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### Article

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## Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA, like the preceding one, is partly monographic, with a section containing the proceedings of the Panel on Islamic Literature in Ethiopia: New Perspectives of Research, from the '19<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies', held in Warsaw, Poland, on 24–28 August 2015.

Starting from this issue, the annual bibliography on Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics held from its inception in 1998 for eighteen years by Rainer Voigt is handed over, on Voigt's own will, to a pool of younger scholars, with the substantial support of the AETHIOPICA editorial team. I would like on this occasion to express the deep gratitude of the editorial board of AETHIOPICA and of all scholars in Ethiopian Semitic and Cushitic linguistics to Rainer Voigt for his fundamental and valuable contribution.

### Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.  
*ÄthFor* Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).  
*AethFor* Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid.*, 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid.*, 2012ff.).  
*AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.  
*CSCO* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.  
*EAE* S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).  
*EI<sup>2</sup>* *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I–XII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1960–2005).  
*EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.  
*JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.  
*JSS* *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Manchester 1956ff.  
*NEASt* *Northeast African Studies*, East Lansing, MI 1979ff.  
*OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.  
*PICES* 9 A.A. GROMYKO, ed., 1988, *Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Ethiopian Studies, Moscow, 26–29 August 1986*, I–VI (Moscow: Nauka Publishers, Central Department of Oriental Literature, 1988).  
*RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli 1983ff.  
*ZDMG* *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, Leipzig–Wiesbaden–Stuttgart 1847ff.

## Sound and Power in the Christian Realm of Ethiopia (Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries)\*

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The Christian realm of Ethiopia achieved relative stability, politically and militarily, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This period was known as the *Gondär period* because kings built churches or palaces in the city of Gondär. Nevertheless, the seat of power was seminomadic, since kings, year after year, travelled to the provinces during the dry season. Whether the king was moving around the realm, entering or leaving a stronghold, or issuing decrees and making appointments from a palace, sounds punctuated the exercise of royal power. This 'sound code'<sup>1</sup> will be explored here by a historian proficient in analysing written sources and images, along with their contexts, and two ethnomusicologists who, competent in organology, have carefully examined passages about music in Ethiopian sources of the period and adopted a symbolic approach to musical instruments.

Our objective is to identify the instruments associated with royal power in Ethiopia, their contexts of use and, just as important, the symbolic associations established with sound- and music-making objects. Pero Páez, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary who lived in Ethiopia in the early seventeenth century, noticed that each company of soldiers had its own instruments:

King Susənyos (1607–1632) was preceded by all his captains, each with his troop drawn up in order with men on foot in the vanguard and then those on horseback, all dressed for celebration with many banners and playing their drums, trumpets, shawms and flutes, which they have in their own fashion, and firing many guns so that the

\* This article was originally written in French and translated in English by Noal Mellot (CNRS).

<sup>1</sup> 'Sound code' is a concept coined by Corbin 1994.

whole of that broad plain echoed. Lastly came the emperor with many lords on horseback.<sup>2</sup>

We do not intend to identify all musical instruments from this realm's regions and cultures. Instead, we have focused only on those instruments, aerophones and membranophones, associated with the king and royal power.<sup>3</sup> These are the instruments mentioned in the royal chronicles (which, written in Gə'əz, are our major source of written documents) and depicted in the images used to decorate churches. Nonetheless, several methodological problems crop up because of the porosity between religious imagery and the intentions of those (usually nobles) who asked for images to be made. Representing something as sensorial and as fleeting as sound, whether through words, spoken or written, or through images, can be taken for granted only in contemporary descriptions. Let us also point out that it is hard to date the instruments in Ethiopian and Western collections. But judging from the date of the collections themselves, the instruments collected do not, we assume, come from before the nineteenth century. The quest to grasp this evanescent reality in the past has been an arduous but passionate task that, as we shall see, still holds surprises.

### 1. The *nägarit*, drums 'that announce'

The royal chronicles provide rather homogeneous descriptions in the seventeen mentions of kettledrums<sup>4</sup>, an instrument easy to identify. In addition, travellers from abroad often mentioned these drums. This instrument has been passed down to our times; it is on display in museum collections, such as that of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (henceforth IES) in Addis Ababa. In fact, these drums are still played on certain occasions. In the Maryam Şəyon Church in Aksum for instance, the *nägarit* are played on the eve of every Marian feast and to announce the end of Lent.

To refer to this instrument, the sources invariably use the word *nägarit*, 'what announces, the annunciator', from the verb *nagara*, 'say, make known'.

<sup>2</sup> *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia* 2011, I, 127. On the ethnic diversity of army units in medieval Ethiopia (for want of a similar study on the Gondär period), see Deresse Ayenachew 2014, 83–95.

<sup>3</sup> In line with Sachs and Hornbostel's universal classification of musical instruments into four major families based on how sound vibrations are produced: idiophones, chordophones, membranophones and aerophones. Aerophones consist in musical instruments that produce their sound by setting up vibrations in a body of air, such as flutes, reed and brass instruments; membranophones group musical instruments that produce their sound by setting up vibrations in a stretched membrane. This category comprises mainly drums.

<sup>4</sup> Kettledrums are struck membranophones equipped with one skin, usually with an egg-shaped or hemispherical resonator.

The name tells us nothing about the instrument's shape, but does state its function. This singular noun has a plural, collective referent, since *nägarit* refers to a pair of drums, evidence of this being Queen Məntəwwab's donation in the mid-eighteenth century of four pairs of metal *nägarit* and two pairs of wood *nägarit* to her church in Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am.<sup>5</sup>

In the Gondär chronicles, we notice the importance assigned to the *nägarit* as objects representing power and endowed with royal authority. In fact, these drums were not necessarily played—owning or, to be more precise, displaying them sometimes sufficed to signal the power associated with them. The *nägarit* were displayed and/or played during the funerals of kings, queens, nobles and prelates.<sup>6</sup> They were used for courtly celebrations such as the inauguration of the Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase royal church in Gondär in 1693, which marked the zenith of the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706). Preceding the altar which was about to be consecrated in the church were the *nägarit* and *nəsər qana* (an aerophone discussed hereafter). The king, carrying a lance, came next, on horseback. Fifty years later, during the consecration of the royal church in Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am, the king and queen proceeded there 'in accordance with the royal ceremonial, with banners and *nägarit*'.<sup>7</sup>

The association of the *nägarit* with authority is very clear in historians' accounts of attempted usurpations. For example, a rebel pretending to be the king's son during the reign of Iyasu I (1682–1706) laid claim to the *nägarit* and the ceremonial canopy (*dəbab*, carried to shelter the king when moving).<sup>8</sup> In this example, the rebel's seizing the *nägarit*, which accompanied the king during public appearances, amounted to a declaration of his legitimacy.

<sup>5</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 105 (tr.). According to Bruce 1790, IV, 515, the metal, called *santal* in the Chronicle, was silver: 'It was the month of December [...], it was a party of pleasure, of the most agreeable kind, to convoy the king to his capital. The priests from all the convents for many miles round, in dresses of yellow and white cotton, came, with their crosses and drums, in procession, and greatly added to the variety of the scene. Among these were three hundred of the monks of Koscam, with their large crosses, and kettle-drums of silver, the gift of the Iteghé [Queen Məntəwwab] in the days of her splendor'.

<sup>6</sup> Kings: the transfer of the remains of Bäkaffa and Iyasu II: Guidi 1910–1912, 195 (tr.). Queens: for the funeral of Säblä Wängel, mother of Iyasu I: Guidi 1903–1905, 149–150 (tr.) 143–144 (text). Nobles: *ibid.* 333 (tr.) and 311 (text) as well as Guidi 1910–1912, 163 (tr.). Prelates: Guidi 1903–1905, 224 (text) and 238 (tr.): for the burial in Azazo of əččäge Agnatyos, the head of the Ethiopian Church and superior of the Täklä Haymanot Order, 'with banners, *nägarit* and *nəsər qana* as is the custom for kings (*bä-lamadä nägäšt*)'.

<sup>7</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 96 (tr.).

<sup>8</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 130 (text).

### 1.1 Using the *nägarit* for proclamations

A declaration publicized by the beating of drums became an official proclamation. Under Iyasu II (1730–1755), rebels led by Tānse Mammo entered Gondär with, in all likelihood, the intention of using the *nägarit* to make an official proclamation (*awaḡ*). Putting up a fight, loyalists forced them to abandon the drums. This passage also accuses the rebels of wanting to make an attempt on the life of the young king and queen.<sup>9</sup>

The *nägarit* were the king's voice. Significantly, they were played on the square (*addäbabay*) in front of the main gate to the Gondär palace, to the south of the outer walls. This was the preferred place for announcing royal edicts, but the chronicles seldom provide a clear description of how announcements were made. On another occasion, under Iyasu II, the *nägarit* were brought out (*awḍə'a*) to proclaim an edict from the *awaḡ mängärya* (literally 'the place where edicts are announced')—probably a tower on the southern wall overlooking the aforementioned square.<sup>10</sup> This passage contains no verb for beating the drums: simply mentioning that the drums were brought out and displayed sufficed to express the purpose. While on an expedition, the king could also make a proclamation to the sound of the *nägarit*. For example, Iyasu I, after his coronation in Aksum, confirmed with drums (*bä-nägarit*) the land privileges granted to the Aksum church.<sup>11</sup> Once again, the Ethiopian text did not need to mention the drumming itself. Nevertheless, as James Bruce, a Scottish traveller at the Gondär court in 1770–1771, clearly noted, beating the *nägarit* was associated with issuing a proclamation:

the king had given him in fief, or for military service for ever, three large villages in Dembea, which he named, and this was proclaimed afterwards by beat of drum at the door of the tent.<sup>12</sup>

### 1.2 The *nägarit* and the delegation of power

By metonymy, the *nägarit* represented power in general. Authority over a territory or province was sometimes expressed in terms of the number of these drums in the governor's possession. Several examples from Ethiopian or foreign sources attest this conception of the emblems of authority.<sup>13</sup> For

<sup>9</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 55 (tr.).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 174 (tr.). The place has been located after a careful reading of royal chronicles from this period and the hypotheses formulated by Ollivier 1997.

<sup>11</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 159 (tr.), 152 (text).

<sup>12</sup> Bruce 1790, IV, 665.

<sup>13</sup> When *ras* Mika'el Səhul had his own narrative inserted in the Chronicle of King Iyo'as, he repeatedly had his power magnified by insisting on how many *nägarit* he had; see

example, in the first half of the eighteenth century, Ayyo, the governor (*abägaz*) of Bägemdär, forced a rebel to abandon all his weapons and then confiscated his horses and mules along with the *nägarit*.<sup>14</sup> Once again, the Chronicle has clearly associated the fact of having and/or using these drums with legitimate power, in this case by a governor acting on the king's behalf during a rebellion.

In this passage, the drums were borne on the back of mules, one pair per animal. The *nägarit* were part of military processions and marches; having them conveyed by this 'noble' animal—mules, being sterile, were expensive—is evidence of their value, both symbolic and real. Owning *nägarit* entailed being able to provide for mules, mule-drivers and drummers. The histories of families who held the prestigious position of *bahər nägäs* (the 'prince of the sea', governor of the northernmost part of Abyssinia) very frequently used the phrase 'saddle the *nägarit*' to refer to the power represented by owning or inheriting these drums.<sup>15</sup> Bruce confirmed this in a reference to the northern province:

Masuah, in ancient times, was one of the principal places of residence of the Baharnagash, who, when he was not there himself, constantly left his deputy, or lieutenant. In summer he resided for several months in the island of Dahalac, then accounted part of his territory. He was, after the King and Betwudet, the person of the greatest consideration in the kingdom, and was invested with *sendick* [banners] and *nagareet*, the kettledrum, and colours, marks of supreme command.<sup>16</sup>

He also described the authority of the governor of Q<sup>w</sup>ara, the province located to the west of Ṭana Lake:

The governor of Kuara is one of the great officers of state, and, being the king's lieutenant-general, has absolute power in his province, and carries *sendick* and *nagareet*. His kettledrums are silver, and his privilege is to beat these drums even in marching through the capital, which no governor of a province is permitted to do, none but the king's *nagareets* or kettledrums being suffered to be beat there, or anywhere in a

Guidi 1910–1912, 243, 248. These drums and banners had to be protected; a governor who abandoned them on the battlefield, fleeing like a coward before the enemy, was condemned to death; *ibid.* 167, 172. The symbolism of the *nägarit* is also implied by Bruce 1790, V, 52: 'Sancoho is an old frontier territory of Abyssinia. [...] The inhabitants of the town are Baasa, a race of Shangalla, converted to the Mahometan religion; it is an absolute government, has a *nagareet* or kettledrum for proclamations'.

<sup>14</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 88 (tr.).

<sup>15</sup> Kolmodin 1915, 68, 208.

<sup>16</sup> Bruce 1790, III, 249.

town where the king is; but the governor of Kuara is entitled to continue beating his drums till he comes to the foot of the outer stair of the king's palace. This privilege, from some good behaviour of the first officer to whom the command was given, was conferred upon the post by David II [Ləbnä Dəngəl, 1508–1540], who conquered the province.<sup>17</sup>

Playing the drums in the royal city, up to the palace gates, was, as we see, an exceptional privilege. The sounds intrinsically associated with the legitimacy of political and military power were subject to rules of precedence and territorialisation. Not only was the right to play these drums, as well as horns and trumpets, reserved for governors and kings, but the places for making these sounds, calls and alarms were regulated.

An example drawn from the chronicles helps us better understand how these kettledrums became a symbol of royal power and of the delegation of this power to military and political authorities. During the 1730s, the young king Iyasu II, who had just taken the throne, was attacked while Wärañña, a loyal army chieftain (*däggäzmač*), was not in Gondär. Once informed of the attack against his sovereign, Wärañña mounted an expedition. In too much of a hurry to wait for the mules for conveying the drums, he had his twelve *nägarit* loaded on the shoulders of his men and left for Gondär. According to the chronicler, the chieftain arrived at the capital 'with *nägarit* and *sändäq* (banners)' and was received by the king and his mother in like manner, with



Fig. 1: The entry of Christ in Jerusalem, detail of a mural from the reign of Bäkaffa (1721–1730), on the western wall of the *mäqdäs* in the Zur Amba Monastery, Bägemdər (credit: A. Wion, 2015)

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 260.

drums and banners.<sup>18</sup> Beyond telling an (amusing) anecdote, this passage was also intended to underscore Wärañña's steadfast loyalty and his zeal in placing his soldiers in the king's service. The kettledrums were brought to the king, but the way of conveying them did not allow for having them played. These drums were but the symbol of the governor's vassalage. For the governor to place his army in the king's service, the emblems of power (drums and banners) had to be presented to the king as soon as possible.

A particular detail of a mural painting in the Zur Amba Monastery portrays an animal laden with drums. Painted during King Bäkäffa's reign (1721–1730), this portrayal of Christ entering Jerusalem shows a drummer on a mule preceding Christ. Since Ethiopian paintings during the Gondär period do not depict secular scenes, we have to use religious paintings to understand the material conditions of the time. This mural embeds elements from the contemporaneous material culture in a Biblical narrative, thus showing that kettledrums were utilized for more than drumming: they represented legitimate power.

### 1.3 A resonant ceremonial instrument

A marching army could be seen because of its banners, and heard because of its drums. Is that all there is to it? Reading the chronicles does not help us answer this question, since the sound made by drums is seldom described, probably because it was taken for granted. However, three accounts provide details. According to two of them, the *nägarit* 'make the earth quake' (from the verb *däläqläqä*) during military expeditions.<sup>19</sup> The same verb was, as we shall see, frequently used with reference to the awesome sound of firearms. In the chronicles, *zäbätä* ('beat, strike, make a loud sound') refers to the action of beating drums.<sup>20</sup> This verb, which draws attention to the intensity of the sound, is not used only for membranophones.

### 1.4 Wood and metal *nägarit*: A ranking of materials?

The written sources are less forthcoming about the physical aspects of these kettledrums. Some drums were made of wood, but others, of metal (*santal* in ancient Amharic). In the early seventeenth century, Pero Páez wrote very precise descriptions, such as the following:

<sup>18</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 73–77 (tr.).

<sup>19</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 138 (tr.), when the king left the capital in accordance with royal ceremonial; *ibid.* 154 (tr.), when *rās* Wadäğē victoriously returned to Gondär.

<sup>20</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 214 (text), 228 (tr.).

Shortly afterwards he [King Susānyos] sets off with his banner to the sound of the drums, of which there are ordinarily four on two mules, some of red copper and others of wood covered with cowhide, and he is followed by all those whose duty it is to do so [...] The drums follow next, usually eight very large copper ones, their mouths covered with cowhide, and he sometimes takes more loaded on mules, two on each, and the players ride on the mules' hindquarters.<sup>21</sup>

Charles Poncet, who, in 1699–1700, lived in Gondär in circles close to King Iyasu I, twice mentioned silver kettledrums. First when the king left Gondär to wage war:

When the rains were over, the King makes his departure known; and the infallible signal for the King to march is that he has his tents pitched on a large plain outside the capital city of Gondär. [...] Three days later, the King makes [soldiers] march to the sound of two big silver kettledrums [*timbales*] everywhere in the city. Afterwards, he mounts his horse and goes to Aringo, a major stronghold six days from Gondär, where the King has a palace nearly as magnificent as the one in Gondär. That is the meeting-place for mustering troops. The King passes them in review during the three days he spends there. Afterwards, the campaign begins.<sup>22</sup>

Poncet also described a procession accompanying the king:

When leaving with ceremony, he is accompanied by about two thousand men, cavalry or infantry. The kettledrums, trumpets, flutes, oboes or instruments unfamiliar to me precede the troops. The accord of all these instruments does not make a disagreeable sound. And among the kettledrums, some are in silver. After these instruments comes a cavalry corps divided into squadrons, in the midst of whom the King is on a sumptuously adorned horse.<sup>23</sup>

Poncet confirms that the instruments preceded the king, and clearly attests the prestige of metal drums. Although several *nägarit* in wood have been preserved, the conservation of metal drums is less sure. To the best of our knowledge, there are four or five metal drums at the Dagna *abunä* Gäbrä Krəstos Monastery in Təgray. These drums, of medium size (diameter, approximately 35 cm), are of a lightweight metal, probably copper, with a

<sup>21</sup> Páez 2011, I, 140.

<sup>22</sup> Poncet 2010, 137.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 163.



Figs. 2a and 2b: Metal *nāgarit* from the Dagna *abunä* Gäbrä Krəstos Monastery and the church in Yəḥa

single drumhead. The church at Yəḥa, also in Təgray, has a small cone-shaped metal drum without a skin; it might be a small *nāgarit*.

The variety of wooden kettledrums is remarkable: flat-bottomed or cone-shaped shells, various means for attaching the drumhead, with or without handles on the side, and sizes ranging from small to impressively large. Some of them, such as the one in the IES, have a diameter of more than two meters. It is important to note that some *nāgarit* have their resonator covered by an additional skin. However, this skin does not contribute to the sound of the instrument, which can still be classified as a kettledrum. A photograph from not later than 1936 shows how a very large *nāgarit* along with a very small one were conveyed on the back of a mule.<sup>24</sup> Most of these drums had two heads: a skin stretched over the large opening (the only one beaten) and the second at the other end of the shell. However a few had but one head.

### 1.5 The *dəb anbäsa* ('lion drum'), a prestigious *nāgarit*

One of the *nāgarit* used at the royal court had a special name: *dəb anbäsa*, the 'lion drum'.<sup>25</sup> It was brought out to announce King Bäkaffa's death in 1730 from the aforementioned *awaḡ mängärya* ('tower of proclamations') overlooking the square to the south of the palace.<sup>26</sup> Two generations later,

<sup>24</sup> Photograph in *L'impero coloniale fascista* (1936), page unknown; for a well illustrated paper on *nāgarit*, see the self-edited article of Timkehet Tefferä 2016.

<sup>25</sup> According to Leslau 1987, 117.

<sup>26</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 30 (tr.).

when *ras* Mika'el Səhul overthrew the Gondär monarchy in the 1770s, Bruce attested this prestigious use of the *deb anbäsä*, which was beaten before the announcement:

There was a number of people in the outer court of the king's house, crying very tumultuously for a convocation of the church. At twelve o'clock there was no word of Michael at the palace; but I saw the members of the council there, and expected he was coming. Instead of this, the large kettledrum, or nagareet, called 'the lion', was carried to the king's gate, which occasioned great speculation. But presently proclamation was made in these words [...]: 'Hear! Hear! Hear! They that pretend they do not hear this, will not be the last punished for disobeying'.<sup>27</sup>

This tells us something about how the announcement was made. Notice the redundancy: to inform the people, the drums were used along with the cry 'Hear! Hear! Hear!' No one dared pretend that they did not hear the announcement; and no exception would be made for those who disobeyed. Decisions by power-holders were announced at specific places, using specific objects, and following a ceremonial. The message was intended for everyone, and ignorance of it was no excuse. As this passage reminds us, the voice—more evanescent than the sound of an instrument and harder for us to imagine—played a significant part in proclamations.

The use of the *dəb anbäsa* to accompany the king is attested as early as the fifteenth century. Although written before the Gondär period, this excerpt from the *Chronicle of King Zär'a Ya'qob* (1434–1468) is of interest owing to its vocabulary. It also shows that certain practices were longstanding:

*Məsərqana* and *dəb anbäsa* are in front and behind, and from far away (*taqqä*) they blow (*yanäffəhu*) and beat (*yəzäbbətu*) according to each one's rule (*bäbä-sər'atomu*). And truly many among them sound (*yanäffəhu*) the *məsər qana*, which are blown during the king's march and when he enters his palace.<sup>28</sup>

This excerpt from a medieval chronicle presents the drums along with aerophones, and names the instruments. Three centuries later, in the mid-eighteenth century, a compilation of court documents, known as the *Sər'atä mängəst* (or Regulations of the Realm), about rules of ceremony and of etiquette, repeatedly mentions the *dəb anbäsa* drum and an aerophone, the *nəsər qana* (or *məsərqana*), the etymology of the latter having been lost during the medieval period.

<sup>27</sup> Bruce 1790, VI, 369–370.

<sup>28</sup> Perruchon 1893, 45.

## 2. The *nəsər qana*, the king's shawms?

There is no doubt that the *nəsər qana* are aerophones. First of all, the sources always use the action verb 'to blow' with this instrument. Secondly, we can imagine the sound produced thanks to the comparison, made by Ethiopians of the early seventeenth century, with a bird's call. Owing to the similarity of its sound, the crowned crane (*Balearica pavonina*) was called 'the burgomaster's (*käntiba*'s) *nəsər qana*'.

There are other birds almost as large as a swan, but with white only on their breasts and wingtips, the rest tending toward black; they have long legs and a tail, a short beak and some long, delicate golden feathers on their heads that look like crowns. They always gather in flocks, particularly in Dambiâ whose viceroy is called cantibâ, and these birds are called *cantibâ mecercâna*, or 'the *cantiba*'s shawms (*cheremelas*)', because their cries sound like the shawms that always precede him and make rather poor music.<sup>29</sup>

*Charamelas* in Portuguese (*chaleémies* in French) refers to double-reed aerophones of the oboe family.<sup>30</sup>

Shawms were used in Portuguese liturgical celebrations at the start of the seventeenth century—a practice limited to the Iberian Peninsula. Páez would have had many opportunities to hear this instrument. Taking this learned man at his word, the *nəsər qana* are a sort of oboe. Furthermore, crowned cranes make sounds similar to the oboe's. This nasal sound, typical of double reeds, is close to the sound of Renaissance shawms. Shawms and oboes in general were played outdoors, for parades, in various European countries at the time, as well as in the Mediterranean basin and Near East since Ancient Times. Acoustic analyses have confirmed that the oboe is capable of being heard in a crowd outdoors.

<sup>29</sup> Páez 2011, I, 213–214.

<sup>30</sup> Idem. 2008, 222: 'Há outras aves quase tão grandes como um cisne, mas com só o peito e pontas das asas brancas e o demais atira a preto; têm os pés e colo comprido, o bico curto e na cabeça umas penas compridas delicadas e como louras que parecem coroa. destas, andam sempre muitas juntas, e particularmente em Dambiâ, a cujo vice-rei chamam cantiba e a estas aves caniiba mecercâna, 'cheremelas do cantiba', porque quando gritam se parecem com as caramelas que ele leva sempre diante e lhe fazem assaz de ruim música'.

On *charamelas* in Portuguese music (at the time of, and from the very places in Portugal from which the Jesuits in Ethiopia had come), see Estudante Moreira 2007; on references by the missionaries to Ethiopian aerophones, see Damon-Guillot 2009, 65–99.

A passage from the Chronicle of Yoḥannəs describes how the *nəsər qana* were to be played, at a ceremony with great pomp observed in a church in Gondär for the relics (a bone from the hand) of a famous Ethiopian saint, Ewoṣtatewos:

the *məsərqana* are blown, and they are blown with great care (*bä-təgab*); and the silver and copper *maṭāq'eta* are blown, and they are blown with force (*bä-ḥayl*).<sup>31</sup>

Unlike the instruments requiring force to be blown, the *nəsər qana* had to be handled carefully. This description leads us to suppose that the *nəsər qana* were reed instruments used at the Ethiopian court during the Gondär period. The supposition that double-reed instruments were used in Ethiopia has never been formulated previously, probably because none has been passed down to us. Did Ethiopians lose the know-how for making reed instruments? Did reed instruments go out of use as other instruments were introduced?

### 2.1 Was the association of *nəsər qana* and *deb anbäsa* more than symbolic?

The Gondär chronicles mention the *nəsər qana* seven times but the ‘lion drums’ only thrice. These two instruments are mentioned together twice, in the Chronicle of Iyasu I, during the celebration of a religious feast in the king’s presence following a church council.<sup>32</sup> In the second mention, the *nəsər qana* and *dəb anbäsa* were played along with *aqrənt* (horns) and *anzira* (we are not yet able to determine whether this word refers to a single instrument or is a generic term for small instruments).

This is far from the systematic association between *nəsər qana* and *dəb anbäsa* stipulated in the *Sər'atä mängəšt*'s protocol.

For King Bäkaffa's wedding and then the coronation of the queen in 1723, the Chronicle states that the ceremonial followed the *Sər'atä mängəšt*, which prescribes playing the *dəb anbäsa* and *nəsər qana* for the crowning of a queen. However the king went to his wife's house ‘while the *mätqə'* was being played and the horn blown’.<sup>33</sup> The *Sər'atä mängəšt* uses words and symbols to explain what musical instruments—probably those passed down from medieval times—should be used. But ceremonies during the Gondär period were performed with a wider range of instruments than what this normative protocol would lead us to think.

<sup>31</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 40 (text), 39 (tr.).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 98 (text), 111 (tr.).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 286 (text), 305 (tr.): ‘*anzä yə'aqā'e ma qe wa-yetanafa qärm*'.

The *nəsər qana* are mentioned as having been played during solemn observances: lavish funerals, coronations or important religious ceremonies in the king's presence. An example: the proclamation of the young Yoḥannəs as king just after the announcement of his father's death (Fasilādas) in 1682.<sup>34</sup> During the official announcement of the choice of a new king and of the death of the preceding king, the *nəsər qana* were played along with horns, to underscore the solemnity.<sup>35</sup>

As we have already seen, the *nəsər qana* and *mätqə* were played during the ceremony celebrating Saint Ewoṣtatewos' relics, this being evidence of the king's determination to intervene in religious politics. Without delving into the complicated details, suffice it to say that, during the whole Gondär period, several theological currents were competing to have their members occupying positions of power; and the kings switched sides in alternation. In this case, King Yoḥannəs showed his commitment to the monastic movement founded by Saint Ewoṣtatewos, a current known as 'unctionism'. Since relics were seldom venerated in Ethiopia, it was highly significant that those of Ewoṣtatewos (who died in Armenia at the end of the fourteenth century) were brought to Gondär at the end of the seventeenth century. To amplify this event's political overtones, the *nəsər qana* were played. In like manner, *əččäge* Agnaṭəyos was, during the reign of Iyasu I, buried in Azazo 'with the banners, *nəgarit* and *nəsər qāna* as is the custom for kings'.<sup>36</sup> This was a sign of the king's commitment to the Däbrä Libanos monastic order, headed by the *əččäge*.

### 3. 'To the sound of the horn': From Bible to battlefield

*Qärn* literally means 'horn' (*aqrant*, the plural in *Gəʿəz*). It is easy to imagine that this aerophone was, initially at least, made of horn, whether from a zebu, gazelle, kudu or even rhinoceros. As in English, the word might then have come to refer to an instrument made from other materials. After all, cars have horns! The texts do not precisely describe this instrument's physical appearance.

Horns are often mentioned as being played on the battlefield to signal the start of fighting or a withdrawal, or even the return of troops to the capital after an expedition. The Chronicle of Bäkaffa happens to mention that

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 5–6 (text), 4–5 (tr.).

<sup>35</sup> Much later, in 1758, in the third year of Iyo'as' reign, the remains of his father (Iyasu II) and of his grandfather (Bäkaffa) were transferred to Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am; *ras Wäldä Lə'ul* marched with the banners, several *nəgarit*, the *məsər qana* and *mäläkät*; Guidi 1910–1912, 185–186 (text), 195 (tr.).

<sup>36</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 224 (text), 238 (tr.): *məslä nəgarit wä-sändäq wä-qana nəsər bälamadä nəgäšt*.

horns were loaded onto mules, like the *nägarit*.<sup>37</sup> They were, like these drums, part of the equipment for campaigns. At least a dozen passages mention horns being used during military expeditions. Even more frequent are the more than twenty instances of the phrase *bä-qalä qärn*, ‘to the sound of the horn’ (literally: ‘by the voice of the horn’). It was nearly always used to announce an official decision whether locally, in the royal camp during a campaign, or, to proclaim a decree or law.

The Biblical phrase *bä-qalä qärn* ‘to the sound of the horn’, crops up several times in the Ethiopic Old Testament. It mainly appears in the chronicles written by Sinoda. This royal historian, whose career spanned three reigns, eagerly excerpted passages from the Bible to enhance his accounts of royal exploits. Later, in the writings of his son, who, too, had become the king’s historian, we come upon a similar instance: as Wädaḡe, a governor and military chieftain, was rushing into battle, he cried, ‘Forward! Forward when the horn blows’.<sup>38</sup> Despite their strong Biblical connotations, phrases such as ‘by the voice of the horn’ are to be taken literally since a horn was blown to announce royal decisions.

Although horns were mainly used in the royal camp and on the battlefield to signal troop movements and impart orders, they were also present during religious feasts and royal ceremonies, in particular during coronations.<sup>39</sup>

How were horns played? In all instances mentioned, *qärn* and *aqernet* occur with an action verb that, unsurprisingly, usually means ‘to blow’, especially when *qärn*, the singular form, is used. The lesser used plural (*aqrant*) always appears along with the verb *zäbätä* (‘make a loud sound’).<sup>40</sup> Whereas a single horn is blown, several horns make a loud sound. As pointed out earlier, *zäbätä* is also used for the *nägarit* and *däb anbäsa* membranophones. It might, therefore, also be interpreted as ‘ring out’, ‘make heard’ or ‘resound’.<sup>41</sup>

The word *qärn* probably referred to various aerophones. In the second part of the seventeenth century, Fares, a rebel, penetrated a territory whose

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 277 (text), 295 (tr.).

<sup>38</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 83 (tr.); compare with the Gəʿəz text of Job 39:24–25, in Pereira 1905, 678.

<sup>39</sup> Horns at the coronations of Yoḡannəs (1682), Bäkäffa (1721), Iyasu II (1730) and Iyoʿas (1755). The *Sərʾatä mängəšt* recommends them for this ceremony.

<sup>40</sup> In the Chronicle of Yoḡannəs, when the King was enthroned and the death of his father announced (Guidi 1903–1905, 5–6 (text), 4–5 (tr.)). In the Chronicle of Bäkäffa, when the commander of the vanguard (*fitawrari*) sounded the departure of troops (*ibid.* 277 (text), 295–296 (tr.)), then when the royal palladium returned to Gondär after a victory (*ibid.* 305 (text), 326 (tr.)).

<sup>41</sup> Leslau’s Gəʿəz dictionary (p. 631) proposes the following: ‘strike, smite, plague, beat, pluck (a musical instrument), beat (the drum), whip, scourge, chastise, shake, agitate, cut off, cast’.

inhabitants remained loyal to the king, in order to plunder it ‘to the sound of the *mātaqqāṣṣ* and *qārn*, which were *zaguf*.<sup>42</sup>

The chronicler might have used *qārn* with *zaguf* to disparage the blood-thirsty rebel by asserting that the horns announcing his army were nothing more than flutes. This reveals a ranking of instruments, apparently as a function of their association with power. How ridiculous: a rebel announced by flutes, the instrument of shepherds!

#### 4. The *mäläkät*, an Oromo aerophone gradually adopted during the eighteenth century

Reports by travellers during the nineteenth century have made us familiar with the word *mäläkät*, a word referring to the ceremonial trumpet that accompanied the movements and proclamations of power-holders. Casimir Mondon-Vidailhet provided a complete description:

First of all, the *Malakat*, or Abyssinian trumpet, one of the instruments reserved for royal music; it used to be called *Qandā-malakat*. These trumpets are of various sizes; those used for royal occasions are more than a meter long; they are in bamboo and have a copper bell or calabash at the end. The frame is covered over its whole length by a carefully curried hide. The bell's outer rim is sometimes decorated with inlaid shells or glass beads. Not far from the mouthpiece is a hole for emitting a half-tone below the instrument's high note. These trumpets often preceded the King of Kings in war; I doubt that they do so nowadays. They have, in any case, a military tone [...] The players' dexterity consists in making strident sounds at a military gait. I admit that they manage to do so, even though the effects are necessarily quite limited.<sup>43</sup>

According to the IES catalog of musical instruments, the *mäläkät* were ‘traditionally’ made of bamboo with a mouthpiece of horn; some of them were wrapped with leather, but there were metal *mäläkät* that produced the same sound as the original in bamboo.<sup>44</sup> Three are on display at the museum in

<sup>42</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 34 (text), 34 (tr.): *ənzä yaṭaqqāṣṣ mātaqqāṣṣ tā wä-yanäffəb qārnä zä-wəṣṣatu zaguf*; Villoteau also mentioned the word *zaguf* (from Abyssinian priests whom he met in Cairo in the early part of the nineteenth century): ‘The *zagouf* is another sort of flute [He had just described the *embilta*] closely related to the *nay* of the Egyptians; some have six holes pierced, others only three, and still others but two’, Villoteau 1812, 1002.

<sup>43</sup> Mondon-Vidailhet 2003, 162.

<sup>44</sup> *Musical instruments of Ethiopia* 1999, 34, 51.



Fig. 3: *Mäläkät* in the collection at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies

Addis Ababa. These aerophones have a long, narrow, cylindrical tube, uncoiled, with the bell at the end. The mouthpiece and shaft are of metal. Two of these instruments are wrapped with leather or cloth straps for carrying them. None of the three is decorated.

When reading chronicles from the Gondär period, we notice that the *mäläkät* appear at a late date among Abyssinian musical instruments, the first mention being in the Chronicle of Iyasu I (1682–1706). During a campaign against the Meçça Oromo, the king's troops spied enemy soldiers 'singing, with the insignia (*alama*) and to the sound of horns (*qärn*), which are the *mäläkät*'.<sup>45</sup> Once again, the word *qärn* refers not to horns as such but to a category of instruments, namely aerophones. The chronicler used *qärn* to tell readers about a sort of instru-

ment unfamiliar to him. After winning the battle, the king's soldiers seized the *alama* and *mäläkät* as booty. These two words are Gəʿəz, the language used in the Chronicle; they are not Oromo. *Alama* literally means 'insignia'; and *mäläkät* means 'that which shows, makes heard, indicates', the Gəʿəz verb *mälkäätä*, from which *mäläkät* is derived, meaning 'show, indicate, signal'.

The chronicler did not use an Oromo word when he first mentioned this aerophone, which had been seized as booty. Instead, he coined a word for this instrument which had signaled the presence of Oromo forces. This deictic word is specific to the chronicler's use of language. Associating *alama* and *mäläkät* has a symbolic function like the *sändäq/nägarit* (banner/drum) association made in the Ethiopian camp. The king's soldiers seized as a trophy what they thought symbolized the defeated enemy's power. This is

<sup>45</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 254 (text), 273 (tr.).

evidence that this aerophone represented Oromo military strength in the early eighteenth century.

The word *mäläkät* does not reappear in the chronicles till two generations later. In 1758, banners, *nägarit*, *nəsərqana* and *mäläkät* accompanied the solemn royal cortege conveying the mortal remains of King Iyasu I for his re-burial.<sup>46</sup> A little later, a royal emblem was brought back to Gondär, a pearl that enemy forces had seized following a defeat a few years earlier. Its triumphal return took place

with great joy and in clamor, and [to] the blowing of the horn, and the *nägarit qändä käbäro*, and the *mäläkät* in large numbers, and the *anzira*, and the *masinqo* (a single-stringed viol), and the cries of joy and songs.<sup>47</sup>

For its part, the *mäläkät* entered the musical ensembles of Christian dignitaries: the insignia of enemy forces was gradually adopted by the victors. Meanwhile, during the eighteenth century, power was increasingly shared with certain Oromo clans, as yesteryear's enemies became allies or even high officials.<sup>48</sup> This power-sharing might also explain why Abyssinian armies used an Oromo trumpet.

### 5. The *mätqəʿt*, trumpets of renown

The chronicles mention *mätqəʿ* (plural: *mätqəʿt*) fourteen times. In most cases, the verb associated with this noun is, very simply, *təqʿa*. But in three cases, it is used with the verb *däläqläqä*, 'make tremble, cause a tumult'.<sup>49</sup> Recall that, in one of the few passages describing how instruments were to be played, the Chronicle of King Yoḥannəs stated that the *mätqəʿ* must be 'blown with force'. It is noteworthy that several of these passages describe *mätqəʿ* as silver but without specifying which parts of the instrument were made of, or enhanced with, silver. Whatever the case, silver was a distinctive mark of prestige.

The *mätqəʿ* was played on a wide range of occasions: the departure of the army or its victorious return (eight instances); religious ceremonies in the king's presence (thrice); and solemn royal ceremonies (twice: King Bäkäffa's wedding and coronation); and the proclamation of royal edicts (twice). We

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 185–186 (text), 195 (tr.).

<sup>47</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 209 (text), 219 (tr.): *wä-konä ʿabiy fəssəḥa wä-dələqləq, wä-tänäffha qärm wä-nägarit qändä käbäro wä-mäläkät bəʿza wä-ʿanzira wä-mäsänaqut wä-konä yəbabe wä-məḥlet.*

<sup>48</sup> Perret 1989, 129–136; Toubkis 2010.

<sup>49</sup> Leslau, 1987, 131.

are now familiar with these manifestations of royal authority and power, which called for the accompaniment of musical instruments and musicians.

At the start of the eighteenth century, a literal battle of sound, involving these trumpets in the city of Gondär, illustrates the stakes in controlling sound. While King Iyasu I was away fighting a hostile Oromo group, Mika<sup>3</sup>el, the royal chaplain (*qes haše*) who stayed in Gondär, sent a servant to ask about the outcome of the battle.<sup>50</sup> When the servant returned with good news, Mika<sup>3</sup>el intended to celebrate the victory and the king's imminent return in the Täklä Haymanot Church. The clergy from this church made a procession 'to a place where the king's *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> is sounded' and then entered the palace precincts. At that point, the superior of the royal church of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase, *mäl'akä bərhanat* Qäwstos, proceeded to perform the same ceremony! He ordered the silver *mätqə*<sup>3</sup>*a*, 'which had no equal' to be sounded as well as the church's big bronze bell (*dəmsä bərt ʿabiy*, literally 'the sound of the big bronze') 'for which no king of Ethiopia had an equivalent'.<sup>51</sup>

The *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> served to vent the rivalry between the royal chaplain and the superior of Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase. At the end of the latter's procession, the burgomaster of Gondär, *käntiba* Matewos, had the horn blown. The chronicler clearly states that the *käntiba* oversees the land in the king's absence. Matewos then ordered to sound the '*mätqə*<sup>3</sup> of joy' (*azzäzä yätqə<sup>3</sup>u mätqə<sup>3</sup>a fəssəba*). The king's soldiers finally arrived and mustered around the *käntiba*—apparently discrediting the royal chaplain for having sounded the *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> to announce the victory. The chronicler then works out a metaphor, with the insinuation that there was a traitor involved in this incident, but without going so far as to blame anyone outright. A little later, in 1723, Qäwstos replaced Mika<sup>3</sup>el as royal chaplain!<sup>52</sup> This bitter dispute over the privilege of sounding the instruments for announcing a royal victory was one factor, but probably not the only one, in the dismissal or promotion of the rivals.

How was the *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> played? It is mentioned along with horns (*aqrənt*) five times, in military or ceremonial contexts. In the passage about the transfer of Ewostatewos' relics, it is mentioned alongside the *nəsər qana*, which, according to the chronicler, were blown with great care, while the *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> were blown with force. The *mätqə*<sup>3</sup> is always mentioned with aerophones, never with membranophones.

<sup>50</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 284–287 (tr.).

<sup>51</sup> For Guidi, the referent is the bells that the Dutch gave to the Ethiopian king, according to the *Short Chronicles*. Basset 1881, 303, note 342, quoted by Guidi 1903–1905, 286 (tr.).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 305 (tr.). The chronicler is now Sinoda, a member of the Däbrä Bərhan Šəllase clergy—he might have lacked impartiality.

Villoteau's inquiry in the late nineteenth century in Cairo among Ethiopian priests has nothing to say about an instrument called *mätqə*. However he pointed out that Edmund Castell mentions that the *mätqə* was a 'tuba' or 'buccin' in his *Lexicon heptaglotte* (1669), information which Castell took from Hiob Ludolf who collected it during the seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup>

The word *mätqə* was frequently used until Bäkäffa's reign, but it no longer appears in the chronicles after 1730. Does this mean the instrument was no longer used or known or that musical practices had changed? By the start of the nineteenth century, all sources, Ethiopian as well as European, refer to ceremonial trumpets as *mäläkät*. Might *mäläkät* have gradually replaced *mätqə*? If so, was this replacement a mere change in terminology or, instead, a modification of Abyssinian musical practices and instrumentation?

#### 6. The thunder of gunpowder: To hear is to fear

A description of Säršä Dəngəl's coronation (1563–1597) provides evidence that, as of the end of the sixteenth century, firearms produced, along with musical instruments, the ambiance of sound during royal ceremonies and military parades:

After this, a magnificent procession was formed: here were the fusileers, there were the gunners; here were the cavalry, there were the infantry, and all the while the drum *dəb anbäsa* was beaten (*γəzäbbətu*), and the *santi*, *nəsər qana* and *ənzira*, the instruments (*nəway*) of the Turks and the Amhara, were blown (*γənäffəhu*). Then the muskets and cannon were fired, and the noise was like that of thunder. On this day there was great pomp and ceremony such as had never been seen before.<sup>54</sup>

As the number of firearms in the Ethiopian realm increased, firing them to make a thunderous sound became more and more common.<sup>55</sup> There are three mentions of using firearms to accompany military events and ceremonies during the reign of Iyasu I.<sup>56</sup> A chronicler mentioned an unusual celebration of Easter in Gibe, a pagan land: the King had his soldiers surround him and shots fired. The chronicler dwells on the *din* (*däläqläq*) signaling to the heathens of

<sup>53</sup> Villoteau, 1812, 1006–1007; Ludolf, *Lexicon aethiopico-latinum* (Londini: Apud Thomam Roycroft, LL: Orientalium Typographum Regium, 1661), 417, where *mätqə* is rendered as 'buccina', but also 'tympanum aeneum'.

<sup>54</sup> Conti Rossini 1907, 79 (text), 90 (tr.).

<sup>55</sup> On detonations, see Féraud 2009.

<sup>56</sup> For comments on some of these mentions of firearms, see Pankhurst 1977, 131–144.

Gibe that the resurrection had taken place and that King Iyasu, the Christian King, dares to perform this ceremony on their land.<sup>57</sup>

In fact, throughout the Gondär period, sound had an offensive role in political and military strategies. To cite but one more example, a few months after the aforementioned event, the armies of King Iyasu I left for war, and the enemy was frightened by the sound of weapons.<sup>58</sup> Meanwhile, in the royal camp, the animals to be slaughtered were scared by the noise made by the *aqərnat* and *mätqə<sup>c</sup>at*. The chronicler draws an analogy between the enemy and sacrificial animals to illustrate how the sound of the Christian army struck fear, thus reducing the enemy to the status of animals.

A century later, firearms were shot during Queen Məntəwwab's coronation. Women (called *ite agrod* and *däräbabet*) sang, and then the horn was blown and firearms discharged (*angodägodä näft*) 'so much that the sound was heard from afar'.<sup>59</sup> This signaled a power calling for respect, fear and awe—all the more clearly when Mika<sup>3</sup>el Səḥul, the governor of Təgray, started menacing the king's hold. In 1755, a week after the death of Iyasu II, those who came to Gondär from Təgray for the funeral fired their guns, 'for such is the custom of the people of Təgray the day when their master and king dies'.<sup>60</sup> This addition to the text was probably made at the behest of Mika<sup>3</sup>el Səḥul himself, who hypocritically declared that his intimidating display of force was merely a traditional sign of respect for the king. Shrewdly, Queen Məntəwwab immediately had her daughter, Alṭaş, married to the governor's son. The Gondär monarchy, we suppose, had to come to terms with the power-holder from Təgray. Later, during the previously mentioned episode about Mika<sup>3</sup>el bringing the pearl back to Gondär and crowning the young Iyo<sup>3</sup>as as king, the reign was 'renewed', guns being fired like thunder, now a stock phrase.<sup>61</sup>

The sounding of firearms, though attested from the very start of the Gondär period, appears very slowly in the sources, as if what could be written about royal ceremonies and the army was somewhat out of synch with what was being done—or more simply, as if the firing of guns, despite the fact this had symbolized armed might for a long time, only gradually gained the right to be a full-fledged part of the ceremonial.

<sup>57</sup> Guidi 1903–1905, 264 (text), 263 (tr.).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 252 (text), 270 (tr.).

<sup>59</sup> Guidi 1910–1912, 43 (tr.).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 181 (tr.).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 226–227 (text), 231 (tr.): *wä-ameha konä däləqləq, wä-tänäḥḥa qärn, wä-əngofgodä näfti kämä mäbräq.*

## 7. Interpreting pictorial representations: How to illustrate sounds?

In Ethiopia, mural paintings in churches, illuminations in manuscripts and icons on panels were all made in a religious context. Secular contexts as such, including the political sphere, were not (before the second half of the nineteenth century) chosen as subject matter for pictorialization, even though the making of religious images heavily depended, through patronage, on the monarchy.<sup>62</sup> We can, therefore, suppose that these images show subjects, including musical instruments, in a context close to the sphere of power.<sup>63</sup>

### 7.1 A depreciated status for horns

The oldest images of horns are two portrayals of the Resurrection of Adam and Eve from the sixteenth century. They show angels (one or two) blowing a curved horn with the mouthpiece on the side.<sup>64</sup> These two rather stylized images are not the best evidence for drawing conclusions about musical instruments in Ethiopia.

In contrast, the seventeenth-century mural on the tambour of the Däbrä Sina Church in Gorgora clearly portrays two angels blowing big horns of an undulating shape with the mouthpiece on the side. This is the first depiction of the Apparition of the Virgin at Däbrä Məṭmaq. This scene presents other musicians playing liturgical drums (*käbäro*) and sistra, thus evoking a religious ceremony. We assume that the horns along with the drummers beating the *nägarit* with curved sticks are a separate performance from that of the *sistra* and *käbäro* during the same solemn ceremony, as if the painter thought the Marian apparition was worthy of both a religious and a royal celebration. In fact, the Virgin sits under a canopy, a sign of respect for her primacy.

These curved horns also appear in illuminated manuscripts from the eighteenth century, but in a less religious context. The *Nägärä Maryam* from the Betä Maryam Church in Lasta contains the illustration of a miracle: a resurrection celebrated with three musical instruments. The caption names two of them: a *käbäro* (easy to identify) and an *anzira*. Since, as we know, scribes

<sup>62</sup> Heldman 1994; Bosc-Tiessé 2008.

<sup>63</sup> The pictorial sources analysed herein come from the Mäzgäbä Səəlat Data Base (University of Toronto), the author's personal collection, the Mandragore Data Base of the Bibliothèque nationale de France and existing publications. It would also be worthwhile examining certain manuscripts from the British Library: Or. 510, Or. 603, Or. 607 and Or. 790. Richard Pankhurst pointed them out in articles published between 1989 and 1993 under the heading 'Secular themes in Ethiopian ecclesiastical manuscripts' in the *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*.

<sup>64</sup> IES 4567: Chojnacki 2000, cat. 179, 188 (ill.) and 414–415; Mercier 2000, 113.

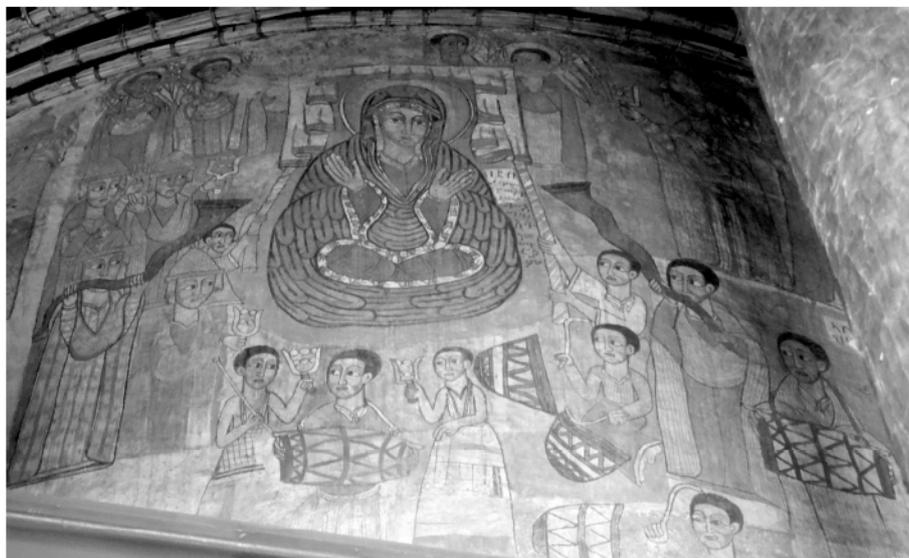


Fig. 4: Musicians accompanying the Apparition of the Virgin at Däbrä Məṭmaq, Däbrä Sina Church in Gorgora, seventeenth century

often wrote the captions before the painters started working on a page, the painter might have interpreted *anzira* as a generic term, whence the two other instruments: a small lyre with ten strings played with a plectrum and a curved horn with a lateral mouthpiece. In this scene, the horn is used on a private occasion. Members of the resuscitated woman's family are honoring the Virgin Mary and the child Jesus. This contrasts with portrayals of the Resurrection or the Marian Apparition, which show horns in a fully religious setting.<sup>65</sup>

During the same period, c. 1740, a scene from another *Nägärrä Maryam*, this one from Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am, which was illuminated for Queen Məntəwwab, portrays the Holy Family mocked in Egypt by individuals playing undulating horns with a mouthpiece at the end and who wear horns on their heads, a sign of evil-doers. This illumination evidently indicates that these horns were 'alien' instruments.

<sup>65</sup> We know of but one portrayal of the Apparition of the Virgin at Dabra Metmāq that shows the Virgin accompanied by musician angels: a miniature in the second Gondār style in a psalter (MS BL Or. 538). However the instruments—small, very stylized aerophones—are hard to identify. See the reproduction in black and white in Chojnacki 1983, pl. 166.



Fig. 5: Celebration of a resurrection from *Nägärä Maryam* (Betä Maryam Church in Lasta), second half of the eighteenth century

Regardless of the curves and mouthpieces, the horns portrayed in our corpus all seem to be made of horn. Despite the limited number of images of this instrument, we might hypothesize that horns actually made of horn had lost prestige in a little more than a century. At the start, they were portrayed being used for solemn occasions; but at the end, they were reduced to the status of pagan instruments used to mock the Holy Family.

Images of the Last Judgement (or Judgement of Nations) underwent a change as horns were soon replaced with membranophones and/or aerophones. The relevant Biblical passage (Revelation 20:11–13) mentions the throne where Christ will sit but not musical instruments. Depictions of this scene during the seventeenth century follow the text: there are no musical instruments.

In contrast, in the second Gondär style at the start of the eighteenth century, aerophones of various sizes—often depending on the image’s dimensions, since illuminations show smaller musical instruments than wall paintings—appear in this scene. There is a considerable number of iconographic representations of this subject from this period. Were Abyssinians now using different instruments, a change reflected in painting? Or, more likely, are these paintings evidence of the influence of European iconography? The latter was, at the time, a major source of inspiration for Ethiopian painters, in particular



Fig. 6: The Holy Family mocked and lapidated from *Nägärä Maryam* (Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am), mid-eighteenth century

through the engravings of Jérôme Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines*.<sup>66</sup> Nadal's Last Judgement shows an angel blowing a trumpet, similar to the instrument often figuring in Ethiopian portrayals of this scene.<sup>67</sup>

Given the strong probability of a foreign origin of this shift in iconography, it is difficult to draw conclusions about Ethiopian instruments. Nonetheless a detail of a mural from the Zur Amba Monastery clearly shows the instrument's mouthpiece, similar to that of the *mäläkät*, on display in the IES museum. Although the captions of images are not easy to analyse, we do notice that the word *mätqə*<sup>6</sup> (used in the Gəʿəz Bible) has vanished. The words most frequently used are *qärn* and *mäläkät*, even though we cannot clearly distinguish the instruments to which they refer.

Another image worth examining is on the tambour of the church at Däbrä Warq. The paintings decorating it in the second Gondär style portray the Ascension of Christ accompanied by the following instruments: straight trumpets, viols with a single string (*masinqo*), *nägarit* and clapping hands. The last should not be overlooked since it tells us something about the

<sup>66</sup> Bosc-Tiessé 2004.

<sup>67</sup> Nadal 1593. For a reproduction of this Last Judgement, consult <http://catholic-resources.org/Nadal/098.jpg>.



Fig. 7: The Last Judgement, mural painting in the Zur Amba Monastery (c. 1721)

participation (physical, rhythmic, musical) of the persons in attendance at solemn public events. The listening experience was not passive; the persons present participated. The *masinqo* and kettledrum were used in Ethiopia at the time, and the painter has shown them true to nature. Yielding to the temptation of supposing that the *Däbrä Warq* painter made his drawings from life, we can assume that the straight trumpet also corresponds to the instrument as it existed in the eighteenth century.

Do these few scenes allow us to conclude that the eighteenth century marked a change in the musical instruments used in the Christian realm of Ethiopia, as horns actually made of horn, and possibly curved, lost prestige, while instruments made by hand were preferred to accompany royal events?

In the two known copies of the complete Book of Revelation with illuminations (MS BL Or. 533 from *Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am*, created in the mid-eighteenth century and a manuscript from *Därasge* which is a latter copy of the *Q<sup>w</sup>əsq<sup>w</sup>am*'s one), a *nägarit* accompanies the angel 'sounding the *mätqə*'.<sup>68</sup> At the time, the kettledrum was apparently the instrument used to make a sound that attracted attention. We would need to examine Biblical commentaries (*andemta*) for passages about how people related to the power of sound.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> See the reproductions in respectively: Heldman 1993 and McEwan 2007.

<sup>69</sup> R. Cowley's book could provide a starting point for approaching the abundance of traditional commentaries: Cowley 1983.



Fig. 8: Detail of the Ascension of Christ, mural from the tambour of the church in Däbrä Wärq, eighteenth century

The *nägarit* even replace the trumpets in some murals of the Last Judgment. In the Mika'el Ara Church in Təgray, a caption states that 'the horn was blown' whereas the image shows a *nägarit*. Confusion is rife about the names and categories of musical instruments. Perhaps this confusion indicates that the main intent was to evoke as clearly as possible whatever served as a sign of both the power of sound and the sound of power.

### Conclusion

This study of how sounds were made and used in the sphere of power in Ethiopia during the Gondär period has, we hope, prepared the ground for future inquiries into sound symbolism. The emission of loud sounds from aerophones, membranophones and firearms was the prerogative of the sovereign, of his armies and governors, a privilege of the powerful. The sounding of these instruments signaled proclamations, major celebrations, court ceremonies, the movement of the king and his troops in and outside of the royal cities, and the start of battles. The intention was to strike fear in the hearts of enemies and, too, to impress the realm's subjects: no one should be unaware of the king's presence, of the might of his soldiers, or of the need to obey the king and know his laws. In a quiet world without motors, fac-

tories and loudspeakers, the tumult caused by the organization of a royal announcement occasioned a physical commotion for heightening the sense of greatness and awe associated with the situation.

The *nägarit* kettledrums were both sound-making instruments and emblems. Owning or displaying them was a sign of power as much as having them played.

Aerophones underwent more changes during the Gondär period. The *näsär qana* were associated with the figure of the king. These double-reed instruments were played in outdoor ceremonies, as in many other cultural areas. It comes as a surprise to find these double-reed instruments at the Abyssinian court, for no one has previously suggested this, probably because they are no longer used in Ethiopia. Another aerophone, the *mätqə*<sup>c</sup>, was an instrument that, usually made of metal, produced a loud sound. The word went out of use during the eighteenth century, but we are unable to say whether the instrument itself fell into disuse. What is certain is that an aerophone of Oromo origin, the *mäläkät*, was gradually adopted in Abyssinia. This long trumpet was originally a symbol of Oromo military might. It entered a Christian environment as the Oromo came to take part in wielding power. Another aerophone, horns, were always present on the battlefield. However an examination of the images in which horns are portrayed leads us to hypothesize that they gradually lost prestige and were replaced with trumpets.

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### Summary

Musical instruments were used in the Christian realm of Ethiopia during the early modern period for proclamations, major religious celebrations, court ceremonies, and the movement of the king and his troops inside and outside of royal cities, as well as for signaling the start of battles. Only the powerful had the prerogative of having certain instruments played. The *nägarit* (kettledrums) were also insignia of power. Owning or displaying them was an expression of power as much as having them played. The *näsär qana* were double-reed instruments associated with the king. Originally insignia of Oromo military might, the *mäläkäts*, long trumpets, were gradually adopted in the Christian realm as the Oromo came to share in exercising power. On the basis of evidence drawn from a study of images, horns, though still present on the battlefield, seem to have lost prestige to the benefit of trumpets.