

Introduction to the Collection

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Some might be tempted to ignore the Mekane Yesus Seminary collection of manuscripts. After all, the manuscripts are neither plentiful nor old. But, this would be an error, because many of them are both important and interesting.

MYS 1 contains the largest single collection of Miracles of Mary that is known to us. Further, it contains a previously unknown cycle of eighteen miracles (numbers 97-115) which we call the Zion Cycle. Ostensibly narrated by Ezra, the eighteen miracles tell the story of the tablet given to Moses and which accompanied Israel throughout its history. The tablet is called Zion and symbolizes Mary. Thus, the story of the tablet's sojourn with the people Israel is the story of Mary's sojourn with Israel. According to Professor Getatchew, this cycle is unknown in any other manuscript.

MYS 8 contains a fairly uncommon form of the Ziq chants known as the Yä-Aba Jale Ziq Chants. And in this manuscript, the scribe often identifies the source of the tradition for that particular chant. For instance, Gojjam, Gondar, Tigray and Shewa are mentioned as specific loci from which these forms of the Ziq chants came. Two other manuscripts in the collection (MYS 9 and 10) contain the more common forms of the Ziq chants.

MYS 16 contains a remarkable collection of twenty-five works including an interesting combination of known theological and liturgical works alongside a set of Asmat prayers. The latter include *Asmat Prayers* for the seven Archangels and *Asmat Prayers* of Solomon.

MYS 20 contains a set of Lectionary Readings from the Four Gospels. These have been arranged for the festivals of the church and have instructions for readings from the Psalter interspersed.

MYS 21, Antiphonary for the Whole Year, or Dägg^wa, is the manuscript which was microfilmed by the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library and given the project number 1256. According to Professor Getatchew's catalogue, it was copied by a reliable hand which made a substantial claim in the colophon (folio 201v) that it had used as its exemplar a manuscript known as Mäzgäbä Berhanä _Alām of Betä Lehem, which was owned by Qäñ Masfen Ḥayla Maryam with baptismal name Gäbrä Maryam

of Efrata in Mänzih (today Mänz). But, in Getatchew's opinion, it is most probably copied from EML 1262.

MYS 25 contains the text of the five books of the Pentateuch with marginal mnemonics for the Andemta traditional commentary. The first section of the Ethiopic Old Testament is not a Pentateuch but an Octateuch, including the books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth. There are schools where students went to memorize the huge body of traditional commentary known as the Andemta. The primary mode of transmission of this body of interpretation was memorization and oral recitation. The marginal notes in this codex represent mnemonics to prompt the memory of the one reciting the interpretation.

MYS 28 is the first of four manuscripts in the collection that were produced in or around the government scriptorium. The others are MYS 34, 39, and 51. These provide us, we believe, with more materials to identify the characteristics of the scriptorium.¹

MYS 29 contains the liturgy for the dedication of a Church. Manuscripts of this work are not very common.

MYS 33 is a fine copy of Acts and Paul (including Hebrews) from the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth century. It also contains a full introduction to each of the books.

MYS 34 is a lengthy codex containing the full text of the Missal in Gə'əz and extensive commentary in Amharic. It is a fascinating example of how the history of publishing in Ethiopia influenced the ongoing manuscript tradition. The colophon says, "This commentary of the book of missal was written in 1974 E.C by Märige(ta) Gäbrä Maryam, Wäldä Maryam of Saynt [in Wollo] and Lə'ul Wäldä Rufa'el." Its contents, however, appear to have been copied from the published edition of ትርጓሜ፡ ጸሎተ፡ ኪዳን፡, which was produced in 1918.

MYS 36 is the first of two marvelous manuscripts of the Ethiopian computus, the literary product of elaborate calculations of the movements of the astronomical bodies, useful primarily for the determination of Easter. MYS 36 was copied in the twentieth century and contains, along with the literary texts associated with this genre, a map of the earth (f. 58r) and three diagrams of the path of the Zodiac through the heavens (f. 61r).

¹ For a description of ten other manuscripts (EMIP 44, 94, 28, 30, 58, 87, 141, 145, 161, and 176) that may have been produced in the government scriptorium, see our "Introduction to the Collection and Its Codicology," in *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscript Imaging Project, Volume 2: Codices 106–200 and Magic Scrolls 135–284*, EMTS 3 (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2011) xxvii.

The other copy of the Ethiopian computus is MYS 53. Copied in the eighteenth-century, it includes charts of the orbit and windows of the stars (f. 1r), the cycle of a quarter of the year (f. 1v), and other tables and computations.

MYS 39, like MYS 16, contains a full set of Asmat Prayers of the Seven Archangels. In addition, this manuscript contains 25 fine illuminations by a very competent artist.

MYS 44 is a very rare work by Aläqa Tayye Gäbrä Maryam providing a –Theological Critique of Certain Practices of the Orthodox Church,” in Amharic. The manuscript, held in a modern two-ring binder, is fully 451 folios long.

MYS 49 contains a complete set of Andemta Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul. This manuscript serves as a complement both to MYS 33, with its text of Acts and Paul, and to MYS 25 with its Andemta on Genesis through Deuteronomy.

The collection contains fully six Gädla manuscripts, or lives and miracles of the saints. These include Gäbrä Krestos (MYS 17), Gäbrä Mämfäs Qəddus (MYS 24), Gälawədwos or Claudius (MYS 43), Saint Marqorəwos or Mercurius (MYS 45), Saint George (MYS 47), Krəstos Šämra (MYS 50)

MYS 51 provides a copy of Sword of the Trinity; MYS 52 provides a copy of the same work, but in a variant form. Folios 49v-68r of the latter include this variant form which contains, in part, Asmat prayers of the prophet Moses.

Finally, MYS 54 comprises fifty-five folios of a late-fifteenth century or early sixteenth century manuscript with more than half of the book of Jubilees. This copy of the book witnesses to a very interesting set of textual affiliations with other copies of the book of Jubilees.² In addition, the manuscript also contains most of the biblical book of Hosea and about half each of the books of Amos and Micah.

It should be clear, then, that Aläqa Meseret had a very discriminating eye in his acquisition of manuscripts and has left to us a collection remarkable for its quality of interesting manuscripts, if not for their quantity and age.

² See the study by Ted M. Erho below on –The Textual Character of Jubilees in Mekane Yesus Seminary 54.”