



Aethiopia 18 (2015)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

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Article

*Traditional Medicine and Magic According to Some Ethiopian Manuscripts
from European Collections*

Aethiopia 18 (2015), 87–100

ISSN: 2194–4024

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut
Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik
der Universität Hamburg
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

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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.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London, 1917ff.).
- 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).
- EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- PdP* *La Parola del Passato. Rivista di studi classici*, Napoli 1946ff.
- PICES 8* TADDESE BEYENE, ed., *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa (26–30 November) 1984*, I–II (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies–Frankfurt am Main: Frobenius Institut, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, 1988–1989).
- PICES 10* C. LEPAGE and É. DELAGE, eds, *Études éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes, Paris, 24–28 août 1988* (Paris: Société française pour les études éthiopiennes, 1994).
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND, A.J. DREWES, and R. SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches* (Paris: (Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres) Diffusion de Boccard, 1991).
- RRALm* *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Roma, 1892ff.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli, 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.

Traditional Medicine and Magic According to Some Ethiopian Manuscripts from European Collections

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Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, traditional medicine is the sum total of the knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures. Whether explicable or not it is used in the maintenance of health as well as in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness. Traditional medication involves the use of herbal medicines, animal parts and minerals.

The traditional medical system in Ethiopia consists of various strata of overlapping elements, which have enabled the indigenous population to overcome illness and diseases over the centuries. Both the empirico-rational and the magico-religious views and interpretations of illness and health were important aspects and components of the traditional methods of treating illness and of the beliefs about its causes. In the course of time, these traditions have been subjected to various influences and have changed as a result of contacts with other cultures.¹

Ethiopian medicinal texts were first written in the classical language, Gəʼəz, and later in the modern vernacular, Amharic. Such texts were kept not only in the libraries of the churches or monasteries but were also carried around by the medical practitioners, who were less able to preserve them for posterity. This could be one of the reasons why most of the manuscripts with medico-magical prescriptions in the European collections originate from the last hundred years.

One of the aims of this research is to trace and study the development and transmission of the medico-magical knowledge, literature, practices and the appropriate objects over the centuries in Ethiopia. A significant feature of the manuscripts which preserve magico-medical knowledge concerns two different but complementary components: a textual and a pictorial one. Various genres characterise the textual part of the manuscripts: we can find not only medical prescriptions and magical incantations but also well-

¹ Slikkerveer 1990, 167–169.

known religious texts. The pictorial component is represented by traditional Ethiopian drawings and illustrations, which are considered to be ‘powerful medicine’. The magical illustrations accompany the incantations as part of the traditional medical therapy.

In addition, the indigenous terminology should be taken into consideration in order to better understand the notion of medicine and healing in Ethiopia. Many Ethiopian terms with different shades of meaning are used to refer to ‘medicine’, such as:

1. *fäws* means ‘healing, cure, medicine, remedy, poison, medicinal herb’ and is derived from *fäwwäsä* ‘cure, heal’,²
2. *šaray* ‘incantation, magic, charm, witchcraft, sorcery, spell, poison, healing, medicine, cure’; see *mäftəhe šaray* ‘a charm to counter the effects of an evil spirit’ and *mäsray*, *mäsre* ‘medicine, drug’,³
3. *mädhanit* ‘salvation, deliverance, safety, redemption, medicine’,⁴
4. *‘aqar* ‘drug, medicine, spice’ (see also the Syriac *‘eqqārā* ‘root, medicinal herb’),⁵
5. *‘asot* ‘healing, gift of healing, remedy’.⁶

In contrast to the large number of Ethiopian manuscripts found in European libraries, there are comparatively few manuscripts preserving texts on Ethiopian traditional medicine. The work represented here does not refer to the large quantity of amulets and magic scrolls employed in medical practice, but primarily to the manuscripts which have played a role in the chain of transmission of medical and magical knowledge: the handbooks and collections of various traditional healers.

The composition of the manuscript itself is a significant aspect in the transmission of medico-magical knowledge; it must also be taken into consideration and is usually very heterogeneous. Thus, this paper will focus on the structure and composition strategy exemplified by four Ethiopian manuscripts. The issues which constitute the foundation of my investigation in this context are: What kind of expertise/specialized knowledge is transmitted in these manuscripts? Who are the specialists involved in the transmission of this knowledge? What kinds of information do the manuscripts provide us regarding the manufacturers? What can the composition of the manuscripts’

² Leslau 1991, 172.

³ *Ibid.* 536.

⁴ *Mädhanit* derives from *dəhnä* ‘be saved, be safe, be released’, *ibid.* 128–129; see also *mädhane ‘alām* ‘saviour of the world’, a designation of Christ. The meaning ‘medicine’ seems to be secondary.

⁵ *Ibid.* 68.

⁶ *Ibid.* 45.

contents tell us about the means and ways of accumulation, preservation and mediation of this expertise? What do the similarities and the differences show us regarding the inner organization of the manuscript content?

The Manuscripts

MS Or. 11390 (see Strelcyn 1978, 154–155, no. 100)	MS Éthiopien 402 (Griaule 1930, 98) (Strelcyn 1954, 34–37)	MS Éthiopien 403 (Griaule 1930, 99) (Strelcyn 1954, 37–38)	MS Éthiopien 648 (Griaule 1930, 340) (Strelcyn 1954, 228–229)
Title: <i>Mäṣḥafä mädhānit</i> 1. (ff. 3 ^{ra} –9 ^{rb}) – <i>Särägälla Elyas</i> – <i>Məṣtirä Dawit</i> 2. (ff. 9 ^{rb} –109 ^{vb}) Magic prayers, pictures and prescriptions, interrupted by other texts: – <i>Särägälla Elyas</i> – Medical prescriptions <i>Mäṣḥafä fäws</i> (inserted at different places, ff. 51 ^{ra} –109 ^{vc}) – <i>Fəkkare Iyäsus</i> – Miracle of the Virgin Mary – <i>Sälam</i> -Hymns to the Virgin Mary – <i>Sälam</i> -Hymn to Joachim and Anne – <i>Sälam</i> -Hymn to St George	1. (f. 1 ^{ra}) <i>Mälk'a sə'äl</i> 2. (ff. 8 ^v –17 ^r) Medical prescriptions <i>Mäṣḥafä fäws</i> 3. (ff. 18 ^v –34 ^r) Magic prayers 4. (ff. 34 ^r –47 ^v) – <i>Ḥaṣurä mäsqäl</i> – <i>Sälam</i> -Hymn to Fanu'el – <i>Ḥassabä ḥəmuman</i> – Three magic prayers – <i>Mälk'a Fanu'el</i>	Heterogeneous prayers and prescriptions from the collection of <i>däbtära</i> Mängəstu from Goḡḡam	1. (ff. 1 ^r –9 ^r) Magic prescriptions known as <i>‘Eṣä däbdabbe</i> 2. (ff. 9 ^r –16 ^r) Other non-magical texts 3. (ff. 16 ^r –40 ^r) <i>Täbibä ṭäbiban</i> 4. (ff. 41–47 ^r) Magic prayers and prescriptions

1. The first manuscript presented here is one of the most interesting of all. It is the Ethiopian manuscript of *Mäṣḥafä mädhānit* ‘The Book of Medicine’ with the shelf-mark MS Or[iental] 11390 from the British Library.⁷ This manuscript contains one of the richest collections of magical prayers and pictures, and of magical as well as medical prescriptions. It is perhaps the oldest manuscript of its kind in public European collections.

Mention of King Iyasu II (1730–1755) together with the Metropolitan Yoḥannəs (about 1750) helps to date the manuscript to the middle of the eighteenth century (f. 19^{vc}).

bä-bäräkätä nəguṣənä Iyasu wä-bä-bäräkätä papasənä abba Yoḥannəs fätaḥku ...

With the blessing of our King Iyasu and with the blessing of our Metropolitan Yoḥannəs I opened ...

⁷ MS London, British Library, Or. 11390.

The parchment manuscript comprises 109 folios written in Gəʿəz and Amharic. In addition to the text, the manuscript contains more than two hundred magical pictures, squares and lines of magical characters. The content is written on vellum in three columns.

The composition of this manuscript is very interesting. Two small texts, the *Särägälla Elyas* ‘The Chariot of Elijah’ (This text contains thirty-nine secret names of God with corresponding prescription for their use; it begins: ‘The secret names of God which is also known as ‘The Chariot of Elijah’’) and the *Məštirä Dawit* (‘The Mystery of the Psalms’ is a text containing prescriptions in Amharic on the therapeutic use of each Psalm)⁸ are followed by the main corpus of magic prayers, pictures and prescriptions, partly as countercharms, partly against various devils and diseases. The main corpus is also very heterogeneous and is interrupted several times by other texts. Within this corpus one can also distinguish another collection of medical prescriptions named *Məšḥafä fäws*, the ‘Book of Healing’ which begins as follows (f. 109^{vb}):

*məšḥafä fäws lä-k^wəllon dəweyat wä-lä-k^wəllon mäläyaləyat zä-
astägabəʾu təbiban qädämt kämä yəkun bäq^wəʿetä lä-k^wəllomu
dəwwəyan*

The book of healing for all the diseases and for all the members of the body which the former wise men collected in order to be useful for all kind of sick persons.

These prescriptions, which are fragments from the ‘Treatise of Therapeutics’ (which was edited and translated by Stefan Strelcyn)⁹ are inserted in different places separated by magic prayers as well as other kinds of texts or illustrations. These fragments contain about five hundred and eighty medical prescriptions (most of them written in Gəʿəz, only about fifty in Amharic). The manuscript is obviously a compilation of different collections of magic prayers and medical and magic prescriptions judging by the great number of authors mentioned in the manuscript. (I counted twenty-nine names, but it could be more than that). Most of these names are preceded by the title *abba*, which is usually an honorific title applied to religious leaders such as monks, abbots and bishops.¹⁰ The title *abeto* (from *abetohun*) appears three times; this was a form of address used in connection with male members of the Solomonic dyn-

⁸ For the Ethiopian versions of this text see Strelcyn 1981 and 1985. For the magic use of the psalms in other traditions see Salzer 2010, 157–159, 170–172, Levene 2003, 11–14, and Shaked, Ford and Bhayro 2013, 19–20.

⁹ Strelcyn 1968.

¹⁰ ‘Abba’, *EAE*, I (2003), 9b (S. Kaplan).

asty. Towards the end of the eighteenth century this form of address came into use for anyone of importance.¹¹ These titles, which accompany the author names, allow us to gain insight into the complex problem of the transmission of medical and magical knowledge. According to anthropological research in the twentieth century, it is the Ethiopian *däbtära* who is responsible for the collection and transmission of magical and medical knowledge (see e.g. the notebooks of the *däbtäras* edited by Griaule 1930, Rodinson 1967).

The manuscript presented here demonstrates that other clerical and scholarly groups were involved in the transmission and preservation of this kind of knowledge in the eighteenth century. Among the authors mentioned in this manuscript are personalities such as *aläqa*¹² Isayäyas, *mämbər*¹³ Wäldä Giorgis, *liqä ma'aməran*¹⁴ Nəway and even *däğğazmač*¹⁵ Mika'el. Each collection of prescriptions or images is separated from the previous collection and from the one following it either by short comments (which use the verbs *wätänä* 'to begin, commence' and *fäššämä* 'to accomplish, finish, end') or graphically; see f. 17^{va} *täfäššämä 'abənnät zä-'Abyud—nahu täwätñä yä-Loga Näčo 'abənnät*; f. 24^{ra} *täfäššämä yä-Loga Näčo 'abənnät—nahu täwätñä särägälla 'Elyas*; f. 24^{va} *nahu täfäššämä särägälla 'Elyas—nahu täwätñä lela təlsäm*.

Regarding the pictures and images contained in the medico-magical manuscripts Jacques Mercier states:

Beginning perhaps as early as late antiquity, Ethiopians developed talismanic art to a unique degree, working from rough drawings they received from the eastern Mediterranean (judging from the tiny fraction that have survived). Over the centuries, they have produced thousands of superb and arresting images, part talismanic, part figurative. Few truly ancient works survive. Some extant works are datable to before 1700, a few dozen may be attributed to the eighteenth century, a few thousand to the nineteenth.¹⁶

¹¹ 'Abetohun', *ibid.* 40a–b (Merid Wolde Aregay).

¹² *Aläqa* is a title given to the head of a major church or a monastery as long as he is not conferred with any other honorary title. *Aläqa* can be also applied to a priest or a *däbtära* who has reached a high level of traditional education, see 'Aläqa', *ibid.* 191b–192a (Habtemichael Kidane).

¹³ *Mämbər* means 'teacher' and is a traditional title in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Over the course of time the term additionally assumed the specific meaning of 'abbot', i.e. the head of a monastic community, the supreme teacher in spiritual, religious matters, see 'Mämbər', *EAE*, III (2007), 713b–714b (M.-L. Derat and D. Nosnitsin).

¹⁴ This is a title meaning 'chief of the learned'.

¹⁵ *Däğğazmač* was one of the highest military titles of traditional Ethiopia.

¹⁶ Mercier 1997, 41.

This is another reason for the importance of this manuscript. Traditional Ethiopian drawings are considered to be ‘powerful medicine’ and called *tälsäm*, from the Arabic *tilasm*, which itself comes from the Greek *télesma* ‘effective object’.¹⁷ Drawings and images used in magic are divided into two categories: *tälsäm* and *sə‘al*, which means ‘picture, image’ and is also the term for the traditional painting of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. In contrast to *tälsäm* drawings, which depict the invisible and hidden aspects of the magical realm, the *sə‘al* images illustrate what ‘can be seen’, usually saints, angels and famous kings (like Alexander the Great or King Solomon).¹⁸

The example presented here (see Fig. 2) is a collection of *tälsäm*-images in which the main protective element is the cross. The stylized representation of



Fig. 1: MS London, British Library, Or. 11390, f. 17^v

¹⁷ See ‘Tälsäm’, *EAE*, IV (2010), 850a–852b (S. Dege and W. Smidt).

¹⁸ For Alexander see Mercier 1979, 112 (fig. 37), 116 (fig. 39); for Solomon see Mercier 1979, 61 (fig. 11), 93 (fig. 27), 114 (fig. 38).

the cross is believed to possess magical defensive power. It is also worth noting the fact that this collection of talismanic pictures has been numbered, as in a modern catalogue. It is very probable that these magical pictures served as models for amulet and magic scroll (*keṣtab*) production.¹⁹ As already mentioned the author has deliberately tried to give a distinctive structure to the manuscript. It seems that the compiler has carefully put together separate, small collections of other authors that may have been acquired over a long period. This could be one criterion of the organization, i.e. the authority of other specialists. The manuscript is introduced by the two texts *Särägälla Elyas* and *Məṣtirä Dawit*, both with a similar structure, which might have been the reason why they were put at the beginning of the text (curiously the *Särägälla Elyas* can be found once again on f. 24^{va-va}). The collection of talismanic pictures mentioned above is clearly separated from the other texts in

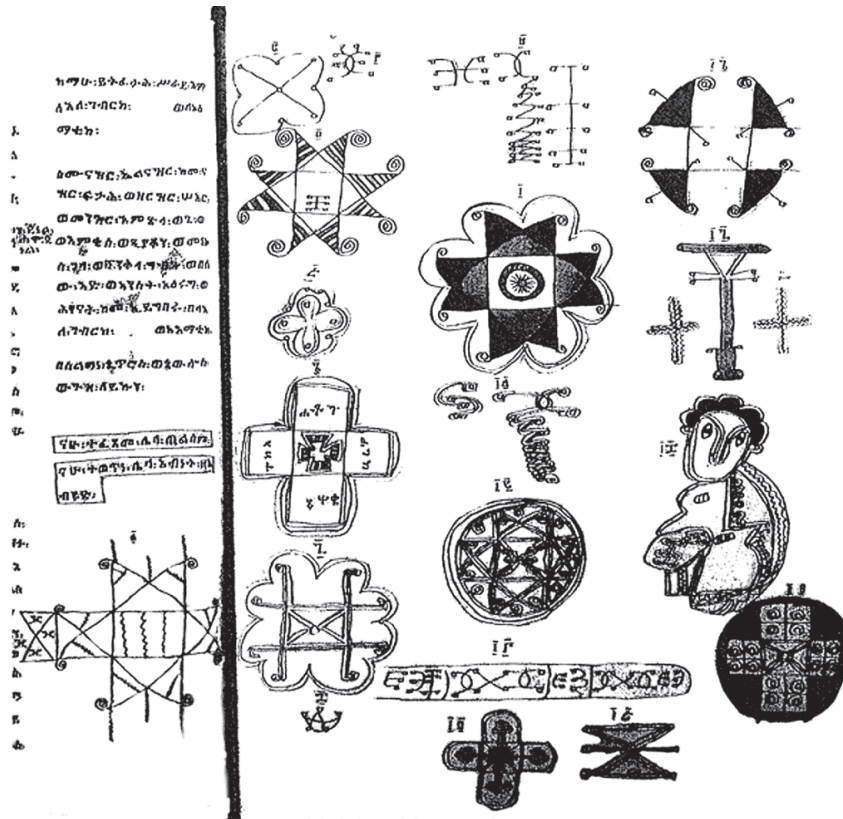


Fig. 2: MS London, British Library, Or. 11390, ff. 46^r–47^v

¹⁹ For cross illustrations on magic scrolls see Mercier 1979, 43 (fig. 2), 111 (fig. 36).

2. The second item is the parchment manuscript MS Éthiopien 402 from the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.²⁰ It has forty-seven folios and comprises six originally separate notebooks which were copied by different scribes. It begins with a *Mälk'*-Hymn for the Icon of Mary (*Mälk'a sə'äl*). *Mälk'* is a poetic composition in Gə'əz praising different parts of the body (usually from head to foot) of a saint, of a member of the Trinity, of St Mary or of an angel. It is followed by medical prescriptions with the same title mentioned above, *Mäšhafä fäws*, which are attributed to the prophet Jeremy. These contain remedies (*mädhanit*) for various ailments (e.g. headache, eye disease, goitre, a cough, syphilis, wounds, etc.) but also prescriptions against demons (or against *buda*) and wizards, or for gaining wealth, for being loved, or for gaining respect. These are written in Amharic but also in Gə'əz.

It should be pointed out that each prescription or incantation is separated from the preceding one by an abbreviation of the term *mädhanit* (*mä-* or *mäd-*) or by a special sign such as a cross (all of them are written with red ink as the next example shows (f. 10^r): *mädhanit* against *qumännä*²¹, *lä-qittəñ* against syphilis, *mä[dhanit] lä-mäftəhe* [*šəray*] for undoing charms, *lä-ras mətat* against headache, *lä-täqmat* against diarrhoea and so on.

The core of this manuscript is a collection of magical prayers against a large and varied selection of illnesses and malignancies. Incantations to cause harm or to obtain favours and advantages, which are usually named as 'black magic', are gathered here (e.g. f. 18^v the incantation to make someone stammer or become mute *əsər ləssanu wä-əšu g^wər^c ehū wä-ləg^wəm afuhū*). This section contains some interesting and, to the best of my knowledge, as yet unreported 'magical squares' (mentioned in the manuscript as *säntäräg*) as well as magical drawings (in the manuscript sometimes called *tälsäm*) being evocative of the well-known spectacle scripts or 'Brillenbuchstaben' from Greek, Coptic and Arabic magic.

The last part of the manuscript contains texts, which typologically belong to Christian literature in Gə'əz, such as the 'Rampart of the Cross' (*Hašurä mäsqäl*), the *Sälam*-Hymn to Fanu'el' or the *Mälk'*-Hymn of Fanu'el (*Mälk'a Fanu'el*). Texts such as the 'Rampart of the Cross' were meant to protect against all categories of harm and enemies, and to curse Satan. The hymns for Fanu'el were meant to expel demons. This is probably the main reason why Christian literature in Gə'əz was collected together with the medico-magical prescriptions.

²⁰ MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 402.

²¹ Kane 1990, 705, 815: *qimännä*, 'resentful, vindictive or vengeful person, infected wound'.

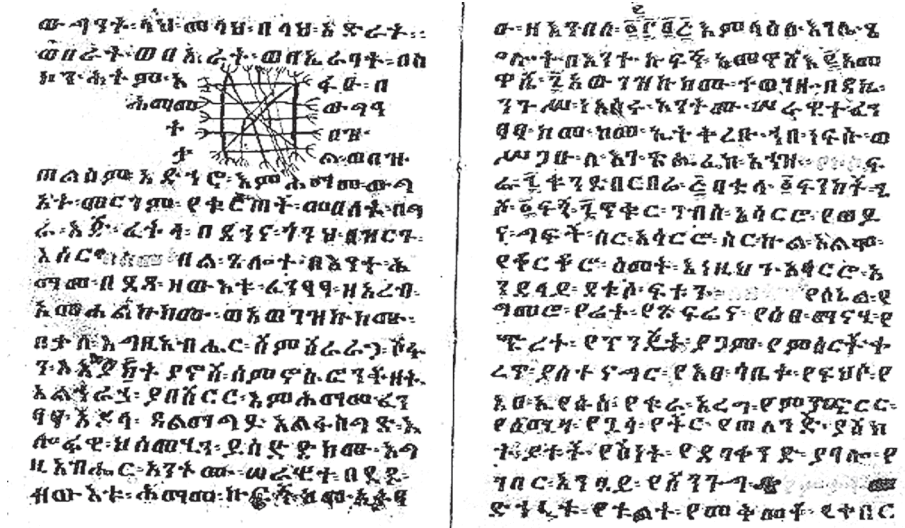


Fig. 4: MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 403, ff. 9^v-10^r

3. The third source is the parchment manuscript MS Éthiopien 403,²² which contains prayers and prescriptions in Amharic and Gəʿəz from the collection of *däbtära* Mängəštu of Goḡgam. It has twenty-three folios.

Although the prescriptions and the prayers have different purposes, the structure of this manuscript's content is more homogenous than that of the other manuscripts. It starts with prescriptions for the revelation of science and for gaining zeal for study. It continues with a prayer against sharp pain and another against smallpox; there then follows a prescription against the disease *mətat*.²³ Besides the usual diseases and malignancies, there are also demons (*buda*, *barya*) and sorcerers who are meant to be counteracted by the power of the incantations. In order to emphasize each of the prescriptions and incantations, certain words, such as the name of the disease or the beginning of each unit, are standing out by using red ink (see the illustration f. 10^r *yä-mətat mädhanit*). The manuscript is also interesting because it shows the kinds of knowledge that interested the *däbtäras* as keepers, makers and distributors of magic and traditional medicinal materials. Some of the prescriptions in Amharic contain instructions for preparing amulets using plants and other ingredients in order to combat specific ailments. It contains only one illustration.

²² MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 403.

²³ Kane 1990, 245a, 'stroke, blow, knock, kick; force of the waves, pounding of the surf; a kind of violent illness accompanied by fever which is soon fatal' and 250a 'apparition, ghost, magic'.

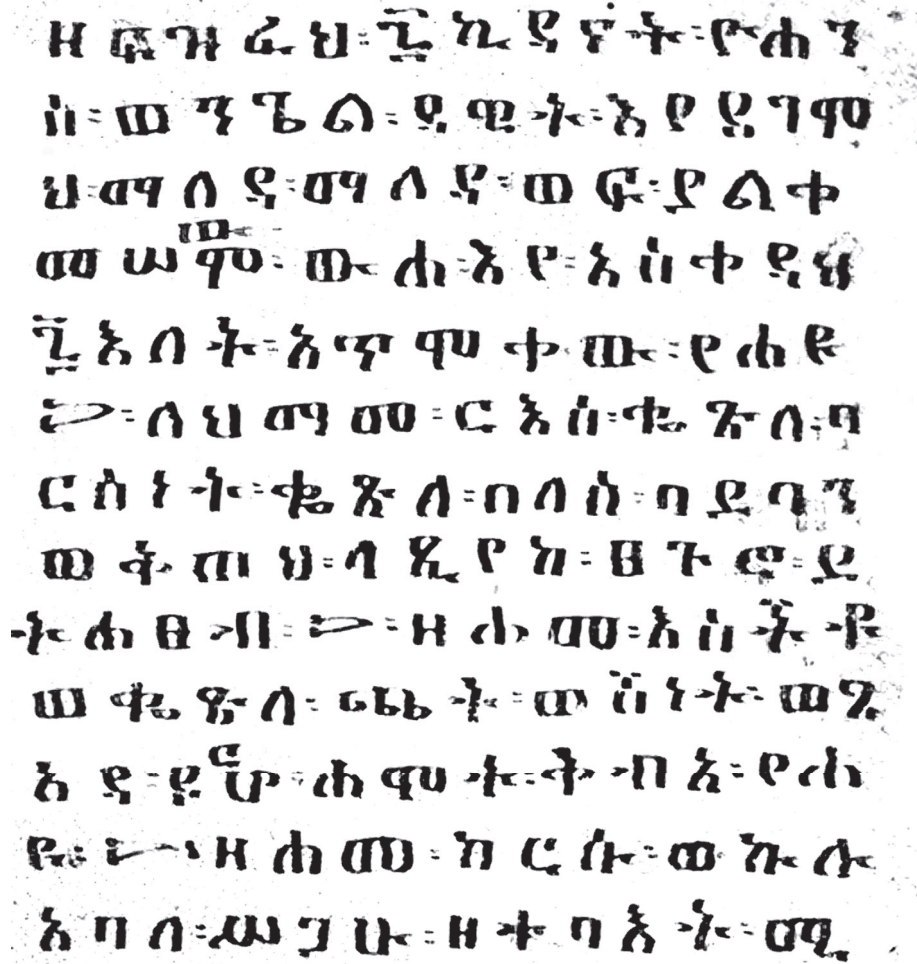


Fig. 5: MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 648, f. 4^r

4. The manuscript MS Éthiopien 648,²⁴ has forty-seven folios. It contains a collection of magic prescriptions named *‘Āṣä däbdabbe* and, further on, other non-magical texts. The core of this manuscript consists of the *Täbibä täbiban* ‘Wisest among the Wise’. This is a hymnological composition written in Gəʿəz which aims to glorify God and is an inherent part of Ethiopian Christian literature. The last part of the manuscript also contains magic prayers and prescriptions. The manuscript consists originally of six separate notebooks written by different scribes. The collection named *‘Āṣä däbdabbe* was originally one of

²⁴ MS Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Éthiopien 402.

the notebooks written by Wäldä Giyorgis. There is no critical edition of this important work.²⁵

A special sign separates the individual prescriptions of this collection from each other (see Fig. 5). The next two texts, *Şälotä ʿəṭan* and a fragment from a *säwasəw*, were originally written on a separate notebook. The last notebook contains magical incantations written by another anonymous author.

Final remarks

1. A common feature of all the manuscripts is the use of both, Amharic and Gəʿəz for the recording and transmission of medico-magical knowledge. This feature distinguishes this kind of manuscript from the amulets and magic scrolls, which are mostly written only in Gəʿəz. The Amharic language is predominantly used for medical recipes while Gəʿəz is the language of magical incantations and religious texts.
2. Some of the manuscripts (MS Or. 11390, MS Éthiopien 402 and MS Éthiopien 648) also contain non-magical and non-medical texts, most of them deriving from Christian literature in Gəʿəz. The reason for this seems to be the need to legitimize the use of medico-magical prescriptions. It seems that the author or the compiler sought to underline the fact that both the performers and their actions remain explicitly under the authority of the Ethiopian Church. The religious texts are meant to be effective against several ailments in the Ethiopian therapeutic context.
3. In the transmission and preservation of medical and magical knowledge, there is a variety of authors and scribes who, according to the titles which accompany their names, had different functions in the society (as MS Or. 11390 shows). By contrast, the content of manuscript MS Éthiopien 403 belonged to one person, a *däbtära*, and reflects his interest and preferences for medical and magical practice. Another way of collecting expertise was to put together originally separate collections and to unite them in a new manuscript. This is the case with MS Éthiopien 402 and MS Éthiopien 648, which were created by the unification of different notebooks of different authors/scribes.
4. Although the boundary between medical prescriptions and magic prayers is somewhat indistinct, the medical prescriptions mainly use herbal medicines, animal parts and minerals in contrast to the magic prayers which employ the power of the magic names *Asmat*, by which various forces, both good and evil, are conjured up. The incantations may be accompanied by traditional Ethiopian drawings, which are considered to be ‘powerful medi-

²⁵ See also Gelahun Abate 1981.

chine'. It is interesting to note that both medical prescriptions and magic prayers are sometimes used for the same kind of illness or malignancy.

5. Alongside the preservation of expertise another important function of these manuscripts was their use (see MS Or. 11390 and MS Éthiopien 403) as a kind of manual for manufacturing other therapeutic objects such as amulets and magic scrolls.
6. Of the terms quoted above for medicine in Gə'əz, only three occur in our manuscripts: *mädhanit*, *fäws* and *šəray*. However, in MS Or. 11390 the Amharic word *abənnät* appears as a generic term for describing the knowledge that is preserved and transmitted this way. *Abənnät*, according to Kane (1990, 1201), means 'model, pattern, example; remedy, medicine, philtre, incantation [...] original of a book [...]'. The anthropological research of the second half of the twentieth century describes *abənnät* as a generic term for magic works of the *däbtäras* (see the definition of Allan Young (1970, 156)). Another scholar, Jacques Mercier (1976, 124), considers *abənnät* as *däbtära* knowledge or *däbtära* science. It is also the designation for the traditional schools of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

The medico-magical prescriptions found in the manuscripts are of interest for many reasons. Firstly, they use herbal and plant materials to a great extent and, in so doing, they document the flora of Ethiopia in the last centuries. Furthermore, the traditional medicines are still used in Ethiopia today, and it would be valuable to compare the old prescriptions of this manuscript with the prescriptions currently used by contemporary traditional healers (*bahälawi hakim*). Future research should pay special attention to the persons who are involved in the collection, preservation and transmission of this kind of knowledge—priests, *däbtäras*, traditional healers, sorcerers—and also to its practical applications regarding both the healing processes and the production of objects such as amulets and magic scrolls.

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Summary

The present paper is dealing exclusively with medico-magical texts and traditions from a Christian Ethiopian environment. The handbooks and collections of various traditional healers in Ethiopia have played a significant role in the chain of transmission of medical and magical knowledge. This paper will focus on the structure and composition strategy exemplified by four Ethiopian manuscripts (MS Or. 11390 from the British Library, MS Éthiopien 402, 402 and 648 from the Bibliothèque nationale Paris). The analysis shows how the specialist knowledge was transmitted, preserved and reused. Moreover, it sheds some light on the protagonists of this transfer.