
This book on Ethiopian art is of interest to all who deal with either Ethiopia or early Christian studies. Its late author, Robin McEwan, managed to frame the facts of the history of book illumination in the context of Ethiopian culture of the 18th and 19th centuries as a whole. Moreover, his commentary on the miniatures continuously refers to texts that preserve early Christian traditions of both commentaries on the Apocalypse and the life of apostle John. His wife, Dorothea McEwan who has now published his work, is herself a scholar who is very sensitive to such an approach. She is known, among other things, from her paper summing up findings in the field of Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts on the Apocalypse.¹

So far, our knowledge of the Ethiopian exegetical tradition of the Apocalypse was basically limited to two commentaries, one in Ge’ez (*Tergwame Qalamsis*, translated from a lost Arabic original of Coptic origin somewhere in the 16th c.) and another in Amharic (*Andemta*).²

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² Cf., on all of this: Roger W. Cowley, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church* (Cambridge, 1983) (Uni-
The latter was written down in the 19th century but could contain much earlier material than the former. The Ethiopian scribes and traditional scholars are famous for their ability to know by heart enormous amounts of text, and this is why their oral tradition is surely not less stable than the written one. As I have been told by those who have worked with Ethiopian Church scholars, it was common until recently in Ethiopia, that if a manuscript reading turned out to be at variance with a text known by an authoritative teacher by heart, one would make preference to the reading known by the teacher. Be that as it may, the two sets of illustrations to the Apocalypse published by McEwan predate the writing of the *Andemta*, and so, are an important third evidence of the Ethiopian exegesis. This is why I dare to coin them the “third level” of the Ethiopian traditional commentary to the Apocalypse, beside two former “levels” of the *Tergwame Qalamsis* (below: *TQ*) and *Andemta* (below: *A*). Besides, both Ethiopian illumination sets cover the *Acta Iohannis* (*CANT* 218) known in many recensions and languages including Ethiopic (*BHO* 470).

Both Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts represent the same tradition of illumination, with very small variants. The manuscript of the church Däräsge Maryam (19th c.) is now preserved in this church, in a remote part of Ethiopia. The color photographs were taken on location by the author. Its illuminations are reproduced without exception. Another manuscript is that of the British Library (BL) Or. 533 (first half of the 18th c.). Most of its illuminations (in total 24), while not all, are reproduced, the others being described verbally. Probably, such a decision is reasonable from the viewpoint of an art historian, while I regret this from my own viewpoint of a historian of exegesis. For instance, I would be very interested to see the illustration of “Babylon” (Rev. 14:8) that is available on the miniature of the BL manuscript only (cf. p. 155–156). Unlike most of the European exegesis where this fallen Babylon is Rome, the Ethiopian exegesis (both *TQ* and *A*) preserves an early tradition where Babylon is Jerusalem. What does “a Gondärine castle” mean, as McEwan describes this fallen city on the BL manuscript miniature (p. 156)?

University of Cambridge Oriental Publications No. 33). Includes a publication of the *Tergwame Qalamsis* as well as the translation of the *Andemta* according to a printed edition of the Ethiopian Church.


(4) It is interesting to note that, in some difficult points, the illustrations are ambiguous. Thus, it is impossible to decide who is the second person, be-