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**Article**

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

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Looking from east to west, the space in an ancient Ethiopian church is organised in a threefold manner. The Maqdás or sanctuary, the easternmost area of the church, stands on an elevated plane and is accessed through the triumphal arch. It may have a rounded apse1 or a flat eastern wall2 with a central window. The altar stands in the middle below a semi-cupola or an ornamented ceiling. Side rooms may be found to the north and/or south. Niches may be present in the walls, and holes in the floor. Secondly, there is the Qaddast which lies between the sanctuary and the nave, west of the triumphal arch. Access used to be closed off by a chancel-barrier. A cupola may adorn its ceiling. It corresponds to the Syrian Qostroma and the Coptic Khurus. Thirdly, the assembly gathers westwards in the Qone maḥlet,3 i.e. the nave and aisles in a basilica church.

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

C. Lepage has demonstrated4 that the furnishings of ancient Ethiopian churches bear witness to how the liturgy developed and provide evidence of

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2 The flat eastern wall is also ancient, as at Dāgum North and South. See note 5 below.
3 The name Qone maḥlet refers to the “service” of God accomplished through liturgical “praise” offered by the assembly. This praise includes the activity of the choir.
4 CLAUDE LEPAGE, “Premières recherches sur les installations liturgiques des anciennes églises d’Éthiopie (Xe-XVe siècles)”, C.N.R.S., Travaux de la Recherche Coopérative
change over time. These changes have increasing importance when studied in terms of comparative liturgy, including today’s liturgical practices, and matched with data from literature and iconography. This approach illuminates the relationship between liturgical celebrations and the furnishings and structures provided to host them in an appropriate manner.

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

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

5 See Marilyn Heldman, “Churches”, in Encyclopaedia Aethiopica, I, Siegbert Uhlig, ed. (Wiesbaden, 2003) (hereafter: EAE). To follow a Syriac plan does not imply that all churches were built in exactly the same way. See also Emma Loosley, “The Architecture and Liturgy of the Bema in Fourth- to Sixth-Century Syrian Churches”, in Patrimoine Syriaque 2 ("Parole de l’Orient", Kaslik 2003) (hereafter: Loosley, “Bema”), 40. This is compatible with ancient Sabean temple architecture which was part of the Yāḥa and Aksum heritage.


7 Heinzgerd Brakmann, "Le déroulement de la messe copte: structure et histoire", in: Achille M. Tripacca – Alessandro Pistoia (eds.), L’eucharistie: célébrations,
ress of Ethiopian Christian worship can generally be observed in relation to changes on the Egyptian scene, it follows that church buildings would be directly, although not necessarily rigidly, dependent on Coptic developments. This tentative line of reasoning bears further investigation since the absence of written documentation until the 13th century has left the church buildings themselves as almost the only surviving evidence available for study.

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

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

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


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


In one important detail Butler is more accurate: “The cavity is of varying size; but very often it is nearly co-extensive with the altar” (Butler, Coptic Churches, 2:5) and available for storage of assorted paraphernalia.
borium, often beautifully painted with a Maiestas Domini, whereas the side altars were made of a simpler cube. These Coptic features indicate that major developments took place during a roughly common period around and after the Fatimid dynasty, which in Egypt endured from A.D. 972 to 1171.

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

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

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

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

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19 It happens, as at the Mu’allaqah, that all three altars are equipped with ciboria.
20 We are using the term for commodity, anachronic as it may be.
21 Such holes were discovered in the southern pastophorion of Dsgum North on 21 October 2004 by E. Fritsch, with Tom Zimmermann and Sean and Niel Prague, in the presence of local cleric Mâmhor Arâgawi, who unearthed them by following the indications given. A similar disposition has been observed in Dsgum South’s southern pastophorion and Gazen’s northern one.
congregation while passing from the prothesis pastophorion through the triumphal arch to the sanctuary.

Other pastophoria have doorways leading only to the sanctuary, as in some Coptic churches, and as at each of the two churches of Dāgum (Fig. B); Bārāqit Maryam and Hawzen Tāklā Haymanot, as well as Wāqro Māsqālā Krastos (Sokota) and Gānnātā Maryam. Thus, only the clergy may approach the chancel-barriers of the-then presbyterium and sanctuary. It is likely that the gifts were carried in a simple and discreet manner to the altar.

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

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24 As at Zarema, Dābrā Damo, Qirqos Agobo, Abrəha wā-AŞbāha, Wāqro Qirqos, Mika’el Imba, Dābrā Sālam Mika’el, Ymroḥannā Krastos, Lalibālā Maryam, Lalibālā Madʒane ’alām, Lalibālā Amanu’el, etc.
25 There are chancel barriers guarding the Qoddast and the south pastophorion. A heap of pieces from the north pastophorion barrier lies on the floor. The isolated existence of a triple chancel and the fact that all three chancels used to have a triumphal arch leads one to question the functions of those rooms (pastophoria or early side sanctuaries?), as well as the function of such a chancel.
26 As at Dāgum South, Abrəha wā-AŞbāha and Wāqro Qirqos.
the transit area for a ceremony like the Eucharist, let alone serve as sanctu-
aries. They are service rooms, devoid of solemn purpose.

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

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

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

Change began inside the pastophoria of churches of the old order. Towards
the end of the 12th century and early in the 13th century, the churches of the
Lalibâla region were constructed according to liturgical plans which presup-
posed that the prothesis would be done in a pastophorion. Zoz Amba has a
sanctuary and two pastophoria which connect with both the sanctuary and the
aisles, according to the common basilica plan.27 Significantly, the church
contains three monoxyle portable altars of a type "don't la production ne
paraît pas avoir duré au-delà du 13e siècle".28 The correlation leads to the con-
clusion that three altars at one stage equipped three sanctuaries, rather than a
sanctuary and two pastophoria. The clergy must have begun adopting changes
before the architecture had adapted to the new church order. Lalibâla is
known for such portable altars and the phenomenon may well have started
there, since it was the centre of royal and ecclesiastical administration. In
short, the Eucharist was at least sometimes being celebrated in the pastopho-
ria, despite their inappropriateness. It seems that changes resulting from Cop-
tic precedents were being applied in Ethiopia in the 13th century.

27 CLAUDE LEPAGE – JACQUES MERCIER, “Une église lalibélienne: Zoz Amba”, in An-
28 LEPAGE – MERCIER, “Zoz Amba”, 153. Three altars entail that a different altar-tablet
is placed upon each altar, a fact which will take important proportions in Ethiopia.
It has been argued elsewhere that the complex of churches, Däbrä Sina, Golgota and Šollase in Lalibäla, belong to the late 14th or early 15th century, a much later date than was heretofore thought. That argument is strengthened by the striking absence in those churches of any pastophoria (Fig. C), unless the unity of architectural style and structure reflects the co-existence of two rites.

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

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30 It is in the mid-13th century, at the beginning of the Mamluk era, that the custom develops of having the altar room covered with a full circle cupola, as a component of the third and last phase of Coptic architectural development (GROSSMANN, Christliche Architektur, 94–96). On Makina Mädhane ‘aläm, see MICHAEL GERVERS, “An Architectural Survey of the Church of ūmäkina Mädhane Aläm (Lasta, Ethiopia)”, in Walattä Yobanna. Ethiopian Studies in Honour of Joanna Mantel Niecko on the Occasion of the 50th Year of Her Work at the Institute of Oriental Studies, Warsaw University, (Rocznik Orientalistyczny, 59 (2006/1)), 92–112.
which allowed this suppression of the ‘sacristies’; there is no presbytery in the interior, a normal situation at such a late date.\footnote{Claude Lepage, \textit{L’église de Zarema (Éthiopie) découverte en Mai 1973 et son apport à l’histoire de l’architecture éthiopienne}, in: \textit{Comptes rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres}, Paris, juillet–octobre 1973 (published, 1974), 450, n. 5.}

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

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

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

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

Lalibâla Giyorgis, a monolith excavated in the shape of a cross, has a sanctuary similar to the old churches, but without side rooms or even side space. This arrangement is also found at ‘Addi Qeśo Mādḥāne ‘alām in Tagray. There is a cupola above the sanctuary of both churches. It seems clear, therefore, that the sanctuary itself was judged sufficient for both preparation and celebration of the mass. For this reason in particular, ‘Addi Qeśo cannot be as old as claimed by Buxton. 32

Significantly, the sanctuary of Betà Giyorgis ends at the top of the steps which rise from the nave while, in contrast, Lalibâla Dābrā Sina still has a Qeddest at the level of the sanctuary and two choir platforms (Fig. C). 33 This

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

33 In fact, Giyorgis has lost several traditional Axumite features. In particular, the Greek cross shape adopted for its plan no longer makes room for four service rooms although it could have, if its model actually was Tamit (JEAN DORESSE, “Nouvelles recherches sur les relations entre l’Égypte copte et l’Éthiopie: XII-XIIIe siècles”, Comptes-rendus de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres (juillet–octobre 1970 (1971), 563; JEAN DORESSE, review of Tamit (1964), Missione Archaeologica in Egitto dell’Università di Roma, in Revue d’Égyptologie, vol. 21 (1969), 183–185; UGO MONNERET DE VILLARD, La Nubia medioevale, vol. 1, 146–66 (Cairo 1935); Missione Archaeologica in Egitto dell’Università di Roma. Tamit (1964, Università di Roma, Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Serie Archeologica, 14 (Rome 1967), 35, fig. 20, 2; WILLIAMS Y. ADAMS, “Tamit” in: C.E. 7: 2200b–2201a). Even the socle was made to fit.
arrangement suggests that Lalibāla Bēta Giyorgis could be more recent even than Lalibāla Dābrā Sina.34

As happened in Egypt, some older churches may have undergone transformations in order to conform to the new trend. They may display arches leading to side rooms instead of the expected pastophoria doors or west walls, possibly merging central sanctuary and pastophoria into a sanctuary running the full width of the church, able to accommodate several altars. Thus the pastophoria of Lalibāla Mārqorewos (Fig. E) may have been turned into additional altar rooms. Gundāfru Šollase (Fig. F1)

34 In any case not as late as the 16th century: the witness of the Portuguese in 1520 and of the Muslims set a clear terminus ante quem (Francisco Alvares, The Prester John of the Indies, ed. by Charles Fraser Beckingham – George Wynn Brereton Huntingford, Hakluyt Society, no. 114, 1:chs. 54–55).
clearly shows reworking. This traditional church, excavated in the manner of the “valley” churches, shows the post holes of the old chancel-set up (Fig. F2) and displays pastophoria at the east end of each aisle. They are quite open and accessed through large arches which have been hewn later in the history of the church (Fig. 2). Not only are these openings clearly reworked, but the ends of the original lodgings of the wooden beams framing top and bottom of the doorways are still visible. Gundāfru’s arches have something in common with those of Dābrā Mā’ar. The ground plan of Lalibāla Mārqorewos is also traditional and one would have expected pastophoria. They may of course have been destroyed later, and the place re-arranged.

The famous mural paintings and inscription of King Yōkunno Amlak (1270–1283) in the church of Gānnāt Maryam are deemed authentic. A common iconography and the epigraphy involved also ascribe the churches of Ūmākīna Mādhāne ‘alām and Waša Mika’el to the same reign. The commemorative text of Yōkunno Amlak clearly states that he both built and painted the church with the involvement of Maḥari Amlak, responsible for Waša Mika’el, and Neheyo.

Ūmākīna Mādhāne ‘alām and Waša Mika’el no longer display either pastophoria or west rooms, the former having one entrance to the sanctuary through the triumphal arch and the latter having retained both the entrance

36 Despite the frequently-expressed opinion to the contrary, Lalibāla Mārqorewos would appear to have been made as a church, for reasons which will be explained elsewhere. In addition, it is akin to the chapel in Betā Gābrero’el-Rufa’el.
through the triumphal arch and the southern door. In apparent contrast, Gänntä Maryam contains two *pastophoria*, treated below. Its west rooms open eastwards, they are framed by the porch and paintings decorate them, conforming that they are not isolated from the rest of the church. Further, the platform of the *Qəddast* has disappeared and a cupola adorns the ceiling of the sanctuary. Gänntä Maryam, which would appear to have been excavated before the same workshop painted Ḫmākina Mādhane 'ālam and Waša Mika’el, includes features which also appear in the later Lalibāla churches (Mārqorewos, the chapel of Gābra’el Rufa’el, Golgota Sllase, Giyorgis). It was designed not only to encourage the people of the Zag’e area to adopt its southern builder as their king, but also to convey yet another message.

It is not by chance that, among all the churches of Lalibāla, Gänntä Maryam (Fig. G) relates more especially with Mādhane ‘ālam (Fig. H). Both churches have majestic columns, crosses carved on the roof, and even a small step left near the north door. It has been convincingly argued that Lalibāla Mādhane ‘ālam was conceived as a “copy” of Saint-Mary of Zion, the mother Church of Ethiopia. Aksum’s monarchs had Saint-Mary of Zion as their

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39 At Waša Mika’el, these two entries give access to a sanctuary, the interior space of which is undivided (see photos in MS: MG-2002.111:025 / 112:032 / 113:001).
40 We propose to study this matter in a work under preparation.
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palladium: if their Zagwe successors had created in Mädžane 'alām their own palladium, so also might Yəkunno Amlak have anchored his new lineage in Aksum through the church of Gänntä Maryam. To reinforce his legitimacy and authority among all Northerners, the first Amhara king dedicated his church to Abba Māṭa. This saint was very popular in Tigray and related to the community of Dābrā Libanos of Šamāzana, which used to back the Zagwe. The pastophoria would probably have been abandoned, therefore, some time before Yəkunno Amlak overthrew thezagwe in A.D. 1270. In the case of Gänntä Maryam, we propose that this explains the murals and even a Maiestas Domini in the SE pastophorion (Fig. 3), which from the start was meant to be a sanctuary rather than a sacristy.

The use of the north-east pastophorion of Gänntä Maryam as a storage area has, to date, impeded the study of its wall paintings. In this connection, it remains to explain the second Maiestas Domini which is found on the north wall of the north aisle of Dābrā Sālam Mika’el and the Maiestas Domini in the north-west end of Mika’el Imba (MS: MG-2006.022:014).

Maryam Waqro (Nábālāt) is known from A. Mordini’s description, which also proposes that it dates from before the rebellion of 1319.46 The sanctuary contains a fully fledged rock-cut high-altar, and in its north wall a doorway leading to what looks like a pastophorion. Remarkably, however, this room contains a monolithic altar, cut as a cube in the Coptic manner. There is no access to this north-east pastophorion from the north aisle, although there is a wide arched opening47 above the floor level. The side sanctuary was conceived as a sanctuary, not as a pastophorion: the monolith and the chamber must have been contemporary. It was meant to stand beside the main sanctuary with the high altar, without a doorway opening towards the aisle.

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

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

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

46 ANTONIO MORDINI, “La Chiesa ipogea di Ucrò (Ambà Seneiti) nel Tigrai”, Annali dell’Africa Italiana 2/2 (1939), 519–526 (p. 526). The dating is possible, but by no means certain.

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

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

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

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

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

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48 Having the three altars lined up is the normal arrangement in Coptic churches.
49 The Coptic church of St. Anthony possesses such a *parekklesion* dedicated to the Four Living Creatures.
50 The hypogeal of Dogu have been described on several occasions by Claude Lepage, in particular in: "Les monuments rupestres de Degum en Éthiopie", *Cahiers Archéologiques* XXII (1972), 167–200.
52 The nave of this ancient basilica, twin to the northern church, now serves as the sanctuary to a *Qone mahlet* of more recent construction.
ways placed towards the western end of the walls separating them from the sanctuary, near its entrance below the triumphal arch (Fig. 12). The south pastophorion is narrow; it has an east window like the north pastophorion, a doorway to the altar and a smaller one to the south aisle. The natural rock constitutes the south wall. Leaning clumsily against it is an old wooden altar (Fig. 7) supporting a tabot carefully wrapped in a large piece of textile. The front and back sections are held together by the top mensa, and might collapse if not supported by the rock wall. The condition of its four feet suggests that they were long ensconced in damp holes. Roughly carved, the altar is adorned with a flat, round decorative element at each corner. It is 100 cm high, 60 cm long, and 50 cm wide. Given the space needed to access the sanctuary as well as the two pastophoria, the original (rectangular) altar must have been erected very close to the flat east wall of the sanctuary, as at Dogum, and likewise there could be no turning around the altar, nor could the deacon stand facing the priest. The dimensions of this altar are compatible with the proportions of the sanctuary and indicate that it must be the original altar of the church for it is unlikely that such an item came from another place. Further, the condition of its feet indicates that it used to be solidly secured in the ground in an appropriate place. Where it stands at present was never meant for any type of altar.53

Type 2. Another type of altar is similar to those above, but it is possible to turn around them. There is room for the deacon to stand facing west towards both priest and assembly, as well as for additional ministers. The unusual church of Ṣāb’ā ‘Ayna Qirqos54 has a nave like that of the neighbouring Qirqos Agobo, though less well realized. The east half is hewn out of the rock, including the triumphal arch, beyond which the rock has not been excavated. The west half is built. In addition, there is a north-east pastophorion. As no other sanctuary was ever made, and the triumphal arch is purely aesthetic, this area has, in fact, always been the sanctuary. There is a striking 100 x 100 cm monolithic rock made into a flat socle visible in the middle of the floor of the nave-sanctuary some 15 cm. above it, with squarish holes into which the feet of the altar are fitted.55 In this exceptional situation, the altar stands in the

53 A modern mānbārā tabot in iron presently occupies the SE corner of the sanctuary.
55 The present altar is not ancient, but the arrangement is.
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centre of one of the largest sanctuaries ever made in an Ethiopian church, apart from that of Gazen.

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

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

Type 3. The portable altars common to Lalibāla, are found in town (at Betā Maryam, Betā Māḏhan ‘alām, Gābra’el-Rufa’el, Golgota and Māşqāl churches),58 at Zoz Amba, Betā Laḥem (Fig. 10), Ṭaḷasfāṛī Ḫtiṇanos,59 and as far afield as at Dābrā Mā’ar in Gār’alta.60 According to certain authors, the production of such monoxyle altars seems not to have lasted beyond the 13th

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57 164 cm, on the contrary, would unnecessarily, considering the modest proportions of the altar, require a step for a priest to officiate.
58 According to STEFAN STRELCYN (Bibliotheca orientalis, XXXVI, nos. 3/4 (1979), 137–8) there are 8 such altars with inscriptions in Lalibāla, of which 2 at Betā Māḏhan ‘alām, 3 at Betā Maryam, 1 at Gābra’el and 2 at Golgota.
59 GERSTER, Churches in Rock, 141–42, fig. 123 and plates 209–11.
60 There are four such altars at Dābrā Mā’ar (MS: MG–2002.014:018–027).
They share features of style: they are remarkable for the smallish square shape of their mensa, which is often framed by an edge, the quality carving of the whole, the proportions of the body (‘chest’) with an interior cavity sometimes closed by a small door, and legs, and their often modest height. They could easily be introduced into places not originally planned for an altar, rooms previously made and used as pastophoria. Hence, it is not surprising to find several of them in a given place. They confirm that the new order may have begun in the churches of the older order in the Lalibela area. Their mensa is only large enough to receive an altar-tablet (tabot), which in turn could just support a paten and a chalice. The missal and other paraphernalia for the Eucharist celebration would have been borne by attendants. The frame and the body cavity indicate the Coptic origin of the altars, as at Đabrâ Sâlam Mika’el above.

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

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

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62 The stone legs added to the altar of Bilbala Qirqos (see above) show how smaller altars could be raised to a more appropriate height. There is a very modest, roughly hewn portable altar at Yâčâr Mâdjahe ‘alam in Lasta (MS:MG–2005.112:021–025), and a carefully carved miniature in the Mâqâle Museum, Toğray (MS:MG–2005.126:026–030).
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to have had a Greek prototype, which would likely have depicted an altar with a canopy, so the artist must have discarded that model in order to replace it with the Lalibala altar. This would make sense, provided that the Lalibala altar type was in current fashion.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

67 There are, however, serious difficulties in interpreting the actual liturgical function of Lalibäla Śallase.
69 The monolith always had a superstructure as there is a large, rectangular opening excavated in the back which reaches the top, necessitating the addition of a surface on which to conduct the Mass.
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churches then created. We may thus conclude that Lalibälä Däbrä Sina and others had up to three altars of the portable type.\textsuperscript{70}

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

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

Type 6. The monastery of Abba Yoßanni, situated in a cliff of the Däbrä ƻ(554,381),(587,414), presents three rock-hewn altars excavated in the easternmost bay of a church characterised by high columns and numerous cupolas (Fig. D).\textsuperscript{73} The sanctuary is separated by curtains only: there are no steps or walls within. The central, high-altar, originally meant to be the baldaquin type, as in type 5, is unfinished, leaving a large, unusable cubic mass, painted on the front with a First Gondar style Crucifixion and Resurrection (Fig. 15). On its lower eastern side is a cavity, presently filled with a variety of ecclesiastical paraphernalia (Fig. 18). The top is flat. The cubic altar on the north side of the sanctuary is the one normally used for liturgical purposes.\textsuperscript{75} Each side is adorned with a

\textsuperscript{70} The number would depend upon whether they had an appropriately-dimensional space available. Lalibälä Giyorgis, for instance, could never accommodate more than one altar.


\textsuperscript{72} See MS: MG–2004.067:005.


\textsuperscript{74} As at Däbrä Šayon, it is unlikely that the curtains were planned when the church was made.

\textsuperscript{75} See MS: MG–2004.043:021–024.
large cross. A niche has been hewn out of its east face and the *mensa* itself is framed by a 6 cm high rim.\(^{76}\)

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

Gäbr’el Waqen, on the slopes of the same Dabrà "Asa, also has three altars, of which two are monolithic and one constructed of stones.\(^{78}\) The central, high-altar has approximately the same proportions as its counterpart at Abba Yoḥanni and, like it, has a flat canopy. The space underneath the *mensa* is used for storage, visible from the nave. The north-east altar has a high, deeply-rimmed *mensa*, also with storage space below. The constructed, off-centred south-east altar seems to have been erected later.

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

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


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

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

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

81 There is no altar in the north bay of the sanctuary, nor any sign that one has been removed.
82 See MS: MG–2002.084:033/034; 2002.086:021/022/023. This rare altar has since been badly damaged by fire, especially the cupola (MS: MG–2006.015:029/037).
83 Possibly, all four corners are similarly decorated.
above. We see in it a simplification of the Coptic high-altar of the type that had become customary in Egypt from the Fatimid period onwards. The frame produced by the four posts rising above the cupola of the altar at Gundà Gunde is patterned after the volume of the flat-topped rock altar. This phenomenon would have had no reason, had the present wooden altars been made before the rock ones. Had they come first, they would have imitated the actual Coptic altars more closely. In this instance, the cupola with its cross, supported by the posts, would have topped the whole structure.84

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

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

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

84 There may be such altars, but to our knowledge none has yet been found.
85 MS: MG–2002.349:017. Guya Abunà Tãklã Haymanot (Ambarra, Tãmbeñ) is located about 20 km. south of Abba Yohanni (Dãbrà ʠAsa).
86 In Ethiopia, as the altar at Dãbrà Ṣyon shows, the flat top of the monolith is unlikely to have received a wooden dome enhancing the appearance of a classic ciborium.
However, while the churches of type 5 retain the proportions of the traditional central sanctuary, type 6 is characterised by the full east bay sanctuary: no trace of any pastophoria is left to be seen. Cupolas stand high above the altar in the full-width east bays, as also above every square space delineated by walls or pillars, a development again inherited from Egypt and translated into Ethiopia’s rock-hewn churches without passing through built counterparts. The significant modifications between types 5 and 6 correspond to a change of period.

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

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

1) A consideration of the old order of preparation of the Eucharistic bread and wine in Syria and Egypt and then in Ethiopia, reveals that churches were equipped with pastophoria, one of which was meant for this rite of the prothesis, before the Mass.

2) Changes in Egyptian liturgical practice led to the rite of the prothesis becoming the beginning of the Mass. The change is first marked by the multiplicity of portable altars in churches obviously built with pastophoria for the ancient rite. It may have taken place around the middle of the 13th century.

88 Except at Gābrs’el Waqen, but there the decor of the ceiling plays a similar role.
3) *Pastophoria* were no longer built in newly-erected churches towards the end of the 13th century. Amongst the first such churches are Ṭmākōn Ṣādēlān and Wāsā Miqa’ēl.

4) The practice of installing an additional altar in the north and/or south sides of the sanctuary continued in many new churches, although this was not obligatory. A single full-width east bay sanctuary eventually emerged in a high-ceilinged and domed church.

5) While the first altars tended to be small, wooden and portable or quasi-portable (types 1 to 4), the permanent witness of rock-cut examples reflects the subsequent advent of the monumental *ciborium*-style high-altar and the matching side ones (types 5 & 6) in the 14–15th centuries.

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

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

**Summary**

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

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90 Priests and deacons celebrate on different altars in the same church for the same assembly, the group at the central altar leading.

91 The *parekklesion* of May Kado Giyorgis is a striking exception in its conception.
Pastophoria and Altars: Interaction in Ethiopian Liturgy and Church Architecture

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

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

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