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 May1985)

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. 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 Gəʻəz 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.

In Mändäfära, for one year, I taught science at St. George Middle School and English to adults. Later, I was transferred to Asmara High School (previously Haile Selassie High School) in Asmara to teach English and volunteered to be the school's choral director. I began to record music of my students in Mändäfära using a borrowed Phillips tape recorder with 3-inch reels. Here is a song called "Ghize" (time) that I recorded in 1963 performed by Haile Ghebremedhin accompanying himself on the kərar (Kimberlin, 2006):

Time, time, time oh time. How are you?

How many wise men did you make a fool?

How many heroes have you made disappear?

How many of the educated have you cheated?

If you say it is not true, I can bring you witnesses

I leave my home as if I had a job

I spend the day walking until I become tired.

Time, time, time, time oh time. (Tecola, translator,1963)



Figure 4: Haile Ghebremedhin, Mändäfära, 1963

I had many discussions with Abba Paulos about music. In a letter to me dated 14 January 1984 Paulos was anxious to read my article on the four quiñat (amharic script). "Do you remember the day the teacher [Alemayehu Fanta] of cärawata has played for us some quiñat [amharic]. Few minutes ago I heard the record and there were the taxata and the Zelesegna..." Abba Paulos was especially interested in Medina and Zelesegna (Genre of Ethipian traditional music) and it is said that they are abstract versions of Ethiopian liturgical music. Below are comments made by Alemayehu Fanta when he was interviewed by Henok Reta (1989).



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 *mäsingo* "*cärawata*" (which is a traditional Ethiopian music instrument), baganna, and kərar. Incidentally Alemayehu was my *mäsingo* teacher whose methodology, in part, formed the basis for material I used for my dissertation on qəñnət 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 qəññət 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.

Lent is the most prevalent time to hear the Medina and Zelesegna music. Three factors distinguish this music from azmari music; it is played to entertain, to praise or criticize a patron, and to chronicle the news of the day. Medina and Zelesegna music introduce a puzzle through the power of their lyrics that transcends the spiritual verses. The azmari can perform accompanied by his mäsingo, in a similar manner in restaurants and bars entertaining guests with audience laughter-filled performances nightly. Medina and Zelesegna, in contrast, are spiritual and are used to worship and praise God, asking for his mercy, exalting his greatness and generosity. "It begins with thanks and ends with praise in a soothing yet melancholy style of playing." Secondly, the playing style itself distinguishes Medina and Zelesegna from azmari music. While listening to Medina and Zelesegna music, the mäsingo is played slowly and carefully maintains the ascending melodic contour followed by the descending melodic contour. The azmari's voice is not necessarily in sync with the mäsingo. But in ordinary azmari music, his mäsingo bowing moves quickly and corresponds simultaneously to the words as they are being spoken. And thirdly, the two terms. Medina and Zelesegna, do not necessarily represent the same meaning or style. On the one hand, Medina is characterized by its short verses depicting the thanks that must be given to God; Zelesegna on the other hand, features a lengthy verse with a persisting breathy humming sound. Moreover, Medina and Zelesegna can be categorized under two well known Ethiopian melodic modes known as təzzəta and ančihoye since both are played in the lower range.

In spite of its wisdom, no one can foresee the future of this art and value this music has had over the centuries. The divergence between those who want to preserve its intrinsic liturgical value and those who think it should be mixed with modern tunes and promoted globally, might not easily be reconciled.

In addition to Alemayehu, another individual who wants to teach it is Habtemichael Demissie, a renowned traditional music artist and *mäsinqo* player who plays *Medina* and *Zelesegna* while traveling to different parts of the world. He says "I can't play the traditional music without it because I think it's the most important part of my music." As a veteran musician, who recently retired from his 35-year service at Hager Fikir Theatre, Habtemichael is struggling to set up a school where he can transfer the wisdom of playing *Medina* and *Zelesegna* to the next generation. (Henok, 2015: page number not given)

E. English translation of song texts by Abba Paulos

i. Medina

The solemn opening of the musical enteretainment and the song in *təzzəta qəñnət* 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 təzzəta qəñnət - 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 qэññэt

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 awway, 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 atta[c]k 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 Qegheet 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 *mäsinqo* 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)

Written in English for me, he titled these unpublished notes: "The Four Tonalities (Kegnit) of the Ethiopian Music" (1989). What precipitated these notes is found in a letter he sent to me dated 31 August 31 1989:

Although I always had and have still a passion for music I confess that since a long time I didn't follow it in a scientific way so that I may be able to deal with it in a competent way. Thus I do not believe to be competent to give valuable contribution. Your proposal [to speak at a conference] would be that I talk about the present music situation in Ethiopia. This would be very difficult for me as, due to my position and my occupations, I am far from the musical environment here. I have however prepared some notes on the four tonalities -qenet- of the Ethiopian music... As you know the genuine Ethiopian music is based on the said tonalities. Since I shall leave for Rome after few days I hope to be able send you the notes to arrange something even via satellite hookup. But no engagement.

(cont.)

I am sending you the notes on the four Kegnit and a Cassetta (apart) on which some examples of the Kegnit are recorded. You will find that the transliteration of some names is not accurate since the notes are not meant for printing. (5/9/89)

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

Figure 6: Page 1 from the "Four Tonalities..."

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1. THERYA
2. SADTI

Figure 7: Page 2 from the "Four Tonalities..."

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

G. Qəññət

Ethiopian music has four tonalities or *qɔm̃ət: təzzəta*, *bati*, *ančihoye*, and *ambassäl*. *Təzzəta* is also also known as Wollo *qɔm̃ət*. Although *ančihoye* 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 *qɔm̃ət* 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. Mäsingo

Songs accompanying the *mäsinqo* is always performed solo, that is, a vocalist accompanying himself on the *mäsinqo*. It is worthwhile to clarify that the name *mäsinqo* is used in the Amharic language, while in the Təgrəñña language, such a name designates another multi-stringed instrument. In Təgrəñña, the Amharic *mäsinqo* 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: *Goʻaz* (the simplest plain chant, used on ordinary days), *Ezel* (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 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 Go'az. 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 Ababa 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 Ga'az, 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 Ga'az), 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 Tiruneh (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 (#!), 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. Thr audio component is not included for this esaay.
