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Review

JUDITH S. MCKENZIE and FRANCIS WATSON, *The Garima Gospels: Early
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JUDITH S. MCKENZIE and FRANCIS WATSON, *The Garima Gospels: Early Illuminated Gospel Books from Ethiopia*, with Preface and Photographs by Michael Gervers and contributions by Matthew R. Crawford, Linda R. Macaulay, Sarah S. Norodom, Andres T. Reyes, and Miranda E. Williams, Manar al-Athar Monograph, 3 (Oxford: Manar al-Athar, 2016). xx, 264 pp., 52 plates. Price: £49.95, \$75.00. ISBN: 978-0-9954946-0-2.

This magnificent and substantial book is an important step in researching the three so-called ‘Garimā Gospels’, namely the three manuscripts of the Four Gospels preserved in the monastery of ʾĒnda ʾAbbā Garimā, nearby ʿAdwā, two of which have now been dated on the basis of carbon-14 analysis to the late antique period. These two manuscripts are considered to be among the oldest illuminated Gospels known so far, and without any doubt, belong alongside the most important monuments of the Aksumite past.

Vaguely hinted at in the 1950s by Beatrice Playne and first documented in the 1960s by Jules Leroy, who had initially stressed their connections with Syrian and Byzantine art—firmly denied in the present book in favour of an Egyptian connection—it is only thanks to the pictures taken by Donald Davies in 1968 and the reliable and detailed description by William F. Macomber in 1979 that the three manuscripts were made available to scholars, and eventually used by art historians, philologists, and palaeographers. The art historian Marilyn Heldman suggested, for some sections at least, an early dating to the sixth century, as did Claude Lepage, assigning them to the sixth century or later. The philologists and palaeographers Siegbert Uhlig and Rochus Zuurmond proposed a later dating, approximately twelfth/thirteenth century, with still others proposing earlier datings from the eighth century on.

At the time of the first discovery and until 2006 the three manuscripts (henceforth AG I, AG II, and AG III, whereby Jacques Mercier calls AG I and AG III ‘Gärima 1’ and ‘Gärima 2’ respectively) were bound in two volumes, each with two metal covers, one volume containing mainly AG I and a second volume mainly AG II and III. Leaves from each of the three manuscripts were transposed and fragments from other manuscripts were present as well. A restoration undertaken in 2006 finally separated the three manuscripts and established the presumably correct sequence of the leaves, unfortunately not without patent errors. The early dating of manuscript AG III (= Gärima 2) in a contribution by Jacques Mercier (2000) was confirmed by a new analysis carried out in 2012 on both AG I (dated to 530–660 CE) and AG III (dated to 330–650 CE) and was announced by Mercier

on the occasion of the conference Ethiopia and the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: The Garimā Gospels in Context, sponsored by the Ethiopian Heritage Fund and held in Oxford on 2–3 November 2013. Unfortunately, despite hopes and promises, the proceedings of this conference were not yet published,¹ making the appearance of the present volume all the more important and welcome.

Given the fact that the post-restoration documentation of MSS AG I and III distributed by Mercier is still subject to restrictions (even though an additional set of digital reproductions of the post-restoration manuscripts has since been acquired by the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library and made publicly available to some extent), the authors of this volume have used the photographic documentation collected by Michael Gervers from 2000 to 2005, prior to the restoration. This documentation, generously made available and published in this book with great care in the arrangement of the figures, and with wonderful full-page colour plates, wisely follows the numbering adopted by Macomber's description. However, whenever possible, the authors have made valuable suggestions and ameliorations, allowing for a better understanding and a more reliable reconstruction of the sequence of the leaves,² even though some points might still remain

¹ See the summary by A. Bausi, 'Ethiopia and the Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity: The Garimā Gospels in Context', *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter*, 7 (2014), 11–12. Two papers presented at the conference were published in the last issue of *Aethiopia*: Getatchew Haile, 'The Marginal Notes in the *Abba* Gärīma Gospels', *Aethiopia*, 19 (2016, pub. 2017), 7–26, and Mersha Alehegne, 'Orature on Literature: The Case of *Abba* Gärīma and His Gospel', *ibid.*, 52–60. One more paper has now been published, namely that of T. F. Mathews, 'The Showing of the Gospel in the Divine Liturgy', in S. Brodbeck, A. Nicolaidès, P. Pagès, B. Pitarakis, I. Rapti, and É. Yota, eds, *Mélanges: Catherine Jolivet-Lévy*, Travaux et mémoires, 20/2 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2016), 359–368.

² It is to be noted here that Getatchew Haile's attributing the additional notes to the single manuscripts (see previous footnote) has a purely descriptive value, based on the arrangement of the manuscripts following the 2006 restoration. Note that the present AG I, fol. 7r (docs 1–5) originally belonged to AG II (now displaced in AG I: fol. 2r according to Macomber's numbering); AG I, fol. 7v (docs 6–9) = AG II (displaced in AG I: fol. 2v according to Macomber's numbering); AG I, fol. 8v (docs 11–12) = AG III (displaced in AG I: fol. 1v according to Macomber's numbering); AG I, fol. 10r (doc. 13) = AG II (displaced in AG I: fol. 3v according to Macomber's numbering); AG I, fol. 10v (docs 14–15) = AG II (displaced in AG I: fol. 3r according to Macomber's numbering; in this case the 2006 restoration has unfortunately placed the leaves in the wrong order, inverting recto and verso, thus, recto and verso of the present fol. 10 should be reversed); AG II (in Getatchew Haile's terminology the second of the two old AG manuscripts, i.e. AG III =

controversial, particularly as far as the Canon Tables and illuminated leaves are concerned. One of the most important contributions concerning detail is the reliable hypothesis that the four paintings of the Evangelists all belong to AG III, and that a fifth painting represents Eusebius of Caesarea (only one example known so far, in the so-called *Mashafa tafut* and its replica in MS London, British Library, Or. 481).

Based on a detailed analysis, and against the vast background of antique, late antique, and Christian Oriental art, and on an extremely rich high-quality documentation generously offered to the reader (in 268 large figures, mostly in colour), the central thesis of the book is that the early dating of two of the three AG manuscripts is consistent with the apparently Alexandrian (i.e. Egyptian) connection in the motifs of the illuminations, but that the original Ethiopian contribution of Aksumite artists can also be demonstrated, for example in the depiction of Ethiopian birds in the Canon Tables (to which Linda Macaulay dedicates a special section of the book, ‘Additional Note: The Garima Birds’, pp. 117–120) and in some architectural details.

The book opens with useful maps and a clear ‘General Introduction’ (pp. 1–9) by Judith McKenzie which is a summary of the most important achievements of this work. The volume has three chapters. Chapter I (pp. 11–66) focuses on the manuscripts and their historical and cultural context, including a very valuable section on the history of research. Chapter II (pp. 67–144), mainly authored by McKenzie, focuses on all the art-historical questions related to the images, on the portraits of the Evangelists, on the illuminated frames, and on the origins and meanings of the buildings represented; and it is here that the aforementioned thesis of an Alexandrian connection is developed. The following section of the book consists of fifty-two full-page plates that provide a virtual reconstruction of the sequence of illustrated pages of each Four Gospels manuscript, in chronological order from the most ancient to the most recent, that is AG III (pls 1–26), AG I (pls 27–42), and AG II (pls 43–52), including the covers. Chapter III (pp. 145–209), authored by Francis Watson, deals with texts and images, the textual importance of the manuscripts, the relationship between the texts and the portraits of the Evangelists, the Canon Tables, and the dating of the Ethiopic translation of the Gospels. Even though textual aspects are not the core of this book, this section is by far the best analysis carried out so far of the Ethiopic Canon Tables and of the *tituli* (or *kephálaia*), and it also offers

Gärima 2), fol. 1 (docs 1–3) = AG III (displaced in AG I: fol. 4r; see in the volume here reviewed pl. 15).

a good overview of the main features of the Gəʿəz version of the Gospels. Watson is particularly effective in showing the tensions between the constraints of the Canon Tables frames and the text to be hosted. There are several very useful appendices: Appendix I, by a specialist of the Canon Tables, Matthew Crawford, on the foliation and content of the ʾAbbā Garimā Gospels (pp. 211–216), particularly clear in showing the collocation of the displaced leaves; Appendix II, by Watson, with the translations of a prefatory text *On the Agreement of the Four Gospels*, attributed to John Chrysostom, and of the Preface of Ps.-Ammonius (pp. 217–220); and Appendix III with an edition of Eusebius' *Letter to Carpianus*, in Greek and Gəʿəz with English translation (pp. 221–227). This latter edition is also welcome, but the text of the AG manuscripts presents some peculiarities in comparison with the vulgate text, that would seem to require some additional explanation.³ A very useful glossary of codicological and art-historical terms, prepared by Sarah Nodorom (pp. 228–231), a rich and well-structured bibliography (pp. 232–248), a long list of illustration credits (pp. 249–255) that gives an idea of the amount of material provided in this book, and a substantial index (pp. 256–264), complete the volume.

This well-edited work (very minor details will be corrected for the planned reprint and paperback edition, since the book is already sold out), full of colour figures, but also tables, summaries, drawings, and with every statement accurately justified with references to up-to-date and relevant literature, has many merits and is essential reading for anyone interested in Ethiopic manuscripts, the history of Ethiopian art and literature, more generally Ethiopian studies, as well as for all those interested in late antique and Christian Oriental art history and manuscript studies. Beyond its specific importance for many questions of detail, this book—like the Oxford 2013 conference—has the historical merit of programmatically re-locating Ethiopian studies in the world of Late Antiquity, where they rightly belong.

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³ I have provided a new edition and commented translation on the basis of a selection of the most ancient manuscripts, including the AG Gospels, which appeared too late to be considered in the volume here reviewed, although my study is mentioned in the bibliography (pp. 235–236), see A. Bausi, 'La versione etiopica della *Epistola di Eusebio a Carpiano*', in R. Zarzeczny, ed., *Aethiopia Fortitudo ejus. Studi in onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in occasione del suo 80° compleanno*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 298 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2015), 107–135.