

Zemmaré (Hymnal) and Mäwase'et (Antiphony)
In Ge'ez, decorated manuscript on parchment with musical notation
Ethiopia, nineteenth century

125 folios on parchment, apparently complete, in gatherings of various sizes, chiefly of six or eight leaves, ruling and pricking are visible throughout, written in black with rubrics (opening lines of principal sections, major punctuation and performance instructions), in a small, reasonable räqiq hand [2 mm.] in two columns of 24-23 lines, with interlinear cantillation signs or musical notation, several leaves have been trimmed, others repaired, and one leaf is currently loose, minor rubbing and staining to some leaves. Original binding of plain wooden boards. Dimensions 190 x 150 mm.

Ethiopian manuscripts are remarkable products of a living scribal culture that has survived from the fourth century until today. Their bindings often preserve structures similar to early Christian books from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Their tradition of liturgical music is equally interesting as a living example of a system transmitted through oral teaching, with use of notation strikingly different from that used in the West. This collection of music from the liturgy of the Ethiopian church includes musical notation or cantillation marks (called *melekket* or "signs").

PROVENACE

1. Written in Ethiopia in the nineteenth century, based on the evidence of the script; there is no colophon giving the date of writing.
2. A note of ownership at the end of the *Zemmaré* portion of the text (f. 81v) has been erased and overwritten with an illegible name.
3. Two other notes of ownership (ff. 122v and 123v), seemingly added later, mention the name of Mokesh Kidana Mehrat.

TEXT

f. 1rv, [single leaf sewn upside down onto the first quire], Blank leaf used for pen trials;

ff. 2-3v, *Zemmaré*, beginning imperfectly, for Teqemt 17th;

ff. 4-81v, *Zemmaré* (Hymnal);

ff. 82-122v, *Mäwase'et* (Antiphony);

f. 123, Prayer for dispelling evil spirits or spells [copied in a different, untutored hand];

ff. 124-125, [added leaves], Part-leaf from a different manuscript.

The manuscript contains two principal liturgical texts, both musical. The *Zemmaré* (also spelled *Zimare*) or Hymnal, is a collection of hymns sung after Mass for all the feast days of the

liturgical year. Traditionally attributed to the sixth-century Saint Yared (505-571), the collection as it now stands belongs to different periods and different authors. The *Mäwase'et* or Antiphonary, is also attributed to Saint Yared, and probably does indeed date from late Aksumite times (the Aksumite empire dated from c. 100-940 AD). The *Mäwase'et* contains the choral portions of the liturgy in the form of antiphons which are inserted between psalms and canticle verses. Saint Yared is credited with inventing the sacred music tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and Ethiopia's system of musical notation (discussed below). Traditionally it was believed that he gained his musical knowledge and insight through interaction with three birds sent by God.

Christianity came to Ethiopia in the fourth century, and until the seventh century Ethiopia maintained close contact with the Coptic Church. Despite a brief period of Portuguese rule, the country remained isolated until the nineteenth century. The continuation of a living scribal culture well into the modern era make Ethiopian manuscripts a special resource for scholars interested in earlier manuscripts; its liturgical texts and music are equally important witnesses to ancient traditions.

The Ethiopian rite is one of the oldest rites. Today it is used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as well as by the group which is in full communion with the Church of Rome, the Ethiopian Catholic Church. The language used in the services is classical Ethiopian called Ge'ez. In its essential elements, it stems from the Alexandrian rite. The similarity between the Ethiopian and the Egyptian Coptic Rites stems from their common origin.

The text here is notable for the use of cantillation marks or musical notation, called in Ge'ez *melekket* or "signs," inserted between the lines of text. The system is indigenous to Ethiopia. They do not depict the melodies in any visual way, but are more a mnemonic device for recalling the chants. To read the notation properly the singer must therefore be already acquainted with the corresponding melodies. The *melekket* comprise (a) characters from the Ethiopian script, occurring either singly or in groups, (b) a small number of conventional, non-alphabetic signs, (c) numbers indicating the repetitions of the "halleluyas," and (d) marginal signs indicating related groupings of melodies. Ethiopian tradition ascribes the origin of the system to the sixth-century Saint Yared. However, copies of liturgical texts before the sixteenth century are without musical notation, and some sources mention two *diibtiiras* who codified the system following the Muslim invasions between 1529 and 1541 (Shelemay, "Melekket" in Uhlig, ed., 2003-2014). Manuscripts containing *melekket* are uncommon in private hands.

Ethiopian manuscripts, even those of a relatively late date such as the present example, are marvelous because their binding structures survive as archetypes of early Christian, specifically Coptic, codices from the fourth to seventh centuries (Szirmai, 1999, pp. 45-50).

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