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Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the '19th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies', held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt's own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

AÉ	*Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
ÄthFor	Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).
AethFor	Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid*., 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid*., 2012ff.).
AION	*Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
EAe	S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: *A–C*; II: *D–Ha*; III: *He–N*; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: *O–X* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: *Y–Z*, *Supplementa*, *Addenda et Corrigenda*, *Maps*, *Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
EI²	*Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).
EMML	Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
JES	*Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.
NEASt	*Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.
OrChr	*Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
PICES 9	A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies*, *Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).
RSE	*Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

Orature on Literature: the Case of *Abba* Gärima and His Gospel*

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1. Introduction

Abba Gärima is one of the Nine Saints[1] who are believed to have come to Ethiopia around 480 CE from different parts of the Eastern Roman Empire.[2] It is also believed that they left the countries of their origin because of religious controversies: they were anti-Chalcedonians, and thus were persecuted by the supporters of the Chalcedonian doctrine.

Tradition has it that they were well received by the Emperor ƎllätAmida and by the inhabitants of the capital city of Aksum.[3] Above all, they are considered to be the fathers of monasticism in Ethiopia, for the most important monastic genealogies are traced to one or other of these Nine Saints. They are well known because of their vital contribution to the development of religious life in Ethiopia and because they exercised a deep influence on the spiritual life of the country and earned high respect and profound devotion among the people.

Described as the son of Mäsfəyanos, an Emperor of Rome, and his wife Säfängəya, *abba* Gärima (formerly Yəsḥaq) was born when his barren mother 'besought our holy Lady, the Virgin Mary, the God bearer'.[4] She called him Yəsḥaq, and he grew up learning the Books of the Church and was ordained deacon. But when his father died, his people made him emperor so that he sat and judged justly and righteously for seven years. But he was summoned by *abba* Ṗänṭälewon and told that 'he should leave his throne to seek the kingdom of Jesus Christ'. He then left his kingdom and

* Paper presented at the international conference on 'Ethiopia and the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: The Garimā Gospels in Context', sponsored by the Ethiopian Heritage Fund, Ioannou Centre for Classical and Byzantine Studies, University of Oxford, 2–3 November 2013. The presentation style of the paper is intentionally preserved.

1 For a comprehensive and balanced presentation, see Brita 2010. Moreover, entries on each of the Nine Saints published in the *EAe* provide useful information and relevant study on each of them; see also the detailed presentation by Marrassini 2014, 83–108.

2 According to *Gädlä Afṣe* (f. 35), they came from different places in the then Roman Empire: Liqanos from Constantinople, Yəmᶜata from Qosayt, Ṣəḥma from Antioch, Guba from Cilicia, Afṣe from Asia Minor, Alef from Caesarea, and Arägawi, Yəsḥaq or Gärima and Ṗänṭälewon from 'Rome'.

3 Sergew Hable Selassie 1972, 116.

4 Budge 1928, IV, 1009.

went to *abba* Ṗänṭälewon. He took the monastic vows and, together, they went to Ethiopia and lived at a place called Mädära, east of Adwa, for 23 years, working countless signs and wonders, casting out devils, and healing the sick.[5] Finally, having incompleted his preordained course, he received God's final blessing, and was caught up in a shining cloud and disappeared.

Among the Nine Saints, *abba* Gärima is the one credited with a predilection for the performance of miracles and wonders. But these miracles and deeds performed by the Saint are rarely documented in his hagiography or in any of the other local sources[6] which document the life and deeds of the saint. In fact, traditions concerning the saints of Ethiopia, the life and deeds of *abba* Gärima, are to be found in orature[7], i.e. the oral traditions which have been narrated through generations. Therefore, this paper aims at presenting some of the popular oral narratives about the Saint and his Gospel and to contribute valuable oral information about related traditions.

The orature on *abba* Gärima and his evangelical mission in Ethiopia, which were obtained through oral interviews,[8] are believed to contain pre-

[5] The main place of his activity is called *ʒnda abba Gärima* ('the Monastery of *abba* Gärima'), *Betä abba Gärima*, 'the house of *abba* Gärima', or *Däbrä Mädära* ('mount of Mädära'), see 'ʒnda abba Gärima', *EAe*, II (2005), 284a–286a (A. Bausi), here 284a–b.

[6] *Gädlä Gärima* is the only comprehensive written source on the Saint. An abridged content of the *gädl* was published in 2007/2008 by the community around a church named after the saint which is located near Baḥər Dar; see Däbrä Qəddusan Abunä Gärima Church, **ገድለ ፥ አቡነ ፥ ገሪማ** (*Gädlä abunä Gärima*, 'The Hagiography of abba Gärima', Addis Abäba: Ethio Tikur Abay Printing Press, 2000 EC (2007/2008 CE)). The late Patriarch *abunä* Ṗawlos has had the *gädl* translated into Amharic by a team of scholars in the Patriarchate but its current status is unclear. The memorial reading for 17 Säne in the Synaxarion contains some biographical data of *abba* Gärima (Budge 1928, IV, 1010). Other references to Gärima in local sources are given by *Gädlä Ṗanṭälewon* (details about the coming of the Nine Saints), *Gädlä Arägawi* (the main hagiographic source on the Nine Saints, where some miracles and deeds of *abba* Gärima are narrated), *Gädlä Afṣe*, the *Dəgg^{w}a*. St Yared, who is traditionally credited with inventing the sacred musical tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and Ethiopia's system of musical notation, honoured *abba* Gärima in his *Dəgg^{w}a* by composing a *mäzmur* in his name; *Mäzmur*, *Zəmmare Mäwasəʿt*; *Säʿatat* of *abba* Giyorgis Zägasəčča, *Dərsanä Yoḥannəs* are also local sources which contain some information about the Saint.

[7] A term introduced by the Ugandan scholar Pio Zirimu in an attempt to avoid confusion raised by the two contradictory terms, 'oral' and 'literature', see 'Notes towards a Performance Theory of Orature' (online available at: *http://www.ohio.edu/people/hartley/ref/Ngugi_Orature.html*; last access: June 21, 2015). Unfortunately the term 'oral literature' seems to be more common both in academic and popular writings.

[8] The following fathers from the monastery were interviewed: *abba* Kənfä Mikaʾel (a librarian at the Patriarchate Museum and Library, Addis Abäba, interviewed on 10 October 2013); *mämhər* Gäbrä Yoḥannəs (a researcher at the Patriarchate Museum and

viously unavailable information that is worth preserving. Data collection also involved a visit to the site.[9]

2. Orature on *abba* Gärima and His Contribution to the Ethiopian Church

The life and deeds of *abba* Gärima are preserved through different 'oral' narratives which were passed on through the generations. Closer inspection of the narratives on the Saint—here reported from Amharic and Təgrəñña speakers—indicates that the majority of them have direct or indirect relations with those recorded in the hagiography. Orature on *abba* Gärima and his contribution to the Ethiopian Church are categorized and presented as follows:

2.1. On his Gospel

Oral narratives state that *abba* Gärima wrote the first Ethiopic Gospel. According to tradition, the specific place where he wrote the Gospel in a single day on 17 *Gənbot* (25 May) is called *Betä mäsqäl Mädära* ('the house of the Cross'), a hill which is located on the south side of the monastery.[10] When he finished writing the Gospel, *abba* Gärima threw away his pen (*mäqa bərᶜ*)[11] for it became too old to be used again. But according to orature, the *mäqa bərᶜ* grew into a tall bamboo tree in the shade of which his disciples could find shelter from the sun. One former member of the monastic community[12] told this researcher that, in former days, students who wanted to learn the skill of traditional calligraphy were advised to travel to the Monastery of *abba* Gärima and to take bamboo sticks from one of the trees in the monastery to prepare their pens (*bərᶜ*). Because, he said, they would learn calligraphy more successfully and quickly if they began their career (as scribes) with a *bərᶜ*

Library, interviewed on 14 October 2013); *abba* Gäbrä Krəstos (the abbot of the monastery of *abba* Gärima, interviewed on 21 October 2013); *mämhər* Gäbrä Maryam (a monk at the monastery of *abba* Gärima, interviewed on 21 October 2013); *liqä diyaqonat* Zäkarəyas Gäbrä Yoḥannəs (a deacon who grew up in the monastery and is currently living in ᶜAdwa, interviewed on 23 October 2013). I am also grateful to my colleague Shimelis Mazengiya for checking the transliteration of the Təgrəñña terms.

9 I thank The Ethiopian Heritage Fund for covering my travel expenses from 20 to 25 October 2013.

10 There are four major mountains which neighbour the monastery of *abba* Gärima: *ᶜAddi mämhər*, lit. 'the country of the teacher/abbot', the mountain where the *mämhər* of the monastery used to reside during the graceful period of the monastery; *ᶜAmba mäläᶜəkt*, lit. 'the hill of the Angels', the mountain about which St Yared composed a hymn.

11 A 'short pen made of bamboo sticks', see Mersha Alehegne 2011, 154.

12 *Abba* Kənfä, head of the Museum of the Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Addis Abäba.

made out of one of the bamboo trees of *abba* Gärima. Orature also identifies a place on the north side of Betä Mäsqäl Mädära in an anecdote about the writing of the Gospel by *abba* Gärima. The name of the place, which is currently fenced in, is *ʿAmba məraq*, 'a hill of spittle'. It is a rocky field where there is a continuous flow of white liquid. According to tradition, the white flow originates from the spittle (or saliva) of *abba* Gärima released during his exercises while writing his Gospel. The fluid comes out of the rock during the warm season of the Ethiopian Spring *ṣäddäy*. The rock is dry during the rainy season (*kərämt*). The ascetics and nearby village community believe in the medicinal power of the fluid and they consider it to be holy water. It is strongly believed that the fluid is effective in curing eye diseases; a lot of stories narrated in and around the monastery testify to this.

Another narrative which seems to be of interest to palaeographers and codicologists is the alleged presence of a scrawl in one of the folios of the Gospel. According to oral tradition, the scrawl was made by a naughty monkey sent by Satan to disturb the Saint and prevent him from writing the Gospel. One day, *abba* Gärima had to leave his writing table for a short time to prepare the prayers for a specific hour of the day while his writing materials were on the table. A monkey came, mixed up the red and black inks, picked up the *bərʿ*, scrawled on the open folio and ran away. According to the narrators of this story, the scrawl is still evident in one of the folios of one of the Gospels. *Abba* Gäbrä Krəstos, one of my informants, told a further narrative in which *abba* Gärima actually punished the monkey by fooling her, and eventually cutting her neck with a sharp piece of bamboo. According to tradition, the monkey was observing what *abba* Gärima was doing, the saint prepared a sharp bamboo and made it look as if he cut his own neck and left his writing table briefly. The naughty monkey came down and imitated him, cutting its own neck.

The name of the monastery of *abba* Gärima is also called *Mädära* and the Saint is also called *abba* Gärima Zämädära. There is a narrative concerning the word *mädära* which is connected with the writing of the Gospel of *abba* Gärima. One day while *abba* Gärima was concentrating on writing the Gospel, Satan, taking the form of a monk, came and asked him what he was doing. *Abba* Gärima, understanding that it was Satan, replied, 'I am writing the Word of God!' But the 'monk' mocked him saying, 'How can you write the Word of God while you are His creation?' *abba* Gärima answered, 'because I am called by Him to do that'. Satan replied, 'Oh really, tell me what I can be called to do, I wish to be like you'. At this point, the amazed *abba* Gärima said to one of his disciples: *mäddäräbbəññ bäl*, 'Oh you see, he is making fun of me'. Therefore, orature claims that it is due to this saying of the saint that the monastery is called *Mädära*.

2.2 Gärima as a Farmer

The local farmers are strongly orientated towards *abba* Gärima. This orientation is expressed through frequently narrated orature concerning miracles performed by *abba* Gärima. According to tradition, on the day that *aṣe* Gäbrä Mäsqäl was crowned as King of Ethiopia, *abba* Gärima sowed wheat at dawn, and reaped it in the evening, and presented some of it as an offering; on the following day he took the remainder to the threshing floor, and trod out the sheaves of wheat, and obtained seventy-seven measures of grain.[13] This narrative is still alive, supported by the name of the place where it was believed that the wheat was harvested in one day. The name of the place is *Gərat wäyni*[14] lit. 'the farm of the vine'. It is located on the eastern side of the monastery. The monastic community says that the farm is still considered to be holy and is normally not used by other farmers; furthermore they are trying to initiate a project to reclaim the land for the monastery.

Abba Gärima's miraculous deed in harvesting wheat in one day is reflected in folklore through a type of *ṭef* which is quickly harvested. The *ṭef* was named after *abba* Gärima. Gärima *ṭef* (*ṭaf* Gärima) is one of the types of *ṭef* known in the region which ripens for harvesting in September, unlike other kinds of *ṭef* which are harvested later. It is widely believed that those who consume *ṭaf* Gärima share in the blessings of the Saint. Farmers of the area revere *abba* Gärima and take him as a model for their life and work. They believe that *abba* Gärima blesses their farms and cattle. A farmer in the region does not sow a seed without rubbing the seed with the holy water and ash of *abba* Gärima; any farmer in the region who believes in the blessings of *abba* Gärima has to travel a long way to the monastery on 17 *Säne* (24 June) and collect the holy water and ash, which are distributed by the abbot of the monastery with blessings and prayers. As stated, the farmer should rub the seed with the holy water and ash before he sows it. According to an informant, the farmers were supposed to perform a special ritual where the seeds were rubbed with the holy water: a priest had to be present and read *mälkəʿa Gärima* and his *Gädl* (if they were available) while the farmer and his family rubbed the seeds with the holy water and ash. Furthermore the farmer was supposed to recite something while rubbing. The informant could not fully recall the exact details, and believes that the ritual is no longer observed. However, the theme of the prayer addressed to the Saint appears to be a request to safeguard the seeds so that they might germinate from the mud, be kept from damage by insects and snow, and be enriched until ready for harvest. In recompense for the assistance received from the Saint, the farmer

[13] This is certainly related to the miracle performed by Jesus Christ.
[14] It is also called *gərabba Gärima*, i.e. 'farm of *abba* Gärima'.

promises to deliver *asrat bäkʷərat*, 'the first harvest', to the monastery. This portion of the crop which is kept aside to be delivered to the monastery of *abba* Gärima is called *əḵli Gärima,* 'Gärima's grain'. It is the main, but not the only, annual income for the monastic community.

2.3 Miracles

Abba Gärima lived at Mädära for twenty-three years, working countless signs and wonders, casting out devils, and healing the sick. These numerous signs and miracles are also documented in the oral narratives of the community who love and cherish him. The Saint, who was originally called Yəsḥaq, got his Ethiopic name (*Gärima*) due to the miracles he performed for his brethren, after being charged with violating the canons of the Church. One day certain spreaders of calumny went to *abba* Ṗänṭälewon and said, 'The priest Isaac consecrated the offering after he had eaten'. And *abba* Ṗänṭälewon followed him, caught up with him on the road, and said unto him, 'Wait, oh man, that I may tell thee a secret'. And Saint Yəsḥaq said unto him, 'Let men shut me in, and remove the stones from us'; and the stones turned aside for a distance of about 800 metres. And *abba* Ṗänṭälewon said unto him, 'O my son Yəsḥaq, thou hast terrified me!', and thereupon he was called *abba Gärima* ('one who terrifies').

2.4 Gärima Recorded on Stones

There are different legends of *abba* Gärima which are recorded on stones still found in the monastery and in the vicinity.

The first stone which narrates the history of the saint is called *əmni märᶜat* (also Amh. *mušərrit dəngay*), 'the bride stone'. The story of this stone, which looks like a widow sitting on a horse's back, is as follows:

One day a bridegroom and his bride were travelling past the monastery of *abba* Gärima. While passing in front of the monastery, they were advised (by the monastic community) to alight from their horse and bow down to the *tabot* of *abba* Gärima. The bridegroom agreed and alighted from the horse; however his bride did not agree. And orature has it that she was immediately turned into stone. Unfortunately, *abba* Zäkaryas (the abbot of the Monastery) told me that the *əmni märᶜat* is no longer in its place, for it was destroyed in the course of constructing a new road.[15]

According to orature, a group of stones which followed *abba* Gärima from Soloda[16] are still standing in front of Ǝnda *abba* Mikaʾel church in ᶜAdwa. And the stone where *abba* Gärima sat, accepting the importunate

[15] It was destroyed when the local people were constructing a terrace about 10 years ago.

[16] A large mountain in the north-western part of ᶜAdwa where the Nine Saints stayed together for three years. It was here that *abba* Gärima was accused of violating the holy commandments by celebrating the liturgy after eating.

accusations of his brothers, is still to be found at the western corner of the same church. The local people call the stone *mäᶜərafi qəddusan*, 'the resting place of the Saints'. The stone still serves as a source of blessings of saints for the community. One believes that those who sit on the stone for a while receive blessings from the Nine Saints.

2.5 *Abba* Gärima through Popular Sayings and Songs

When someone is dealing with a strict deadline to finish something before dawn, he prays, *nay Gärima ṣäḥay habänni*, 'may You give me the Sun of Gärima?!' Seniors bless juniors who are in a hurry to finish something (for example, farming) by saying, *nay abba Gärima ṣäḥay yähabḵum*, 'May (the Almighty) give you the sun of Gärima!' They say this because it is said that *abba* Gärima successfully ordered the sun to stand still and it did so until he had finished writing his Gospel.

According to tradition, one cannot hide oneself after stealing an asset belonging to the monastery of *abba* Gärima. The community expresses this clearly in the saying, *nay abba Gärima mäbaᵓ zəbäläᶜä baᶜlu yələfləf*, 'one who ate (stole) the offerings of *abba* Gärima, would chatter (betray) himself/herself'. The origin of this saying, according to an informant, goes back to the medieval history of the monastery. One day, a certain member of the monastic community took cereal without the permission of the authorities. On finding out what had happened to their provisions, the community gathered and discussed the issue. In the middle of the discussion, one wise monk said, 'it is not a big issue to find out the person who did this. The one who stole the assets of the Saint will chatter by himself without any external pressure'. Hearing this, the monk who had stolen the assets said, 'if so, where is my shout?' Thus was the thief identified.

In autumn (*mäṣäw*),[17] a strong wind blows in and around the monastery of *abba* Gärima. The seasonal wind is called *näfas mänṭälin*, lit. 'the wind of (*abba*) Ṗänṭälewon'. Tradition has it that the wind informed *abba* Gärima about the passing away of his beloved uncle *abba* Ṗänṭälewon: one night, the wind blew so hard and with such power that it destroyed his monastic cell. In this way, *abba* Gärima learned from the wind that his uncle had passed away. He went to the monastery of *abba* Ṗänṭälewon near Aksum and found the Saint departed and his remains in his cell.

Tradition has it that, when the Nine Saints were dispersed to different regions for missionary works and the ascetic life, they promised each other that they would meet annually on 30 *Mäskäräm* (10 October), the day when *abba* Gärima performed the miracle after the accusation made against him by his

[17] Around the end of October and beginning of November.

brothers. On that day, the *tabot* of Gärima was also moved into Ǝnda Abba Mikaʾel church in Aksum. All Christians from the neighbouring parishes still travel some distance to Aksum to celebrate the festival. Popular songs are one of the main elements adding colour to the festival. As in any part of Christian Ethiopia, elderly women celebrate the day by singing loudly and performing traditional dances. The songs mostly commemorate the miracles and deeds of the Saint. To witness this, one has to be in ᶜAdwa on 30 Mäskäräm, when the festival is celebrated. To do justice to the celebration, one should mention a few well-liked hymns. Perhaps the most exhilarating hymn at the celebration is: *attum Ǝndabba Gärima*! *oho məsaḵum ina*, meaning '(Those of) you at *abba* Gärima, we are with you'.

2.6 *Abba* Gärima through *qəne*

Qəne is one of the popular expressions of ecclesiastical culture in Təgray and in the Christian highlands of Ethiopia. Different scholars have composed verses of *qəne* on *abba* Gärima, many of which preserve the miracles of the Saint. The following *wazema qəne*[18] (called *fərənndus* due to the fusion of languages—Gəᶜəz, Təgrəññа and Amharic—in its composition) is a famous composition that commemorates the miracles performed by the Saint. This type of *qəne* is called *fərendus* ('bilingual' or 'mixed') *qəne* of which the composer is unknown:

> *Ṗänṭälewon ᶜabiyy ᶜaddi wäʾabba Gubba ḫayyal bəṣəbaḥ zəgoyyi mängädu*
> *gʷalatkum ḥametä ləbbuna mäṣiʾḵum wəsädu*
> *Gärima zəbbähal säbʾay əntätäqoṭṭiʾu bəḵäbdu*
> *alᶜilu aᶜəbanä känngəndu*
> *käyyəq̄ätla sägg*ʷ*idu sägg*ʷ *idu*.
>
> Ṗänṭälewon of ᶜAbiyyᶜaddi and *abba* Gubba the great who starts his journey in the morning
> come and take your young lady (who is) the backbite of the heart
> if the man who is called Gärima is profoundly offended
> having taken stones together with log
> so that he may not kill her by beating her repeatedly'.

This *qəne* can literally be translated as: 'Oh, the big country Ṗänṭälewon and *abba* Gubba who goes his way early in the morning, take your calumnous daughter, because the man named Gärima will get extremely angry and kill her, thrashing her with woods and stones'. The author of the *qəne* based himself on one of the miracles narrated in the hagiography of the

[18] A type of Qəne which has 3–5 verses.

Saint. According to the narrative, *abba* Ṗänṭälewon (when he found out that the accusation made by the people against *abba* Gärima that he celebrated mass after eating) was baseless, he cursed them insisting that *abba* Gärima had not committed any fault. The composer of this *qəne*, therefore, is trying to express the fact that *abba* Ṗänṭälewon and *abba* Gubba were against those who charged *abba* Gärima falsely.

Another scholar composed the following *qəne* in connection with the same miracle:

> *täwəlaṭä konä əntä Gärima zämän*
> *ənzä ʾiyyəṫʾezzäz säbʾ amṭanä yəṫʾezzäz əbn.*
>
> 'In the time of Gärima, something strange happened; stones became loyal and submissive while men were not'.

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Summary

This paper presents oral narratives told about *Abuna* Gärima, one of the so called Nine Saints, and his evangelical mission in northern Ethiopia. The narratives presented in the paper discuss different issues: where and how did he write his Gospel, which is believed to be the first Ethiopic Gospel, and the oldest known manuscript in the literary culture of the country; the different miracles the Saint performed during his years of service at the monastery; and how he is commemorated in the people's popular songs and *qəne*, a unique style of Gəᶜəz poetry. These narratives were collected through oral interviews made with individuals who relate themselves to the monastery which is believed to have been founded by the Saint.