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## Review

THOMAS C. ODEN, with CURT NICCUM, ed., *The Songs of Africa: The  
Ethiopian Canticles*

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THOMAS C. ODEN, with CURT NICCUM, ed., *The Songs of Africa: The Ethiopian Canticles*, Foreword by Alessandro Bausi (New Haven, CT: ICCS Press, 2017). 214 pp., illus. Price: \$89.95. ISBN: 978-1-62428-060-3.

The topic of this beautifully illustrated volume is not primarily the canticles in the general sense of the word, that is, not the hymns taken from biblical books other than the Book of Psalms. Rather, a wide range of aspects of liturgical singing of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church is treated, touching upon musicological, cultural, and textual aspects. The book consists of thirteen chapters, written by twelve authors, together with an Introduction (pp. 1–8) by Thomas C. Oden. As noted by Alessandro Bausi in the Foreword (pp. xi–xiii), this volume aims to reach a ‘wider and interdisciplinary audience’ (p. xi). It is the product of a project, initiated in 2013, centred around the seven Ethiopic psalter manuscripts in the collection of the Museum of the Bible in Washington DC. The book is concluded by a general Bibliography (pp. 195–206) and Index (of subjects, pp. 207–210; modern authors, pp. 210–212; ancient sources, pp. 212–214; and other writings, p. 214). Below, two of the chapters, which stand out because of their high scholarly quality, are discussed more in detail.

Going far beyond what is suggested by the title, Chapter 2 by Steve Delamarter (‘Between “Then and There” and “Here and Now”: An Introduction to the Codicology of the Museum of the Bible Ethiopic Psalters’, pp. 23–54) is an excellent and easily accessible introduction to the codicology of Ethiopic psalter manuscripts in general. The author is involved in several projects concerning Ethiopic psalters, and this article is one of the outcomes of his work, in which methods of quantitative codicology are applied innovatively and fruitfully.<sup>1</sup> After an introduction to the history of

<sup>1</sup> The projects in question are the Textual History of the Ethiopic Old Testament project and the Social Lives of the Ethiopian Psalter project. Examples of the publications resulting from these projects so far include Daniel Assefa, S. Delamarter, G. Jost, and R. Lee, ‘The Textual History of the Ethiopic Old Testament (THEOT) Project: Goals, Methods, and Initial Findings’, *Textus*, 29 (2020), 1–31; S. Delamarter, ‘The Cave 11 Psalm Scroll (11Q5) and the Textual History of Ethiopic Psalm 151: Memory and Interpretation of David as Anointed Warrior’, in K. Davis, K. S. Baek, P. W. Flint, and D. M. Peters, eds, *The War Scroll, Violence, War and Peace in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature: Essays in Honour of Martin G. Abegg on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah, 115 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 390–407; and various articles by S. Delamarter and others in A. Lange and E. Tov, eds, *Textual History of the Bible*, 1A: *The Hebrew Bible: Over-*

the texts which are generally found in an Ethiopic psalter—the Book of Psalms, the canticles, the Song of Songs, the *Wəddāse Māryām* and the *ʾAnqasa bərbān*—Delamarter discusses the activities of three categories of agents (craftsmen, scribes, and owners/users) involved in making the Ethiopic psalter manuscripts as they have come down to us. Different observations made during Delamarter’s extensive work on psalter manuscripts, ranging from patterns of pricking to systems for marking the middle strophe of the Book of Psalms, are presented and illustrated with examples from the Ethiopic psalters in the collection of the Museum of the Bible. The high-quality colour images, which occur throughout the book, are used to exemplify the discussion, something which makes it easily accessible even for those who have never had the chance to study an Ethiopic psalter manuscript first-hand. One thing that should be pointed out is that the discussion on the activities of artists (miniatures and illuminations), which is announced on page 27, appears to be missing—sadly, as the reader thus cannot profit from Delamarter’s observations on this topic. Also, a note on the role played by the Septuagint in connection with the Hebrew acrosticon in Ps. 118 (cf. the discussion on pp. 47–48) would have been useful. This notwithstanding, this chapter constitutes an excellent example of how the quantitative study of a work can contribute greatly to our understanding of each individual instance of it.

As indicated in the title, Chapter 4 by Steve Delamarter with Sam Aldridge, Jeremy Brown, Brian Jeanseu, and Shaun Short (‘The Dual-Textual Histories of the Ethiopic Canticles: An Exploration of Textual History and Social Location’, pp. 73–84) is dedicated to a comparison of the textual history of the canticles as preserved in Ethiopic psalter manuscripts as against their textual history as preserved in manuscripts of the biblical books in which they originate. Three canticles are treated: the Songs of Hannah, Jonah, and Habakkuk. As emphasized in the introduction to the chapter, the two distinct manuscript contexts correspond to two different social contexts, in which the texts fulfil different functions. In the case of the psalter manuscripts, the canticles are closely connected to the everyday recitation of the faithful, whereas in the biblical manuscripts, they are rather associated with intellectual work in the monasteries and other centres of learning. The chapter is exemplary in how clearly it describes the methodology behind the study. The results are interesting: although textual transmission is very stable in both manuscript contexts, there is a noticeably higher degree

*view Articles*, 1B: *The Hebrew Bible: Pentateuch, Former and Latter Prophets*, 1C: *The Hebrew Bible: Writings* (Leiden: Brill, 2016–2017).

of textual variation in the biblical books than in the psalters, something which the authors connect with the usage of psalter manuscripts in communal recitation. In comparison with Ethiopic manuscripts of the Old Testament in general, the psalter stands out not only in its extremely rich attestation, but also in the stability of its text.

In a few cases, one might have wished for another round of proofreading. For example, on page 78, ተጋልቅ should probably be ተገልቅጉ, or, perhaps, the difference between the readings is one of perfect/imperfect, rather than active/passive (furthermore, whether ተገልቅ is semantically a passive of ገልቅ is disputable).<sup>2</sup> For the sake of clarity, a few words could have been dedicated to explaining how ኢትግብር and ትግብር can be seen as ‘merely different ways of expressing the negative’ (p. 78). All in all, however, this chapter presents a very fine study, the implications of whose results go well beyond its immediate aim, teaching us something about the way texts were, and are, transmitted in Ethiopia in general.

To conclude, a couple of summarizing words should be said about *The Songs of Africa* as a whole. Despite a certain variation in the scholarly quality of the different chapters and a deficit of systematicity when it comes to matters such as transcription and source citations, this book is to be commended for bringing such an understudied topic as the Ethiopian liturgy and its music—in this case with a special, but not exclusive, focus on the works that occur in the Ethiopic psalter—to our attention. With the caveat that some of the chapters should not be read without having taken the previous literature on the respective topic into consideration, this volume can be recommended for scholars and students with an interest in the liturgical and musical tradition of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tawāḥədo Church.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge'ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge'ez-English/English-Ge'ez, with an index of the Semitic roots* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1991), 261; and C. F. A. Dillmann, *Lexicon linguae aethiopiae, cum indice latino. Adiectum est vocabularium tigre dialecti septentrionalis compilatum a W. Munzinger* (Lipsiae: T. O. Weigel, 1865), 575.