

YOSAB I (d. c. 1559)

Yosab I must be considered the successor of Metropolitan Marqos I although this succession took place after a long vacancy of the Ethiopian episcopal throne because of complex circumstances. At the death of Abuna Marqos I (1530), [Ethiopia](#) passed through a severe crisis that had begun in 1527 with the Islamic invasion commanded by the imam Ahmad ibn Ibrahim, called al-Ghazi (the Warrior Champion) by the Muslims and Graññ (the Left-Handed One) by the Ethiopians. In 1525, Joao Bermudez, the physician of the first Portuguese mission to Ethiopia, had chosen to stay in Ethiopia at the request of Negus Lebna Dengel when the mission returned to Europe.

Ten years later in Rome, Bermudez recounted that Lebna Dengel had asked Marqos I, who was then on his deathbed, to name Bermudez as “patriarch” (i.e., metropolitan of Ethiopia. Marqos I acceded to this request by conferring all the holy orders upon Bermudez, who accepted the investiture, providing that the pope in Rome confirm it. Lebna Dengel then directed Bermudez to go first to Rome to make an act of obedience to the pope and then to Portugal, a country with which [Ethiopia](#) had relations.

According to Bermudez, Pope [Paul](#) III (1534-1549) did confirm him as metropolitan of Ethiopia. The majority of historians reject Bermudez’ story, first, because no Ethiopian metropolitan ever had the power to name his successor and, second, because no document has ever been discovered to prove this supposed elevation of Bermudez by Pope Paul III. However that may be, Bermudez did go from Rome to Lisbon, where he solicited Portuguese aid for [Ethiopia](#) in its fight against the Muslims. Thus, in 1540, Bermudez joined with the famous Portuguese military expedition to Ethiopia, which was to bring death to Graññ (21 February 1541) and put an end to the Muslim invasion.

After the departure of the Portuguese troops, Bermudez remained in

[Ethiopia](#) and asked Lebna Dengel's successor, Negus Galawdewos, to join the Catholic church. Far from acquiescing to this request, the negus hastened to ask the [Coptic patriarchate](#) for a new metropolitan, whom Bermudez sought in vain to oppose until 1556, when he was forced to return to Portugal, where he died fourteen years later.

The new metropolitan was named Yosab. His arrival is recorded by two documents of the *Liber Axumae*, as occurring in 1539 of the Ethiopian calendar (A.D. 1546-1547). However, information about this metropolitan is rather scarce in the Ethiopian documents. The so-called [Abridged Chronicle](#) does not mention him at all, whereas the chronicle of Galawdewos mentions him but once, stating that toward [Easter](#) in the eighth year of this negus's reign (1548), Yosab I blessed Galawdewos, who was departing to lead a military expedition against the pagan peoples living in the west of the country, near the frontiers of Damot. As for the *Liber Axumae*, it records Yosab's name in a confirmation act of a fief, donated in 1546 of the Ethiopian calendar (A.D. 1553-1554).

The *Liber Axumae* also records one other important fact. In 1551-1552, a [Coptic bishop](#) by the name of Petros arrived in Ethiopia. A Portuguese source confirms and adds this information: Petros was supposed to be Yosab's coadjutor and succeed him upon his death. The chronicle of Negus Minas (1559-1563) in fact confirms that Petros did succeed Yosab I. However, the date of this succession is not known and can only be approximately determined. In the *Liber Axumae*, the last document in which Yosab's name is mentioned is dated A.D. 1553-1554, while the first document naming Metropolitan Petros II dates from 1552 of the Ethiopian calendar (A.D. 1559-1560). It may be deduced thereby that Yosab I died near the end of Negus Galawdewos' reign and that the episcopal throne was immediately occupied by Petros II.

Further, it must be noted that Yosab I is also cited in the chronicle of Negus Sarsa Dengel (1563-1597), who considered him as the predecessor of metropolitan Marqos II. This, however, is probably the result of an

error on the part of the chronicler, who seems to have confused Yosab I with Petros II.

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