

Tä'ammərä Maryam (Miracles of Mary)
In Ge'ez, illuminated manuscript on parchment
Ethiopia, c.1700-1730

201 folios on parchment, (collation: i¹⁰ [9, a stub] ii-iii¹⁰ iv¹² [4 and 8 stubs] v-vi¹⁰ viii¹² [2 a stub, 11 a single column of text] viii¹⁰ [3 and 7 stubs] ix-xix¹⁰ xx¹² [5 a stub] xxi⁶⁷ [probably originally a quire of 6, 2, a stub, lacking end]), prickings survive throughout, (justification 255 x 265 mm.), written in black ink in several hands in gwell script (Uhlig's Period V) in three columns of 33 lines, opening lines, section headings, and some names (including the donor's name) in red, SEVEN FULL-PAGE PAINTINGS bound at the beginning, most protected by a muslin curtain sewn onto the vellum, probably lacking a miniature after f. 8, the final miracle, numbered 300, is incomplete and ends abruptly, f. 68 a partial leaf containing a single column of text, natural flaws to vellum, contemporary repairs, some cockling and marginal staining, the upper part of the figure on the camel on f. 4v scratched out (perhaps a demon?). CONTEMPORARY BINDING of red morocco tooled in blind, edges a little scuffed, fitted modern box.

Dimensions 320 x 365 mm.

Ethiopia is home to a remarkable Christian tradition dating back at least to the fourth century, with an active scribal culture that has continued into modern times. From the Middle Ages until today, the cult of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, has played an important part of the Christian religious tradition in Ethiopia; the text and illumination in our manuscript are splendid witnesses to the Virgin's cult. This large, sumptuous, illuminated manuscript preserves one of the most popular devotional Ethiopian texts; it represents a rare opportunity to acquire an exceptional example of the art of the Second Gondarine style.

PROVENANCE

1. The manuscript does not have a colophon, but the script, which is datable to Uhlig's Period V (mid seventeenth-first half of the eighteenth century), displays a number of features which when taken together with the style of the illumination, indicate a date in the first three decades of the eighteenth century, c.1700-1730. Invocations for blessings at the end of each miracle, as well as in the introduction to some of the miracles, contain the names of a certain Gälasyos (or Gälaséwos), and Abunä Oryarés, the title 'Abunä' here referring to a senior cleric and not the head of the Ethiopian Church. The name Oryarés occurs with greater frequency in the first third of the manuscript. Both names appear to have been inserted at the time of composition. On f. 69v, at the end of Miracle no. 64, the name T'a'emä Krestos has been inserted in the closing invocation.
2. London, Sam Fogg, 1999.

TEXT

ff. 1-3, Blank; ff. 3v-9v, full-page miniatures (see subjects below);

ff. 10-11, Preamble to the Miracles of Mary, known as the Mäs'hafä Ser'at, beginning: 'In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. One God. Amen. This is the book which issued from the See of Mark the Apostle, from the place of Mä'alqa in Egypt, and which

the teachers of the Christian Church, the reverend archbishops, learned in mysteries and righteous of faith, compiled and which Our Lady Mary dictated to them’;

ff. 11rv, A sälam to the Virgin Mary, in a different hand;

ff. 12-199v, Miracles of Mary (the last miracle, numbered 300, is incomplete); [ff. 200-201, blank].

There are 306 miracles in the present manuscript, although the numbering in the text identifies only 300. There are seven unnumbered miracles at ff. 92-95, identified with a red line framing the text: there is no obvious textual or thematic reason for this. The sequence also omits number 108.

The original “anon’ contained thirty-three miracles, but even before the growth of the cult of the Virgin Mary in Ethiopia in the fifteenth century, numerous additions had been made to the Arabic Vorlage of the Ethiopian text. The largest known collection is British Library Or. 643, dated 1717, and containing 316 miracles-only 10 more than the present text. Smaller collections are more common both in institutions and on the market. The essential reference book on the Ethiopian Cerculli, 1943; see also Budge, 1900 and 1933. In addition, the Online Database, hosted at Princeton University, PEMM, aims to be a comprehensive resource for the one-thousand plus miracle stories written about the Virgin Mary, and the more than 2,500 images of the Virgin illustrating the texts between 1300 and the present (Online Resources).

ILLUSTRATION

The seven full-page paintings are a splendid example of the Second Gondarine style. The reigns of Tekle Haymanot I (1706-8) and later successor Dawit (1716-21) marked a key moment in the development of Ethiopian art, when the First Gondarine style of the seventeenth century was gradually replaced by the court painting style that dominated throughout the eighteenth century. This moment of transition is evident in the present manuscript: we see a marked departure from the earlier style related to icon painting, and a synthesizing of new ideas of surface and space. Though not quite as refined, the style is reminiscent of that of the *Miracles of Mary* commissioned by King Tekle Haymanot I, later in the collections of William Randolph Hearst and Otto Schaefer, which was reproduced in a monumental facsimile in 1900 (Budge, 1900; Art of Ethiopia, Sam Fogg, 2004, cat. 43). Each painting is framed in a double red line and is described by an accompanying text placed in the margin above or within the painting itself. Most of the paintings contain two or, in one instance, three, distinct scenes represented in panels, one above the other.

The subjects of the full-page paintings are as follows:

f. 3v, The Flight into Egypt;

f. 4v, Three panels with Saints Theodore the Oriental and George; Theodore, Claudius and Mercurius; and a tent, figures and a camel;

f. 5, Two panels with Mary appearing in glory at Mt. Mitmaq; and the donor Gälasyos prostrating himself before a group of clerics (däbtära);

f. 6: Two panels with Mary, seated, presenting a book and a garment to Dexius; and Dexius writing, while an angel hovers over him with a drawn sword;

f. 7, Two panels with Mary appearing before the sleeping Caliph; and the Caliph and his scribe, with the Holy Spirit hovering above;

f. 8, Two panels with a dove bearing a scroll landing before the Caliph’s officers who stand outside a tent; and three scenes each identified by text i) the Caliph’s officer who was commanded to demolish the churches; ii) the priest John sending a messenger to the Caliph’s

officer; iii) the Virgin Mary assisting the priest John in preventing the churches from being demolished;

f. 9, Two panels with the Bishops Theophilus and Timothy writing about the Miracles under the Virgin Mary's direction; and Abba Antonius writing.

Ethiopia is home to a remarkable Christian tradition dating back at least to the fourth century. Until the seventh century Ethiopia maintained close contact with the Coptic Church; after the Islamic conquest of Egypt in the 640s, the Orthodox church of Ethiopia developed largely in isolation. Medievalists and historians of the book are particularly interested in Ethiopian manuscripts, since an active scribal culture was preserved there well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

From the Middle Ages until today, the cult of the Virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus, has played an important part of the Christian religious tradition in Ethiopia. The "Miracles of Mary," the texts included in our manuscript, is one of the most frequently copied Ethiopian Christian texts, surviving in tens of thousands of copies (PEMM, Online Resources). Manuscripts of this text, or more properly, this collection of texts, vary greatly in the number of stories they include (from three to over three hundred). The origin of this collection begins in the fourteenth century; in 1400, King Dawit II (r. c.1380-1413) commissioned an illuminated copy of the "Miracles of Mary," with twelve portraits of the Virgin. From that point, the corpus continued to grow, telling tales to illustrate the power and mercy of the Virgin, helping emperors during battles, saving people from hell, healing the sick, protecting the innocent and more, and becoming a central part of Ethiopian culture and religion.

LITERATURE

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ONLINE RESOURCES

"PEMM: Princeton Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Egyptian Miracles of Mary Project"

<https://pemm.princeton.edu/en-us>

Wendy Laura Belcher, Jeremy R. Brown, Mehari Worku, Dawit Muluneh, and Evgeniia Lambrinaki, "The African Library of Stories about the Virgin Mary"

<https://pemm.princeton.edu/en-us/research/research-and-lessons/15>