

GABRA MANFAS QEDDUS

Probably because Abuna Gabra Manfas Qeddus (Servant of the Holy Spirit) does not belong to the early period of the Ethiopian [church](#) and because his hagiographer knew very little about his patron, some scholars have wondered if the saint could have been a European. But there is no evidence supporting such a hypothesis.

According to tradition, Abuna Gabra Manfas Qeddus went to Ethiopia from a monastery in a district of Lower Egypt called Nehisa. The time of his arrival is not certain, but there are some sources that indicate that he died in 1382.

Abuna Gabra Manfas Qeddus can truly be called the saint of the people, a man who probably never visited the courts of any of the political or spiritual leaders of the country. He taught in the area of Medra Kabd and Zeqwala (in Shewa), about 28 miles (45 km) south of Addis Ababa, and died there. He is popularly known as a saint who had the miraculous power to split a cliff in two as one would split a stem of a grass. The exaggerated events in his life preserved in his acts could indicate that he was then, as he is now, highly popular among the [ordinary](#) people.

The name of the saint's family is preserved as Semon and Aqleseya, which could be Egyptian. His native name is not preserved. He is reported to have grown up in a monastery from the time he was three years old. Either there was some real reason for this or, as the hagiographer hints, it was just an imitation of the tradition about the lives of the Blessed Virgin and the prophet Samuel.

The saint started a harsh ascetic life at an early age. The [Lord](#) covered him with hair when he refused to protect himself from cold with clothes. His dark beard became an added cover to his body, especially when he celebrated the mass. His main prayer was to see and hear God himself, and to have those who were in judgment resurrected and pardoned

before the Last Judgment.

When Abuna Gabra Manfas Qeddus came to Ethiopia, he found the physical environment of Medra Kabd very agreeable. He praised God quoting Matthew 11:25: “I thank thee, O Father, [Lord](#) of [heaven](#) and earth, because thou hast hid these things [i.e., Ethiopia] from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes [i.e., himself].” The first people he met in Ethiopia in the wilderness of Medra Kabd were the wandering hermits. Soon wild animals became his friends, and lions and leopards offered him their services, especially to carry him around.

His evangelizing activities were supported by miracles of healing, which he performed among the people. People who heard of his healing power came to him and received his blessing, and he turned them to God. It is not very clear whether the pagans in the region where he taught were in the majority, but there were churches and several other hermits whom he met there.

On his [death](#) on 5 Maggabit (Baramhat), all who knew him in the neighborhood, including angels from [heaven](#) and the sixty lions and sixty leopards, attended his [funeral](#) and mourned him. His monastery, near the crater on the top of Mount Zeqwala, though unimpressive, is a center for pilgrims, especially on the day his [death](#) is commemorated.

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