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The *Abunä*'s Prayer for Fascist Italy: A Curious Episode from the Colonial Archive (Occupied Ethiopia, 11 June 1940)

Mikael Muehlbauer¹

Introduction

Strange bedfellows were forged in colonial regimes, and the Italian Fascist occupation of Ethiopia (1936–1941) was no exception. In its East African imperial project the Italians found a potential obstacle and ally in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, whose influence, via monastic centers, dominated the north and central highlands.² Although the beginnings of the occupation (namely during the era of military governor Rodolfo Graziani, r. 1936–1939) were marked by the brutal repression and execution of church leaders associated with the Imperial court, such as *Abunä* Petros of Addis Ababa,³ later Italian policies towards Ethiopian ecclesiastics included cynical patronage.⁴ The Italian occupiers most conspicuously elevated the status of the Ethiopian *Abunä* (honorific title for the head, properly *pāpas* or “metropolitan,” of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church),⁵ then an archbishopric of the Patriarch of the Coptic Church (Egypt), toward something resembling autocephaly (fully achieved in 1959).⁶

This was a shrewd move by the Italian colonial authorities. The See of Aksum (the Metropolitan Archbishopric of Ethiopia) was, since medieval times, a source of Royal (via coronation) and ecclesiastical authority,⁷ possessing influence that, at times, superseded that of the

¹ This article builds on archival work made at the Archivio Storico Diplomatico in the Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Farnesina, Rome as a Wallace Fellow at Villa I Tatti, with extra funding from a Trinity College Research Grant in Modern Italian History. In 2024, Claire Dillon (Columbia University) kindly took time away from her Rome Prize to scan the published newspaper text for me (including the Amharic original) in the Ministero's Library. Finally, for bringing this article to publication in *California Italian Studies*, I thank editors Jon R. Snyder and Joseph Tumolo, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their helpful criticisms. All translations are my own.

² Stephane Ancel, “The Centralization Process of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: An Ecclesiastical History of Ethiopia during the 20th Century,” *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique* 106, no. 3 (2011): 509–10.

³ Mersha Mersha Alehegne, “Petros,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010).

⁴ Mikael Muehlbauer, “An Italian Renaissance Face on a ‘New Eritrea’: The 1939 Restoration of the Church of Abreha Wa-Atsbeha,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 78, no. 3 (2019): 312–26. The fullest overview of Fascist support for the EOC remains Calvin C. Shenk, “The Italian Attempt to Reconcile the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: The Use of Religious Celebrations and Assistance to Churches and Monasteries,” *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 10, no. 1 (1972): 125–35.

⁵ *Abunä* is an honorific term for clerical head in Ethiopian orthodoxy (lit: “our father”). Whereas the title without the possessive pronoun is more faithfully rendered as *Abun*, I am here consciously rendering the title as *Abunä* for its relative familiarity in English-language academic writings. On this title, see, Denis Nosnitsin, “*Abunä*,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

⁶ Paolo Borruso, “L'impero etiopico e la crisi dell'identità cristiano-amarica durante l'occupazione italiana (1935–41),” *Africa: rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell'Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente* 56, no. 1 (2001): 22–32; Haggai Erlich, “Identity and Church: Ethiopian - Egyptian Dialogue, 1924–59,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32, no. 1 (2000): 29–33. See also Giovanni Coco, “Alle radici di un'idea: la Congregazione per le Chiese Orientali e il dibattito sulle sue competenze,” *Iura Orientalia* 10 (2014): 17–58. On the history of the Egyptian archbishops of Ethiopia, see Steven Kaplan, “Pāppas,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); and Stuart Munro-Hay, *Ethiopia and Alexandria: The Metropolitan Episcopacy of Ethiopia*, vol. 1, Bibliotheca Nubica et Aethiopica 5 (Warsaw: Zás Pan, 1997).

⁷ Stuart Munro-Hay, “The ‘Coronation’ of the Ethiopian Emperors at Axum,” in *Studia Aethiopica In Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Thomas Rave et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004);

sovereign.⁸ In this context, for the Ethiopian Orthodox church hierarchy, the colonial government's granting of (temporary) autocephaly was a watershed, as for the first time Ethiopian bishops and bishoprics could be locally ordained.⁹ For Italy, this detachment from the wider Eastern Christian Miaphysite community, vis-à-vis the Ethiopian dependence on the See of Alexandria, allowed the colonial authorities to better surveil the plurality of their East African subjects, in an attempt to purge any foreign ties from the still influential church.¹⁰ Egypt, after all, was then occupied by the (belligerent) British colonial government.

That said, this alliance should not be overstated. Perceived favoritism towards Islam as well as the involvement of Catholic evangelists in the colonial enterprise often kept the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy at arm's length.¹¹ In fact, in the broader history of the occupation period, collaboration with the Italians was a path taken by only a few, albeit highly influential, factions of the Ethiopian Orthodox church, who were themselves more often a source of popular resistance to the colonial regime.¹² Just a few years prior to the delivery of this sermon, Italian Occupation forces massacred the monastics of Däbrä Libanos (1937), a prominent hermitage north of Addis Ababa, in savage retaliation for local resistance activities.¹³ Nor were the collaborationist clergy widely accepted—every bishop ordained in this period (as well as the likely author of this text) was excommunicated following the restoration of Ḥaylā Səllase's empire in 1942.¹⁴

Whereas it is evident from the text of the prayer that the metropolitan of Aksum chose a path of collaboration, most likely in order to realize the short-term goal of autocephaly, the alliance with the Fascist regime was neither unique nor clear cut. The regime of Ḥaylā Səllase, which the Italians attempted to supplant, was rife with its own interreligious as well as sectarian conflicts; Ethiopian religious authorities often sought governmental patronage wherever they could find it.¹⁵ Moreover, although unlikely given the nuances of the Amharic text, in the absence of any other accounts of its reading there is the possibility that the sermon may have never been given at all. Gavino Gabriel, with his knowledge of Ethiopian languages, could have plausibly invented it for the colonial newspaper.

Heinrich Scholler, "Coronations," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 1 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003).

⁸ Donald Crummey, "Orthodoxy and Imperial Reconstruction in Ethiopia 1854–1878," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29, no. 2 (1978): 427–42. See for example, during the power vacuum that followed the death of Emperor Menelik II (r. 1889–1912), Wolbert Smidt, "The Coronation of Negus Mika'él, King of Wällo and Tegräy, in May 1914: New Findings," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 23 (2007): 413–39.

⁹ Ancel, "The Centralization Process," 508.

¹⁰ On the evolution of Italian policy towards the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, see: Cesare Marongiu Buonaiuti Buonaiuti, *Politica e religioni nel colonialismo italiano (1882–1941)* (Rome: Giuffrè, 1982), 293–347.

¹¹ See respectively Enrico Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam* (Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, 2001) and Lucia Ceci, *Il papa non deve parlare: Chiesa, fascismo e guerra d'Etiopia* (Rome: Laterza, 2010).

¹² Calvin C. Shenk, "The Development of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and its Relationship with the Ethiopian Government from 1930 to 1970" (PhD diss., New York University, 1972), 86; Ian Campbell, *Holy War: The Untold Story of Catholic Italy's Crusade Against the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (London: Hurst, 2021).

¹³ Ian Campbell, *The Massacre of Debre Libanos, Ethiopia 1937: The Story of One of Fascism's Most Shocking Atrocities* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2014). See also, for the early adversarial policies of the Italian occupation regime towards the Ethiopian Orthodox elite, Borruso, "L'impero etiopico," 14–22.

¹⁴ Ancel, "The Centralization Process," 508.

¹⁵ Hussein Ahmed, "Coexistence and/or Confrontation? Towards a Reappraisal of the Christian-Muslim Encounter in Contemporary Ethiopia," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 36, no. 1 (2006): 8–9.

It is with this in mind that I present here a hitherto unexamined document that captures one side of the complex Italian-Ethiopian colonial encounter.¹⁶ The text, both in its published edition as well as its original archival state, is a public prayer (read first in Amharic, and translated into Italian) that was given, likely by the Ethiopian Metropolitan of Aksum in response to, and in support of, Italy's declaration of war against Great Britain and France (June 10, 1940¹⁷).

What did the Abunä Say?

The text, which I have transcribed and translated below (with photocopies of both the published newspaper article and the original memo as an appendix: figs. 1–5), consists of a short sermon followed by a prayer, asking God to support Italy and the Italian Emperor in World War Two. The sermon's context is quoted as: “una grandiosa dimostrazione di lealtà verso l'Italia da parte di quel clero influentissimo che era venuto a conoscenza della dichiarazione di guerra all'Inghilterra e alla Francia” (a great demonstration of fealty to Italy on the part of the highly influential clergy who had learned of the declaration of war).¹⁸ The text (complete with the original Amharic) originally appeared in *Il Corriere Eritreo* on June 16, 1940 (because of the schedule of the paper's weekly publication);¹⁹ this was the government newspaper printed by the propaganda ministry for Italian settlers in Ethiopia.²⁰

Although the text does not mention the specific individual who read the prayer (he is named as “il clero di Axum” [“the priest of Aksum”]), it was likely the Abunä Yoḥannēs I, the contemporary metropolitan archbishop of Aksum, who commanded the highest position in the Ethiopian Orthodox church, or (though less likely) the *Nəburä əd*, a category of senior cleric specific to the town of Aksum.²¹ Notably, the text's likely author, Yoḥannēs I (r. 1939–1941), was ordained autocephalously, a precedent begun by his predecessor, Abrəham (r. 1937–1939). That ordination of Ethiopian metropolitans by Ethiopian, rather than Egyptian, clergy, was first granted by the Italian colonial administration, was a point of fact that likely explains some of the text's collaborationist content.²² From the perspective of the clerical elite in Aksum, the autonomy granted by the Italians was a welcome reversal of fortune and a reassertion of their ecclesiastic primacy in a fractured, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional domain.

¹⁶ Gavino Gabriel, “Testo *gheez* dell'indirizzo del clero di Axum alle popolazioni cristiane d'Etiopia,” Propaganda, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Farnesina, Rome, 1940, Busta 1037, Inventario dell'Archivio Eritrea (1880–1945); Gavino Gabriel, “Indirizzo della città santa alla Christianità etiopica per la vittoria italiana,” Propaganda, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Farnesina, Rome, 1940, Busta 1037, Inventario dell'Archivio Eritrea (1880–1945).

¹⁷ As with other key events in World War Two, the matter of when the conflict began is a matter of semantics. The picture is far more complex (e.g., the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935). Italy, at the time, had an official stance of “non belligeranza” (non-belligerence).

¹⁸ Gavino Gabriel, “Indirizzo della città santa alla Christianità etiopica per la vittoria italiana,” Propaganda, Archivio Storico Diplomatico, Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Farnesina, Rome, 1940, Busta 1037, Inventario dell'Archivio Eritrea (1880–1945).

¹⁹ Gavino Gabriel (uncredited), “Il clero della città santa di Axum in una imponente dimostrazione di lealtà vaticina la vittoria delle Armi d'Italia,” *Il Corriere Eritreo* 143, June 1940, 2.

²⁰ Thomas P. Ofcansky, “Press in Eritrea,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 4:208.

²¹ On what is known of the latter category, see: Denis Nosnitsin, “Nəburä Əd,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 1161–1162.

²² Mersha Mersha Alehegne, “Qerəllōs VI,” in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 4:291.

This prayer exists both in Italian translation, as well as in the original Amharic text (in linguistic terms, the modern language is the matrix wherein several terms in Gə‘əz [ancient Ethiopian, or *gheez* in the Italian memo] are included), which according to the author, Gavino Gabriel, was originally read to a crowd of Orthodox Ethiopians from Aksum and western Təgray (“townspeople and dignitaries assembled from every part [of Ethiopia]”). The sermon itself was given by the Abunä outside of the cathedral of Maryam Šəyon in Aksum as part of what must have been a great clerical procession (since Gabriel states that “the sacred vestments were put on and the treasury displayed” prior to the sermon); this was followed by an address by the colonial administrator of Western Təgray, who assured the local population that they would be protected (by Italy) from the effects of the war.²³

I argue that this text, despite being an unequivocal piece of propaganda—it was, after all, issued by the Ufficio Diffusione Stampa dell’Impero (Imperial Press Distribution Office) for the colonial newspaper *Il Corriere Eritreo*—especially when viewed in light of its Amharic source, nonetheless illustrates a profound localization of Italian rule by the Ethiopian Orthodox church during the occupation. As the text suggests, the collaborationist clergy of Aksum Šəyon legitimated the Kingdom of Italy as they once did the Ethiopian Emperor. Indeed, Vittorio Emanuele III is referred to as the ንጉሠ ነገሥት *nəguṣä nəgäšt* (king of kings) in the Amharic original (“il sovrano” in the Italian).²⁴ As quoted in the document, the Abunä prays for God to “empower our Sovereign [rendered as the, perhaps more dispassionate, “King of Italy” in Amharic] and his peoples to virtue and triumph [in World War Two].”²⁵ Indeed, the *Abunä*’s repeated invocations of the God given rights of the sovereign may evoke culturally specific notions of divine kingship particular to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Ethiopian Emperors.²⁶ Although the Italian Emperor himself took the title “Emperor of Ethiopia,”²⁷ this prayer suggests that, at least for the episcopal see of Aksum, this title and its functions were deemed legitimate and hence were translated into Ethiopic in both form and content. Thus, we find in the text repeated invocations of divine sovereignty in the model established by the late Solomonic emperors whom the Italian occupiers attempted to supplant. Yet as is made clear in the Amharic original, elements of Italian Fascist propaganda were also fully integrated into the sermon’s contents. We find the title of the Italian Emperor, Victor Emmanuel III, also explicitly named as Caesar (*Qesar Amanu’el ቄር:አማኑኤል*) in accordance with prevailing Fascist ideology,²⁸ diffused to the Ethiopian clergy through the colonial propaganda apparatus, alongside the local formulation of *nəguṣä nəgäšt*.

The address and its diffusion as a piece of an Italian propaganda was equally useful for both the Abunä and the Italian occupiers. For the Italians, the prayer’s utility was clear. In the address the Abunä legitimated the Italian Emperor *as sovereign* (i.e the *nəguṣä nəgäšt*) in support of the Italian War effort, making the Italian cause in World War Two a national struggle for all

²³ “The Royal Commissioner then thanked the powerful Clergy of Aksum for this act of loyalty and reassured them that the war will end with Italian triumph, since they [the Italians] fight under the sign of justice. He also encouraged them - using the well-known Ethiopian formula—to not fear the war, since they will be protected from its upheavals. [He reassured them] that the peasants may continue working the land and the merchants their trades.”

²⁴ ንጉሠ ነገሥት:ቄር:አማኑኤል—notably this particular phrasing is absent in the Italian translation.

²⁵ In Amharic: የኢጣልያ መንግሥት:ኋይል:መዋላ:ስጥልን:ኢያልን

²⁶ Donald Crummey, “Imperial Legitimacy and the Creation of Neo-Solomonic Ideology in 19th-Century Ethiopia,” *Cahiers d’études africaines* 28, no. 109 (1988): 24–33; Mikael Muehlbauer, “The Rhinoceros-Horn Beakers of Menelik II of Ethiopia: Materiality, Ritual, and Kingship,” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 26, no. 1 (2019): 61–79.

²⁷ Boruso, “L’impero etiopico,” 25.

²⁸ On this ideology, see: Maria Wyke, “Sawdust Caesar: Mussolini, Julius Caesar, and the Drama of Dictatorship,” in *The Uses and Abuses of Antiquity*, ed. Maria Wyke and Michael Biddiss (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

Ethiopians. This explains the Abunä's statement that "the diocese of Aksum stands in unison [in support of the war]...united in one spirit and in one vow."²⁹ Indeed, both the prayer and its diffusion as a piece of propaganda were intended to rally the overwhelmingly Christian population of Təgray and Ethiopia to the Italian cause. As the Italians relied heavily on *ascari* (native) soldiers for the defense of their colonies, this made perfect sense, since the war would inevitably spill over into the AOI.³⁰ It is likely due to Italian military domination that the Abunä asks God to "protect you [the Italians] as you protect us [the Ethiopian Orthodox]."³¹

That said, although this particular event has been hitherto unexamined by historians, it is far from unique. The Italian government in Ethiopia took great pains to integrate (religious) elites into their colonial enterprise. The alliance between the leadership of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and the Italian colonizers created opportunities for many such propagandistic events. In 1938 Ethiopian Christian dignitaries were brought to Italy to tour the country and given audience with Mussolini, an event that culminated in the gifting of a great liturgical cross in honor of the church's newfound autocephaly.³² More often than not, Italian administrators were present (and even participated) in major feast days held at distinguished churches such as Aksum Şəyon during the years of occupation.³³

The text also attests to the power of sound in the Fascist enterprise.³⁴ Sound recordings and radio broadcasts could be transmitted nearly anywhere and were a valuable tool, particularly in contested places like Ethiopia.³⁵ Despite being written down, the sermon remains profoundly oral, even in newsprint. The prominent use of liturgical Gə'əz (like the Lord's Prayer) would have been fully appreciated only when sung—of which its ethnomusicologist translator was well aware.³⁶ Whereas its diffusion in the old imperial vernacular (Amharic) further elided the occupiers with the Solomonic monarchy, so too did its collection and dissemination fit in with the Fascist program to fully document and publish the cultures of Italy's new imperial subjects.³⁷

For the Abunä of Maryam Şəyon, their alliance with the Italian occupiers secured increased autonomy and patronage for their episcopal see, cementing their autonomy from the Coptic patriarch in Egypt as well as their primacy in what was then a fractured and decentralized Orthodox Christian landscape.³⁸ This collaborationist sermon, after all, was delivered in spite of well

²⁹ ዛሬም፡ያክሱም፡ጽዮን፡ማሕበርና፡መኳንንት፡ሕዝብ፡ሁሉ፡ትልቁም፡ትንሹም፡ተሰብስበን ፤

³⁰ Uoldelul Chelati Dirar, "From Warriors to Urban Dwellers: 'Ascari' and the Military Factor in the Urban Development of Colonial Eritrea," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 44, no. 175 (2004): 533–74.

³¹ እግዚአብሔር፡እምጽዮን፡ወንትፌሣህ፡በአድኅኖትከ

³² Alberto Sbacchi, "Italy and the Treatment of the Ethiopian Aristocracy, 1937–1940," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 10, no. 2 (1977): 226–28.

³³ Shenk, "The Italian Attempt to Reconcile the Ethiopian Orthodox Church: The Use of Religious Celebrations and Assistance to Churches and Monasteries," 125–30.

³⁴ Nicolò Palazzetti and Jonathan Thomas, "Propaganda, Diplomacy and Ideological Crisis: Sonic Cultures and Italian Fascism During the Early 1940s," in *Controlling Sounds: Music, Sound Technologies, War and Power in the Era of Fascisms*, ed. Christian Koller et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2025).

³⁵ See, for example, on the substantial Ethiopian resistance Seltene Seyoum, "Review of the Literature on Ethiopian Resistance with Particular Emphasis on Gojjam: 1936–1941," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2003): 37–57.

³⁶ Gabriel writes, "Dopo la lettura furono intonati, secondo il costume, le preghiere per la vittoria delle nostre armi (the priests' prayers for our armies' victory was chanted in the local manner)."

³⁷ On this, see: Isabella Abbonizio, "Etnografia musicale e colonialismo italiano," *Ethnorêma* 7 (2011): 27–42; Gianpaolo Chiriaco, "Abdi's Shop and the Duka Azmari House: Musical Traces of the Italian Colonial Project in Addis Ababa and in Italy," *From the European South* 11 (2022): 48–63.

³⁸ On competition between monasteries in the central and north highlands see: Habtamu Mengistie Tegegne, "Dispute over Precedence and Protocol: Hagiography and Forgery in 19th-Century Ethiopia," *Afriques* 7 (2016), <http://journals.openedition.org/afriques/1909>.

publicized repressions of the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy by the Italians, such as the aforementioned massacre at Däbrä Libanos in 1937.³⁹ Indeed, the close relationship between Aksum's religious authorities and the Fascist occupying government, as otherwise illustrated in this document, were a continuing theme in Italian-occupied Africa. In Ethiopia, for instance, the government famously encouraged the growth of Islam and took care to sponsor local Muslim clerics, perhaps as a counterweight to Christian power.⁴⁰ Nor was this phenomenon limited to the religiously fractured region of Ethiopia.⁴¹ In Italian Libya, where the local populace was confessionally homogenous, the occupation regime was also keen to cultivate Islamic authority.⁴² In 1937 in Libya, *il Duce* (Mussolini) was named a quasi-Caliph (lit. "defender of Islam") and gifted the "Sword of Islam"—a modern manifestation of the legendary sword of the Prophet Muhammad, the Dhū al-Faqār.⁴³

The medium of the public sermon itself was something of a Pandora's box in occupied Ethiopia as well. Whereas the particular text under discussion was almost wholly collaborationist in content, we do not know the exact circumstances that led to its delivery – it could possibly have been coerced. Moreover, elsewhere in the AOI, otherwise "collaborationist" religious authorities used their local prominence to voice anticolonial dissent. In a 1938 sermon entitled "Islam and Freedom" by *Sīdī* Ġa'far al-Mirghani, a prominent Muslim cleric in occupied Eritrea, the religious leader used his dignified position to protest against the Italian policies of racial discrimination and apartheid.⁴⁴

Conclusion

In sum, there are many ways to interpret the spectacle captured in this document. The union of the Italian monarchy with the clerical elite of Aksum, under the guise of religious ceremony, could be seen partly as an invented tradition, which other colonial regimes in Africa also sought to institute.⁴⁵ This, as formulated in a seminal article by Africanist Terence Ranger, included the uplifting of European monarchical ideas through indigenous power structures—to which the text clearly testifies with the clerical invocation of the Italian regent as "Caesar," a term bereft of meaning in its local setting. Therefore, just as the King of Italy was legitimized as the neo-Solomonic Emperor of Ethiopia (through the phrase *nəguṣā nəgāśt*), so too was Fascist neo-Roman imperialist ideology an invention made of whole cloth. This collaborationist sermon, with its exhortation in defense of the occupation regime, therefore carried complex meanings. By recombining Italian and Ethiopian sources of authority, the clergy of Aksum attempted to win

³⁹ Campbell, *The Massacre of Debre Libanos*.

⁴⁰ On Italian favoritism toward Islam in the Fascist period more broadly, see: Enrico Galoppini, *Il Fascismo e l'Islam* (Parma: Edizioni all'insegna del Veltro, 2001).

⁴¹ Ahmed, "Coexistence and/or Confrontation?"

⁴² Anna Baldinetti, "Fascist Propaganda in the Maghrib," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37, no. 3 (2011): 408–36.

⁴³ John L. Wright, "Mussolini, Libya, and the Sword of Islam," in *Italian Colonialism*, ed. Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). On the legendary sword of the Prophet, see: David Geoffrey Alexander, "Dhu L-Fakar (Sacred Sword, Muhammad, Islam)" (PhD diss., New York University, 1983).

⁴⁴ Silvia Bruzzi, *Islam and Gender in Colonial Northeast Africa: Sittī 'Alawiyya, the Uncrowned Queen*, Islam in Africa 21 (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 182–83. On Italian racial policies in the colonies, see: Nicola Labanca, "Il razzismo coloniale italiano," in *Nel nome della razza: Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870–1945*, ed. Alberto Burgio (Il Mulino, 1999).

⁴⁵ On this concept, see: Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Terence Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa," in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-Century Africa*, ed. Terence Ranger and Olufemi Vaughan (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

concessions from this new government through both the localization and importation of Fascist power ideology.

Amended below is my annotated translation of the text, primarily from the original Italian (with references to the published Amharic where relevant), followed by a transcription of the Italian original, together with the published sermon as well as the original pre-print memos.⁴⁶ That said, it should be noted that the Italian version that I translated is itself also a literary translation; ideally it should be read alongside the Amharic original. To aid the reader, I have glossed in the apparatus several omissions in the Italian translation of key phrases which are present in the original Amharic. Finally, it should be noted that although the sermon's original Amharic language text carries the most historical weight, the Italian translation is broadly accurate. It was, after all, the work of Gavino Gabriel, an accomplished ethnomusicologist specializing in liturgical chant who studied Ethiopian languages extensively.⁴⁷

Preface

"S/S 0012

June 14, 1941

Governor of Eritrea
Director of Personnel and AA. GG.
Study Section
Editorial for publication in *Il Corriere Eritreo*

ASMARA

"The Ge'ez text of the address of the clergy of Aksum to the orthodox peoples of Ethiopia is to be published in tomorrow's edition . . ."

- the head of the studies section, Prof. Gavino Gabriel

"On a very recent visit by the Royal Government Commissioner of Western Tigray to the monastery of Maryam Səyon in the holy city of Aksum—Ethiopia's holiest place—there arose a great demonstration of fealty to Italy on the part of the highly influential clergy who had learned of the declaration of war on England and France.

⁴⁶ Having formally studied only Gə'əz (Classical Ethiopic), my engagement with the Amharic original here is admittedly limited. My knowledge of the written language here is indebted to the text's use of mutually intelligible phrases and loan words—which, as a clerical text, make a large part of it directly visible.

⁴⁷ Gavino Gabriel, like several other academics in fascist Italy, worked on behalf of the colonial regime. Isabella Abbonizio, "Gli anni africani di Gavino Gabriel," in *Musica e identità nel Novecento italiano: il caso di Gavino Gabriel*, ed. Susanna Pasticci (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2018).

After reading [their address], the priests' prayers for our armies' victory was chanted in the local manner.

NB: the Commander of the Northern Exchequer wants the [positive] attitude of the clergy of Aksum to be properly emphasized.

Text of the Address of the Holiest City of Ethiopian Christians for the Italian Victory [in World War Two]

⁴⁸ ንጉሠ:ነገሥት:ቁሳር:አማኑኤል See the use of divinely ordained kingship by Ethiopia's late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century monarchs: Crummey, "Imperial Legitimacy," 16–36. See also: Denis Nosnitsin, "Nəburä Əd," in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007).

⁴⁹ Note the literal transcription of Caesar in the Amharic source text, as noted above. This, I strongly suspect, is a propagandistic embellishment, perhaps added at the request of the Italian government, since the Ethiopian clergy would have had no little need to articulate this particular facet of Italian Fascist ideology, especially when trying to engage the local populace. On Mussolini's use of the imperial Roman past, see Wyke, "Sawdust Caesar."

⁵⁰ This is perhaps a reference to the immediate disbursement of food by the Italians following their invasion of Tigray.

⁵¹This is adapted from the Go'əz (Classical Ethiopic) version of the Lord's Prayer, ኢየሱስ፡ሁለ፡ጊዜ፡ልመናዎን፡ወደ፡እግዚአብሔር፡ታቀርበለኝ

8

the Virgin,⁵³ and our crosses⁵⁴ in prayer. May God empower our sovereign and his peoples to virtue and triumph. It is for our king and for his kingdom that we raise our utmost prayers to God so that they will succeed in virtue and triumph. It is to our sovereign and his kingdom that we pray to God in the words of the prophet David: May the Lord God place into your hands the scepter of strength and total victory; may you annihilate them and reign over them.⁵⁵ May the Lord protect you as you protect us. May the Lord God be always near you, in your departures and arrivals from this moment and forever. Amen. Praise the Lord.

Composed in the great city of Aksum, on the 4th of the month of Sane [Ethiopian Calendar Date] our year of favor 1932 (11 June 1940. XVIII)

Italian Original

(fig. 1) “S/S 0012

14/VI 40

XVIII
GOVERNO DELL’ERITREA
Direzione del Personale e AA. GG.
SEZIONE STUDI

REDAZIONE DEL *CORRIERE ERITREO*

ASMARA

1 1 Testo gheez dell’indirizzo del clero di Axum alle popolazioni cristiane d’Etiopia per pubblicarlo nella edizione di domani, 15 c.m. e. appena copiato, restituire a questo Ufficio.”

IL CAPO SEZIONE STUDI, Prof. Gavino GABRIEL

(fig. 2)

“Una recentissima visita del R. Commissario di Governo del Tigray Occidentale al Convento di Mariam Tzion nella città santa di Axum – massimo centro religioso dell’Etiopia – ha dato lungo a una grandiosa dimostrazione di lealtà verso l’Italia da parte di quel clero influentissimo che era venuto a conoscenza della dichiarazione di guerra all’Inghilterra e alla Francia.

Indossati i sacri paramenti ed esposto il Tesoro del convento, alla presenza dei notabili e delle popolazioni accorse d’ogni parte, tutti i Sacerdoti si raccolsero attorno al Priore il quale dette solenne lettura dell’indirizzo seguente:

.....

Altar in the Ethiopian Church: History, Forms and Meanings,” in *Inquiries Into Eastern Christian Worship: Selected Papers of the Second International Congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Rome, 17-21 September 2008*, ed. Bert Groen et al., Eastern Christian Studies 12 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012).

⁵³ Icons of the Virgin were often processed, along with other liturgical paraphernalia, in response to crises such as declarations of war. See Marilyn Heldman, “St. Luke as Painter: Post-Byzantine Icons in Early-Sixteenth-Century Ethiopia,” *Gesta* 44, no. 2 (2005): 125–48.

⁵⁴ These crosses are large processional staff crosses meant to be seen from afar.

⁵⁵ This statement appears to be derived from Psalm 110 in the Gə’əz Old Testament.

Dopo la lettura furono intonati, secondo il costume, le preghiere per la vittoria delle nostre armi.

Il R. Commissario ha ringraziato il potente Clero di Axum per tale atto di lealtà e ha rassicurato le popolazioni sulla vicenda della guerra, che finirà col trionfo dell'Italia la quale combatte sotto il segno della giustizia, e le ha invitate—usando la nota formula etiopica—a non temere sconvolgimenti a loro danno da questa guerra, esortando i contadini a lavorar la terra e i commercianti a continuare tranquilli nei loro traffici.

L'Ecc. il Comandante lo Scacchiere Nord desidera che l'atteggiamento del clero di Axum venga opportunamente sottolineato.

D'ordine della ECC. Mosconi
(Prof. Gavino Gabriel) ”

(figs. 3 and 4)

“INDIRIZZO DELLA CITTÀ SANTA ALLA CRISTIANITÀ ETIOPICA PER LA VITTORIA ITALIANA

Che sia benedetto il nostro Iddio d'Israele che ci fu benigno, che fece opera di redenzione verso il suo popolo e che volle elevarlo secondo il vaticinio dei suoi forti figli, col dare lo scettro a Vittorio Emanuele, rampollo ed erede degli immortali Cesari di Roma e baluardo nostro contro ogni nostro nemico e contro quanti vorranno attentare alla nostra esistenza. E siccome dal giorno in cui il governo di sua Maestà Imperiale pose piede su questa terra fino a oggi ogni cosa sta procedendo ottimamente e in conformità dei suoi nobili propositi, per questo motivo non resta al popolo d'Etiopia se non l'innalzare incessanti inni a Dio, dicendo: RIDUCI O DIO, AL NOSTRO SOVRANO I SUOI NEMICI SOTTO I SUOI PIEDI: TUTELA E CONSERVA LUI, IL NOSTRO SOVRANO E IL SUO ESERCITO.

Il Capitolo della chiesa di Axum si unisce in questo giorno a tutti i Capi e alla popolazione, ai grandi e ai piccoli, indistintamente: e tutti, fusi in un solo spirito e in un solo voto, mediante la esposizione del TABOT, delle Immagini di Maria Vergine e della Croce, innalziamo fervide preci a Dio perché al nostro Sovrano e alla Sua Gente dia il dono della virtù e del trionfo. Per il nostro sovrano e per il Suo Regno innalziamo preghiere a Dio con le parole stesse del Profeta Davide dicendo: CHE IL SIGNORE IDDIO PONGA NELLE TUE MANI LO SCETTRO DELLA FORZA E LA PIENA VITTORIA, SÌ DA POTER RIDURRE I TUOI NEMICI E REGNARE SU DI LORO. CHE IL SIGNORE ASSECONDI LE TUE INTENZIONI IN CUI SICURAMENTE CONSISTE IL NOSTRO BENESSERE. CHE IL SIGNORE IDDIO TI SIA SEMPRE VICINO E UNITO NELLE TUE PARTENZE E NEI TUOI ARRIVI DA QUESTO MOMENTO E NEI SECOLI DEI SECOLI. COSÌ SIA. PATER NOSTER.

Redatto nella grande città di Axum, in data 4 del mese di senè dell'anno di Grazia 1932 (11 giugno 1940. XVIII).”

(figs. 4 and 5)

ይታባረክ፡እግዚአብሔር፡አምላክ፡እስራኤል፡ዘተሣሃለነ፡ወገብረ፤መድኃኒተ፡ለሕዝብ፡ዚአሁ፡አንስኦ፡ለነ፡ቀርነ፡መድኃኒትነ፡እማኑ
ኤልሃ፡እምልተ፡ቈሣ[C]፡ገብሩ፡ሀስመ፡ነበበ፡በአፌ፡መኃንንቲሁ፡ኃያላን፡እለ፡አምዓለም፡ከመ፡ይድኅነነ፡እምእደ፡ፀርነ፡ወሰሥዕደ፡
ኩሎሙ፡እለ፡ይጸልኡነ፡ኃያል፡ግርማዊ፡መንግሥተ፡ኢጣልያ፡ወደ፡ኢትዮጵያ]፡ከመጣ፡ጀምሮ፡እስተ፡ዛሬ፡ድረስ፡መልካም፡እን
ጂ፡ክፋ፡ነገር፡አሳገኘችምና፡በሰላም፡በጤናስለ፡ኖረች፡እግርር፡ፀሮ፡ታሕተ፡እገሪሁ፡እቀብ፡ንግሦ፡ወስራዊቶ፡ለንጉሠ፡ነገሥት፡ቄሳር
፡አማኑኤል፤ኢያለች፡ሁለ፡ጊዜ፡ልመናዋን፡ወደ፡እግዚአብሔር፡ታቀርበለኝ፤ዛሬም፡ያክሱም፡ጽዮን፡ማሕባርና፡መኃንንት፡ሕዝብ፡
ሁሉ፡ትልቁም፡ትንሹም፡ተሰብስበን፤ታቦት፡ተሸከመን፡ስእለ፡ማርያምና፡መስቀል፡ይዘን፡ለኃያሉ፡ግርማዊ፡የኢጣልያ፡መንግሥተ፡
ኃይል፡መዊእ፡ስጥልን፡ኢያልን፤ሌትና፡ቀን፡ኢያለቀሰን፡ብርቱ፡ምሕላና፡ጸሎት፡ይዘናል፡በትረ፡ኃይል፡ይፌኑ፡ለከ፡እግዚአብሔር፡
እምጽዮን፡ወንትፌሣህ፡በአድኅኖትከ፡እግዚአብሔር፡ይእቀብከ፡በንግደትከ፡ወበእትወትከ፡እምይእዜ፡ወእሰከ፡ለዓለም፡አሜን፡አ
ቡነ፡በዘሰማያት።

፲፱፻፴፩፡ዓመተ፡ምሕረት፡ሰኔ፡፬፡ጻፈ፡በአክሱም፡ዓባይ፡ሀገር።⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ I have glossed typos in the printed Amharic in brackets for my transcribed text. These errors are modifications of the Amharic ligatures resulting from the poor quality of the printed text in the colonial newspaper.

Appendix

Fig. 1.

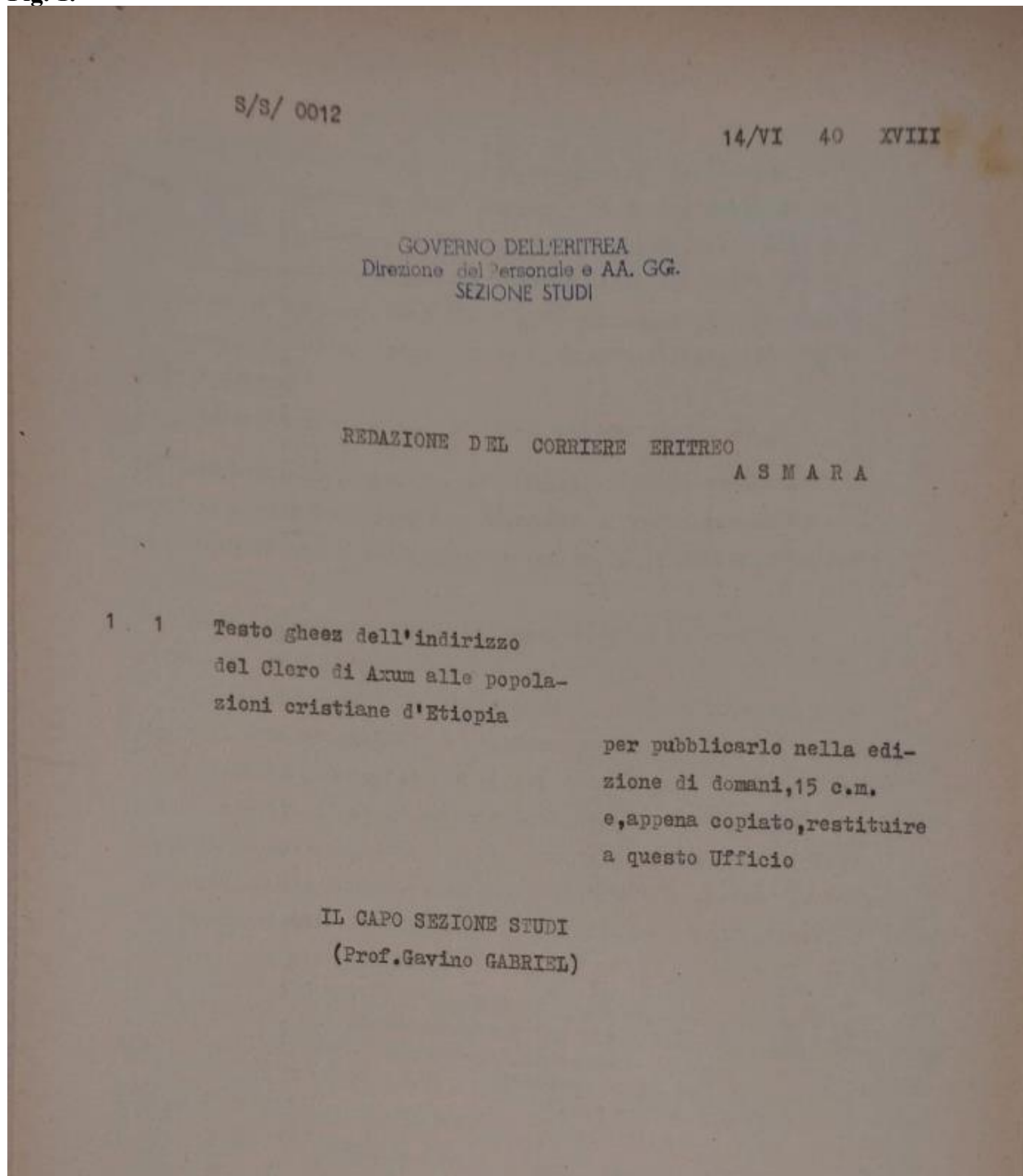


Fig. 2.

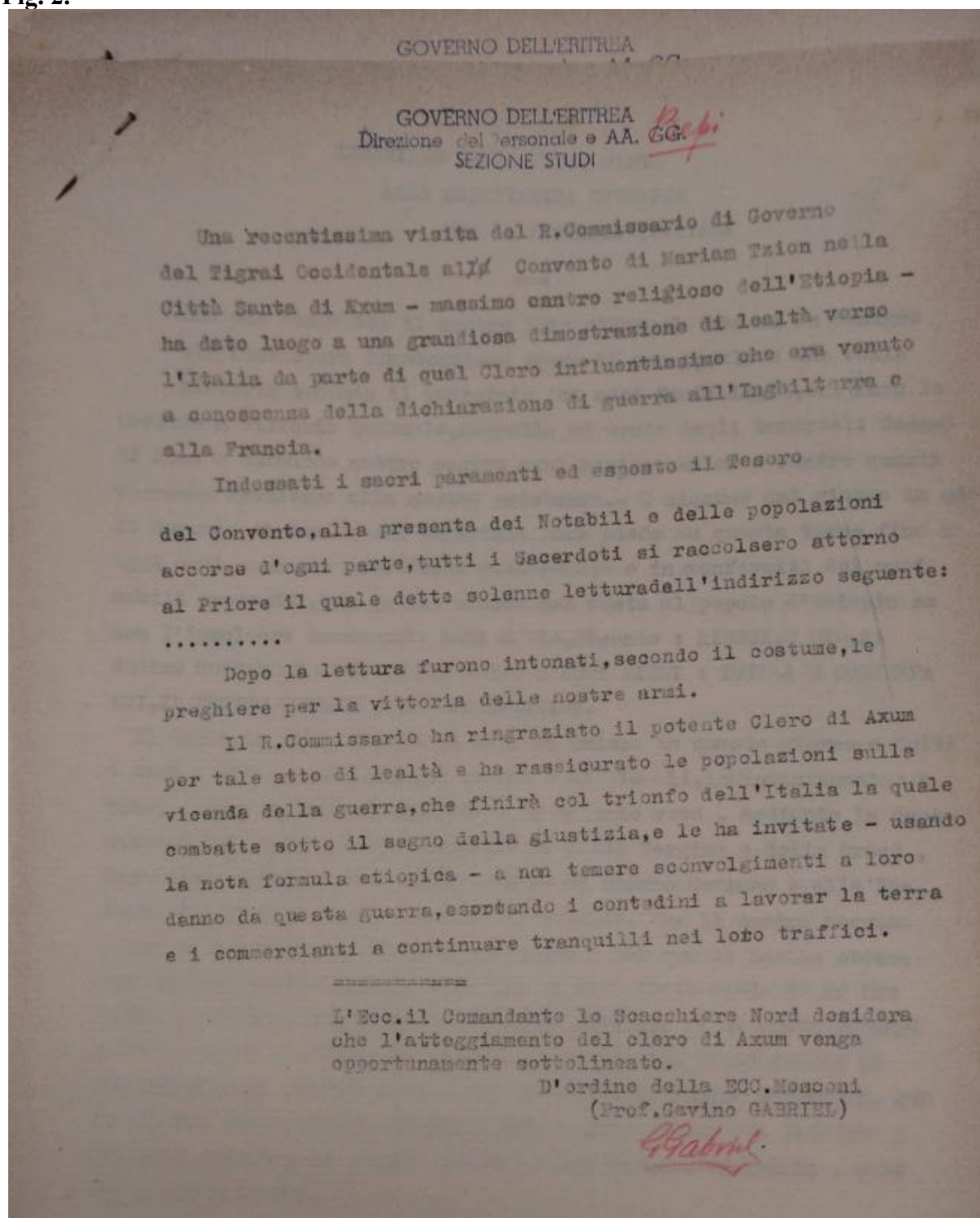


Fig. 3.

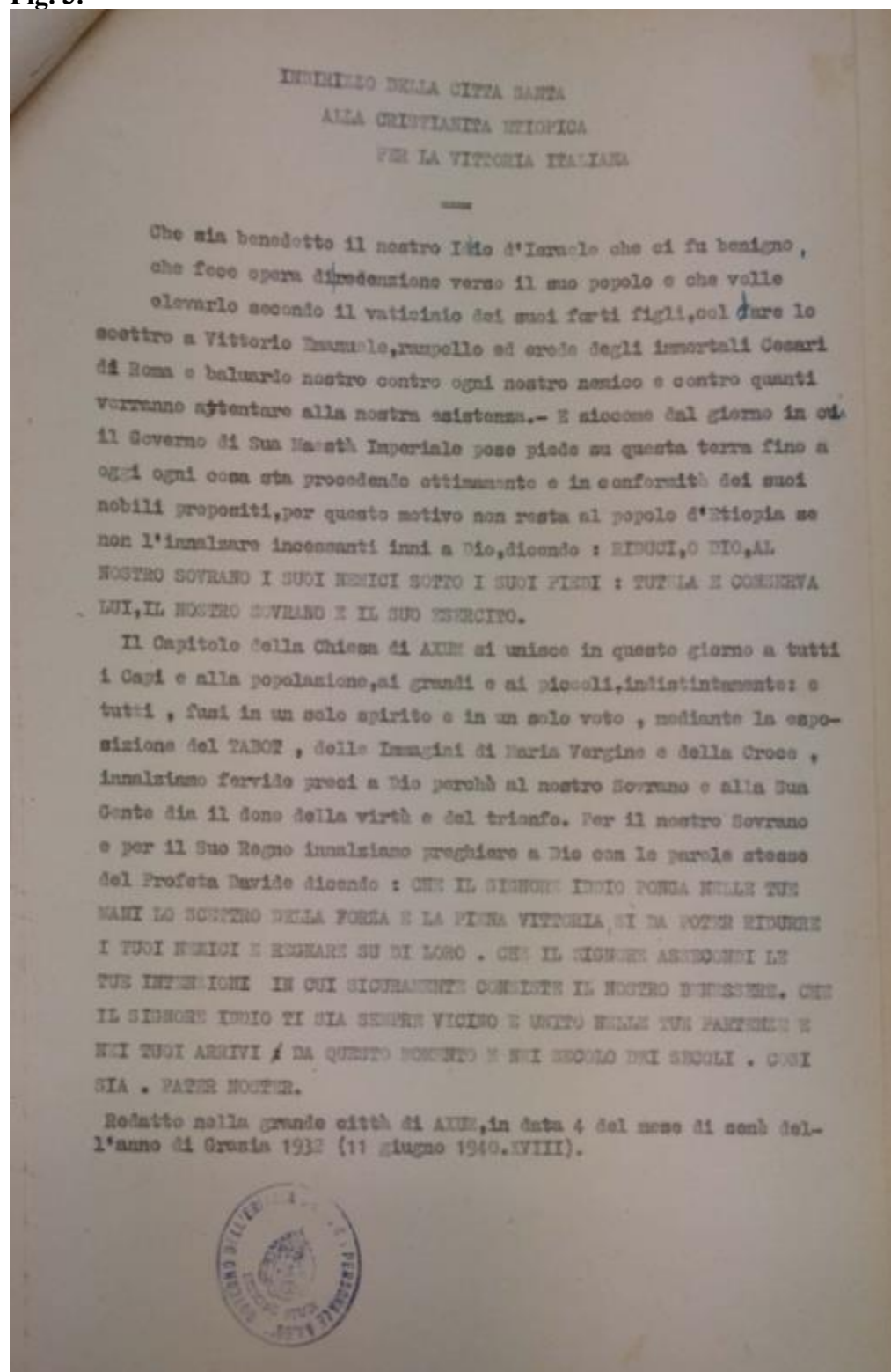


Fig. 5.

quasi somministra a favore del personale addetto e per il quale devono essere richieste le carte personali di razionamento.

bar, ristoranti, alberghi, che di bevande, pasticceria, è fatto assoluto divieto dare i generi razionati all'incorporati nei dolciumi, e, bevande ad essi sommate.

12. — Per la prima appone del razionamento, al ti è consentito di effettuare cessioni al dettaglio agli all che ne facciano richiesta e che esibiscano il nulla del Comando della R. di Finanza del luogo, R. Residente della circoscrizione se nel luogo non vi sia do di R. G. di Finanza, senza la presentazione di tagliandi ritirati ai clienti, detto al comma 4, dell'articolo precedente. cessioni non possono superare ciascun cliente la massima di dieci quintuplicati così ceduti sono dati in subconsegna assista al rivenditore, il assume l'obbligo di docu- in qualsiasi momento corrispondenti tagliandi parte di razionamento i attivi mancanti a com- il deposito stesso.

autorità di cui al primo so del presente articolo esono dare il nulla osta sioni a commercianti entrata in vigore del ramento risultino detentori ate nazionali.

13. — I possessori delle li razionamento che de- o acquistare generi ra- hanno facoltà di effet- gli acquisti in qualsiasi dell'A. O. I. e presso il ante da essi preferito. arte devono essere pre- con i tagliandi attac- distacco sarà fatto dal re ed alla presenza del- ente.

liandi annessi alle carte namento sono validi dal 25 del mese precedente il giorno 5 del successi- uello in essi indicato a

li tagliandi, devono es- gruppi in ordine nu- a cura dei dettagliandi oltre il giorno 10 di cia- se, presentati ai fornir- rossisti dai quali ebbero razionati in deposito o i desiderino rifornirsi.

go di ciascun tagliando si venire apposto un indicante la ditta che staccarlo dalla carta di nio e la data in cui uata la vendita.

sisti devono conservare tagliandi, come pure altre autorizzazioni rinde documentare quap lestine dalle autorità ti, la legalità delle ces etuate.

andi devono essere te- gruppi per ditta di za e per mese.

— I ristoratori, i bar, ghi, le pasticcerie, le di bevande e simili siderati depositari dei di di zucchero e di o- assegnati a norma de- il 10 e non possono di- he nella misura più e, e per gli scopi per, i ono concessi.

Essi hanno facoltà di rifiutare la cessione a chiunque esibisca la documentazione del diritto all'acquisto e ne paghi

quello della sua pubblicazione nel giornale del Governo Generale dell'A. O. I. Addis Abeba, il 1. giugno 1940. F.to: AMEDEO DI SAVOIA

Per le eventuali richieste di affitto rivolgersi alla Segreteria Municipale (Ufficio Contratti) durante le ore di ufficio.

napace portava direttive dell'Ispetto Angelo Tutti La mattina di buon'ora il carne accompagnato Vitolo eseguiva singoli Gruppi po to della prepara di soccorso, dell vero e di quant delle funzioni de ne civile.

Nella mattinata dal Segretario camerata Meni l'Eccellenza Frus sentava gli omag re del P.N.F. per lo Tuttoilmond interprete vers Frusci della sim micie nere verso po di questo im

Il camerata M gretario Federal nuovamente alla rio Emanuele » dei Duce, veni alle donne e al ed altri regali.

Ieri mattina i napace col Seg si portava a Ma la sede di quel i trattati i proble danti la mobili

L'Ispettore de bilizzazione civil ripartito stamari beba.

Disciplina autopu

Il Podestà, a zioni del R. che da oggi libera circolazione delle macchine mane sospesa, stinati turni e giorni ciascuno

Pertanto, l'obline autorizza trovandosi aff la sede munic gli interessati il Comando V zazioni relative

Il clero della città santa di Axum in una imponente dimostrazione di lealtà vaticina la vittoria delle Armi d'Italia

Una recentissima visita del R. Commissariato di Governo del Tigray occidentale al Convento di Mariam Tzlon nella Città Santa di Axum — massimo centro religioso dell'Etiopia — ha dato luogo a una grandiosa dimostrazione di lealtà verso l'Italia da parte di quel clero influentissimo che era venuto a conoscenza della dichiarazione di guerra all'Inghilterra e alla Francia.

Indossati i sacri paramenti ed esposto il tesoro del Convento, alla presenza dei notabili e delle popolazioni accorse d'ogni parte, tutti i sacerdoti si raccolsero attorno al Priore il quale dette solenne lettura dell'indirizzo seguente:

« Che sia benedetto il nostro Iddio d'Israele che ci fu benigno, che fece opera di redenzione verso il suo popolo e che volle elevarlo secondo il vaticinio dei suoi forti figli, col dare lo scettro a Vittorio Emanuele, rampollo ed erede degli immortali Cesari di Roma, e baluardo nostro contro ogni nostro nemico e contro quanti vorranno attentare alla nostra esistenza.

« E siccome dal giorno in cui il Governo di Sua Maestà Imperiale pose piede su questa terra fino a oggi, ogni cosa sta procedendo ottimamente e in conformità dei suoi nobili propositi, per questo motivo non resta al popolo d'Etiopia se non l'innalzare incessanti inni a Dio, dicendo: Riduci, o Dio, al nostro Sovrano i Suoi nemici sotto i Suoi piedi: tutela e conserva Lui, il nostro Sovrano e il Suo Esercito.

Il Capitolo della Chiesa di Axum si unisce in questo giorno a tutti i Capi e alla popolazione, ai grandi e ai piccoli, indistintamente: e tutti, fusi in un solo spirito e in un solo voto, mediante la esposizione del Tabot, delle immagini di Maria Vergine e della Croce, innalziamo fervide preci a Dio perché al nostro Sovrano e alla Sua gente dia il dono della virtù e del trionfo.

Per il nostro Sovrano e per il Suo Regno innalziamo pre-

ghiere a Dio con le parole stesse del Profeta Davide dicendo:

« Che il Signore Iddio ponga nelle Tue mani lo scettro della forza e la piena vittoria si da poter ridurre i Tuo nemici e regnare su di loro. Che il Signore assecondi le Tue intenzioni in cui sicuramente consiste il nostro benessere. Che il Signore Iddio Ti sia sempre vicino e unito nelle Tue partenze e nei Tuo arrivi. Da questo momento e nei secoli dei secoli. Così sia. Pater noster.

Redatto nella grande città di Axum, in data 4 del mese di Asse del l'anno di grazia 1932 (11 giugno 1940-XVIII).

ይትባረክ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ አምላክ፡ አብራሐ፡ ዘተሣሃለ፡ ወገብረ፡ መድኃኒት፡ ለሕዝብ፡ ዚአቡ፡ አንስኦ፡ ለ፡ ቀርብ፡ መድኃኒት፡ አማኑኤል፡ አምላክ፡ ቄሣር፡ ገብሩ፡ በስመ፡ ነባብ፡ በአፈ፡ መኳንን ጊዮ፡ ኃያላን፡ እለ፡ እምሳለም፡ ከመ፡ ይደላኝ፡ አምላክ፡ ዐርብ፡ ወዕምዕደ፡ ከሎሎ፡ እለ፡ ይጸልኩ፡ ኃያል፡ ግርማዊ፡ መንግሥተ፡ ኢጣልያ፡ ወደ፡ ኢትዮጵያ፡ ከመጣ፡ ጀምሮ፡ እስተ፡ ዛሬ፡ ድረስ፡ መልካም፡ እንኚ፡ ክፉ፡ ነገር፡ አላገኘችምና፡ በሰላም፡ በቤናባለ፡ ኖረች፡ እግርር፡ ዐር፡ ታሕተ፡ እገሪሁ፡ እቀብ፡ ንግሦ፡ ወስፈዋቸ፡ ለንጉሠ፡ ነገሥት፡ ቂርብ፡ አማኑኤል፡ ኢያላች፡ ሁለ፡ ጊዚ፡ ልመናዋን፡ ወደ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ ታቀርባለች፡ ዛሬም፡ ያክሱም፡ ጽዮን፡ ማሕበርና፡ መኳንንት፡ ሕዝብ፡ ሁሉ፡ ትልቁ ግርማና፡ መስቀል፡ ይዘን፡ ለኃያል፡ ግርማዊ፡ የኢጣልያ፡ መንግሥተ፡ ኃያል፡ መዋሪ፡ ስጥልን፡ ኢያልን፡ ሌትና፡ ቀን፡ ኢያለቀሰን፡ ብርቱ፡ ምሕላና፡ ጸሎት፡ ይዘናል፡ በትረ፡ ኃያል፡ ይፈራ፡ ለክ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ እምጽዮን፡ ወትኬንን፡ በማእከለ፡ ጸላእትክ፡ የሃብክ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ ዘከመ፡ ልብክ፡ ወይፈጽም፡ ለክ፡ ከሎ፡ ስምረትክ፡ ወንትፈላሃህ፡ በአድግኖትክ፡ አግዚአብሔር፡ ይለቀብክ፡ በንግደትክ፡ ወበእትወትክ፡ እምደክዚ፡ ወክስክ፡ ለኃያልም፡ አሜን፡ አብ፡ በዘሰማያት፡

እዚህ፡ ዓመተ፡ ምሕረት፡ ሰኔ፡ ፬፡ ቀን፡ ተጽፈ፡ በአክሱም፡ ዓባይ፡ ሀገር፡

Piccole grandi cose

Al mercato. Verdura poca e prezzi extra calmieri. Un chilo di pomodori lire tre e cinquan-

Invito a congiunti di richiamati

Il Podestà del Municipio di Asmara avverte le sottoelencate

