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EMMANUEL FRITSCH (C.S.Sp.), Ethiopian Catholic Bishops' Episcopal Committee for Liturgy, Addis Ababa –

MICHAEL GERVERS, DEEDS Project, Toronto

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Pastophoria and Altars: Interaction in Ethiopian Liturgy and Church Architecture*

EMMANUEL FRITSCH (C.S.Sp.), Ethiopian Catholic Bishops' Episcopal Committee for Liturgy, Addis Ababa –
MICHAEL GERVERS, DEEDS Project, Toronto

Looking from east to west, the space in an ancient Ethiopian church is organised in a threefold manner. The *Mäqdäs* or sanctuary, the easternmost area of the church, stands on an elevated plane and is accessed through the triumphal arch. It may have a rounded apse[1] or a flat eastern wall[2] with a central window. The altar stands in the middle below a demi-cupola or an ornamented ceiling. Side rooms may be found to the north and/or south. Niches may be present in the walls, and holes in the floor. Secondly, there is the *Qəddəst* which lies between the sanctuary and the nave, west of the triumphal arch. Access used to be closed off by a chancel-barrier. A cupola may adorn its ceiling. It corresponds to the Syrian *Qostroma* and the Coptic *Khurus*. Thirdly, the assembly gathers westwards in the *Qəne maḫlet*,[3] i.e. the nave and aisles in a basilica church.

Older churches normally display service rooms flanking a narthex-like entrance-room, westwards, and two other entrance doors on the north and south sides of the building. These service rooms match the eastern service rooms beside the sanctuary, which are called *pastophoria*. These four rooms stand at the corners of the cross-in-square interior. This interior is generally structured around four piers, which support the ceiling and divide the space into nave and aisles (Fig. A).

C. Lepage has demonstrated[4] that the furnishings of ancient Ethiopian churches bear witness to how the liturgy developed and provide evidence of

* The following study is preliminary to a more comprehensive work presently in preparation. The authors are indebted here to Gordon Belray, Travis Capener, Rodolfo Fiallos, Karen Heath, Ken Jones and Gillian Long for their assistance.

1 The circular apse characterizes many ancient churches made on a Syrian plan; CLAUDE LEPAGE, "Une origine possible des églises monolithiques de l'Éthiopie ancienne", in *Comptes-Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 1997 fasc. 1, 210 n. 31.

2 The flat eastern wall is also ancient, as at Dəgum North and South. See note 5 below.

3 The name *Qəne maḫlet* refers to the "service" of God accomplished through liturgical "praise" offered by the assembly. This praise includes the activity of the choir.

4 CLAUDE LEPAGE, "Premières recherches sur les installations liturgiques des anciennes églises d'Éthiopie (X^e–XV^e siècles)", C.N.R.S., *Travaux de la Recherche Coopérative*

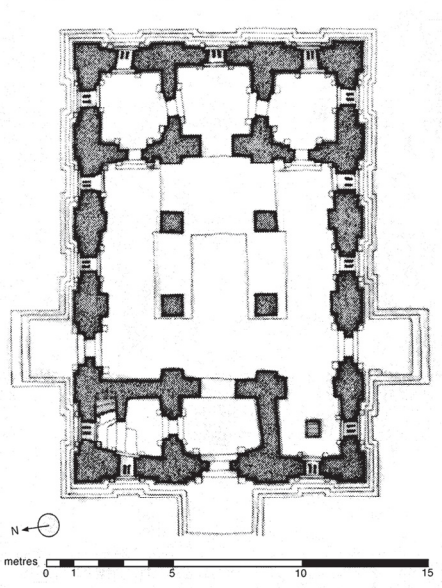


Fig. A: Ground Plan of the church of Lalibäla Amanu°el (Lasta) (after Bianchi Barriviera)

change over time. These changes have increasing importance when studied in terms of comparative liturgy, including today's liturgical practices, and matched with data from literature and iconography. This approach illuminates the relationship between liturgical celebrations and the furnishings and structures provided to host them in an appropriate manner.

From her earliest days, the Ethiopian Church was in contact with Syria-Palestine and even Constantinople. Earlier churches, built on a basilica plan with an inscribed circular apse flanked with side rooms, generally follow a Syriac plan.[5] This adoption from the Christian East met with architecture developed in Aksum to create features which are characteristically Aksumite. Rising from a significant foundation, buildings display an "indented plan", in which both base and walls of the superstructure alternate between recesses and projections.[6]

The structure of the Aksumite church continued to develop throughout Ethiopian history when Coptic Egypt, itself in close contact with Antioch, was the nearly-exclusive reference for Ethiopian Christianity.[7] Since the prog-

sur Programme RCP 230. Documents pour servir à l'histoire des civilisations éthiopiennes, fasc. 3 (Sept. 1972), 77–114, with 19 figures (hereafter: LEPAGE, "Premières recherches").

[5] See MARILYN HELDMAN, "Churches", in *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I, SIEGBERT UHLIG, ed. (Wiesbaden, 2003) (hereafter: *EAE*). To follow a Syriac plan does not imply that all churches were built in exactly the same way. See also EMMA LOOSLEY, "The Architecture and Liturgy of the Bema in Fourth- to Sixth-Century Syrian Churches", in *Patrimoine Syriaque* 2 (*"Parole de l'Orient"*, Kaslik 2003) (hereafter: LOOSLEY, "Bema"), 40. This is compatible with ancient Sabean temple architecture which was part of the Yəḫa and Aksum heritage.

[6] MARILYN HELDMAN, "Early Byzantine Sculptural Fragments from Adulis", in: *Études éthiopiennes. Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes* (Paris, 1994), 243.

[7] HEINZGERD BRAKMANN, "Le déroulement de la messe copte: structure et histoire", in: ACHILLE M. TRIACCA – ALESSANDRO PISTOIA (eds.), *L'eucharistie: célébrations,*

ress of Ethiopian Christian worship can generally be observed in relation to changes on the Egyptian scene, it follows that church buildings would be directly, although not necessarily rigidly, dependent on Coptic developments. This tentative line of reasoning bears further investigation since the absence of written documentation until the 13th century has left the church buildings themselves as almost the only surviving evidence available for study.

Of particular significance in the present study are the rooms, if any, which flank the sanctuary. Their presence is as obvious in the oldest churches, as is their absence in later ones. A fuller understanding of their purpose, and subsequent disappearance, is helpful in explaining the chronology of change in the form and function of the Ethiopian church. The existence and location of an altar or altars provides further evidence for dating.

Applied from Egyptian as well as Graeco-Roman holy places to Christian edifices, the function of the *pastophoria* flanking the sanctuary to north and south, which were especially common in Egypt, first, and the Syrian area,[8] and in early Ethiopian churches, was to relieve the absidial centre from secondary activities. The name *pastophoria* recalls how the Septuagint named secondary rooms of the Jerusalem Temple, using Hellenistic-Egyptian nomenclature.

According to West-Syrian tradition, the *pastophorion* may serve as a sacristy, a funerary place which often is also used as a martyrium, or a baptistery, and finally as the place for the preparation of the bread and wine, the *prothesis,* in advance of the Eucharist.[9] In the Coptic Church also, and often earlier than in Antioch, the bread and wine were generally brought to the north side room where they were selected and prepared. After the Gospel and Dismissal

rites, piétés. Conférences Saint-Serge, 41e Semaine d'Études Liturgiques (Paris, 28 Juin–1 Juillet 1994), Centro Liturgico Vincenziano. Edizioni liturgiche, Bibliotheca «Ephemerides Liturgicae». Subsidia, 79 (Rome, 1995) (hereafter: BRAKMANN, "Déroulement"), 107.

[8] And as far afield as Greece, Macedonia, etc., but not Constantinople. R.F. Taft wrote that "it is not until the 10th century that the tripartite apse at the east end of Constantinopolitan churches becomes general" (ROBERT FRANCIS TAFT, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of Gifts and other Pre-anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 200² [Rome, 1978] [hereafter: TAFT, *Great Entrance*], 184). PETER GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten*, "Handbuch der Orientalistik", 1/62 (Brill – Leiden, 2002) [hereafter: GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur*], 26–28.

[9] GEORGES DESCOEUDRES, *Die Pastophorien im syro-byzantinischen Osten,* Schriften zur Geistesgeschichte des östlichen Europa 16 (Wiesbaden, 1983) (hereafter: DESCOEUDRES, *Pastophorien*), 33; LOOSLEY, "Bema", 25.

of Catechumens, the deacons, and later the priest, arranged the altar for the Eucharistic liturgy and brought to it the bread and wine.[10]

There is no further mention of a separate complete *prothesis* rite in Syria after the 6th century. Severus of Antioch († 538), who was familiar with the old ways, is the last to mention it when referring to the new system.[11] The preparation of offerings directly upon the altar became the first part of the Mass,[12] and the side rooms became available for other purposes. On the Coptic side, Ibn Siba° (late 13th–early 14th century) was the last witness to the use of a *pastophorion* for the selection of offerings.[13] The remaining preparations were already being done on the altar itself. This situation is an intermediate one. Already in the 11th, but especially from the 13th century onward, *pastophoria* were destined to become additional sanctuaries equipped with altars.[14] Most

[10] E.g. the Eucharistic Catechesis of the *Mystagogy*, preserved in Geᶜez, describes an Alexandrine rite probably dating back to the 5th century. See ROBERT BEYLOT (ed. and trans.), "Sermon éthiopien anonyme sur l'Eucharistie", in: *Abbay* 12 (Paris 1983–84), 113–16; GÉRARD COLIN (ed. and trans.), *Le synaxaire éthiopien. Mois de T'err*, in: *Patrologia Orientalis* 45, no. 201 (1990), 220–21. See BRAKMANN, "Déroulement", 109.

[11] See STÉPHANE VERHELST, "La déposition des oblats sur l'autel en Syrie-Palestine. Contribution à l'histoire de la prothesis", in *Oriens Christianus* 82 (1998) [hereafter: VERHELST, "Déposition"], 187, 189.

[12] DESCOEUDRES, *Pastophorien*; TAFT, *Great Entrance*; VERHELST, "Déposition", 184–203; BABY VARGHESE, *Early History of the Preparation Rites in the Syrian Orthodox Anaphora*, Symposium Syriacum VII, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 256 (1998), 127–138.

[13] Vincentio Mistrih, OFM, ed., trans. of: Juhanna Ibn Abi Zakaria Ibn Siba, *Pretiosa Margarita de Scientiis Ecclesiasticis*, Studia Orientalia Christiana, Aegyptiaca, Centrum Franciscanum Studiorum Orientalium Christianorum (Cairo, 1966), 179 (Arabic) and 488 (Latin). See BRAKMANN, "Déroulement", 113–14.

[14] An altar-tablet (*lawḥ al-muqaddasah*) consecrated by the bishop is placed upon each Coptic altar. The earliest instances of multiple altars seem to be the following: 1) the consecration by Ephrem (Abraham) the Syrian (975–978) of Cairo's Saint Mercurius' church: "Then the church was consecrated, and the first liturgy was celebrated in it, on the middle altar" (B.T.A. EVETTS: *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt attributed to Abu Salih, the Armenian* [Oxford, 1895] [hereafter: Abu l-Makarim] fol. 36a–36b. Abu l-Makarim is the actual author of this chronicle which he wrote in the very early years of the 13th century [UGO ZANETTI, *Abū l-Makārim et Abū Sālih*, Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte 34 [1995], 85–138)]; 2) under Pope Christodoulus (1047–1077), George, bishop of Batû, consecrated in a new "church four sanctuaries (*hayâkil*) on that day" (Sawīrus ibn al-Mukaffaᶜ, Bishop of al-Asmunin, *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church: Known as the History of the Holy Church*. Trans. and annot. by AZIZ SURYAL ATIYA – YASSĪ ᶜABD AL-MASĪH – OSWALD HUGH EWART KHATZIS-BURMESTER, Société d'archéologie copte [hereafter: HPEC]: II/3 [1959] 282) The first redactor of the *History of the Patriarchs* … was actually Mawhub ibn Mansur ibn Mufarrig (see JOHANNES DEN HEIJER, *Mawhub ibn Mansur ibn Mufarrig et l'historiographie copto–arabe. Étude sur la composition de l'Histoire des Patriarches d'Alexandrie*, CSCO

churches built from the Coptic Middle Ages until the present time have three sanctuaries, each equipped with an altar.[15] Thus several altars would have been available to accommodate assemblies in successive masses, each mass being celebrated on a different altar.[16] This arrangement would have solved the problem caused when the Copts were not allowed to build the new churches which they wished to dedicate to certain saints,[17] or repair old ones. The movement was probably more important in those areas under most pressure. In this manner, the traditional principle of celebrating but one Mass a day on one particular altar would have been respected. But we are still ignorant as to why the *prothesis* rite hitherto accomplished in the *prothesis* room was discontinued in the first place. It may have been to create room for more altars and thus solve the pastoral problem just mentioned. Some Syrian influence cannot be excluded.

P. Grossmann provides a succinct description of the Coptic altar.[18] The general development was, as Abu l-Makarim already noted in his time, that the altar in the central sanctuary, the "high altar", was adorned with a *ci-*

513, Subs. 83, Louvain, 1989); 3) Cairo's Abu Qudamah's church is described with three altars in 1097: "There were in it three altars, the first of them (under) the name of Saint Abba Pachomius (Anba Bakhum), the second (under) the name of saint Mahrâyîl, the martyr (and) virgin, and the third, (under) the name of Saint Severus, the patriarch" (HPEC, II/2 [1948] 397).

[15] There are sometimes more altars. See OSWALD HUGH EWART KHATZIS-BURMESTER, *The Egyptian or Coptic church: a detailed description of her liturgical services and the rites and ceremonies observed in the administration of her sacraments, Publications de la Société d'Archéologie Copte, Textes et Documents* (Cairo, 1967), 18; ALFRED J. BUTLER, *The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, vol. II (Oxford, 1884, reprint. Gorgias Press, 2004) (hereafter: BUTLER, *Coptic Churches*); PAUL VAN MOORSEL, *Le Monastère de Saint Antoine* (Cairo: IFAO, 1995), 8–10; SYLVESTRE CHAULEUR, "L'autel copte", in: *Les Cahiers Coptes* 9 (1955), 12ff. Peter Grossmann refers to "the introduction of churches with several altars in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries" (GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur*, 94 sq.; "Altar", under "Architectural Elements of Churches", *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (hereafter: *C.E.*), 1:106) adding that "When, as a result of the increased frequency of masses during this period [Mamluk: 13th to 16th c.], it became customary to supply the churches with multiple altar rooms, the available side chambers of the apse of older churches were converted into additional altar rooms" ("Khurus", under "Architectural Elements of Churches", *C.E.*, 1:212).

[16] E.g. in Abu l-Makarim, fols. 30b, 82a.

[17] We are grateful to Prof. Dr. Heinzgerd Brakmann who confirmed this interpretation of the movement (conversation on 26 July 2006).

[18] GROSSMANN, "Altar", under "Architectural Elements of Churches", *C.E.*, 1:106–07. In one important detail Butler is more accurate: "The cavity is of varying size; but very often it is nearly co-extensive with the altar" (BUTLER, *Coptic Churches,* 2:5) and available for storage of assorted paraphernalia.

borium, often beautifully painted with a *Maiestas Domini*, whereas the side altars were made of a simpler cube.[19] These Coptic features indicate that major developments took place during a roughly common period around and after the Fatimid dynasty, which in Egypt endured from A.D. 972 to 1171.

Ethiopian churches saw changes in their *pastophoria* and altars according to patterns developed in Egypt. The Ethiopian progression can be traced through study of: a) the churches themselves, by comparing the various features present in their architecture or furnishings; b) references to, or descriptions of, sanctuaries and gifts of furnishings in *Vitae* or chronicles; c) iconographic evidence in codices or murals; d) ancient altars or other paraphernalia preserved in stores or sanctuaries; and e) liturgical practices within the context of comparative liturgy. We propose here briefly to review the rite and location of the *prothesis*, the later transformation of churches, and the altars.

The early Ethiopian Mass definitely included the *prothesis.*[20] There were *pastophoria* in the earliest known churches of Ethiopia, and certain ritual features deriving from this fact still exist in modern Eucharistic celebration. The eventual disappearance of the *pastophoria* indicates a major change in procedure. The question is, where and when did this change begin?

Often the two *pastophoria* will be dissymetric in size or décor. In general, the north *pastophorion* seems to have a more specialised purpose, having one or more niches in the walls, holes to fit a table in the ground near a corner, [21] and better workmanship. The doorways are crucial because they facilitate communication between the places used by the clergy during the liturgy. We shall, therefore, classify the *pastophoria* according to their doorways.

Some *pastophoria* communicate only westwards towards the aisle, as in some Coptic and Syrian churches. Such is the case in Adulis, Maṭara or Gazen.[22] This arrangement allows laymen to approach the *pastophoria*, perhaps up to the Palaeo-Christian-type chancel barriers, to give offerings to the deacons without sullying the holy sanctuary. Ministers were thus seen by the

[19] It happens, as at the Mu'allaqah, that all three altars are equipped with *ciboria*.

[20] We are using the term for commodity, anachronic as it may be.

[21] Such holes were discovered in the southern *pastophorion* of Dəgum North on 21 October 2004 by E. Fritsch, with Tom Zimmermann and Sean and Niel Prague, in the presence of local cleric *Mämhər* Arägawi, who unearthed them by following the indications given. A similar disposition has been observed in Dəgum South's southern *pastophorion* and Gazen's northern one.

[22] FRANCIS ANFRAY, "Deux villes axoumites: Adoulis et Mäṭära", *IV Congresso Internazionale di Studi Etiopici* (Rome, 1974), 1:761–65; MARILYN HELDMAN, "Church Buildings", *EAE*, 1:737 (ground plan based on data from R. Paribeni).

congregation while passing from the *prothesis pastophorion* through the triumphal arch to the sanctuary.

Other *pastophoria* have doorways leading only to the sanctuary, as in some Coptic churches, and as at each of the two churches of Dəgum (Fig. B); Bäraqit Maryam and Hawzen Täklä Haymanot, as well as Wəqro Mäsqälä Krəstos (Sokota)[23] and Gännätä Maryam. Thus, only the clergy may approach the chancel-barriers of the-then presbyterium and sanctuary. It is likely that the gifts were carried in a simple and discreet manner to the altar.

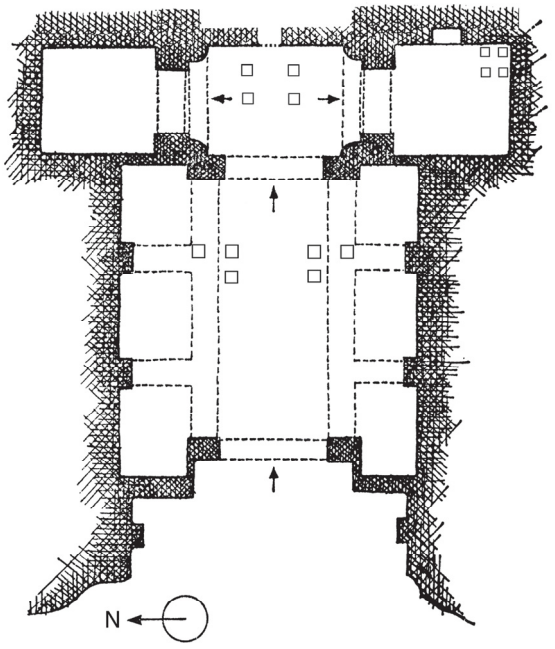


Fig. B: Ground Plan of the *north church* at Dəgum (Gärᶜalta, Təgray)

Some *pastophoria* communicate directly both with the aisles and the sanctuary (Figs. A, E).[24] However, the furnishing of Mikaᵓel Imba (Aṣbi) suggests that in certain such churches the laity could not approach the *pastophorion*.[25] The doorways of the *pastophoria* open toward the aisles, are accessed by steps and have single-panel doors opening inwards. Sometimes a very low lintel, as at Däbrä Sälam Mikaᵓel, forbids any ceremonial use. Often the doors are off-centre and a window opens into the space behind.[26] Even where the doors are in the middle of the appropriate wall and aisle, they were obviously not meant to be

[23] MICHAEL GERVERS, "The Monolithic Church of Wuqro Mäsqäl Krəstos", *Africana Bulletin*, 50 (2002), 99–113.

[24] As at Zarema, Däbrä Damo, Qirqos Agobo, Abrəha wä-Aṣbəḥa, Wəqro Qirqos, Mikaᵓel Imba, Däbrä Sälam Mikaᵓel, Yəmrəḥannä Krəstos, Lalibäla Maryam, Lalibäla Mädḫane ᶜaläm, Lalibäla Amanuᵓel, etc.

[25] There are chancel barriers guarding the *Qəddəst* and the south *pastophorion*. A heap of pieces from the north *pastophorion* barrier lies on the floor. The isolated existence of a triple chancel and the fact that all three chancels used to have a triumphal arch leads one to question the functions of those rooms (*pastophoria* or early side sanctuaries?), as well as the function of such a chancel.

[26] As at Dəgum South, Abrəha wä-Aṣbəḥa and Wəqro Qirqos.

the transit area for a ceremony like the Eucharist, let alone serve as sanctuaries. They are service rooms, devoid of solemn purpose.

Churches like Lalibäla Libanos and Bilbala Qirqos (Fig. 1) also have *pastophoria* which communicate with the sanctuary only. The west faces of their western walls, however, display blind doorways towards the aisle, recalling what had become an unnecessary door, while still maintaining aesthetic balance. The feature points to a later period of disuse.

This classification is based upon the oldest monuments available and the stages of development are relatively clear. The chronology for other stages is less straightforward but, provisionally, the proposed order makes sense.

Changes in liturgical architecture can be expected to happen only after a new practice is firmly established in the minds and habits of the population. As we have seen, the *prothesis pastophorion* was still used in Egypt, according to Ibn Siba°, towards the end of the 13th century, while Abu l-Makarim reported that it had been abandoned more than a century earlier. In Ethiopia, where the pressures of Egypt were unknown but where Coptic adaptions became the norm, it is likely that the *prothesis pastophorion* was used for other purposes, or excluded from plans of new churches, sometime *after* the rite of the *prothesis* was transferred from the side room to the sanctuary altar.

Change began inside the *pastophoria* of churches of the old order. Towards the end of the 12th century and early in the 13th century, the churches of the Lalibäla region were constructed according to liturgical plans which presupposed that the *prothesis* would be done in a *pastophorion*. Zoz Amba has a sanctuary and two *pastophoria* which connect with both the sanctuary and the aisles, according to the common basilica plan.[27] Significantly, the church contains three monoxyle portable altars of a type "dont la production ne paraît pas avoir duré au-delà du 13e siècle".[28] The correlation leads to the conclusion that three altars at one stage equipped three sanctuaries, rather than a sanctuary and two *pastophoria*. The clergy must have begun adopting changes before the architecture had adapted to the new church order. Lalibäla is known for such portable altars and the phenomenon may well have started there, since it was the centre of royal and ecclesiastical administration. In short, the Eucharist was at least sometimes being celebrated in the *pastophoria*, despite their inappropriateness. It seems that changes resulting from Coptic precedents were being applied in Ethiopia in the 13th century.

[27] CLAUDE LEPAGE – JACQUES MERCIER, "Une église lalibelienne: Zoz Amba", in *Annales d'Ethiopie* 18 (2002), 151–53 (hereafter : LEPAGE – MERCIER, "Zoz Amba").

[28] LEPAGE – MERCIER, "Zoz Amba", 153. Three altars entail that a different altar-tablet is placed upon each altar, a fact which will take important proportions in Ethiopia.

It has been argued elsewhere that the complex of churches, Däbrä Sina, Golgota and Śəllase in Lalibäla, belong to the late 14th or early 15th century, a much later date than was heretofore thought.[29] That argument is strengthened by the striking absence in those churches of any *pastophoria* (Fig. C), unless the unity of architectural style and structure reflects the co-existence of two rites.

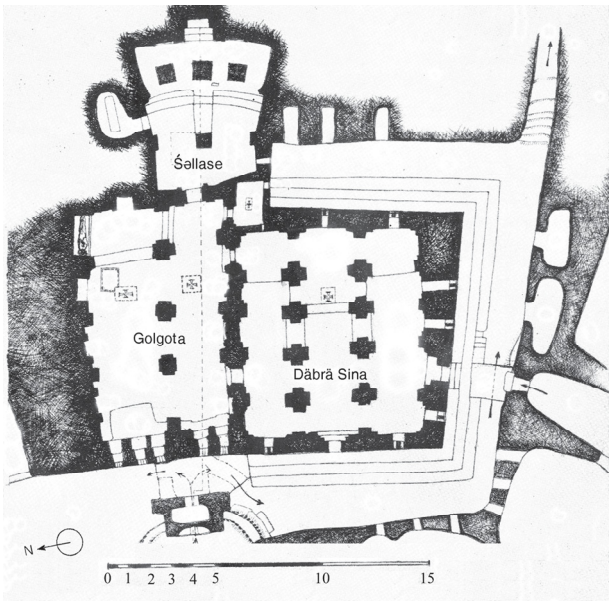


Fig. C: Ground Plan of Lalibäla Däbrä Sina, Golgota and Śəllase (Lasta) (after Bianchi Barriviera)

There is chronological bearing in how different solutions were applied to deal with space liberated by liturgical change. The sanctuary of Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ʿaläm (end 13th c.) fills the eastern end of the small church, with one entrance under the triumphal arch and a cupola above the altar.[30] No doors remain but the half columns in the walls and flat lintels on the ceiling are architectural delimitations which divide the space. The arrangement at Zammadu Maryam, probably the latest of the churches built in caves, is similar. There, as Lepage noted already in 1973, "it is the evolution of the liturgy

[29] MICHAEL GERVERS, "The rehabilitation of the Zaguë kings and the building of the Däbrä Sina-Golgotha-Sellassie complex in Lalibäla", *Africana Bulletin* 51 (2003), 23-49 (hereafter: GERVERS, "Däbrä Sina-Golgotha-Sellassie").

[30] It is in the mid-13th century, at the beginning of the Mamluk era, that the custom develops of having the altar room covered with a full circle cupola, as a component of the third and last phase of Coptic architectural development (GROSSMANN, *Christliche Architektur*, 94–96). On Makina Mädḫane ʿaläm, see MICHAEL GERVERS, "An Architectural Survey of the Church of Ǝmäkina Mädhane Aläm (Lasta, Ethiopia)", in *Wälättä Yohanna. Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Joanna Mantel Niećko on the Occasion of the 50th Year of Her Work at the Institute of Oriental Studies,Warsaw University*, (*Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 59 (2006/1)), 92–112.

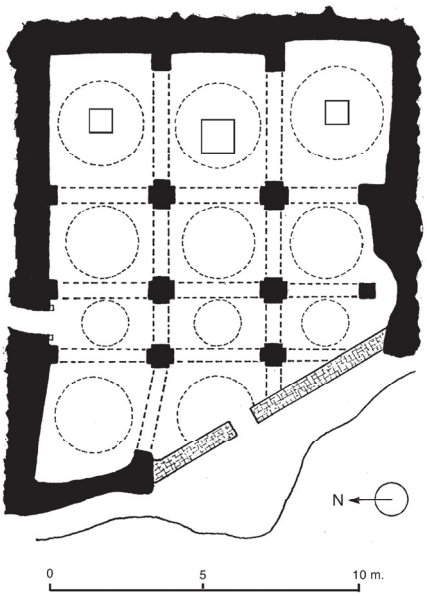


Fig. D: Ground Plan of Abba Yoḥanni (Tämben, Təgray) (after Plant)

which allowed this suppression of the 'sacristies'; there is no *presbyterium* in the interior, a normal situation at such a late date."[31]

More strikingly, and possibly as late as 1400, in Lalibäla Däbrä Sina (Fig. C) the space previously covered on the ground plan by the *pastophoria* has been left free. The level of the eastern bay is raised and there are no dividing walls. This entire bay *is* the sanctuary; gone is the tripartite division, each with its own separate purpose and character. However, the central area definitely retains its priority. This is a major change from the past. The construction was decided and organised so that, although side rooms were unnecessary, there could be additional space at the level of the usual central sanctuary for more altars, likely the portable ones mentioned above since there do not seem to be traces of more permanent structures on the ground.

In other churches, space previously allotted on the ground plan to *pastophoria*, but left free of permanent structures in the earlier examples, is occupied by altars. A high altar stands in the traditional centre, while cubic altars are erected in what has clearly become a triple sanctuary. This is the case in Abba Yoḥanni (Fig. D) and Gäbrəʾel Wəqen in Däbrä ʿAsa, with their impressive rock-hewn altars, influenced by Coptic models. The central demi-cupola once covering *the* altar is now multiplied, following the developing Coptic usage that each and every altar – and indeed the entire church – be topped by a cupola.

In these cases also, and in contrast with the earlier Lalibäla Däbrä Sina, the churches have become like large halls compartmented by piers and high, decorated vaults. They are oriented, of course, and the altars characterise the wide open sanctuary, now with few, if any, steps to differentiate it from the

[31] CLAUDE LEPAGE, *L'église de Zarema (Éthiopie) découverte en Mai 1973 et son apport à l'histoire de l'architecture éthiopienne*, in: *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Paris, juillet–octobre 1973 (published, 1974), 450, n. 5.

rest of the space. In this 15th century church, pillars have barely-marked, if any, triumphal arches.

Lalibäla Giyorgis, a monolith excavated in the shape of a cross, has a sanctuary similar to the old churches, but without side rooms or even side space. This arrangement is also found at ᶜAddi Qešo Mädḫane ᶜaläm in Təgray. There is a cupola above the sanctuary of both churches. It seems clear, therefore, that the sanctuary itself was judged sufficient for both preparation and celebration of the mass. For this reason in particular, ᶜAddi Qešo cannot be as old as claimed by Buxton.[32]

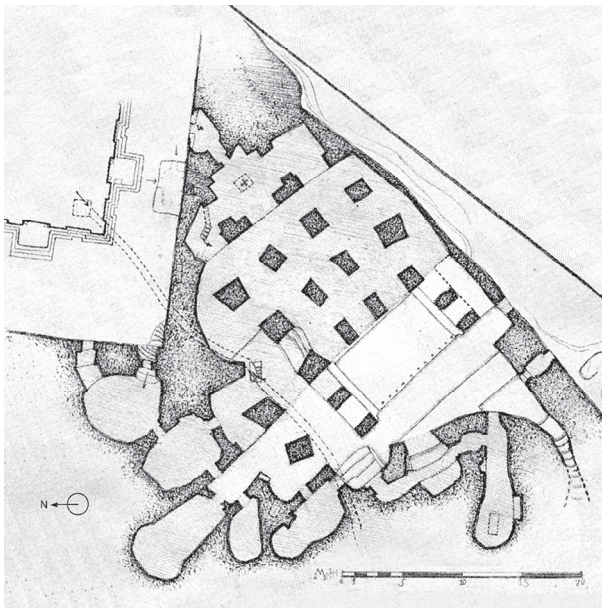


Fig. E: Ground Plan of Lalibäla Märqorewos (Lasta) (after Bianchi Barriviera)

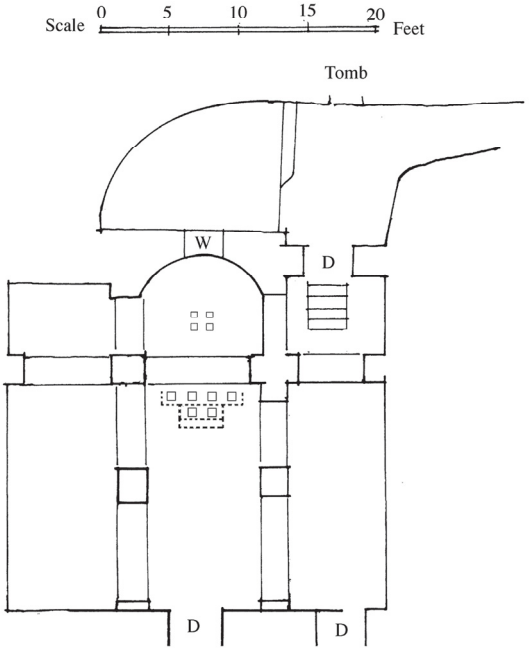
Significantly, the sanctuary of Betä Giyorgis ends at the top of the steps which rise from the nave while, in contrast, Lalibäla Däbrä Sina still has a *Qeddest* at the level of the sanctuary and two choir platforms (Fig. C).[33] This

[32] Buxton understood that "the late tenth or early eleventh century … would be a feasible period for this earliest attempt, if such it is, to carve a Christian church from the solid rock". DAVID BUXTON, "The Rock-Hewn and Other Medieval Churches of Tigré Province, Ethiopia", *Archaeologia* (Society of Antiquaries of London, 1971) (hereafter: BUXTON, "Rock-Hewn"), 103:41. There would be other reasons, but Buxton never refers to the liturgy.

[33] In fact, Giyorgis has lost several traditional Axumite features. In particular, the Greek cross shape adopted for its plan no longer makes room for four service rooms although it could have, if its model actually was Tāmit (JEAN DORESSE, "Nouvelles recherches sur les relations entre l'Égypte copte et l'Éthiopie: XIIᵉ-XIIIᵉ siècles", *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* (juillet–octobre 1970 (1971), 563; JEAN DORESSE, review of *Tamit (1964), Missione Archaeologica in Egitto dell'Università di Roma,* in *Revue d'Égyptologie*, vol. 21 (1969), 183–185; UGO MONNERET DE VILLARD, *La Nubia medioevale,* vol. 1, 146–66 (Cairo 1935); *Missione Archaeologica in Egitto dell'Università di Roma. Tamit (1964,* Università di Roma, Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Serie Archeologica, 14 (Rome 1967), 35, fig. 20, 2; WILLIAMS Y. ADAMS, "Tamīt" in: *C.E.* 7: 2200b–2201a). Even the socle was made to fit.

arrangement suggests that Lalibäla Betä Giyorgis could be more recent even than Lalibäla Däbrä Sina.[34]

As happened in Egypt, some older churches may have undergone transformations in order to conform to the new trend. They may display arches leading to side rooms instead of the expected *pastophoria* doors or west walls, possibly merging central sanctuary and *pastophoria* into a sanctuary running the full width of the church, able to accom-



W=Width
L=Length
D=Depth
Dis=Distance

Fig. F1: Ground Plan of Gundäfru Śəllase (Aṣbidära, Təgray) (after Ruth Plant)

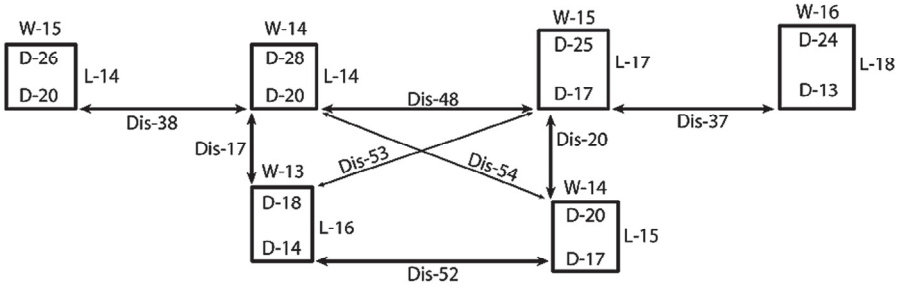


Fig. F2: Prop holes for supporting the chancel screen on the steps before the central altar at Gundäfru Śəllase (Aṣbidära, Təgray)

modate several altars. Thus the *pastophoria* of Lalibäla Märqorewos (Fig. E) may have been turned into additional altar rooms. Gundäfru Śəllase (Fig. F1)

[34] In any case not as late as the 16th century: the witness of the Portuguese in 1520 and of the Muslims set a clear *terminus ante quem* (FRANCISCO ALVARES, *The Prester John of the Indies*, ed. by CHARLES FRASER BECKINGHAM – GEORGE WYNN BRERETON HUNTINGFORD, Hakluyt Society, no. 114, 1:chs. 54–55).

clearly shows reworking. This traditional church, excavated in the manner of the "valley" churches, shows the post holes of the old chancel-set up (Fig. F2)[35] and displays *pastophoria* at the east end of each aisle. They are quite open and accessed through large arches which have been hewn later in the history of the church (Fig. 2). Not only are these openings clearly reworked, but the ends of the original lodgings of the wooden beams framing top and bottom of the doorways are still visible. Gundäfru's arches have something in common with those of Däbrä Mäᶜar. The ground plan of Lalibäla Märqorewos is also traditional and one would have expected *pastophoria*. They may of course have been destroyed later, and the place re-arranged.[36]

The famous mural paintings and inscription of King Yəkunno Amlak (1270–1283) in the church of Gännätä Maryam are deemed authentic. A common iconography and the epigraphy involved also ascribe the churches of Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜaläm and Waša Mikaʾel to the same reign.[37] The commemorative text of Yəkunno Amlak clearly states that he both built and painted the church with the involvement of Maḥari Amlak, responsible for Waša Mikaʾel, and Neheyo.[38]

Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ᶜaläm and Waša Mikaʾel no longer display either *pastophoria* or west rooms, the former having one entrance to the sanctuary through the triumphal arch and the latter having retained both the entrance

[35] See the website "Mäzgäbä Səəlat" (hereafter: MS): <*http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca*> UserID & Password: student : MG-2004.082:018; MG-2005.024:008/018/019.

[36] Despite the frequently-expressed opinion to the contrary, Lalibäla Märqorewos would appear to have been made as a church, for reasons which will be explained elsewhere. In addition, it is akin to the chapel in Betä Gäbrəʾel-Rufaʾel.

[37] EWA BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, "The wall-paintings in the church of Mädhane Aläm near Lalibala", *Africana Bulletin* 52 (2004), 9–29 (esp. 14, 27 & 28) (hereafter: BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, "Mädhane Aläm").

[38] See MARILYN H. HELDMAN – GETATCHEW HAYLE, "Who's who in Ethiopia's Past. Part 3: Founders of Ethiopia's Solomonic Dynasty", *North-East African Studies* 9/1 (1987), 1–11. SERGEW HABLE SELLASIE, in *Ancient and Medieval History to 1270* (Addis Ababa 1972), 291, refers to the building, not the painting. On Gännätä Maryam, see CLAUDE LEPAGE, "Peintures murales de Ganata-Mariam", *Travaux de la RCP 230 du CNRS*, fasc. 6 (Paris, 1975), 59-93; EWA BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, *Les peintures murales de l'église rupestre éthiopienne Gannata Maryam près Lalibela*, in *Arte Medievale* (Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana) 12–13 (Roma 1998–1999), pp. 93–209 and "The Iconographic Programme of the Sanctuary Area in the Church of Gännätä Maryam near Lalibala". Paper delivered at the Orbis Aethiopicus Conference "Ethiopian Art – A Unique Cultural Heritage and a Modern Challenge", Leipzig, 24–26 June 2005 (hereafter: BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, "Iconographic Programme". On Waša Mikaʾel, see JACQUES MERCIER, "Peintures du XIII^{e} siècle dans une église de l'Angot (Éthiopie)", in: *Annales d'Éthiopie* 18 (2002), 143–48.

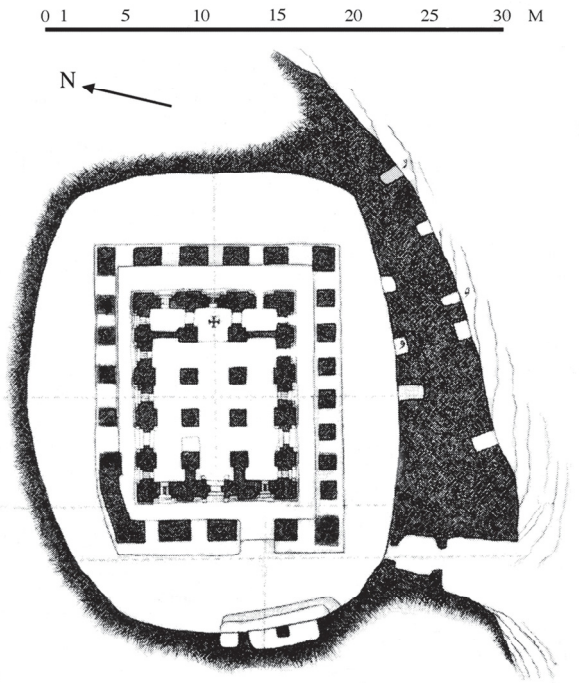


Fig. G: Ground Plan of Gännätä Maryam (Lasta) (after Bianchi Barriviera)

through the triumphal arch and the southern door.[39] In apparent contrast, Gännätä Maryam contains two *pastophoria*, treated below. Its west rooms open eastwards, they are framed by the porch and paintings decorate them, conforming that they are not isolated from the rest of the church. Further, the platform of the *Qəddəst* has disappeared and a cupola adorns the ceiling of the sanctuary.[40] Gännätä Maryam, which would appear to have been excavated before the same workshop painted Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ʾaläm and Waša Mikaʾel, includes features which also appear in the later Lalibäla churches (Märqorewos, the chapel of Gäbrəʾel Rufaʾel, Golgota Śəllase, Giyorgis). It was designed not only to encourage the people of the Zagʷe area to adopt its southern builder as their king, but also to convey yet another message.

It is not by chance that, among all the churches of Lalibäla, Gännätä Maryam (Fig. G) relates more especially with Mädḫane ʿaläm (Fig. H). Both churches have majestic columns, crosses carved on the roof, and even a small step left near the north door. It has been convincingly argued that Lalibäla Mädhane ʿaläm was conceived as a "copy" of Saint-Mary of Zion, the mother Church of Ethiopia.[41] Aksum's monarchs had Saint-Mary of Zion as their

[39] At Waša Mikaʾel, these two entries give access to a sanctuary, the interior space of which is undivided (see photos in MS: MG-2002.111:025 / 112:032 / 113:001).

[40] We propose to study this matter in a work under preparation.

[41] DAVID BUXTON, "The Christian Antiquities of Northern Ethiopia", *Archaeologia* XCII (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1947), 1–42 (esp. 28–9); *idem*, *The Abyssinians* (New York, 1970), 102, 111; *idem*, "Rock-Hewn", 88; MARILYN E. HELDMAN, "Ar-

palladium: if their Zagʷe successors had created in Mädḫane ᶜaläm their own palladium, so also might Yəkunno Amlak have anchored his new lineage in Aksum through the church of Gännätä Maryam.[42] To reinforce his legitimacy and authority among all Northerners, the first Amhara king dedicated his church to Abba Mäṭṭaᶜ. This saint was very popular in Təgray and related to the community of Däbrä Libanos of Śəmäzana, which used to back the Zagʷe.[43] The *pastophoria* would probably have been abandoned, therefore, some time before Yəkunno Amlak overthrew the Zagʷe in A.D. 1270. In the case of Gännätä Maryam, we propose that this explains the murals and even a *Maiestas Domini* in the SE *pastophorion* (Fig. 3), which from the start was meant to be a sanctuary rather than a sacristy.[44] The example of Maryam Wəqro (Amba Śännayti near Näbälät) shows that the absence of doorways between side rooms and aisles does not negate the probability that the *pastophoria* of Gännätä Maryam were conceived as sanctuaries.[45]

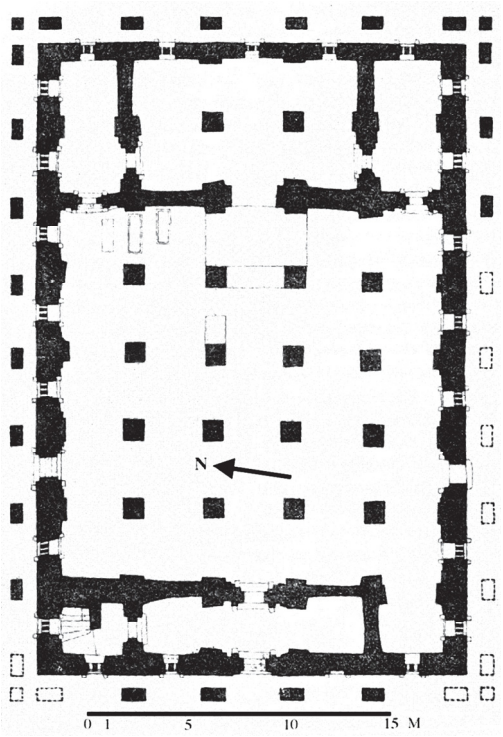


Fig. H: Ground Plan of Lalibäla Mädḫane ᶜaläm (Lasta) (after Bianchi Barriviera)

chitectural Symbolism, Sacred Geography and the Ethiopian Church", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22 (1992), 222–41 (230–32) (hereafter: HELDMAN, "Symbolism").

[42] See HELDMAN, "Symbolism", 230–232; MARIE-LAURE DERAT, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens (1270–1527). Espace, pouvoir et monachisme* (Paris, 2003), 225 (hereafter : DERAT, *Domaine*).

[43] CARLO CONTI ROSSINI, *L'Evangelo d'oro di Dabra Libanos*, "Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei", series 5, 10 (1901), 177–219; DERAT, *Domaine,* 94, 215, 225.

[44] BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, "Iconographic Programme". The use of the north-east *pastophorion* of Gännätä Maryam as a storage area has, to date, impeded the study of its wall paintings. In this connection, it remains to explain the second *Maiestas Domini* which is found on the north wall of the north aisle of Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel and the *Maiestas Domini* in the north-west end of Mikaʾel Imba (MS: MG-2006.022:014).

[45] See RUTH PLANT, *Architecture of the Tigre, Ethiopia*, Worcester, 1985, pp. 76–79.

Maryam Wəqro (Näbälät) is known from A. Mordini's description, which also proposes that it dates from before the rebellion of 1319.[46] The sanctuary contains a fully fledged rock-cut high-altar, and in its north wall a doorway leading to what looks like a *pastophorion*. Remarkably, however, this room contains a monolithic altar, cut as a cube in the Coptic manner. There is no access to this north-east *pastophorion* from the north aisle, although there is a wide arched opening[47] above the floor level. The side sanctuary was conceived as a sanctuary, not as a *pastophorion*: the monolith and the chamber must have been contemporary. It was meant to stand beside the main sanctuary with the high altar, without a doorway opening towards the aisle.

Current practice confirms there is no insurmountable difficulty in the lack of a doorway to the aisle when using a *pastophorion* as a sanctuary. The present arrangement seems to conform to earlier practice. Change in the architectonics of the building would have followed, rather than preceded, liturgical evolution. The multiplication of altars first took place in churches not intended for them, including churches whose *pastophoria* were not accessible from the aisles. As the liturgical use of the *pastophoria* was flexible enough to allow the celebration to take place without the need for additional steps, or direct communication with the assembly, it was taken for granted that this was just an alternative way of performing the rite. The community would have been quite comfortable with the practice as experienced in the *pastophoria* – now side sanctuaries – of older churches such as Gännätä Maryam.

Maryam Wəqro is unusual in that the north side sanctuary has been built without direct communication with the aisle. It is not unusual, however, in that it reproduces the case of Gännätä Maryam, where at least the south side room was never meant to be a *pastophorion* and was probably always equipped with a portable altar, which explains its murals.

May Kado Giyorgis (Figs. 4, 5) is particularly interesting because it displays a sanctuary with a rock-hewn high-altar in its midst and also a shorter north aisle with a sanctuary and a cubic rock-hewn altar. The two altars are centred in their nave or aisle, with an autonomous sanctuary each, although, since there is no south wall for the sanctuary of the aisle, there is direct access from its raised level to the stairs leading to the high-altar. This side sanctuary also has a niche hewn in a pillar. Obviously, there are no *pastophoria*. The north aisle was made as an autonomous chapel, at which Mass was to be celebrated independently from the high-altar. Otherwise the two altars would

[46] ANTONIO MORDINI, "La Chiesa ipogea di Ucrò (Ambà Seneitì) nel Tigrai", *Annalì dell'Africa Italiana* 2/2 (1939), 519–526 (p. 526). The dating is possible, but by no means certain.

[47] As at Gännätä Maryam.

have been erected on the same horizontal line, as seen elsewhere.[48] However, the simple cubic type of altar is always second to the high-altar of the central sanctuary. It is, therefore, doubtful that the nave, for example, would have been extended eastwards at a date later than that of the rest of the church.

The north side aisle and sanctuary would appear to have served as a *parekklesion*, a chapel with a level of autonomy, within or near a larger church, likely made to venerate the saint to whom the altar was dedicated.[49]

The variety of altar styles, sizes and materials obviously contributes to our understanding of the churches for which they were meant. A provisional classification of types follows:

Type 1. In the *north church* at Dəgum (Fig. B)[50] as in several other ancient churches, post holes to support a free-standing altar have been carved out of the sanctuary floor (Fig. 6).[51] The four holes, almost square, located under the window of the flat east wall, would have supported a squarish altar with a top, or *mensa*, measuring approx. 70 cm long x 60 cm wide. In the south church at Dəgum Śəllase, the flat east wall also has a window and four mortises to receive the feet of the approximately 50 x 40 cm altar. These mortises are located just to the west of the small 60-cm wide step which fills the extremity of the apse.[52] These probably also supported a free-standing altar. As in Egypt and Syria, these altars appear to have been carried on legs fitted into the floor. The arrangement of the holes at both Dəgum churches suggests that only a priest and deacon officiated at the altar, possibly assisted by other clerics standing around. Due to the confined space, the deacon could not have stood facing the priest and the assembly across the altar, as is the norm today both in the Coptic Church and in Ethiopia. Nor could there have been processions or any turnings around the altar. The altar table could have carried only the essentials for the celebration of the Eucharist.

The sanctuary of Qirqos Agobo is lit by an east window. Stone "tiles" presently cover the sanctuary floor and much of the *pastophoria*, as also the space before the sanctuary door, making it impossible to search for holes in the ground. The two *pastophoria* connect with the sanctuary through door-

[48] Having the three altars lined up is the normal arrangement in Coptic churches.

[49] The Coptic church of St. Anthony possesses such a *parekklesion* dedicated to the Four Living Creatures.

[50] The hypogea of Dəgum have been described on several occasions by CLAUDE LEPAGE, in particular in: "Les monuments rupestres de Degum en Éthiopie", *Cahiers Archéologiques* XXII (1972), 167–200.

[51] See GEORG GERSTER, *Churches in Rock. Early Christian Art in Ethiopia* (London, 1970) (hereafter: GERSTER, *Churches in Rock*), pl. 168, between pp. 130 and 131.

[52] The nave of this ancient basilica, twin to the northern church, now serves as the sanctuary to a *Qəne maḫlet* of more recent construction.

ways placed towards the western end of the walls separating them from the sanctuary, near its entrance below the triumphal arch (Fig. 12). The south *pastophorion* is narrow; it has an east window like the north *pastophorion*, a doorway to the altar and a smaller one to the south aisle. The natural rock constitutes the south wall. Leaning clumsily against it is an old wooden altar (Fig. 7) supporting a *tabot* carefully wrapped in a large piece of textile. The front and back sections are held together by the top *mensa*, and might collapse if not supported by the rock wall. The condition of its four feet suggests that they were long ensconced in damp holes. Roughly carved, the altar is adorned with a flat, round decorative element at each corner. It is 100 cm high, 60 cm long, and 50 cm wide. Given the space needed to access the sanctuary as well as the two *pastophoria*, the original (rectangular) altar must have been erected very close to the flat east wall of the sanctuary, as at Dəgum, and likewise there could be no turning around the altar, nor could the deacon stand facing the priest. The dimensions of this altar are compatible with the proportions of the sanctuary and indicate that it must be the original altar of the church for it is unlikely that such an item came from another place. Further, the condition of its feet indicates that it used to be solidly secured in the ground in an appropriate place. Where it stands at present was never meant for any type of altar.[53]

Type 2. Another type of altar is similar to those above, but it is possible to turn around them. There is room for the deacon to stand facing west towards both priest and assembly, as well as for additional ministers. The unusual church of Ṣäbᵓa ᶜAyna Qirqos[54] has a nave like that of the neighbouring Qirqos Agobo, though less well realized. The east half is hewn out of the rock, including the triumphal arch, beyond which the rock has not been excavated. The west half is built. In addition, there is a north-east *pastophorion*. As no other sanctuary was ever made, and the triumphal arch is purely aesthetic, this area has, in fact, always been the sanctuary. There is a striking 100 x 100 cm monolithic rock made into a flat socle visible in the middle of the floor of the nave-sanctuary some 15 cm. above it, with squarish holes into which the feet of the altar are fitted.[55] In this exceptional situation, the altar stands in the

[53] A modern *mänbärä tabot* in iron presently occupies the SE corner of the sanctuary.

[54] North-east of Aṣbi. See RUTH PLANT, *Architecture of the Tigre, Ethiopia* (Worcester, 1985), 106, no. 48 (Cherkos, Tsaba Anya). ROGER SAUTER, "Eglises rupestres au Tigré", *Annales d'Éthiopie* X (1976), 171, reads: "Tsav-Aina" no. 1507. It is Ṣäbaᵓena Qirqos in C. CONTI ROSSINI (ed. and trans.), *Documenta ad illustrandam historiam I. Liber Axumae*. Text C.S.C.O. Scriptores Aethiopici, series altera, vol. 8 (1909) (vol. 54, t. 24: 1962), 25; French trans. C.S.C.O. Script. Aeth. vol. 8 (1909) (vol. 58, t. 27: 1961), 25.

[55] The present altar is not ancient, but the arrangement is.

centre of one of the largest sanctuaries ever made in an Ethiopian church, apart from that of Gazen.

At Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel the altar sits in the middle of the sanctuary between the inscribed apse and the triumphal arch (Fig. 8). It is made of wood and shaped like a rectangular chest on feet. Its legs are fitted in the rock floor.[56] A badly damaged *Maiestas Domini* aptly occupies the demi-cupola above. Considerably smaller than this altar in the sanctuary are two portable ones in the north aisle, compatible in size with the altar of Qirqos Agobo. The *first* is like a box with feet and is decorated with rough carvings. The table top has a 2 cm-high frame. The lower parts of the legs, to a height of 7 cm, are inflated to fit mortises in the ground. The *second* table is also box-like, with feet but without carving. The bottom of the box, as well as one side, has disappeared.

The south *pastophorion* at Bilbala Qirqos, accessed from the sanctuary only (Fig. 1), contains a small, wooden, portable altar perched on stones. The altar is box-like, with its front and top parts missing. The priests now use the bottom level of the "box" as a *mensa*. A small ornament marks each of the four superior angles, distinguishing this piece of furniture as an altar. The present *mensa* stands at about 112 cm above the ground. The original *mensa* would have been 164 cm above the floor if the present stones were already used, or 94 cm above the floor if it was used without additional support. This elevation is similar to that of the altars seen above; it allows for the adequate use of the altar for celebrations and qualifies it to sit in the real sanctuary.[57] The fact that where this altar is located was a real *pastophorion*, as evidenced by the very high steps of the doorways between them and the sanctuary, suggests that there was no altar there originally and that the portable altar was elsewhere, likely in the sanctuary of the same church, and transported to the south *pastophorion* later, after it was damaged, to save it from greater destruction.

Type 3. The portable altars common to Lalibäla, are found in town (at Betä Maryam, Betä Mädḫane ʿaläm, Gäbrəʾel-Rufaʾel, Golgota and Mäsqäl churches),[58] at Zoz Amba, Betä Ləḥem (Fig. 10), Ṭəlasfärri Ǝsṭifanos,[59] and as far afield as at Däbrä Mäʿar in Gärʿalta.[60] According to certain authors, the production of such monoxyle altars seems not to have lasted beyond the 13th

[56] See photo in MS: MG–2000.080:007.

[57] 164 cm, on the contrary, would unnecessarily, considering the modest proportions of the altar, require a step for a priest to officiate.

[58] According to STEFAN STRELCYN (*Bibliotheca orientalis*, XXXVI, nos. 3/4 (1979), 137–8) there are 8 such altars with inscriptions in Lalibäla, of which 2 at Betä Mädḫane ʿaläm, 3 at Betä Maryam, 1 at Gäbrəʿel and 2 at Golgota.

[59] GERSTER, *Churches in Rock*, 141–42, fig. 123 and plates 209–11.

[60] There are four such altars at Däbrä Mäʿar (MS: MG–2002.014:018–027).

century.[61] They share features of style: they are remarkable for the smallish square shape of their *mensa*, which is often framed by an edge, the quality carving of the whole, the proportions of the body ('chest') with an interior cavity sometimes closed by a small door, and legs, and their often modest height.[62] They could easily be introduced into places not originally planned for an altar, rooms previously made and used as *pastophoria*. Hence, it is not surprising to find several of them in a given place. They confirm that the new order may have begun in the churches of the older order in the Lalibäla area. Their *mensa* is only large enough to receive an altar-tablet (*tabot*), which in turn could just support a paten and a chalice. The missal and other *paraphernalia* for the Eucharist celebration would have been borne by attendants. The frame and the body cavity indicate the Coptic origin of the altars, as at Däbrä Sälam Mikaʾel above.

Such altars are also known from miniatures, where they appear in Christian churches representing the Temple of Jerusalem according to a pattern widespread in Christian iconography. One example, depicting Christ's Entry into Jerusalem, appears in the Kohain Däbrä Maryam Gospels (A.D. 1361).[63] The Temple is represented by a Christian sanctuary, through the triumphal arch of which can be seen a small, apparently wooden, portable altar with feet, of the Lalibäla type, surmounted by a censer. Another miniature, depicting the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, in the well-known Four-Gospel book of Kəbran Gäbrəʾel, dated *ca.* 1400 and perhaps originating in the scriptorium of Ḥayq Ǝsṭifanos, shows a similar altar (Fig. 10).[64]

Why would painters at the turn of the 15th century depict altars of this Lalibäla type, if more impressive altars were then current? Possibly because the artist was simply copying an earlier source. The Kəbran Gospels are believed

[61] LEPAGE – MERCIER, "Zoz Amba", 153.

[62] The stone legs added to the altar of Bilbala Qirqos (see above) show how smaller altars could be raised to a more appropriate height. There is a very modest, roughly hewn portable altar at Yäčəra Mädḫane ʿaläm in Lasta (MS:MG–2005.112:021–025), and a carefully carved miniature in the Mäqäle Museum, Təgray (MS:MG–2005.126:026–030).

[63] MARILYN E. HELDMAN, "Christ's Entry into Jerusalem in Ethiopia", in: HAROLD GOLDEN MARCUS (ed.), *Proceedings of the First United States Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (1973), 47, fig. 3.

[64] Project no. 8308 of: *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis-Ababa, and for the Hill Manuscript Library, Collegeville* (not yet catalogued); MS: MG-1982.056:036. MARILYN E. HELDMAN points to the similarity of the altar "painted without benefit of foreign models" with the altars of Ṭelasfarri Ǝsṭifanos ("The Kibran Gospels: Ethiopia and Byzantium", in: ROBERT L. HESS (ed.), *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Session B, April 13–16*, 1978, Chicago, USA), p. 361, fig. 6 and 10, and n. 41).

to have had a Greek prototype, which would likely have depicted an altar with a canopy, so the artist must have discarded that model in order to replace it with the Lalibäla altar. This would make sense, provided that the Lalibäla altar type was in current fashion.

Another and opposite case is the highly stylised high-altar engraved on the wall of the prayer room of Abunä Abrəham, the famous 14th century founder of Däbrä Ṣəyon's rock-cut church (see below), which matches the church's rock-hewn high-altar, complete with *ciborium* (Fig. 11). In fact, it seems that manuscripts and other artistic media do not vehicle novelties at the same speed, as witnessed by the example of a 17th-century icon in Munich's Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde showing the Ark of the Covenant resting on a small altar before being carried back to the Hebrews by a Philistine.[65]

From these representations we may conclude that portable altars served as main, or high-altars, and were not restricted to Lasta, even if they had originated there. At about the same time as the miniatures mentioned above, a new phenomenon may be observed:

Type 4. The fashioning from rock of monolithic altars. The eastern part of the crypt of Lalibäla Śəllase (Fig. C, Fig. 13) is a platform on which three altars have been hewn from the rock. The central altar is 1.5 m high and the side altars 1.35 m high. Each is roughly 70 to 90 cm square.[66] They closely replicate in rock the appearance of tall portable altars, with both chest and legs. For the first time altars are seen side by side and in a sanctuary totally open to the assembly. This is not surprising in light of the evolution shown by Lalibäla Däbrä Sina, mentioned above, which necessarily predates Lalibäla Śəllase because one has to pass through the former in order to reach the latter. In addition, the typical altar of that place and time, possibly around 1400, was still the portable altar. The association of the elements listed here is a landmark useful to our relative chronology. The application of rock-hewing to

[65] "Diptyche à l'Arche", end 17th c.; tempera sur bois stuqué: 65.5 x 70.0 cm. Munich, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Inv. No. 86–307678, in JACQUES MERCIER, *L'Arche Éthiopienne: art chrétien d'Éthiopie*, Paris: Pavillon des Arts, 2000–01, p. 134. Considering parallels between Nubian and Byzantine liturgical vestments, Karel Innemée writes that the "new developments tend to appear slightly earlier in manuscripts than in wall-paintings; nevertheless manuscripts seem to be more conservative since here the more archaic costumes keep on being depicted side by side with the portraits in a next phase of development, while in wall-painting one way of depicting the costume is more or less replaced by the next one" (KAREL C. INNEMÉE, "Parallels between Nubian and Byzantine Liturgical Vestments", *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 32 (1989), 181–185 (p. 181)).

[66] See LINO BIANCHI BARRIVIERA, "Le chiese in roccia di Lalibelà e di altri luoghi del Lasta", *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 18 (Rome, 1962), 38–39; GERVERS, "Däbrä Sina-Golgotha-Sellassie", 35.

erecting an altar is a new development, although there is nothing inherently special about a monolithic altar, nor is the number of three altars an issue. However, it is now documented that portable altars stood side by side in an open type of chapel without *Qəddəst*.[67]

The rock-cut church of Maryam Dəngəlat, hewn out of a cliff south-west of ʿƎdäga Ḫamus (East Təgray), has a single monolithic altar and no *pastophoria* (Fig. 16).[68] The altar is tucked into a tiny sanctuary delimited by the surrounding walls with just enough space for a deacon to stand on the east side and for a procession to pass. The monolith is topped by a wooden superstructure. The priest would have celebrated on the lower surface of the superstructure, within a space measuring about 85 cm square.[69] The later east window and the wooden door frame of the church have mid-15th-century counterparts at Gundä Gunde.

It is significant that in the chapel with three monolithic altars at Lalibäla Śəllase (Fig. 13) and at Maryam Dəngəlat, the *pastophoria* are absent. At the same time, the physical appearance of the altars differs. Those at Lalibäla Śəllase are of the portable type, but the single altar at Maryam Dəngəlat with a large niche in the back is definitely Coptic in detail. With respect to the liturgy, these furnishings are too cramped to allow for many ministers to stand and serve together.

For the first time with Maryam Dəngəlat, we find another type of altar, a small, unmoveable Coptic model. Those of May Kado and Abba Yoḥanni will later display Coptic features, but Maryam Dəngəlat's Coptic altar is noteworthy for its small size. We propose that this is an intermediary stage, whereby the relative newness of the Fatimid Coptic altar is made familiar through reduction to the proportions of the hitherto-traditional altars. In addition, we are reassured that Egyptian influence is active in the background. Both types of altar are related to the disappearance of the *pastophoria* and the

[67] There are, however, serious difficulties in interpreting the actual liturgical function of Lalibäla Śəllase.

[68] On Maryam Dəngəlat, see MICHAEL GERVERS, "The Rock-Cut Church of Maryam Dəngəlat (Haramat, Təgray)", *Proceedings of the XV^th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies* (*Hamburg July 20–25, 2003*), ed. by SIEGBERT UHLIG, Wiesbaden, 2006, 435–45.

[69] The monolith always had a superstructure as there is a large, rectangular opening excavated in the back which reaches the top, necessitating the addition of a surface on which to conduct the Mass.

churches then created. We may thus conclude that Lalibäla Däbrä Sina and others had up to three altars of the portable type.[70]

Type 5. As seen above, the sanctuary of Maryam Wəqro (Amba Śännayti near Näbälät)[71] contains a tall, rectangular monolithic high-altar, its upper part open through arches on all sides, like a *ciborium* incorporated in the structure (Fig. 14). In a separate north-east sanctuary is another monolithic altar, this time cubic and with a *mensa* rimmed in the Coptic manner; each side is decorated with a large cross (Fig. 17).[72] In this case the main sanctuary retains its traditional proportions and the side altar remains in a *pastophorion*-like sanctuary.

The sanctuary of May Kado Giyorgis is also of traditional proportions and has a rock-hewn high-altar in its midst, similar to that at Maryam Wəqro (Fig. 4). The second sanctuary of the north aisle has a cubic rock-hewn altar with a large cross on the west face and a rimmed *mensa,* again in the Coptic manner (Fig. 5). Both sanctuaries are autonomous, although the absence of a south wall for the north aisle's sanctuary may presage an entire east bay without partitions. There are no *pastophoria*.

Type 6. The monastery of Abba Yoḥanni, situated in a cliff of the Däbrä ᶜAsa, presents three rock-hewn altars excavated in the easternmost bay of a church characterised by high columns and numerous cupolas (Fig. D).[73] The sanctuary is separated by curtains only:[74] there are no steps or walls within. The central, high-altar, originally meant to be the baldaquin type, as in type 5, is unfinished, leaving a large, unusable cubic mass, painted on the front with a First Gondar style Crucifixion and Resurrection (Fig. 15). On its lower eastern side is a cavity, presently filled with a variety of ecclesiastical *paraphernalia* (Fig. 18). The top is flat. The cubic altar on the north side of the sanctuary is the one normally used for liturgical purposes.[75] Each side is adorned with a

[70] The number would depend upon whether they had an appropriately-dimensioned space available. Lalibäla Giyorgis, for instance, could never accommodate more than one altar.

[71] See above pp. 37f. and in MS: MG–2004.066:013/014/022/023, MG-2004.067:013.

[72] See MS: MG–2004.067:005.

[73] See MS: MG–2002.047:027–031, 2002.048:018-023/029–037, 2004.043:012–024, 2004.044:009–013.

[74] As at Däbrä Ṣəyon, it is unlikely that the curtains were planned when the church was made.

[75] See MS: MG–2004.043:021–024.

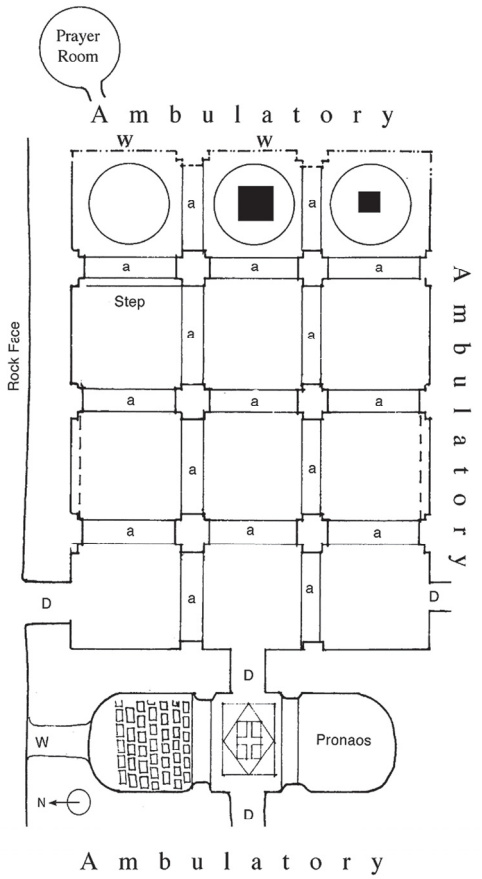


Fig. I: Ground Plan of Däbrä Ṣəyon (Gärᶜalta, Təgray) (after Plant)

large cross. A niche has been hewn out of its east face and the *mensa* itself is framed by a 6 cm high rim.[76]

The south altar is also cubic, but the front top has collapsed westwards.[77] Here, too, a niche has been dug out from the east side. The *mensa* is also hollowed to a depth of 5 cm. The floor level is uncertain as there has been considerable build-up over time. One of perhaps several steps has been found, indicating that the priest would have had to climb up in order to serve. There can be little doubt that Egyptian influence is again active.

Gäbrəʾel Wəqen, on the slopes of the same Däbrä ᶜAsa, also has three altars, of which two are monolithic and one constructed of stones.[78] The central, high-altar has approximately the same proportions as its counterpart at Abba Yoḥanni and, like it, has a flat canopy. The space underneath the *mensa* is used for storage, visible from the nave. The north-east altar has a high, deeply-rimmed *mensa*, also with storage space below. The constructed, off-centred south-east altar seems to have been erected later.

Like Abba Yoḥanni, Däbrä Ṣəyon (Fig. I) is a multi-domed, rock-cut church (the *Qəddəst* has a flat ceiling, though somewhat carved), but the highly decorated sanctuary space is better divided by a 20 cm high *Qəddəst*

[76] An enclosed, wooden, cupola-shaped structure has been added to this altar so as to make it look like the common altar of the later Ethiopian churches (see MS: MG–2004.043:021–024). Sacred vessels are stored within.

[77] See MS: MG–2002.047:027, 2004.043:013

[78] For the central high-altar, see MS: MG–2004.041:002/003/004; the north-east altar: MG–2004.040:008/009; the south-east altar: MG–2004.040:023.

step. [79] Two altars only occupy the east bay, which is partitioned by pillars and cupolas. The centrally-positioned rock-hewn high-altar, similar to the previous *ciborium* examples, is 214 cm high (Fig. 19). It is matched by the highly stylised altar carved in low relief on the wall of the prayer room of Abuna Abrəham, the famous 14th-century founder of the church (Fig. 11). The *mensa* stands at 140 cm above the floor, necessitating a stone step in order for a priest to celebrate before it. There is a storage niche in the back, although the iron frame and door which have recently been affixed to it with cement make it difficult to know how original it is. In the high, flat wall behind the altar is a window with an open-work cross, above which is painted a *Maiestas Domini*. The south-east altar is rock-hewn and an approximate cube.[80] There is a back niche 30 cm above the floor. The *mensa* is without a surrounding ridge or frame. This monolith is referred to locally as an altar, but Mass has not been celebrated on it for several generations.[81]

Type 7. Cupolas are visible over the three ceiling units of the central aisle of the sanctuary in the monastery church of Däbrä Garzen at Gundä Gunde, and probably stand above the adjacent units in the north and south aisles. The easternmost bay of this sanctuary houses a unique wooden example of an ancient altar (Fig. 20).[82] The four corner posts, which support a cupola above the *mensa*, are carved with a cross in the middle of the front posts. The space between the posts is wide open on the four sides and arched, framing the window in the back wall. Painted in the particular style of Gundä Gunde, an angel is depicted on each of the two front arched corners.[83] Covering the entire top and the exterior, curtains hang down on all sides, giving the impression of a flat top.

At first sight, some details would appear to be closely inspired by Coptic precedents; for example, the exceptionally well made cupola and the open sides of the altar. However, the cupola is a universal pattern. The back has not been seen, so it remains unknown whether or not the altar contains a niche or storage space. Other features are not obviously Coptic: the posts, meant only to support the cupola, rise above it and frame the whole. The cross does not top the cupola, but hangs in front and above it. The flat top recalls the appearance of the massive rock-hewn altars belonging to types 5 and 6 described

[79] See MS: MG–2000.065:026–036, 2004.143:023–034, 2004.145:015–019, 2004.149:006–008.

[80] See MS: MG–2000.069:009, 2004.145:017/019.

[81] There is no altar in the north bay of the sanctuary, nor any sign that one has been removed.

[82] See MS: MG–2002.084:033/034; 2002.086:021/022/023. This rare altar has since been badly damaged by fire, especially the cupola (MS: MG–2006.015:029/037).

[83] Possibly, all four corners are similarly decorated.

above. We see in it a simplification of the Coptic high-altar of the type that had become customary in Egypt from the Fatimid period onwards. The frame produced by the four posts rising above the cupola of the altar at Gundä Gunde is patterned after the volume of the flat-topped rock altar. This phenomenon would have had no reason, had the present wooden altars been made before the rock ones. Had they come first, they would have imitated the actual Coptic altars more closely. In this instance, the cupola with its cross, supported by the posts, would have topped the whole structure.[84]

The wooden altar seen at Gundä Gunde can immediately be related to numerous rock-cut churches with multiple cupolas and not-infrequently tall, monolithic high-altars. Chronologically speaking, this altar at Gundä Gunde appears to have been influenced by the monumental rock-hewn altars found in wide churches with several cupolas, and belonging to type 6 above. The construction of the church in this isolated, mid-15th century, staunchly religious and therefore liturgically conservative monastery, points towards a date that fits the likely time-frame of such an altar and iconographic style; that is, shortly after the introduction of the monumental samples. Moreover, the altar top has been burned, which explains its dark areas and makes it difficult to see its iconography. We may, therefore, date it from between the erection of the church (*ca.* 1450) and its restoration by ʿƎzra after the fire in the beginning of the 16th century. The craftsmen were unlikely to have seen any original Coptic altars with their own eyes and it is not surprising that their reproduction was lacking in detail.

A striking niche-like opening gives access to the lower hollow part of the wooden altar of Guya Abunä Täklä Haymanot (Tämben).[85] This altar documents the evolution of the Ethiopian altar one step further towards what we today consider the norm, through adaptation or simplification, while maintaining analogous liturgical requirements.

The impressive rock-hewn altars of both types 5 and 6 are of similar manufacture and constitute a definite change from the portable type. Consider the raised edge around their *mensa*, the niche in their back, the frequent necessity of a step for the celebrant and the commonly-arched openings hung with curtains on all sides of the *mensa*.[86] These free-standing, massive monuments of surprising height point strikingly towards models which spread throughout the Coptic area from the time of the Fatimid dynasty.[87]

[84] There may be such altars, but to our knowledge none has yet been found.

[85] MS: MG–2002.049:017. Guya Abunä Täklä Haymanot (Ambarra, Tämben) is located about 20 km. south of Abba Yoḥanni (Däbrä ʿAsa).

[86] In Ethiopia, as the altar at Däbrä Ṣəyon shows, the flat top of the monolith is unlikely to have received a wooden dome enhancing the appearance of a classic *ciborium*.

[87] See especially BUTLER, *Coptic Churches*, II, 2, 9–10, 28–31.

However, while the churches of type 5 retain the proportions of the traditional central sanctuary, type 6 is characterised by the full east bay sanctuary: no trace of any *pastophoria* is left to be seen. Cupolas stand high above the altar in the full-width east bays,[88] as also above every square space delineated by walls or pillars, a development again inherited from Egypt and translated into Ethiopia's rock-hewn churches without passing through built counterparts.[89] The significant modifications between types 5 and 6 correspond to a change of period.

With this development of the liturgical equipment whereby the monumental high-altar with its *ciborium*-like shape, relayed by wooden derivatives such as found at Gundä Gunde, replaces the portable wooden altar, we have jumped into the modern era of the Ethiopian liturgy. However miserable the village church and however shabby this essential piece of church furniture may be, the Ethiopian altar from that time on is understood as being a complete piece of furniture with a main body which serves as a chest. The *mensa* is the top of the chest. It is surmounted by a structure which can be completely enclosed, including the sides and front, either by shutters, curtains, and now even by metal doors. This feature is found especially in the more recent large churches. An icon of the Mother of God normally fills the blind back of the altar, behind which the deacon continues to stand. This is the modern altar, once the central high-altar, an adapted survivor of what we have come to know through the rock-altars and the wooden example from Gundä Gunde. This modern *mänbärä tabot* may be found either in a sanctuary with only one altar, a feature of the round churches, or in a full-width east bay sanctuary with three altars, characteristic of the modern cathedrals.

It is important to recognize that far more rock-cut than built churches have survived from the Middle-Ages, and that not all examples of either have been invoked in this study. Our conclusions and relative chronology are, therefore, open to re-interpretation and correction.

1) A consideration of the old order of preparation of the Eucharistic bread and wine in Syria and Egypt and then in Ethiopia, reveals that churches were equipped with *pastophoria*, one of which was meant for this rite of the *prothesis*, before the Mass.
2) Changes in Egyptian liturgical practice led to the rite of the *prothesis* becoming the beginning of the Mass. The change is first marked by the multiplicity of portable altars in churches obviously built with *pastophoria* for the ancient rite. It may have taken place around the middle of the 13th century.

[88] Except at Gäbrəʾel Wəqen, but there the decor of the ceiling plays a similar role.
[89] BUXTON, "Rock-Hewn", 97.

3) *Pastophoria* were no longer built in newly-erected churches towards the end of the 13th century. Amongst the first such churches are Ǝmäkina Mädḫane ʿaläm and Waša Mikaʾel.
4) The practice of installing an additional altar in the north and/or south sides of the sanctuary continued in many new churches, although this was not obligatory. A single full-width east bay sanctuary eventually emerged in a high-ceilinged and domed church.
5) While the first altars tended to be small, wooden and portable or quasi-portable (types 1 to 4), the permanent witness of rock-cut examples reflects the subsequent advent of the monumental *ciborium*-style high-altar and the matching side ones (types 5 & 6) in the 14–15th centuries.

Although we have emphasized the Coptic origin of major changes in the Ethiopian liturgy, it must be recognized that, in this instance as in others, Ethiopia does not entirely abide by the Coptic models. For example, we note that additional sanctuaries do not always have a doorway leading to the aisle: Gännätä Maryam and Maryam Wəqro-Näbälät lack this feature. Also, Copts may celebrate several Masses a day on different altars in a given church whereas the Ethiopian Church keeps to a unique Eucharist (the liturgies celebrated on the various altars have to be synchronised).[90] This differs from Egyptian practice because whatever provoked the change there did not exist in Ethiopia.[91] Another difference is the fact that the tops of Ethiopian monolithic altars are flat, not curved like *ciboria*.

Many questions remain, such as: When and where did the large monolithic altars of the permanent Coptic altar type first appear? What would be the rapport between the multiplication of the altars and that of the Ethiopian altar tablets, and their relationship with the veneration of saints in the Ethiopian mind? Why is it that the West-Syriac and the Ethiopian Churches are today the only ones to celebrate Masses in a synchronised manner? The *pastophoria* and other architectural features of the churches have much bearing on the liturgy of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Täwaḥədo* Church and *vice versa*. We hope to address these and other questions in greater depth at a later date.

Summary

There are three parts to the interior space of ancient Ethiopian churches: a sanctuary (*Mäqdäs*) which is expanded into the "Holy Place" (*Qəddəst*) and the place of the assembly (*Qəne maḥlet*). Four rooms stand at the corners of a cross-in-square interior: two service rooms on either side of a narthex-like entrance-room, westwards and, more important for

[90] Priests and deacons celebrate on different altars in the same church for the same assembly, the group at the central altar leading.
[91] The *parekklesion* of May Kado Giyorgis is a striking exception in its conception.

the present discussion, two eastern service rooms which flank the sanctuary. These are called the *pastophoria*. After early input from Syria-Palestine, the Ethiopian basilicas took on an Aksumite character. Their development continued in a loose relationship with changes on the Egyptian scene, notably with a double phenomenon: the evolution of the rite and place of preparation of the bread and wine for Mass (the *prothesis*), and the demand for more altars at a time when churches could not be multiplied in Egypt.

A study of architectural changes in the churches, alongside a comparison of liturgical practices and clues found in iconography and Coptic and Syriac literature, can bear witness to how the liturgy of the Ethiopian Church developed. Such investigation is all the more important because the absence of written documentation until the 13th century has left the church buildings as almost the only evidence available for study. The present study concentrates on the evolution and eventual disappearance of the *pastophoria*. The nature and location of the altars provides further evidence for dating. It should be noted that Ethiopia does not entirely abide by the Coptic models, essentially because what provoked change in Egypt did not exist in Ethiopia.

Many questions still remain to be answered, including: When and where did the large monolithic altar of the permanent Coptic altar type first appear? Why are the West-Syriac and Ethiopian Churches today the only ones to celebrate Mass in a synchronized manner? We hope to address these and other questions at a later date.