

Conversations with an ethnomusicologist and Cardinal Paulos Tzadua 1972-2000

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Abstract

On February 24, 1977, Paulos Tzadua became Archbishop of Addis Ababa, in the midst of the horrors of the Red Terror. His compassionate and caring leadership of Ethiopia's Catholic Church earned him the notice of Pope John Paul II who named him a Cardinal on May 25, 1985. As the first cardinal from Ethiopia in history, "his elevation raised his profile giving him the added stature and authority in dealing with Ethiopia's Marxist leaders on numerous issues, including the church's efforts to relieve suffering caused by famine. (*San Francisco Chronicle*, 26 May 1985)

1. Introduction

I first met Abba Paulos in April of 1972 as a US Fulbright scholar conducting a year of fieldwork in Ethiopia. At the time my husband, daughter, and I were living in a rented house located in Addis Ababa just up the street from Ras Mackonnen Bridge. We wished to enroll our daughter at a catholic school and also wanted to record an Ethiopian orthodox church service since Easter was soon to be commemorated. Aleqa Berhanu Mekonnen who teaches zema at the Haile Selassie University (HSU) Theological School suggested recording an all night service at the Holy Trinity Cathedral and that the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) should write a letter of permission on my behalf.¹ Berhanu and I went to the church to introduce myself and to ask if I could record the all night service on Sunday April 2nd. I was greeted by an ordained priest named Paulos Tzadua and unbeknown to me, he was to become auxiliary bishop of Addis Ababa in 1973.

¹ Opened in 1942, the Holy Trinity Cathedral, (Kidist Selassie), is the highest ranking Orthodox cathedral in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was built to commemorate Ethiopia's liberation from Italian occupation and is the second most important place of worship in Ethiopia, after the Church of Our Lady Mary of Zion in Axum.



Figure 1: Author with Abba Paulos, Addis Ababa, 1996

He agreed to let us record from the empty pulpit located across from the pulpit where the actual sermon would be given, and he advised us where to place our microphone. And that is when our friendship began. Thereafter I have always referred to him as “Abba Paulos”. My paper will focus on my conversations and correspondence with Abba Paulos about music and related topics.

My field diaries and Paulos’ twelve letters and three photographs that he sent to me, reveal thoughts and insights that span almost three decades, including his unpublished notes on music, his early desire for a religious life, his preference to become a researcher rather than an archbishop, the role of the *azmari* (traditional singer)², and his travels abroad.

A. The *Fetha Negast*

His best known scholarly work is his translation of *The Fetha Negast* (The Law of the Kings) from Gə‘əz to English which was first published in 1968 with a second edition published in 2009. He learned English when he was forced to flee his Seminary to England (where he was ordained) during the Italian occupation. (Strauss, 2009). This seminal work:

² *Azmari* is a traditional singer in Ethiopia, that usually plays traditional instruments and uses folks lyrics.

is a book of law that has been in use in Christian Ethiopia since at least the 16th century... It is not an original composition, for it is rather derived from an Arabic work known as *Magmu al-qawanin*, ('Collection of Canons') written in the year 1238 by the Christian Egyptian jurist... Al-Assal as-Safi, a contemporary of Patriarch Cyrill III of Alexandria. (Paulos, 2005: 534-35)

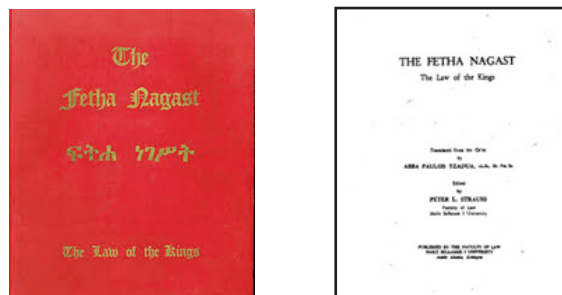


Figure 2: The Fetha Negast

It deals with matters related to the canon and civil laws and, in small part, also to criminal law.

B. Other scholarly works

I suddenly realized, among his many interests in fields of learning, such as Ethiopian history and liturgy, he also seemed to me to be a closest musicologist. In excerpts from some of his letters, he writes: “Do you know how I would like to follow the life of studies instead to be an Archbishop? Really my vocation should be to study, to do research etc.” (19 March 1978)

I am very happy to know that you are always dedicated to study and teach African music...How it would be interesting to sit together and to talk about your finding...Maybe it will happen once in the future in America or in Ethiopia. (7 October 1985)

In the mean while I recall with pleasure the visits that you, along with Kegnasmach Ghebremedhin, so gently paid to me and the discussions we held on several issues. During one of your visits I

did mention to you that within our Archdiocese there are a number of social and pastoral projects that we need funding for. [Financial help for the completion of the works of extension of the Nativity Boys School, Addis Ababa. (23 September 1996)]

C. Segeneiti and Mändäfära, Eritrea

Abba Paulos (1921-2003) born in Adifinni, a village in Akele Guzai, Eritrea, discovered I was a friend of one of his closest boyhood classmates with whom in 1932 he went to St. Michael's primary school in Segeneiti, Eritrea.



Figure 3: Kegn. Ghebremedin Tessema, Addis Ababa, 1996

He was Kagnazmatch³ Ghebremedhin Tessema, an accountant, who was assigned to me as my host in 1962 when I first arrived in Asmara for additional training and right before I began my tenure as a US Peace Corps volunteer teacher in Mändäfära and later in Asmara. It was 30 years earlier while at St Michael's that Abba Paulos felt a call to the religious life. This led him to the town of Mändäfära where Franciscan Capuchins have a school. He became a novitiate at the Capuchin school in Mändäfära but was dismissed in 1940 as not having the right temperament for the Capuchin way of life. (Tedros, 2005)

³ Originally a military title equivalent to Brigadier General of the right wing of the army, later conferred to civil officials.



Figure 5: Alemayehu Fanta, 1996

Abba Paulos also met with Alemayehu Fanta to discuss Ethiopian music as well as listened to Alemayehu perform on the *mäsinqo* “*cärawata*” (which is a traditional Ethiopian music instrument) , baganna, and *kərar*. Incidentally Alemayehu was my *mäsinqo* teacher whose methodology, in part, formed the basis for material I used for my dissertation on qəññät and other articles (Kimberlin 1976, 1980. 1983, 1986, 1996).

D. *Medina* and *Zelesegna*

Alemayehu Fanta is a major figure in the field of traditional music and a foremost proponent of *Medina* and *Zelesegna*. Unfortunately, he may well represent an endangered class of traditional musicians that are experts in *Medina* and *Zelesegna*. According to Alemayehu, in his meetings with Abba Paulos, there is a music genre/melodies called *Medina*, which the *azmari* performs on the *mäsinqo* as an introduction, before he begins the musical and vocal entertainment portion. The song text has a religious sentiment — an invocation, praise or thanksgiving to God. In some *Medina*, instead of the words being directly addressed to God, they are generic religious thoughts. The voice sounds fuller with only a slight vibrato. Another type of melody is the *Zelesegna* which is performed only in *təzzəta qəññät* and is the alternation of the *Medina* melody. This melody is more vivid than the *Medina* and the vocalist exhibits much more vibrato. The poetic words can have a religious meaning, but they can also contain sentences alluding to moralistic character.

E. English translation of song texts by Abba Paulos

i. Medina

The solemn opening of the musical entertainment and the song in *təṣṣəta qəññət* is addressed to God:

Be honoured and thanked Oh our Lord
 You who have made us reach to this [moment]
 So such are the favours of God
 Should somebody be who thanks.

Medinaa song text

ii. Zelessegna

In *təṣṣəta qəññət* - 'The second stanza has a religious sense: the player complains about his religious ignorance of not being capable of knowing the elementary prayers, while his companion is able to read the psalms:

He seemed [to] me a poor [soul] seeing him naked
 But he was the crucified Lord.

Zelessegna song text

iii. Shillela - In *bati qəññət*

The name Bati derives from a small town in Wollo called Bati. This *qəññət* is used to perform passionate music and songs of love and war. *Shilliela* (songs of war) celebrates the bravery of heroes and the warriors, it excites the fighter and his horse during battle, and celebrates the fatherland:

Come on, oh come on
 Oh you [valiant warrior] who kills [the enemy] driving him away
 Invisible like the sun which is setting
 I didn't believe you could come back.
 You have driven them away, that is enough, come back

[Otherwise] if you are lost who will replace you?

In the evening [the warrior] left his companion
At dawn he was seen like the morning star.

The warrior cordial with his companion [in arm(s)]
with his long Mauser he burns the kidney [of the enemy]

The son of beautiful Ethiopia
Gallant fighter since his early youth

O hero of Ethiopia open your eyes
Watch carefully your adversary
To prevent your country from being conquered
Come on, come on Sengo (appellative of the horse)
What is this carelessness?

If the spear is launched
The risk is to me as well as to you.
Oh my country Ethiopia who will dare to attack you
Unless I am fallen dead and eaten by a beast.

Shillela song text

F. Preparing unpublished notes

Abba Paulos talked about obtaining more information on Ethiopian music in preparing to write in his notes. He says:

I have visited once the Yared Music School and I have asked for some literatures about the Ethiopian music in general and about the Qeqheet in particular. But it seems that there is scarcity of materials of such kind... In the Yared Music School I met Ato Alamaehu Fantaye, the *mäsingo* and krar player whom we know. After we have met many times to record music and songs which are the basis on which I prepared the notes.

Excerpt of a letter from Abba Paulos to author (1989)

Below, I paraphrase excerpts from comments he made about *qəññət*, *azmari*, and *mäsingo* in his unpublished notes. (Paulos, 1989).

G. *Qəññət*

Ethiopian music has four tonalities or *qəññət*: *təṣṣəta*, *bati*, *ančiboye*, and *ambassäl*. *Təṣṣəta* is also also known as Wollo *qəññət*. Although *ančiboye* is of Wollo origin, the meaning of the name is unclear. *Ambassäl* is named after a mountain where an ancient fortress is located. Even though the four *qəññət* are played throughout Ethiopia, mention has been made that each of them originated in Wollo province. The people of Wollo, especially a group called Arho, perform music and dance in all seasons for all occasions.

H. *Azmari*

The true *azmari*s are a group of musicians who migrated to Ethiopia from Israel. *Azmari* is an inherited profession passed from father to son⁴. *Azmari* is categorized as a caste system by the Jewish people along with potters and blacksmiths, and he may not change his profession. An exception was Tesema Eshete, a famous *azmari* who also held a high government position while maintaining his profession as an *azmari*. Tesema was such an excellent *azmari* that his body of songs and their particular style is known as the ‘Tesema Eshete style’. Certain twists and turns and other detailed characteristics of style can be identified as ‘Tesema Eshete’s inflection.’ His son played *mäsingo*, but quit and became a Vice Minister or general manager of the Sports Institute in Addis Ababa.

Azmaris enjoy a certain immunity. This allows them to express freely in their songs whatever they like, even if what they express is biting or mocking with regard to anybody. *Azmaris* may be the only persons in Ethiopia with freedom of speech. For example if I (Paulos) owned an *azmari*, this *azmari* could insult me and I couldn’t do anything personal to the *azmari*. If I (Paulos) owned someone’s former *azmari*, this same *azmari* could insult me and I couldn’t do anything against the *azmari*. He is probably the only person in the country with freedom of speech.

⁴ The author generally did not find this to be true.

I. *Mäsiṅqo*

Songs accompanying the *mäsiṅqo* is always performed solo, that is, a vocalist accompanying himself on the *mäsiṅqo*. It is worthwhile to clarify that the name *mäsiṅqo* is used in the Amharic language, while in the Təgrəñña language, such a name designates another multi-stringed instrument. In Təgrəñña, the Amharic *mäsiṅqo* is known as *cärawata*.

Prior to having written these notes, Abba Paulos published another essay in 1982 that included some comments about church music titled “The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Ethiopian Church”, *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, Garabed Amadouni and John Madey (eds) 1982: 37-68. Paderborn [u.a.], Germany. Eastern Churches Service.

J. Ethiopian church music; the *baganna*

Abba Paulos provided material I used for two of my publications. I acknowledged him for an article I wrote titled “The Music of Ethiopia”, *Music of Many Cultures*, Elizabeth May, ed. University of California Press, Berkeley first published in 1980 and reprinted in 1983. Paulos provided me with material on Ethiopian church music plus a drawing taken from my discussions with him. He delineates conventional music signs in the orthodox liturgy and music vocabulary such as describing the manner in which the liturgy is performed; the three styles or modes of church chant: *Gə‘əṣ* (the simplest plain chant, used on ordinary days), *Eṣṣel* (a slow and dignified, usually associated with fasts and funerals), and *araray* (the most complex mood, freer and lighter, with musical embellishments, sung on great festivals). (Kimberlin, 1972 field notes book 1).

When I showed an interest in looking at drawings depicting the *baganna* in hopes of learning about its history, Abba Paulos kindly provided me with letters of introduction to take with me to conduct research in Europe in 1972. The letters allowed me to study Ethiopian manuscripts containing drawings at the Vatican Library, the National Library in Paris, and the British Museum Library in London. While at the Vatican, I was able to meet and speak with Father Michael, an Ethiopian who was in charge of Ethiopian programming at the Vatican radio. Prompted by a suggestion by Abba Paulos, I gave Father Michael a copy of

one of the very first recordings I made of Alemu Aga playing the baganna, so that it could be played during Lent. Alemu was my baganna teacher at the time (Kimberlin, 1978).

Based on my visit to the British Museum, two manuscript paintings showing the baganna can be found in my commentary/notes for my recording titled *Ethiopia III: Three Chordophone Traditions*, a UNESCO LP disc published by Bareinreiter in Germany in 1985. It was reprinted on a CD by Avidis in France in 1995. Both drawings were probably from the late 17th and 18th century manuscripts and identified as folio 61 #590 18th century and folio 19 #635 17th century in the William Wright Catalogue of Ethiopian manuscripts housed in London's British Museum.

K. Closing remarks

The last time I spoke to Paulos was on 12 November 2000 while I attended the 14th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in Addis Ababa. He sent me photographs taken of him in 1972, 1976, 1979, 1985, 1996, and 2000 including two official portraits of him. I own an autographed copy of his own copy in English translation the *Fetha Nagast* which he gave me as a gift in 2000.



Figure 8: Paulos, Addis Ababa, 1976



Figure 9: Paulos, Addis Ababa, 1979



Figure 10: Paulos, Vatican, 1985

Figure 11: *Keddase* (Eucharistic Liturgy)
(Photo: Asrat Habte Mariam, 1996)

On the eve of the feast of St. Michael, Ethiopian Catholic priests and seminarians in Addis Ababa gathered at St. Michael's to celebrate its first patronal feast day. Celebrations began with recitation of Psalms and the intonation of Yaredian songs and set in *Gə'əz*. The next morning Cardinal Paulos Tzadua, Archbishop of Addis Ababa, celebrated the *Keddase* (Eucharistic Liturgy).

On occasion, Abba Paulos often remarked how he missed the food and the traditional music of Ethiopia and Eritrea but could not go out on his own to eating establishments and venues to observe musicians perform. So I did the next best thing. I brought the food and the musicians to him at my home in Addis Ababa. Here is an excerpt from a recording of music performed for Abba Paulos by these musicians. The following is the text of "The fertile land".

Refrain: The fertile land, fertile Ethiopia
 For the one who stands and sees it, you see a fisherman carrying his shoes.
 For the one who sees or visits Ethiopia - Untouched plants
 untouched plants with their fruits
 Going down the hill and crossing the river how wonderful is the
 number of deer
 When the cow stands at the gate and calls saying please milk me
 carrying the milk
 Untouched plants or trees, untouched plants with their fruits being

eaten by birds

Cut the tree and replant them so that the river sides of my country
remain barren

Refrain: The fertile land, fertile Ethiopia

English translation of “The fertile land” by Sisay Ghebremedhin



Figure 12: Abba Paulos with musicians⁵ at the author's residence in Addis Ababa. Abba Paulos as the first Cardinal from Ethiopia, “was a gentle, unassuming man of remarkable intelligence” according to Abba Paulos' editor of the *Fetha Nagast* Peter L. Struass. Pope John Paul II recalled Abba Paulos as “a zealous priest and Bishopa pastor of outstanding concern for lay people.” (Paul, 2003:1). His command of several languages was remarkable. I recall one afternoon when I was with him outside his residence talking to people, speaking Amharic, Tigrinya, Italian, and English within the span of ten minutes. This fluency proved to be a valuable asset when he worked on the *Fetha Nagast*:

in addition to *Gə‘əṣ*, the language of the traditional text, and his native Tigrinya, Abba Paulos was fluent in Amharic (the language of a local translation and much commentary), Arabic (the language from which the work had been translated in to *Gə‘əṣ*), Italian (the language of the existing European translation by [Ignazio] Guidi,

⁵ Notable musicians and an artist from Ethiopia and Eritrea appear in this photograph: Abba Paulos with musicians and friends at Kimberlin's residence, Addis Ababa (1972) – (Front Left to right) Lisa Kimberlin, Almaz (dancer), Asnackech ‘ChuChu’ Babichi (dancer), Tecklu Danaqa (kərar), (Seated) Babichi Habtemayer (*mäsinqo*), Mahay Sofa (kərar), Abba Paulos, Jerry Kimberlin, Cynthia Tse Kimberlin. Back row (Carol Zenger, Eshetu Tirunch (artist), Sisay Ghebremedhin, Alemayehu Fantay (*mäsinqo*, kərar, baganna, instructor at Yared), Alemu Aga (baganna, former instructor at Yared), Kegnazmach Ghebremedin Tessema, Akberet Hagos.

Latin (Roman Law sources) and, of course, English - thus permitting him access to most of the source documents of the Fetha Nagast. (Struass, 2009: xxxiii)



Figure 13: Cardinal Paulos Tzadua playing the kabaro, chapel of the Pontifical Ethiopian College, Vatican (Photo: Pieter Philippi, 1990s)

And finally, I discovered that he had a lifelong interest for the performing arts, his passion for study and writing about Ethiopian and Eritrean traditional music, song, and dance. My conversations with him highlight these interests as demonstrated by his rich commentary and insight.

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Correspondence from Paulos

January 8, 1977

March 19, 1978

July 27, 1978

January 14, 1984

Easter 1988

Easter 1989

July 10, 1989

August 31, 1989

September 5, 1989

December 15, 1995

July 30, 1996

September 6, 1996

Visits between Paulos and Kimberlin in Addis Ababa at his residence
1972, 1991, 1992, 1994, 1996, 2000.

Music Examples 1-5 song texts were translated to English by Tecola (#1), Paulos (#2-4), and Sisay (#5). 2-4 are taken from the audio cassette of the music recorded by Paulos at his residence in Addis Ababa. The audio component is not included for this essay.
