everyday¹⁵⁵.

The students who attend traditional church education were parts of the monastery population. They learn church education to be Deacon, Priest, and Monk to serve the church service. In the early time they sit and learn day and night at the church yard under the shadow of trees or in the house of teacher due to the lack of comfortable shelter. But they continue their education by resisting these challenges. The students who learn this traditional or religious education come from different districts surrounding Eastern Gojjam and other parts of, Amhara¹⁵⁶

The relationship between the residents of the monastery and the nearby Christian was not only bounded in the compound but also extended to the nearby churches and visited other

¹⁵⁴ Mertule Mariam ena Edgetua, “ Mertule Mariam””, 1997,pp, 5-12

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, Informant : Aba Fikremariam and Ezanawit Solomon

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*

religious places, the public and social issue. The monastery had the regular program to discuss different issues with other religious and non religious institution ¹⁵⁷

In relation with source of income of Mertule Mariam Monastery, it had received land from the kings and its followers also contribute indirectly or indirectly. The land was administered by the monastery during the ancient time and the monastery becomes one of the major land holders until the coming to power of the Derg. In the 19th century Tekle Haymanot gave a land for the monastery about 4 hectares. However, after the Dergue came to power in 1975 the land of the monastery was confiscated by the 1975 Land Reform Proclamation. As a result, the church was unable to support its communities. So, the source of income for the monastery was a donation gained from individual believer. ¹⁵⁸

The other source of income for the monastery is money gained in different ways, for instance, during child baptizing celebration, the local people bring cereals to the church and bring foods during *Teskar* and *Fithat* that priest rendered when a person died and inturn the dead families pay money ¹⁵⁹.

3.4. PAINTING AND MINIATURES OF THE MONASTERY OF MERTULE MARIAM

According to the Tamere *Maryam [the miracle of saint mary]* manuscript in Mertule Mariam monastery which the miniatures are found was written and illuminated in the second half of the eighteenth century. The donor of the manuscript was *Memher* Libariwos who was the head of the monastery in the second half of the eighteenth century. *Mamher* Libariwos is mentioned at two places in the manuscript ⁵².

¹⁵⁷ Informants: *Merigeta* Debekulu Damtie and *Qes* Fenta Abiye

¹⁵⁸ Mertule Mariam *Ena Mahiberu*, 1962-75/ 309/σ-57. from Debre Markos University Archival Center on behalf of Haddis Alemayehu

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*

The miniatures are depicted on the first eight folios of the manuscript. The miniatures are extremely colorful and beautiful. Both secular and religious themes are depicted. The seven archangels, Gabriel, Michael, Rufa'el, Ragu'el, Fanu'el, Saqu'el and Afnin, are depicted in the same manner as attendants and maids are depicted. The only difference is that they have wings. All of them gaze towards *Abune* Ewostatiwos who was placed in their midst. The story by which the painter was inspired is not clear at all. Nine equestrian saints are depicted together with the idols and unbelievers they killed. Eight of them are rendered in the usual manner, riding a horse and in action¹⁶⁰.

Two angels hold a curtain behind her. Saint George and the Virgin with Child are depicted on the two consecutive pages. In the lower part of both miniatures the Apostles and the seventy-two preacher evangelists stand in a row forming an integral part of the composition¹⁶¹.

The Four Evangelists hold a book in their hands. Near the feet of the three evangelists, Saint John, Saint Mark and Saint Luke, are their respective beasts with which they are associated. In the case of Saint Matthew there was no beast. The painter seems to have consciously done this. As already indicated Saint Matthew was identified with the human-faced beast. It was probably due to this that the painter did not depict the human-faced beast.¹⁶²

Ewostatiwos was depicted in the upper part of the painting sitting on the right side of Christ. Behind Ewostatiwos there were a number of heads lined up in a somewhat schematic way. The annual feast of the church until very recently was celebrated on the annual feast of *Abune* Ewostatiwos¹⁶³.

In the expansion of Christianity in the region in the early fifteenth century the followers and successors of *Abunä* Ewostatiwos played a very prominent role. According to local traditions Christ himself is said to have served the church. It is apparently based on this

¹⁶⁰ Informants; Reause rusan *Aba* Hayle Mariam and *Megabi* Ambel Alemi

¹⁶¹ Abebaw Ayalew, pp, 69-76

¹⁶² *Tamre Mariam* manuscript, Mertule Mariam Church, f.olio 254. 55

¹⁶³ The Hagiography of Ewostatiwos in Mertule Mariam monastery.

mythology and historical fact that the painter depicted *Abune* Ewostatiwos sitting on the right side of Christ¹⁶⁴.

The last of the miniature of the manuscript was completely secular. In the upper register of this painting are depicted Queen Eleni and King Be'ade Mariam sitting side by side. Both had a multitude of attendants on their side. Two of the attendants standing in front on both sides hold a royal umbrella and a whisk. The ones on the side of King Be`ade Mariam hold their scabbards. Both Eleni and Be`ade Mariam have crowns on their head. The crowns they wear was identical¹⁶⁵.



Fig 8, painting from Mertule Mariam monastery partially.

Source: Photography from *Ye Enebse Sarmider Woreda Hagere Sibket* “ Mertule Mariam” by Esuyawkal Moges, 2017.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁶⁵ Informant : Aba Mekicha Atinafu and Ezanawit Solomon

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TREASURES OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

Regarding the process and expansion of Christianity in Mertule Mariam,, historical sources assert about the earlier existence of Mertule Mariam monastery. These historical sources are the Oldest church of Abreha and Atsebhat that its wall had glorified with classical painting and sculptures and a letters sent by Emperor Menelik in 1897 to Tekle Haymanot of Gojjam. While the former was burnt in several occasions and half of its remaining still found, the later stated about the precedence of Mertule Mariam monastery. The monastery of Mertule Mariam is endowed with various historical heritages. Most of these precious heritages merely found there not other else.¹⁶⁶

Although it is exhaustive to trace all of the heritages and relics which are found in Mertule Mariam monastery, I would like to list some of them in the following tables
Mariam monastery, I would like to list some of them in the following tables

Heritages	Materials from which the relics produced	Quantity
Akelil	Gold	-
<i>Arganon</i> book	Parchment	1
<i>Fetha Negest</i> [the law of king]	Parchment	

¹⁶⁶ Ye Enese Sar Mider Woreda ye Mengest ena Gudaywoch Tsefetbet, 1997.P,6

<i>Gedle</i> [hagiography] Abreha and Atsebha	Parchment	1
<i>Gedle</i> [hagiography] Ewosetatio	Parchment	1
<i>Gedle</i> [hagiography] Abune Selama	Parchment	1
<i>Metsehafe</i> [book]of Qendil	Parchment	1
Senksar	Parchmen	1
<i>Sinodos</i> [Synod]	Parchmen	1
<i>Tamre Iyesus</i> [Miracle of Jusus]	Parchment	1
The crown Cloath of Dejjazmach Beru	Silver	1
The crown Cloath of Emperior Gelawdiwos	Silver	1
The crown Cloath of Fasiledes	Silver	1
The Vestment [Cloath[<i>Kabba</i>] of Queen Elleni	Silver	1
The Vestment[Cloath[<i>Kabba</i>] of Tewabech	Silver	1
Years Qur [Furs]	Gold	1

Table 2 Endowments Given to Mertule Mariam Monastery

Source:-Mertule Mariam ena Edgetua, Mertule Mariam Ye Woredaw ena ye Mengist Gudayoch Tsefet bet, 1997.¹⁶⁷

4.1.1. Holy Arks (Replica of the Ark of Covenant)

Tabot was one of the Judaic elements retained by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is the most sacred object in every Ethiopian Orthodox Church and was believed to be the

¹⁶⁷ Vestement is a cloth wear by member of the Cleargy.Ye Enese Sar Mider Woreda ye Mengest ena Gudaywoch Tsefetbet, 1997.P,6

prototype of the Ark of covenant, which Moses received from God in Mount *Sina*¹⁶⁸. In Mertule Mariam monastery priest were not allowed to tell the quantity of Holy Arks however, four Holy Arks are found in other churches which are found in the town and the surrounding areas.¹⁶⁹

4.1.2. Manuscripts

In the monastery of Mertule Mariam a very large number of various spiritual books and collections of manuscripts were found, almost all of them were written in Geez and Amharic. Among the various holy books the oldest seven are well known and these manuscripts and books were products of earliest times and with various decorations both on their covers and inside the page¹⁷⁰.



Fig 9 Parchements in the Mertule Mariam Monastery,

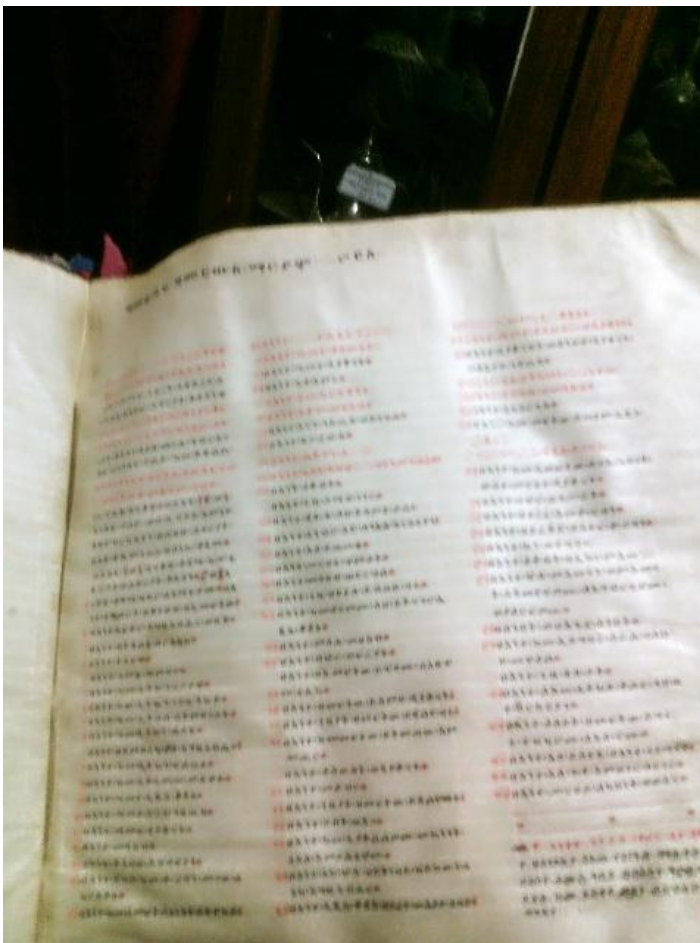
¹⁶⁸ E. a .Wallis Budge , The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek.Cambridge, 2000, pp, 7-1

¹⁶⁹ Mitiku, pp, 58-59: Parchements in the Mertule Mariam Monastery

¹⁷⁰ Informants: Aba *Mekicha*, Aba *Desta Leku* And *Ato Tanashe Wudineh*

Source : Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal
29January ,2017

The treasury house of Metule Mariam monastery contains a number of religious books which differed in shape, size and the material in which they made. These book were the base of Orthodox Christian religion and they were very indispensable for adherants. Some of the books were the hagiographyies [Abreha and Atsebha, Abune Selama, Ewostatiwos] book of the faith, liturgical books, prayer books, book of miracles and book of wisdoms were some of them. These religious books have strong colliders decorated by colorful painting even if they were already damaged ¹⁷¹..



¹⁷¹ Ibid, Mertule Mariam ena Edgetua, “ Mertule Mariam””, 1997,pp, 5-12

Fig 10 The Hagiography of Abune Selama iat Mertule Mariam Monastery, the first page
Source : Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal 29,
January 20

4.1.3. Crosses

The cross was one of the most important heritage of the Ethiopia Orthodox Church that symbolizes the redemption through the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ. It was used for ornamental, procession and blessing purposes. The symbol of the cross had long history in Ethiopia, where it was first appeared on the coins of king Ezana in the 4th century A.D. crosses are made from various materials including wood, brass, silver and gold¹⁷² ..

There were twelve oldest crosses in Mertule Mariam monastery with different shape and size. Among them the four cross are found in the other church which are found near the monastery.¹⁷³ The *Erufe mesqel* cross was a spoon, which had a cross at the end of its handled and used to administer the blood of Jesus Christ during commotion service in the monastery..¹⁷⁴ .

¹⁷² Ralph, Lee, Symbolic Interpretation in Ethiopic Ephemeric Literature, Ph.D Thesis. School of Orientale and African Studies, 2011, pp, 126-129

¹⁷³ Informant: Ato Tanashe Wudineh

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, and Emehoye Zewude Ejigu



Fig 11. Cross in the monastery of Mertule Mariam *Eka Bet*

Source : Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal 29, January 2017

4.2. OTHER TREASURIES

In the Anicent Monastery of Mertule Mariam the Liturgical objects were church heritages mainly used for the celebration of the Holy Communion during the mass and to perform other sacrament rites. However, I would like to encompass some of other heritages which were found in the monastery.

Censer (*Meatent*)

Meatent is seemed a dish hanged to three chains, terminating to one handle whose top is a cross. Many ornamental bells are attached to the chain the censer gives a sound vein swayed or move gently to cause someone to change their opinion with the help of the land only priest handle causes in all occasions. Beside the mass and sacramental prayers, it was carried in other church processions such as epiphany and funeral ceremonies¹⁷⁵.

Mesobe Worq

Mesobe worq is a golden basket, used to contain the bread of the Holy Communion when transporting from Bethlehem to the church carried by the deacons. *Tsh'ahel* is metallic tray like vessel used to contain the bread for consecration during the communion service. It was made from metals and looks like a tray. The other wsa *Tsewa* it is metallic made from precious metals and used to hold when to be consecrated during the service of the Holy Communion¹⁷⁶.

Megonatsefia and Bells

It was linen and cotton decorated cloth used to cover the sacred containers of church as the Tsahel and member. Church bells are two types. These were the small bell called *Kachil* and a bigger one called *Merewa*. The small one was mainly used during the service of the holy communion when mass is conducted and in some church ceremonies such as epiphany. The *Merewa* was usually suspended from a tower or a big tree within

¹⁷⁵ Informants; Ato Ephrem Asnakew and Qes Yinges Derese

¹⁷⁶ Ibid,

the church compound. It is used at different times indicating various circumstances and conveying a special message. The big bell was ringed at the beginning of mass and during the administration of the Holy Communion¹⁷⁷.

Umberela

Umberela was used in the church not only as a shade against the sun or rain but mainly also as a mark of distinction. Umbrella carried on both open air and inside the church. Umbrella fringed decorative of threads on clothing and decorative with given crosses, stars and figure of saints. They were mainly used in many occasions such as epiphany, and funeral services¹⁷⁸. In addition to this the monastery had a large number of different types of materials such as *Ye Kahenat Ena Ye Diaconat Albasat*, different clothes for priests and deacons, *Ye Kahinat Ena Ye Diaconat Aklil* priest and deacon crown that made from gold, silver, cobalts, *Ye Tabot Makberia Aklil*, special crown to glorify Ark, daweil bell made from silver, *Yetalayayu Ye Eje Meskeloch* (different kinds of hand crosses), Atronse (plat form), Maqraz (Candle burner), *Megonatsefia* (special vestment used for covering the Ark), *Maqomiya* (Prayer stick), Kebero (Drum), and so on are found in this monastery.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ *Abakaletsedeq* Abebe Tadege And *Ato* Tanashe Wudineh

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, Aba Isqael Fele

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*



Fig 12. Aklil in Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet*

Source : Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal 29, January 2017.



Tsinah a material made up of metal disk for the pleasant smell of the church

Fig. 13. *Tsena* in Mertule Mariam monastery Treasury house

Source : Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal 29, January 2017.

4.3. ANNUAL FESTIVALS AND RENOVATION OF MERTULE MARIAM MONASTERY

In Ethiopia Orthodox Church there are a number of festivals throughout the year¹⁸⁰. The known religious center the ceremonies of the spiritual holiday were a very colorful in Mertule Mariam monastery. Church ceremonies were a major feature of people life and have a considerable economic and socio-cultural importance for the society in Mertule Mariam. The Monastery of Mertule Mariam celebrated three important big and yell festival every year. These are September 18 and 21,, January 21. And October 4, the commemorative day of Abreha and Atsebha in the great fasting day celebrated colorfully and the society and church students singing religious song. Therefore, the clergy of Mertule Mariam monastery worked many activities to get money the society and church students also singing religious songs¹⁸¹

To sum up, Ethiopian church and monasteries are important educational institutions and have a greater importance in the production of elite societies in Ethiopia. By using its own alphabetical system, the church served as a center of intelligence and make tolerant generation for today's survival of the country. Therefore, before the introduction of modern education in early 20th century, the educational system was confined into the monastery. The advent of the establishment of church education or its traditional education introduced in Mertule Mariam was begun from the time of foundation and continued still now.

¹⁸⁰ Informant; *Aba Fikremariam* and *Ato Getahun Sisay*

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*

Conclusions

The presence of Mertule Mariam monastery in the *Enebse Sarmider Woreda* plays a significant role for development of Christianity religion for the people of Ethiopia in general and the people of East Gojjam in particular. Since the establishment of the Mertule Mariam monastery, Orthodox Christianity was preached in the area for manycentury. As aresult the monastery of Mertule Mariam become well known religious center in East Gojam.

One of the major role of the monastery of Mertule Mariam was to make the generation literate as much as possible by teaching the alphabets prepared by it. Long befor the introduction of modern education into Ethiopia, traditional education played acrucial role in relation with producing important figures who might influence the socio-economic cultural and poletical atmosphere of the country. Paradoxicaly such progress were the result of traditional education which significantly given in monasteries and churches of Ethiopia, the monastery of Mertule Mariam constitute a large part in this regard.

The income of Mertule Mariam monastery was gerenated not only from the contribution of the believers and agricultural product of its own land which was located east of the monastery, but also it earns money when performing religious activities such as child baptizing, gift during celebration (holiday) and in the form of cereals from local people.

Generally, since Mertule Mariam monastery has different historical manuscripts, great deal of historical materials and attractive place; it plays a a significant part in the development of our country by producing income through tourism in so far as it considered to have the power to generate income for one country apart from the capacity building of the country.

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List of Informants

No	Name	Sex	Age	Date of interview	Place of interview	Remark

1	Abebe Tadege <i>Kaletsedq</i>	M	61	21/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He is the present Eka Bet,manager he have good knowledge about every aspect of the monastery.
2	Abiye Alelign <i>Ato</i>	M	55	05/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He works in Finote Selam but he knows a lot about the monastery.
3	Ambel Alema Megabi	M	67	21/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He works in the <i>Betekihnet of Enebse Sarmider Woreda</i> , he know very well about the history of Mertule Mariam Monastery.
4	Asefa Mulu <i>Ato</i>	M	65	26/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was knowledgeable person in Mertule Mariam Monastery. He know a lot regarding the traditional education
5	Awoke Temesge <i>Ato</i>	M	54	12/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was knowledgeable person in Mertule Mariam Monastery. He know a lot regarding the traditional education
6	Befikadu Getie <i>Ato</i>	M	65	13/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has a good knowledgeable about the monastery.

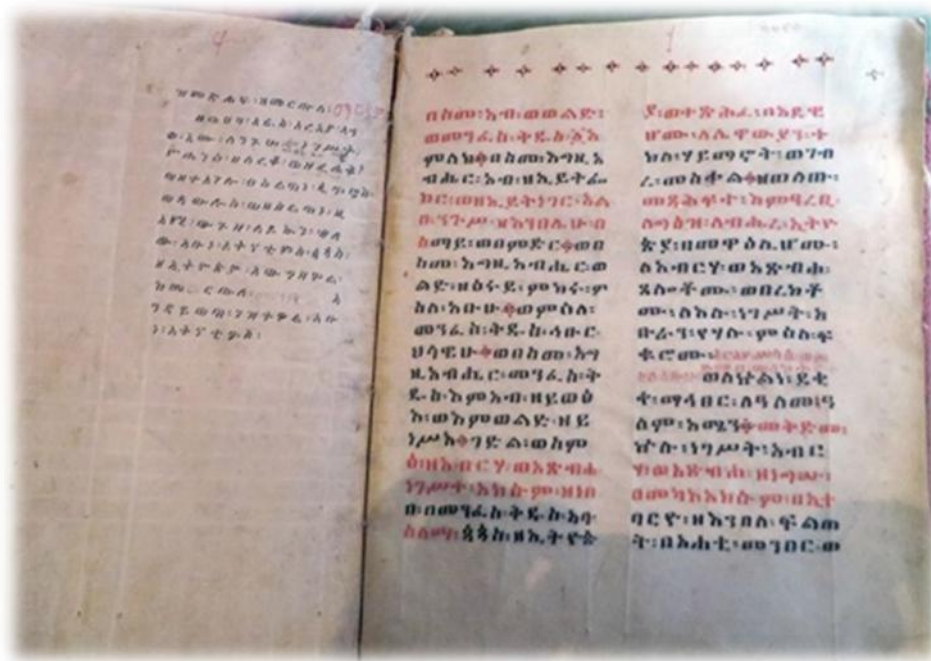
7	Biazn Derese Melakehayel	M	62	02/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He is knowledgeable about the monastery.
8	Bitew Mekonnen <i>Aba</i>	M	68	06/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was live in Mertule Mariam, he know well about the school history of the monastery
9	Chekole Fentie <i>Abahoy</i>	M	75	27/08/09	Mertule Mariam	He is elderly man in Mertule Mariam, he know about the monastery.
10	Debekulu Damtie <i>Merigeta</i>	M	56	09/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was serving the monastery as a teacher for long years and he knows well about its historical background
11	Dinku Bedasa <i>Ato</i>	M	48	01/04/2017	Debre Markos	He has knowledgeable about the monastery in every activities carried out in the monastery.
12	Dires Tesfaw <i>Ato</i>	M	56	03/04/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
13	Ephrem Asnakew <i>Ato</i>	M	55	08/04/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
14	Fenta Ayalew <i>Megabi</i>	M	64	23/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He know a lot about traditional education
15	Fikremariam <i>Aba</i>	M	55	07/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was knowledgeable person in Mertule

						Mariam Monastery. He know a lot regarding traditional education
16	Habte Mariam <i>Aba</i>	M	58	11/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He know very well about the church education of Mertule Mariam Monastery
17	Gebyaw Abebaw <i>Ato</i>	M	67	24/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
18	Getachew Aychile <i>Aba</i>	M	60	16/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He knows very well about the heritage of the monastery.
19	Getahun Sisay <i>Ato</i>	M	54	21/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was born and grew around the monastery. he knows well about the history of the monastery
20	Mekicha Atinafu <i>Aba</i>	M	70	31/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	He work in the monastery by teaching students, he visit as far as Jerusalem and he have good knowledge about the monastery.
21	Muluye Temesgen <i>Emahoy</i>	F	70	02/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	She live almost 3 killometers away from the monastery and she know well about the

						monastery
22	Sahle Kidane <i>Qes</i>	M	56	12/03/2017	Debre Markos	He have good knowledge about East Gojam monaster in every aspect.
23	Solomon Aleign <i>Merigeta</i>	M	56	23/04/2017	Debre Markos	He was working in the East Gojjam Diocese Ecclesiastical Office. He is a well known religious scholar. He knows and has read manyof the manuscripts that have historical reference in various Monasteries .
24	Solomon Hailu <i>Ato</i>	M	46	15/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He was born in mertule mariamm monastery and he knows well about the history of the monastery
25	Tanashe Wudineh <i>Ato</i>	M	64	23/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
26	Temeye Getia <i>Ato</i>	M	53	11/04/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
27	Tibebu Darge <i>Merigeta</i>	M	69	12/04/2017	Debre Markos	He lives in Debre Markos, he know very well about the traditional school held

						in East Gojam.
28	Wale Yesigat <i>Ato</i>	M	52	09/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He has knowledgeable about the monastery.
29	Wondifraw Abeje <i>Abahoy</i>	M	70	29/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	He work in the monastery by teaching students, he visit as far as Jerusalem and he have good knowledge about the monastery
30	Yalew Admamu <i>Ato</i>	M	65	06/04/2017	Debre Markos	He has immense knowledgeable about the monastery.
31	Yididiya Solomon <i>Woizerit</i>	F	20	12/02/2017	Mertule Mariam	She is member of the <i>Mezmur Bet</i> .
32	Yinges Derese <i>Aba</i>	M	57	14/03/2017	Debre Markos	He works in East Gojam Hageresibket and know very well about the church education of Mertule Mariam Monastery.
33	Zewude Ejigu <i>Emahoy</i>	F	69	27/03/2017	Mertule Mariam	She live almost 3 kilometers away from the monastery and she know well about it

Appendices



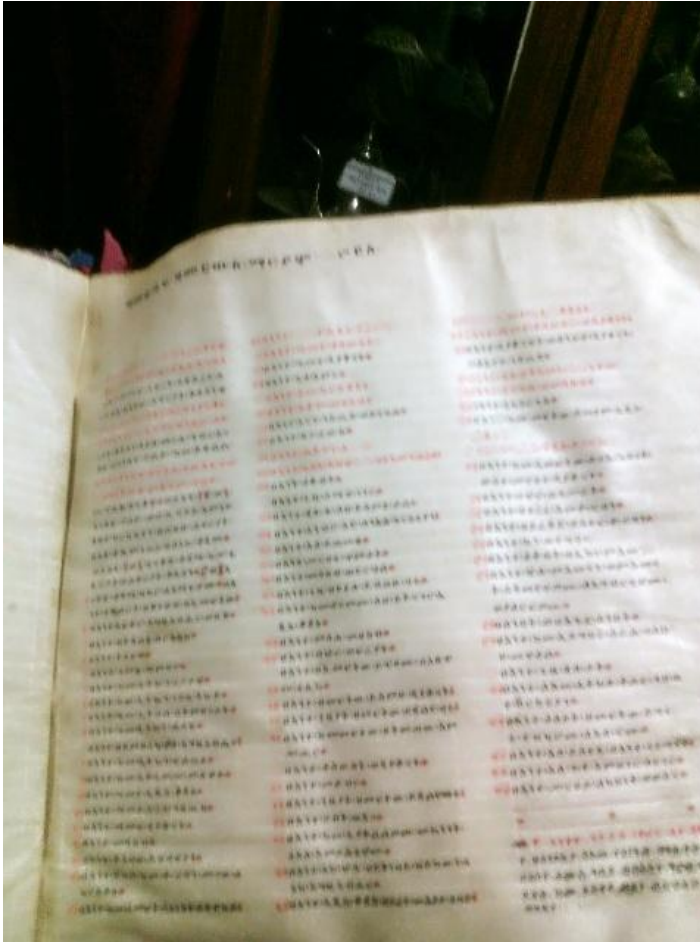
Appendix 1. The Hagiography of Abune Selama

Source: Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal, 29, January 2017.



Appendix 2. The Hagiography of Ewoistatniwos

Source: Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal, 29, January 2017.



Appendix 3. The book of *Sanksar*

Source: Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal, 29, January 2017.

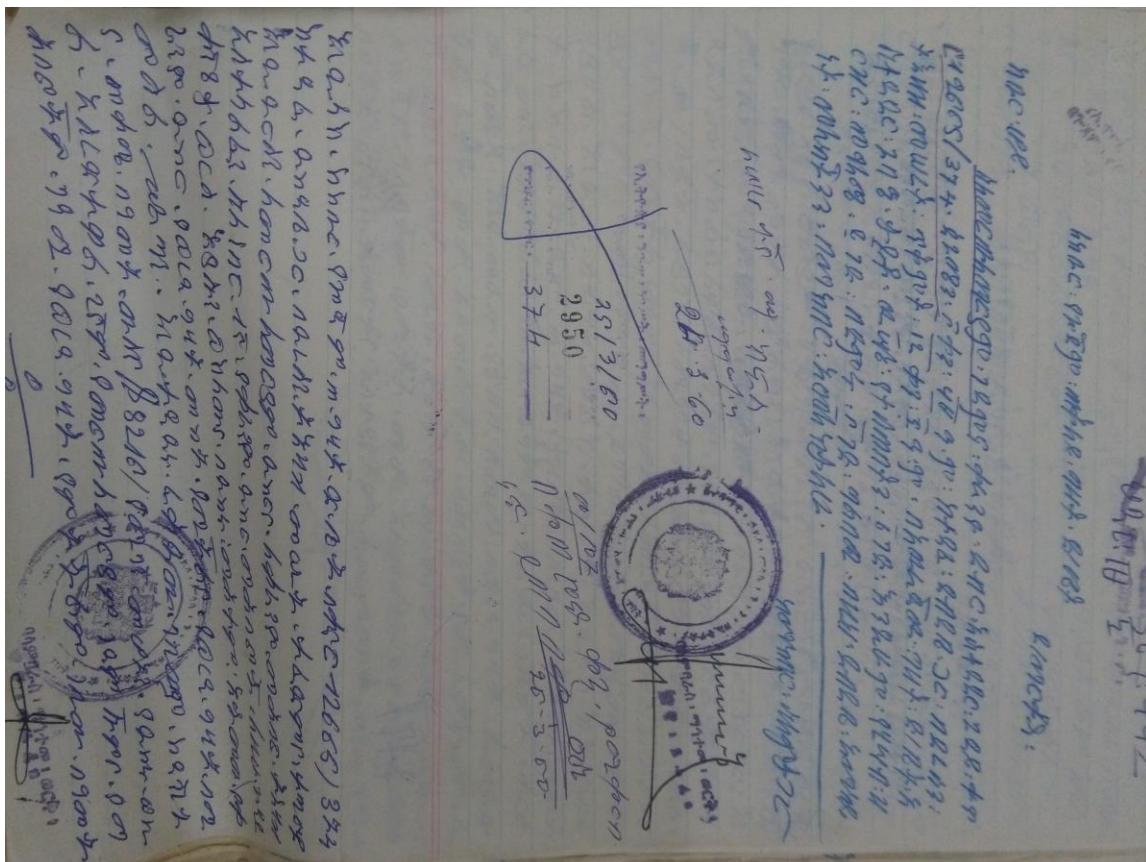


Appendix4.The Crown of Abreha and Atsbeha which is found in mertule mariam monastery..

Source: Photography from Mertule Mariam Monastery *Eka Bet* by Esuyawkal, 29, January 2017.

Handwritten text in Malayalam script on lined paper. The text is written in a cursive style and includes several lines of prose. There are some corrections and markings, such as a large 'X' over a line, a red '52' written over a line, and a signature 'A' at the bottom right. The text appears to be a formal document or a letter, possibly related to the church mentioned in the caption. The date '0132/2711-13' is written in the top right corner. The text is written in Malayalam script.

Appendix 6. about the denouncement of Mota Keranyon Church concerning the request of Mertule Mariam Monastery demand to govern themselves when they come under Mota Awuraja From Dmu Archive Center,2017 by Esuyawkal.



Appendix 11 concerning Mertule Mariam Monastery and mota keranyo church in Debre Markos. from Dmu Archival Center



Appendix 12 about collection of Manuscripts in Mertule Mariam Monastery
Photography by Esuyawkal May 2017