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The Liturgical Fan and Some Recently Discovered Ethiopian Examples

Abstract

The liturgical fan widely used in the services and ceremonies of the Early Church, is one of a number of sacral implements which gradually lost their original importance over time. The Syrian Churches are the exceptions, for the fan still serves during the mass and is an attribute of high ranking ecclesiastics. The fan was imbued with a complex symbolic meaning based on the biblical and patristic texts recalling worship of God and the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. This symbolism influenced its design. Since very few old liturgical fans have survived, our knowledge about their role in the liturgy, their shape and decoration derives predominantly from written and iconographical sources. Eight examples are known from Ethiopia, all executed between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 17th C. All are made of parchment folded like a concertina and decorated by the paintings. Their original function is today forgotten and, in case they are shown during solemn services their role is limited to the display of devotional pictures.

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The liturgical fan, called in Greek *rhpidion*, *rhpisterion*, in Latin *flabellum*, *ventilabrum*, was derived from an ordinary fan¹. The oldest written source to confirm the use of fans in liturgy are the *Apostolic Constitutions*, formulated about 375, which state that two deacons,

¹ Originally the fans used in everyday life to create air-currents and disperse insects were simple objects like a bunch of feathers, a large leaf or a piece of cloth fastened to a handle. Gradually more effective things had replaced them, such as wooden laths or metal plates. There were also fans made of folded strips of parchment fastened to a handle so that they could be opened and closed, cf. the examples: J. Blondel, *Histoire des éventails de tous les peuples et à toutes les époques*, Paris 1875; Ch. De Linas, *Les disques crucifères, le flabellum et l'umbrella*, "Revue de l'art chrétien" 26 (1883), pp. 477–484; J. Braun, *Das christliche Altargerät*, München 1932, pp. 645–646.

one on each side of the altar, held a peacock feather, a piece of fine cloth or a parchment fan, with which to wave insects away from the communion chalice².

This practical function was gradually discontinued and a special meaning was attributed to the fan, which changed its appearance. Through the influence of biblical texts describing visions and revelations it became associated with cherubs guarding the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple³ and with seraphs and tetramorphs gathered around the throne of God, worshipping Him⁴. To assist in visualisation, the upper part of the fan, often in the form of a round plate, was decorated with angelic pictures⁵ (Fig. 1). Moreover it was fringed with peacock feathers⁶ or their pictorial equivalent, because according to Christian iconography, feathers covered with eyes were distinctive features of these heavenly beings who are characterised by vigilance and watchfulness⁷ (Figs 3AB). It seems that this type of decoration – particularly appropriate on the fan protecting the sacrament – became standard, at least in the Eastern churches, because another name appears: it is called *hexapterygon* from *hexapterygos* – six-winged – a popular designation of seraphs and tetramorphs⁸.

² Book VIII, chap. 12:3, *Les constitutions apostoliques*, M. Metzger (ed. & trans.), Paris, vol. 3, 1987, pp. 178–179.

³ Ex 37: 7-9; I Kings 6: 23-28; Ez 41: 18-20. A Syrian commentary to the liturgy written in the 11th century states: "It is said that they [marwəḥāthā] represent two cherubs which have been in the sanctuary of the Israelites", G. Khouri-Sarkis, *Le Livre de Guide de Yahya ibn Jarir*, "L'Orient Syrien" 12 (1967), p. 328.

⁴ For instance Ez. 10:4ff: "The cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple... The glory of the Lord rose from above them and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court..." The association is already present in the text of Pseudo-Athanasios, *Oratio in dormitione B. Mariae*, "Patrologia Graeca" 28, 953. See also Job the Monk, *De Verbo incarnato* quoted in Photios, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 222, Photius, *Bibliothèque*, R. Henry, (ed. & tr.), vol. III, Paris 1962, pp. 179–180; Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, P. Meyendorff (trans. & com.), Crestwood, New York, 1984, pp. 86, 94; Pseudo-George of Arbela (Anonymi auctoris *Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae* Georgio Arbelensi vulgo adscripta), II, interpretatus est R.H. Connolly, (CSCO, *Scriptores Syri* 2:92 [= 29], textus), Romae & Parisiis 1913, 101, (CSCO, *Scriptores Syri* 2:92 [= 32], versio), Romae & Parisiis 1915, p. 92.

⁵ For a recent study of the mixed iconography of seraphs, cherubs and tetramorphs in Christian art see: G. Peers, *Subtle Bodies. Representing Angels in Byzantium*, Berkeley 2002, pp. 48–49.

⁶ The peacock was a symbol of incorruptibility for early Christians, Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XXI, 4, Corpus Christianorum SL, vol. XLVII, Turnhout 1955, p. 762; see also I. Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ; la mystérieuse emblématique de Jésus-Christ*, Burges 1940 (repr. Milano 1975), pp. 618–623.

⁷ "Their entire bodies including their backs, their hands and their wings were completely full of eyes as were their four wheels" (Ez. 10:12). The earliest depiction of the seraphs and the cherubs with many-eyed wings is to be found in the apse mosaic of the Hosios David Church in Thessaloniki dated to the mid-fifth century, T.F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods. A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton 1999, 115ff, Fig. 88. From the description of the fans by Job the Monk it appears that the symbolic meaning of feathers with eyes was already clear in the 6th century, cf. note 4. The *flabella* still used in the Vatican (cf. below note 27) are decorated with multi-eyed peacock feathers, which have a complex metaphorical meaning: one side symbolises the eyes of the Christian population directed upon the Pope, the other represents his eyes perceiving the needs of the whole Catholic congregation, which relies upon his vigilance, cf. M. Martiny, *De l'usage du flabellum dans les liturgies antiques*, Mâcon 1875, p. 35.

⁸ This identification already appeared in the old Syrian liturgy, (in the anaphora preceding the *Tersanctus*), cf. F.E. Brightman, *Liturgies Eastern and Western*, vol. I, Oxford 1896, p. 175. See also Pseudo-Dionisios

The symbolism of liturgical fans was also reflected in church rituals. A deacon holding a fan stepped forward when the most important part of the Eucharist – the anaphora – began. The pronouncement that God in His glory is praised by all heavenly powers is followed by the *Tersanctus* – the invocation which according to the Book of Revelation is incessantly repeated by the tetramorphs: “holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come”⁹. Since this prayer was associated with the sound of bells ringing before the consecration, the next symbolic adaptation of the fan was the application of jinglets around the plate (Fig. 4), which were shaken instead of small church bells when the *Sanctus* was pronounced¹⁰.

Deacons holding fans flanked the altar during the reading of the whole Canon and angled them toward the celebrant when he raised the communion vessel (Fig. 5). The ritual symbolically reminded the congregation that God is attended in His temple by His closest assistants: seraphs, cherubs and tetramorphs. This part of the liturgy is represented in a miniature of a Byzantine liturgical scroll dated to the second quarter of the 12th century (Patmos, Monastery of John Theologian, Cod. 707 [Roll 1])¹¹ (Fig. 6).

Staffs-mounted *rhypidia*, flanked the cross displayed on, or beside the altar, an arrangement which is depicted in a relief on an altar slab dated to the 7th century from the Ferentillo church in Umbria¹² (Fig. 7). It also appears in a Syrian miniature of the 13th century (Gospel Book, London, British Library, Add. 7170, f. 8r)¹³ (Fig. 8) in which there was a double meaning. We learn from a commentary to the Syrian liturgy written in the 13th century that the cross between two fans symbolised not only God worshipped by the highest heavenly powers but also Christ crucified between two thieves¹⁴. The fans accompanied the cross when it was taken from the altar and when it was carried in

the Areopagite, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* IV:1&5, Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Complete Works*, C. Luibheid & P. Rorem (trans. & com.), [Classics of Western Spirituality] New York 1987, pp. 224, 229.

⁹ Is. 6:3; Rev. 4:8; See also B.D. Sparks, *The Sanctus in the Eucharistic Prayer*, Cambridge 1991.

¹⁰ In the Syrian churches prescriptions concerning the use of bells on the fan are more detailed: “Des éventails....sont agités pour faire tinter les grelots: au premier *Qaddishat* de chaque chant du *trisagion*, pendant le *hulôlo* et le dialogue qui précède la lecture de l'évangile, pendant le *Saint est le Père saint*, pendant l'agitation du voile-anaphore après la prière du voile, chaque fois que le célébrant fait les mouvements de mains qui rappellent le battement d'ailes, aux paroles de l'Institution, au moment où le célébrant lève les deux moitiés du pain consacré au milieu du rite de la fraction, pendant l'élévation, et à la présentation des mystères”, G. Khouri-Sarkis, *L'Eucharistie et les heures canonicales chez les Syriens Jacobites. Une description des ceremonies*, “L'Orient Syrien” 12 (1967), p. 68.

¹¹ *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture in the Middle Byzantine Era A.D. 843–1261*, H.C. Evans & W.D. Wixom (ed.), New York 1977, no. 64.

¹² The interior of the sanctuary and the altar are symbolised by the species, namely the liturgical bread and a chalice of vine, H. Leclercq, *Flabellum*, in: *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie* 5:2, 1619–20; De Linas, op. cit., pp. 494–95.

¹³ J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peinture conservés dans les bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, Paris 1964, pp. 302–303, Fig. 73:1.

¹⁴ *Life of St. Martha*, in: *La vie ancienne de S. Symeon Stylite le Jeune (521–592)*, t. II: *Traduction et Commentaire. Vie grecque de sainte Marthe mère de S. Syméon*, P. Van den Ven (ed.), Bruxelles 1970, 312; Khouri-Sarkis, op. cit., p. 328.

a procession¹⁵. They also could be displayed on the *templon* as a miniature in the Menologion of Basil II, (Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana, Gr. 1613)¹⁶ from the 10/11th century demonstrates (Fig. 9). From the text of the *Chronicon Paschale* one may conclude that they did not have a permanent place in the sanctuary but might be kept together with other liturgical paraphernalia in the *skeuophylakia* or church treasuries¹⁷. In significant churches like Hagia Sophia in Constantinople sixteen fan-bearing deacons might take part in the solemn celebration of the Divine Liturgy¹⁸.

Since the fans were usually deployed by the deacons, they played an important role during their consecration¹⁹. A Syrian miniature of the 11th century (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Syr. 112, f. 69r)²⁰ (Fig. 10) confirms that the fans were also used during the ceremonial consecration of a bishop. On that occasion twelve fans were carried, as we learn from a commentary to the Jacobite liturgy written in the 7th century²¹. In the East the fan became an attribute of church officials and was hung close to their seats, a custom which is still alive in the Syrian churches (Fig. 11).

The use of a liturgical fan in the early church is mentioned many times in the *Vitae* of saints²² and in the texts of the Church Fathers²³. One of the earliest witnesses, John Moschos (c. 540-619) indicates that the use of fans was common to both Western and Eastern liturgies²⁴. However it should be noted that the role and importance of the fan differed. In the West, the number of fans displayed during a mass, was soon reduced to one²⁵ and already in the 14th century they are out of use. Their original function was quickly forgotten and the old pieces served as patens or covers for baptismal fonts²⁶. The exceptions were and still are some papal services and ceremonies at the Vatican. The fans, which appear on those occasions, are decorated with peacock feathers and called "cherubs"²⁷.

¹⁵ S. Pétridès, *Cérémonie du Lavement des pieds à Jérusalem*, "Echos d'Orient", 14 (1911), 91.

¹⁶ *Il Menologio di Basilio II (Cod. Vaticano Graeco 1613)*, [Codices e Vaticanis Selecti Phototypice Expressi], Torino 1907, vols VIII:1, 83 and VIII:2, 303.

¹⁷ *Chronicon Paschale* 284-628, M. & M. Whitby (transl.), Liverpool 1989, [p. 714], 167. See also a text of Cyril of Alexandria quoted in Martigny, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

¹⁸ *Chronicon Paschale* [p. 714], (note 17). Also the inventory of the treasures of Hagia Sophia dated to 1396 mentions 16 *rhypidia*, P. Hetherington, *Byzantine and Russian Enamels in the Treasury of Hagia Sophia in the Late 14th Century*, „Byzantinische Zeitschrift" 93:1 (2000), p. 133.

¹⁹ *Euchologion sive rituale graecorum*, J. Goar (ed.), Venice 1730 (rep. Graz 1960), pp. 113-114.

²⁰ Fol. 32v, cf., Leroy, op. cit., pp. 332-333, Fig. 111:2.

²¹ R.H. Connolly, *Two commentaries on the Jacobite Liturgy*, London 1913, London 1913, pp. 22ff.

²² Enumerated and quoted in de Linas, op. cit., p. 503; Braun, op. cit., pp. 642-643, 649.

²³ Pseudo-Athanasios, *Sermo de Descriptione Deiparae*, *Patrologia Graeca* 28, 953D; Pseudo-George of Arbela, *Expositio* (note 4), p. 71; Pseudo-Sophronius, *Commentarius Liturgicus*, *Patrologia Graeca* 87, 4001 A-B.

²⁴ *The Spiritual Meadow*, J. Wortley (transl.), Kalamazoo, Michigan 1992, chap. 96, 123 and chap. 150, 173.

²⁵ The texts confirming the use of *flabellum* in the Western church are collected in Martigny, op. cit., § 3; the text confirming the reduction of their numbers to one in De Linas, op. cit., pp. 487-88.

²⁶ Leclercq, op. cit., 1616-1617; Braun, op. cit., pp. 648-660 collected the examples mentioned in various church inventories.

²⁷ Cf. de Linas, op. cit., pp. 488-9, 513 and idem, *Les disques...*, "Revue de l'art chrétien" 27 (1884), pp. 29-30; Leclercq, op. cit., 1617-1618; Martigny, op. cit., 5, 24.

In the Eastern tradition *rhypidia* are still utilised except in the Greek Orthodox Church where a piece of folded textile, also called *rhypidion*, has replaced the fan²⁸. In the Armenian Church the fan, *q'shots*, made of metal and adorned with many bells have been transformed into the church musical instrument²⁹.

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The number of old liturgical fans, which have survived to our times and can be used as a source of information is very limited. Fortunately the relatively rich iconographical material enables us to fill in some of the blanks.

One of the oldest representations of the fan in a religious context is to be found on an *epitaphium*, probably from the 4th century, in St. Agnes' catacombs in Rome (Fig. 12). It shows a simple plate and a long shaft bearing an inscription commemorating a certain Christian woman by the name of Constantia³⁰. The already-mentioned relief from Ferentillo dated to the 7th century, which depicts three liturgical fans, each fastened on a shaft is another example.

A rich repertory of fans represented in old Irish miniatures shows that they played an important role in Irish church rituals. In the 8th century manuscript called the *Book of Kells* (Dublin, Trinity College, Ms A.I.6. 58) they appear in different contexts, for instance in the hands of guardian angels flanking the enthroned Virgin Mary³¹ or accompanying the symbols of Evangelists (Fig. 13).

The baldachin of the ciborium in San Prospero Church in Perugia decorated with relief and dated to the 9th century represents a *flabellum* on a short shaft³². A rosette instead of a seraph is depicted in its centre but a connection with the heavenly being is suggested by the juxtaposition of the fan with a peacock, the symbol of incorruptibility³³.

Lastly the painting on a cupola in the church of St. Sophia in Kiev, executed around 1050, has a direct connection to the eschatological visions (Fig. 14). It depicts the Pantocrator surrounded by four archangels each holding a rectangular fan with a triple inscription of the *Sanctus*³⁴.

Fans appear in a definitely liturgical context in the Byzantine and Oriental versions of the Communion of the Apostles (Fig. 15). Christ, represented twice, distributes the

²⁸ The practice of replacing a *rhypidion* by a piece of cloth, which is otherwise used to cover the chalice, was already noted in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, book VIII, chap. 12:3, (note 2) p. 179, and later on by John Chrysostomos, *Euchologion*, (note 19) p. 76.

²⁹ De Linas, op. cit., pp. 507, 508.

³⁰ De Linas, op. cit., p. 484.

³¹ *The Book of Kells*, MS 58, Trinity College Library, Dublin. Facsimile and commentary, P. Fox (ed.), Lucerne 1990, fols 5r, 7v, 129v, 202v.

³² H. Leclercq, *Ciborium*, in: *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et liturgie* 3, 1610, Fig. 2930.

³³ See above note 6.

³⁴ Similar angels were represented on a mosaic dated to the 9th century in the bema arch in the destroyed Church of the Dormition in Nicea, cf. P. Underwood, *The Evidence of Restorations in the Sanctuary Mosaics of the Church of the Dormition at Nicea*, "Dumbarton Oaks Papers" 13 (1959), pp. 235–249, Figs 6–9.

sacramental bread to one group of disciples and wine to the other. Two angel-deacons carrying fans watch over both eucharistic species³⁵. They appear with the same attributes in the *Threnos*, lamenting Christ after the Deposition. The body of the dead Jesus lying on a stone slab was identified with the sacrament placed on the altar³⁶. This scene was the traditional decoration of the *epitaphioi* – the liturgical cloth, which originally covered the chalice and paten during the Eucharist, and was later used separately during the Holy Friday service³⁷. The angel-deacons, still portrayed among the fan-holding participants in altar services, are depicted in the representations of the Celestial Liturgy³⁸. Both those scenes are embroidered on the *epitaphios* from Tessaloniki (Museum of Byzantine Culture, βυφ 57) dated to the 13th century³⁹ (Fig. 16). Finally as a sign of reverence fans appear in the hands of angels paying homage to the soul of the Virgin Mary in the *Koimesis* scene⁴⁰, for example in a wall-painting, dated to 1200, in the monastery of Dayr-as-Suryān in Egypt⁴¹ (Fig. 17).

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The earliest pair of preserved fans is presently divided between museums in Washington (Dumbarton Oaks) and Istanbul (Archeological Museum)⁴² (Figs 2AB, 3AB). They are silver-gilt discs stamped in the year 577, with scalloped edges worked as peacock feathers. The six and four-winged creatures incised in the centre of the discs combine the features of cherubs and seraphs. The fiery wheels on either side of the figures belong to the description of cherubs revealed in the vision of Ezekiel⁴³.

³⁵ This could be seen as a pictorial equivalent to those anaphora which have been already mentioned, where we read: "angels serving with *hexapteryga* covering the mystical table in the presence of the *cherubim* and *seraphim*", Brightman, op. cit., p. 175. Another examples of the scene: K. Wessel, *Abendmahl und Apostelkommunion*, Recklinghausen 1964; *Splendori di Bisanzio. Testimonianze e riflessi d'arte e cultura bizantina nelle chiese d'Italia*, Milano 1990, pp. 204–205; Ch. Walter, *Art and Ritual in the Byzantine Church*, London 1982, pp. 233–234, Figs 59, 60.

³⁶ See also the *melismos* or *amnos* ritual representing the Jesus-Child lying on a paten, Walter, op. cit., Fig. 56.

³⁷ *Byzantium. Faith and Power (1261–1577)*, [Exhibition Catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York], H.C. Evans (ed.), New York 2004 nos 187A, 187B, 188, 190, 191.

³⁸ K. Wessel, *Himmlische Liturgie*, in: *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst* 3 (1972), 119–131; E. Lucchesi-Palli, *Liturgie himmlische*, in: *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, [Herder], 3 (1971), 103–106; Walter, op. cit., pp. 235–237, Figs 63, 65.

³⁹ *Byzantium. Faith and Power*, op. cit., p. 312, no 187A.

⁴⁰ K. Kreidl-Papadopoulos, *Koimesis*, in: *Reallexikon zur byzantinischen Kunst*, 4 (1984), pp. 137–182.

⁴¹ For more information about the painting, see seven papers in "Cahiers archéologiques" 43 (1995).

⁴² B. Ross, *Metalwork, Ceramics, Glass, Glyptics* [Catalogue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, vol. 1], Washington 1970 (2), no. 11; M. Mundel Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium. The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures*, Baltimore 1986, nos 31, 32.

⁴³ Ez 10:9, "I looked and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like chrysolite".

A precious fan dated to the 9th century, which once belonged to the abbey of St. Philibert in Tournus is kept in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello in Florence (Fig. 18). It consists of folded parchment fastened to an ivory shaft and an ivory box decorated with carvings⁴⁴. Both sides of the parchment are covered with polychrome paintings representing fantastic animals and female and male saints. The figures are accompanied by their names, a dedicatory inscription and invocations. Figures of the saints are represented, as well as the scenes taken from Vergilius⁴⁵.

A similar, but mutilated, artifact is kept in the British Library (Add. 42497). It is made of parchment, folded into sections and painted on both sides. Paintings that represent scenes from the life of John the Baptist are stylistically connected with the convent in Hohenbourg and date to the second half of the 12th century⁴⁶ (Fig. 19AB).

A rare example of a Western metal fan, which came from Rhein and is dated to 1200, belongs to the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, (The Cloisters). It is made of gilded bronze and silver and decorated with cabochons and enamel⁴⁷.

A sumptuous fan shaped like four-leaved clover and dated to the 11th century, is preserved in the Schemokmedi-church in Georgia⁴⁸ (Fig. 20AB). On the obverse, in repoussé relief, the Heavenly Liturgy is performed in front of a cross. Two angels who act as deacons bear liturgical fans. A half cherub-half tertramorph is depicted on the reverse side. Small jinglets which once hung around the fan have all disappeared.

A pair of fans in the Brooklyn Museum, New York, which most probably came from Egypt, is dated to the 11th century⁴⁹ (Fig. 21). Simple silver discs are decorated with repoussé relief and depict four tetramorphs with eye-covered wings. Each creature is represented twice – either *en face* and in three-quarter view or in profile and from behind. Here the artist has consciously followed the biblical texts, which describe the appearance of tetramorphs from all possible visual angles.

⁴⁴ Diameter 30 cm, shaft 30 cm long. This is the work of a Carolingian ivory master carver, A. Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser*, I, Berlin 1914 (rep. 1969), 155f, Fig. 66.

⁴⁵ For a detailed description see Leclercq, op. cit., (note 12) 1620–1622; Braun, op. cit., pp. 659–660; L.A. E. Eitner, *The Flabellum of Tournus*, [The Art Bulletin, Supplement, 1; Monographs on Archeologie and Arts, 1], New York 1944; D. Gaborit-Chopin, *Il Flabello di Tournus*, [Lo specchio del Bargello 40], Florence 1988. A Ph.D thesis about the artifact is prepared by Karin Leuenberger, *Le flabellum de Tournus. Étude de la symbolique d'un éventail liturgique*, Université de Lausanne, Section d'Histoire de l'Art Médiéval.

⁴⁶ R.B. Green, *The Flabellum of Hohenbourg*, "Art Bulletin" 33 (1955), pp. 153–155. See also a similar fan without figural decoration in the cathedral of Monza, dated with reservation to the 13th–14th century, De Linas, op. cit., pp. 484–486.

⁴⁷ H. Hibbard, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1980, p. 161.

⁴⁸ R. Mepiaschwili, *Die Kunst des alten Georgien*, Leipzig 1977; T. Sanikidzé & G. Abramishvili, *Orfeverie géorgienne du VII^e au XIX^e siècle*, Genève, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire 1979 [Exhibition catalogue], no 18; there is also a fan from the 16th century, no. 52 in the catalogue but the captions and photographs of the two have been confused.

⁴⁹ *L'Art Copte* [Exhibition catalogue], Paris, Petit Palais, 17 juin–15 septembre 1964, R.P. du Bourguet (ed.), no. 11.

Also worthy of note is the 13th century fan made of bronze, which once belonged to the Dayr as-Suryān monastery (presently Mariemont, Musée Royal)⁵⁰ (Fig. 22). Besides the enthroned Virgin Mary with the Child, flanked by two flying angels engraved in the central medallion, a Syrian inscription in ornamental *estrangelo* script is applied as decoration⁵¹. The perimeter of the disc is punctuated by small holes where the feathers were originally fastened.

There are important collections of sumptuous rhipidia, usually of later date (17th–18th centuries) belonging to the Athos monasteries⁵² and to the Kremlin Museum in Moscow⁵³.

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The liturgical fan is called *mārāwəḥ*, pl. *mārāwəḥt(at)* in Ge'ez⁵⁴, which now also designates a church bell⁵⁵. According to my knowledge there is no iconographical evidence for the use of the fan in the Ethiopian church. However, eight such artifacts can be found today in Ethiopia. All are made of parchment folded like a concertina and decorated on one side by paintings. Each folded section usually houses one holy figure, which, in most cases, is identified by an inscription. An ornamented horizontal band runs along the top and bottom of the parchment, which was originally folded between two wooden slats and fastened to a shaft. However, in only one case have both those parts been preserved.

Two fans belonging to the Qirqos church on Tana-sea were the first to be recognised by scholars⁵⁶. Both are similarly composed: in the centre (which appears at the top when

⁵⁰ *Arts tardifs et chrétiens d'Égypte, Musée archéologique de Louvain-la-Neuve. Exposition du 6-IX au 23-X 1988*, M. Rassart-Debergh (ed.), "Le Monde Copte" 14–15 (1988), no. 95. I was unable to consult the article by J. Leroy in „Cahiers de Mariemont” 5–6 (1975–76), pp. 31–39. Recently Bas Snelders presented the paper "A thirteenth century flabellum from Deir as-Suryan" at the IX Symposium Syriacum (Liban, Sayyidat al-Bir, 20–22 September 2004).

⁵¹ Which reads: "For the glory and the honour of the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity these fans were made for the house of *Theotokos*, Our Lady Mary at the desert Scete in year 1514 of Greeks". Besides giving the exact date of production of the fan, 1202 AD, the inscription states that there was originally a pair of them. The Paris catalogue (see note 49) mentions that a similar fan is kept in the Coptic Museum in Cairo.

⁵² *Treasures of Mount Athos*, Thessaloniki 1997 [Exhibition catalogue], nos 9.64, 9.65, 9.66. *Byzantium. Faith and Power*, op. cit., no. 70.

⁵³ I.I. Vishnevskaya, *The Royal Court and the Orthodox Church in the Seventeenth Century. Treasures of the Czars from the State Museum of the Moscow Kremlin* [Exhibition Catalogue, Florida, International Museum], London 1995, pp. 134–159; see also other examples in De Linas, op. cit., pp. 32–33 and Braun, op. cit., p. 647, pl. 140–141.

⁵⁴ From the root *rwḥ*, 'make a breeze', 'wave'.

⁵⁵ *roḥa* also means 'rattle' and 'clank'.

⁵⁶ They were displayed in 1955 at the exhibition of Ethiopian art in Gondär and described by O. Jäger, *Ethiopian Manuscript Paintings*, "Ethiopia Observer" 4 (1960), p. 363; idem, *Äthiopische Miniaturen*, Berlin 1957, pl. 4 and in 1963 at an international exhibition (Essen, Vienna, Paris), *Koptische Kunst. Christentum am Nil. 3 Mai bis 15 August 1963, Villa Hügel, Essen* [Exhibition Catalogue], W.F. Volbach (ed.), Essen 1963, no. 552. See also J. Leroy, *Ethiopian Painting in the Late Middle Ages and under the Gondar Dynasty*, London 1967, p. 47; C.S. Millard, *Keepers of the Faith*, "National Geographic" 200:11, (July) 2001, pp. 122–123.

the fan is unfolded) is shown the Virgin Mary Orans. The archangels, apostles and saints flank her, each identified by an inscription (Fig. 23AB)⁵⁷. Both fans are decorated with the same type of interlaced ornamental band with finials in the form of stylised acanthus leaves. The paintings represent the style, which flourished at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries in the scriptoria connected with the dissident sect of Stephanites⁵⁸.

From the same time and probably from the same artistic milieu comes the piece recently acquired by the Walters Art Gallery (Fig. 24AB)⁵⁹. It consists of thirty-eight sections⁶⁰ decorated with holy figures, also gathered around the Virgin Mary⁶¹ and framed by horizontal bands elegantly ornamented with palmettes and rosettes.

The fourth example, stylistically connected with the previous three, and belonging to the Däbrä Şəyon church in Gär'alta, preserves its original form. It is a huge piece made of camel skin, composed of forty-three sections⁶². When opened it makes a circle 131 cm in diameter, (Fig. 25A) spread between two wooden boards and fastened on a long shaft (Fig. 25B)⁶³. The repertory of figures displayed around the Virgin Mary with the Child is almost the same as in the previous examples (Fig. 25C)⁶⁴. A very wide ornamental border is elaborated in masterly fashion. In addition to the simple, colourful interlaced design every section is crowned by a different complicated cross ornament.

According to a local tradition the fan was executed during Zär'a Ya'əyqob's time, (1436–68) which is not impossible from a stylistic point of view. The fan is not used in the liturgy, only displayed for the community during some big church festivals. The monk who

⁵⁷ The bigger fan, measuring 74 cm long and 16 cm wide is composed of thirty sections representing: left hand side, (from right to left) archangel Michael; apostles: Andrew, Paul, Peter, Jacob, John, Bartholomew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew, Jacob the Lord's Brother, Thaddeus; saints: Stephan the Protomartyr, St. Anthony the Eremitic; apostle Nathaniel; right hand side, (from right to left) archangel Gabriel, a seraph, a cherub; archangels: Saquel, Ramuel, Raphael; patriarchs: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob; St. Macarios. The smaller fan, measuring 45x7 cm has forty-one sections but is in bad condition, as was reported in 1964 by J. Leroy, *Ethiopian Painting*, p. 47. The figures represented on the fan are: left hand side, (from right to left) archangel Michael; a cherub, archangel Raphael; saints: *abba* Samuel, Qirqos, Gäbrä Krestos, Stephan the Protomartyr; monks: Sinoda, Kiros?, Anthony the Eremitic; right hand side (from right to left): archangels Gabriel, Fanuel, Suriel, Raphael; patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Melchisedek; two Babylonian youths Ananias and Asarias; St. Claudius; Matthew the Evangelist; apostles: Thaddeus, Thomas, Bartholomew, Philip, Jacob, John, Nathaniel, Matthias, Peter, Paul, Andrew; archangel Michael; third Babylonian youth, Misael; the prophets Isaiah and Ezra.

⁵⁸ A. Mordini, *Il Convento di Gunde Gundè*, "Rassegna di Studi Etiopici" 12 (1953), pp. 29–70.

⁵⁹ *Ethiopian Art. The Walters Museum*, D. Horowitz (ed.), Baltimore 2001, pp. 114–115.

⁶⁰ Each section measures 62x10 cm.

⁶¹ Left hand side: archangel Michael, John the Baptist, St. George, Ss. Qirqos and Julitta; right hand side: archangel Raphael, St. Paul and archangel Afnin. The inscriptions for the other figures are missing.

⁶² Each section measures 62x11 cm.

⁶³ The boards are 48x12 cm and the shaft 50 cm.

⁶⁴ In the centre, the Virgin Mary with the Child; she is flanked on the left hand side by (from right to left): archangel Michael; Jacob the Lord's Brother; [?]; apostles: Andrew, Jacob, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Paul; [?]; saints: *abba* Samuel, Gäbrä Mäsqäl, Qiros, Pantaleon; [?]; [?]; [?]; [?]; right hand side (from left to right): archangel Gabriel; apostles: Thomas, Matthias, Thaddeus, Nathaniel, Jacob; [?] the evangelist Marc; [?]; [?]; St. Theodore; [?]; Bisoy, Sinoda; [?]; [?]; [?]; [?].

is the keeper of the church, when asked for the name of the piece, called it *kənf* – a wing. Could it be reminiscent of early Christian symbolism elaborated in a liturgical fan?⁶⁵

To the same stylistic group belongs a fan, presently containing twenty-one badly damaged sections⁶⁶ and some loose pieces of parchment, kept in the Däbrä Sālam church in Aṣḥab Dāra (Fig. 26A). Judging from the repertory of the figures which can be identified by the inscriptions written in the squares which they hold before their chests (Fig. 26BC), the fan presented the same iconographical programme, i.e. the Virgin Mary flanked by the archangels and surrounded by figures from the Old Testament, apostles and most probably saints⁶⁷. The local priests were not able to tell us what it is or what it is called⁶⁸.

Also in very bad shape is the piece kept in the church ʿĪnda Abbate Woldä Yoḥānnəs near Sānkata⁶⁹. It is composed of two strips of parchment sown together and divided into fifty-eight narrow folded sections⁷⁰ (Fig. 27A). One end is still fastened to a wooden board. The painted decoration, which on stylistic grounds allows the fan to be dated to the second half of the 15th century⁷¹, consists of an ornamental band along the upper border of the parchment and suites of figures, each occupying two folded panels. The figures are displayed in two rows clearly divided by a red band. In the upper row twenty-four archangels are represented, flanking the centrally-placed *Maiestas Domini* (Fig. 27B). An inscription identifies each archangel⁷². Judging from the names, they represent the twenty-four Priests of Heaven who, according to the Book of Revelation (4, 4-5), were gathered around the throne of God⁷³. All angels have colourful wings and present the

⁶⁵ For the photographs see website: *Māzgābā Səʿəl. Treasury of Ethiopian Images*: <http://128.100.218.174:8080/ethiopia; username and password: student; 2000.082:19–36; 2000.086:01–25; 2004.140:33–35; 2004.141:01–19; 2004.144:19–24>.

⁶⁶ Each section measures 63x10 cm.

⁶⁷ There are nine still connected sections in the fragment representing, from left to right: apostles: Jacob, Jacob son of Alpheus, Peter, Paul, Thomas, Nathaniel, Thaddeus, Bartholomew, Philip, Andrew; archangels: Raphael, Michael; cherub. Salomon and Ezra and two disciples of Paul, Philemon and Titus are represented in two other fragments. Two figures facing each other seems not to have inscriptions. For details see *Māzgābā Səʿəl*, 2000.082:19–36 and 2000.086:01–25; 2004.089:09–20.

⁶⁸ When in 2000 the pieces of the fan were shown to me the parchment was badly damaged by mildew. I informed the priest about the value of the object and recommended to dry it up and put it in a wooden box. My advice was not followed and in 2004 when I again visited the church, I put the fan into a box which was specially ordered in Mäqāle.

⁶⁹ For the photographs see *Māzgābā Səʿəl*, 2002.020:20–36 and 2002.021:01–14.

⁷⁰ Each section measures 49x10 cm.

⁷¹ The paintings are comparable with the miniatures in the Psalter of Däbrä Wārq, the Miracles of the Virgin Mary from Gəṣhen Maryam and the Gospels from Ġāhḡāh Giyorgis, see Leroy, op. cit., p. 49, pl. III; Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, *Un psautier éthiopien inconnu*, "Orientalia Suecana" 33–34 (1984–86), Figs 35–38, 44; S. Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting from the 13th to the 19th Century*, Wiesbaden 1983, Figs 71, 79.

⁷² Not all the names can be deciphered because the parchment is partly destroyed and the inscriptions are often very unclear; from left to right: Akaʿel, Fanuʿel, Anuʿel?, Dartoʿel?, Zāraʿel, Suraʿel, Rufaʿel, [?], [?], Gäbrʿel?, *Maiestas Domini*, [?], Uraʿel. Probably we are dealing here with variants of the names quoted in the text called the "Prayer of the Virgin Mary at Bartos", cf. R. Basset, *Les Apocryphes éthiopiennes V: Les prières de la Vierge à Bartos et au Golgotha*, Paris 1895, p. 21.

⁷³ F. Van der Meer, *Majestas Domini. Théophanies de l'Apocalypse dans l'art chrétien*, Città del Vaticano 1938, pp. 82–125.

same attributes: in one hand a staff cross and in the other a hand-cross. The middle part of the lower row is occupied by the “Entry into Jerusalem”. In the centre Jesus approaches the Temple⁷⁴ riding a mule or a horse. He is surrounded on each side by the apostles⁷⁵ carrying palm branches. Two of them are depicted in the same section of parchment. The scene is completed on both sides by the depiction of a golden cross. In the remaining sections cherubs are represented at the far left (Fig. 27C) and, on the extreme right, the disciples of Paul⁷⁶.

The iconographical programme of the fan deserves special attention. In the upper row where the *Maiestas Domini* is flanked by twenty-four Priests of Heaven, the Celestial Liturgy is pictured – a fitting subject for the decoration of liturgical fans⁷⁷. It is juxtaposed with the “Entry into Jerusalem” rendered as an *adventus* ceremony rather than a narrative of a biblical episode⁷⁸. In the pictorial language of the Church the conjunction of these scenes expressed the direct connection between the earthly and celestial triumph of Christ⁷⁹. That idea was largely exploited by the Ethiopian artists because we find the same compositions in the wall-paintings dated to the 13th and 14th centuries in the churches: Däbrä Sälam in Atšbi Dära, Gännätä Maryam in Lasta and Qorqor Maryam in Gär’alta⁸⁰.

It seems that the bad condition of the ʾĪnda Yoḥannəs fan disturbed the community because, about twenty years ago an artist from the Amhara region made a new fan (Fig. 28)⁸¹. He obviously tried to copy the old one⁸² depicting the *Maiestas Domini* and twenty-four Angelical Priests, bearing their names. He also kept the “Entry into Jerusalem” but by the addition of other christological scenes, the “Bearing of the Cross”, the “Crucifixion” and five miracles of Jesus, the importance of the double triumph of Christ was lost. Moreover he simplified the composition by rendering all figures and scenes in one, single row⁸³.

⁷⁴ Represented here as the “Fountain of Life” which in old Ethiopian manuscripts containing the Gospels closes the series of the Eusebian Canons, see the examples in J. L e r o y, *Recherches sur la tradition iconographique des Canones d’Éusèbe en Éthiopie*, “Cahiers archéologiques” 12 (1961), 173–204.

⁷⁵ Left hand side, (from left to right) [?], [?], Jacob, Philip, Bartholomew, Marc; right hand side, (from left to right) Thomas, Thaddeus? Nathaniel, Andrew, Jacob, Lord’s Brother?, [?].

⁷⁶ In the first five sections from the beginning of the strip: two cherubs called Suraʾel and Kärubʾel; Titus, Philemon and Clemens. The sections at the end of the strip are damaged and after Paul who appears directly after the image of the cross only one figure can be identified, Timothy.

⁷⁷ Cf. above, the Shemokmedi fan and the representations of the Celestial Liturgy with fan-bearing deacons.

⁷⁸ In order to give the scene a grand character Jesus is represented riding a horse (or mule) and not the donkey mentioned in the Gospels, while two apostles standing close to him portray his attendants.

⁷⁹ Cf. for instance the examples recalled in: E. Kantorowicz, *The ‘King’s Advent’ and the enigmatic panel in the doors of Santa Sabina*, “Art Bulletin” 26 (1944), pp. 207–231; M. Sacopoulos, *Le linteau copte dit d’All Moállaka*, “Cahiers archéologiques” 9 (1957), pp. 98–115, Mathews, op. cit., pp. 23–53.

⁸⁰ The photographs of the paintings see in *Mäzgäbä Səʾal*, 2000.078:18 and 2000.080:18; 2002.114:36 and 2002.114:26; 2000.073:08.

⁸¹ Information given by the local clergy. The name of the artist has been forgotten.

⁸² The fan is composed of thirty-eight sections; each figure and each scene occupies two sections.

⁸³ 100 cm in diameter fastened to the shaft which is 27 cm long; for photographs see *Mäzgäbä Səʾal*, 2002.020:09–12.

One more fan is preserved in Däbrä ʾĪṣṭifanos on Ḥayq island. Partly damaged, it is presently fastened to a piece of textile and displayed on the wall⁸⁴ (Fig. 29A). The compositional principles of the decoration are the same as in the last two: between two horizontal borders a long procession of figures meets in the centre, which is occupied by the enthroned, white-haired Ancient of Days supported by the symbols of the Evangelists (Fig. 29B). The introduction of the figure of God rendered according to the apocalyptic visions⁸⁵ accentuates the eschatological character of the scene⁸⁶. The angels and the saints gathered around God cannot be identified by name because the inscriptions are missing but their attributes help us to establish their identity. Immediately to His left and right twenty-four angels are represented, each carrying a cross and a censer. There is no doubt that the painter had the Priests of Heaven in mind. To the extreme right six bearded figures holding palm branches and crosses are depicted, (Fig. 29C) to the extreme left seven angels armed with swords (Fig. 29D)⁸⁷.

The style of the paintings with simplified, geometric human figures suggests a provincial artist. The dating of the piece cannot be established before detailed comparisons are made with relevant dated manuscripts. For the moment, with reservation, we tentatively date it to the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries. The provincialism and the relatively late date of the item may perhaps explain some confusion concerning the iconography, which most probably was copied from a fan similar to that kept in ʾĪnda Yohannēs. Twenty-four Heavenly Priests are not symmetrically posed on both sides of God, and the figures with the palms, which at first glance look like martyrs, may have represented the procession of apostles belonging to the now-destroyed the "Entry into Jerusalem". The armed angels seem to be confused with the cherubs, who, with flaming swords in hand guarded the gate of Paradise according to Genesis 3:24 and some apocryphal texts⁸⁸. However, despite all these changes, the eschatological connotation of the whole composition is still clear and corresponds well with the symbolic function of the liturgical fan.

The role of the fan in Ethiopian church ceremonies is somewhat obscure. It seems that *mārāwāḥ* disappeared from the liturgy a long time ago because the priests interviewed when these items were photographed were able neither to explain their function nor to give them a name. It may also be noted that fans are not mentioned in the classic works on Ethiopian liturgy with the exception of Täklä Maryam Semharay Sälam. He states that when a mass is celebrated according to the rules prescribed in the Apostolic Canons, i.e.

⁸⁴ For more photographs see *Mäzgäbä Səʾal*, 2000.002:19–37.

⁸⁵ Presently thirty-nine sections are preserved; each is occupied by one figure.

⁸⁶ For instance Daniel 7:9–10, 13–14; Revelation 4:4. See also G.K. McKey, *The Eastern Christian Exegetical Tradition of Daniel's Vision of the Ancient of Days*, "Journal of Early Christian Studies" 7 (1999), pp. 139–161.

⁸⁷ On the representations of the Ancient of Days in Ethiopian art see S. Chojnacki, op. cit., pp. 101–146.

⁸⁸ For instance the texts telling the story of the Entry of the Good Thief into Paradise, cf. Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, *The Crucified Thieves in Ethiopian Art: Literary and Iconographical Sources*, "Oriens Christianus" 82 (1998), 206, part. notes 8, 9.

with seven assistants, the sixth of them carries a fan⁸⁹. He also adds that it is made of fine silk threads. In fact, objects, which correspond with that description, are to be found in the treasury of the Trinity Church of Čălăqot but they are called *čəra* – whisks – by the local ecclesiastics⁹⁰ (Fig. 30). Their shafts are of silver with chiselled ornamentation and the upper party is made of multicoloured fine silk threads.

This allows to us suppose that some time in the past the whisk replaced the fan in the Ethiopian liturgy. However, since it was also an everyday object, *čəra* did not assume the elaborate symbolism of the *rhypidion* and consequently could not play such an important role in the services. Obviously this hypothesis needs to be proved. Unfortunately, interviews with Ethiopian ecclesiastics, even those educated in the traditional Ethiopian church schools, have not yet offered any clues. The lack of iconographical evidence is another serious complication. It seems that only systematic research in the written sources will be able to throw new light upon the problem⁹¹.

The author is thankful to Gilian Long for editing the text and to Michael Gervers for the photographs 25–30.

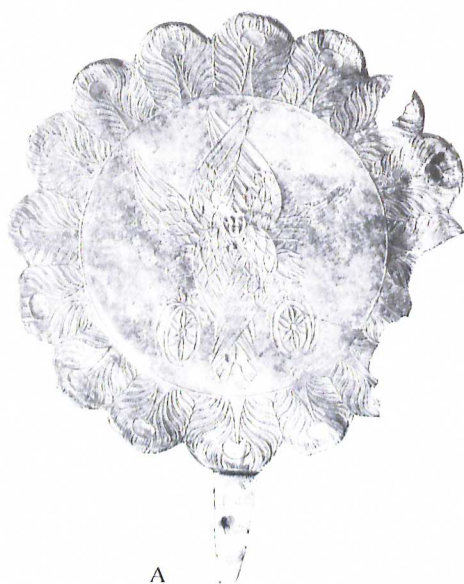
⁸⁹ *Règles spéciales de la messe éthiopienne*, Rome 1936, p. 10.

⁹⁰ In fact this kind of object was also in use in the Early Church as appears from the *Vita* of St. Fulgence, 6th C, who made whisks from palm leaves, *Acta Sanctorum*, January, t. I, 38.

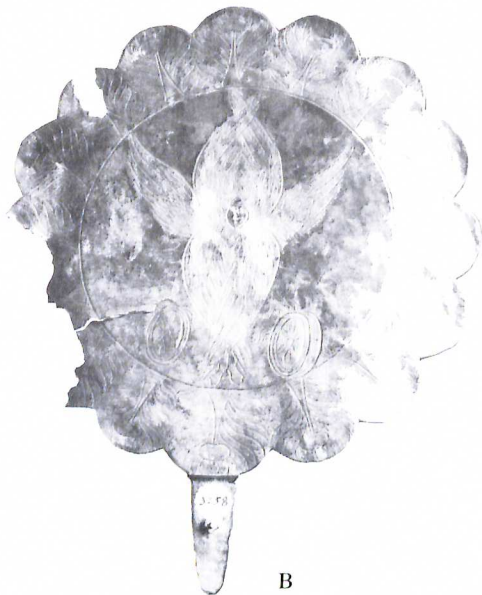
⁹¹ The other problem which perhaps may be solved when more written sources concerning the use of fan in Ethiopian church have been collected, is that of close similarity between the Ethiopian pieces, the West European examples like those of Tournus, Monza and Hohenbourg described above and others mentioned in the church inventories and listed in Braun, op. cit., pp. 656–657.



Fig. 1. Russian fan, Athos, Dionysiou Monastery, 17th C



A



B

Fig. 2. Istanbul, Archeological Museum

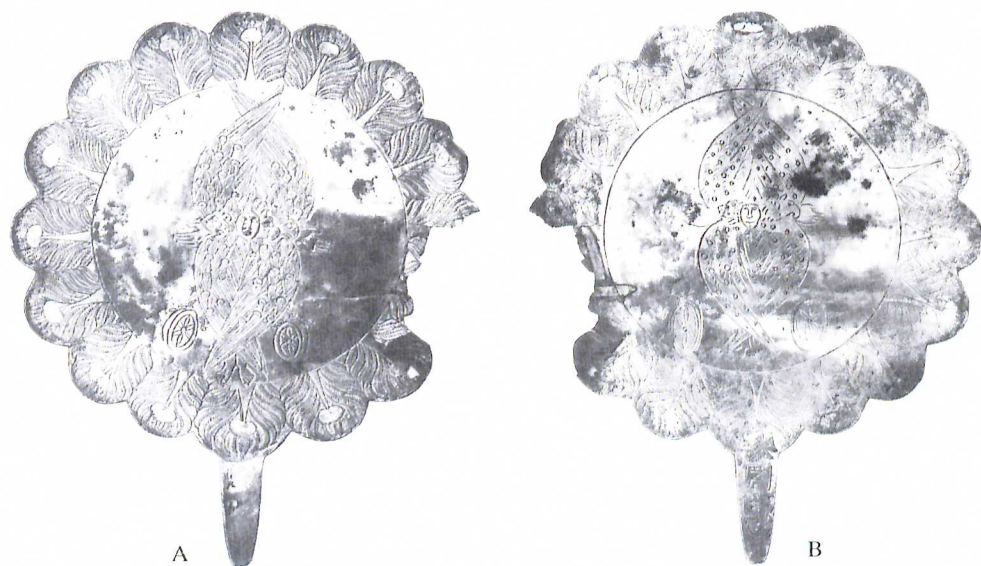


Fig. 3. Washington, Dumbarton Oaks

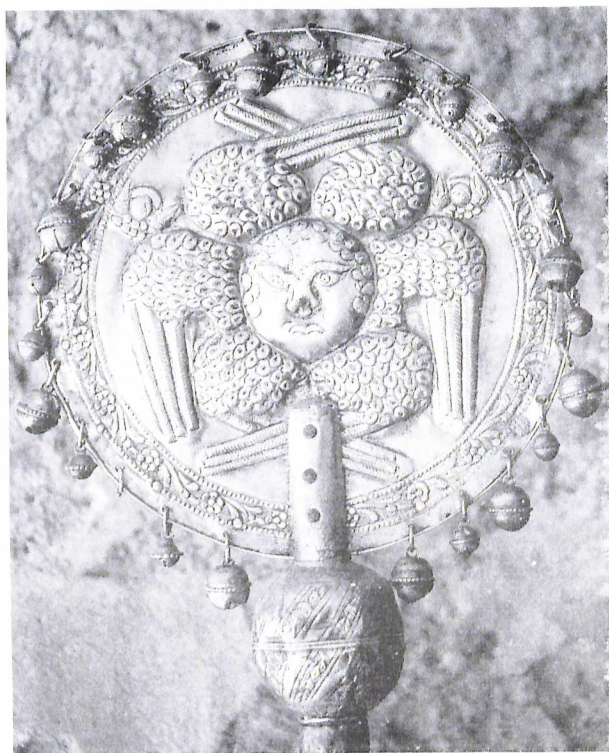


Fig. 4. Turabdin, Mor Kyriakos near Batman



Fig. 5. Celebration of the mass, Turabdin, Mor Gabriel



Fig. 6. Patmos, Monastery of John the Theologian



Fig. 7. Altar slab, parish church of Ferentillo, Umbria

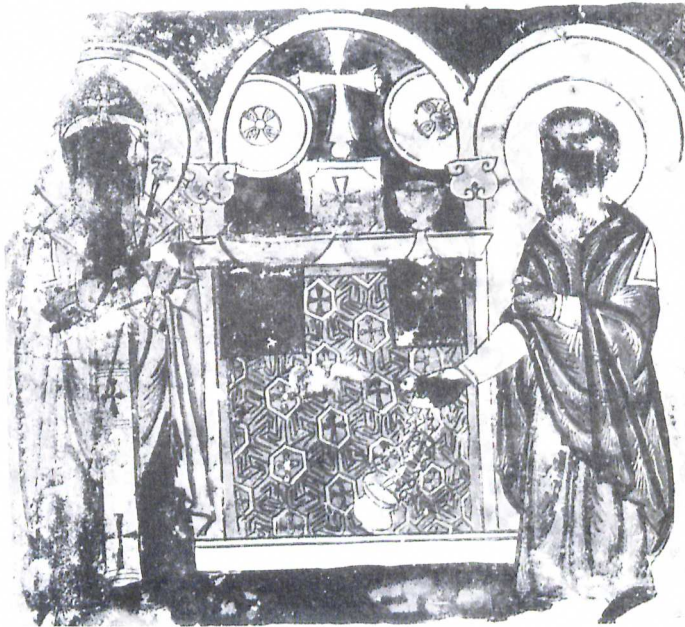


Fig. 8. Syriac Gospel Book, London, British Library



Fig. 9. Menologion, Rome, Biblioteca Vaticana



Fig. 10. Pontifical, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale

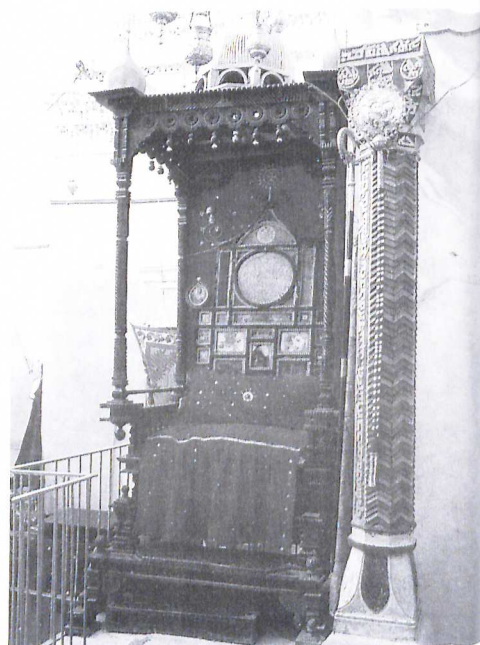


Fig. 11. Patriarch's seat, Turabdin, Saffron Monastery



Fig. 12. Decoration of an *epitaphium*, Rome, catacombe of St. Agnes



Fig. 13. *Book of Kells*, Dublin, Trinity College



Fig. 14. Wall-painting, Kiev, St. Sophia



Fig. 15. Syriac Gospel Book, Turabdin, Dayr as-Zafaran



Fig. 16. *Epitaphion*, Tessaloniki, Museum of Byzantine Culture



Fig. 17. Wall-painting, Dayr as-Suryān

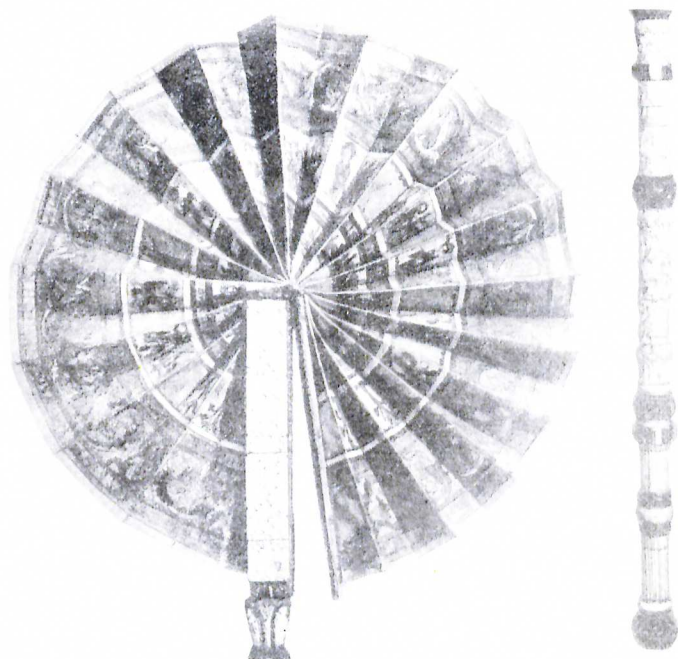


Fig. 18. Flabellum of Tournus, Florence, Museo del Bargello

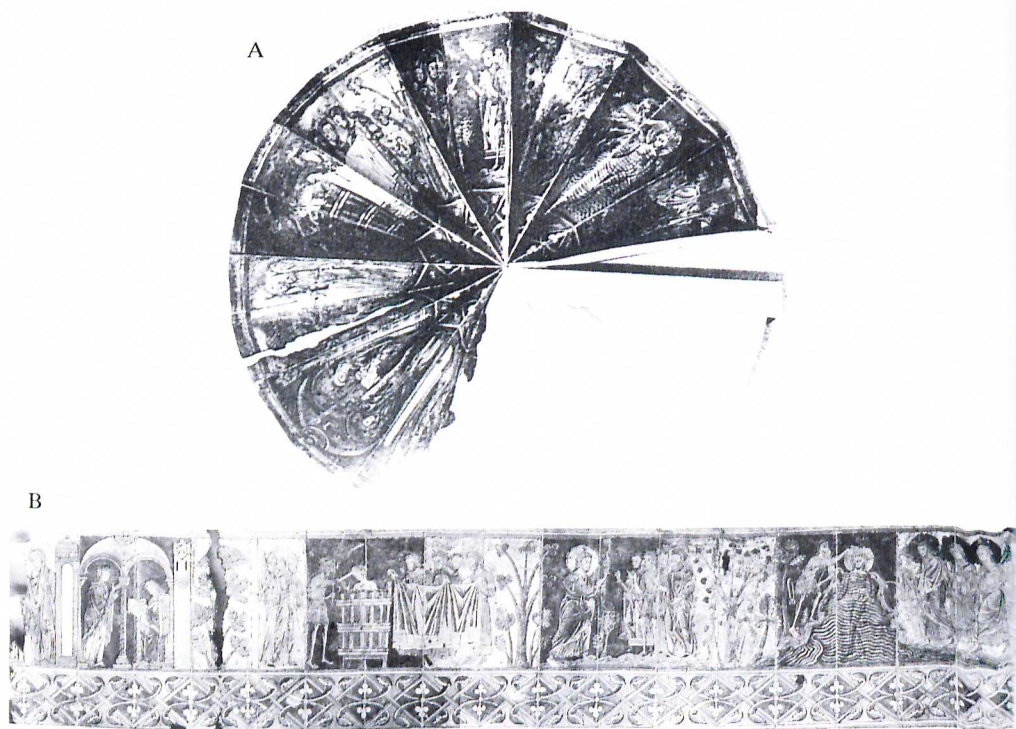


Fig. 19. Flabellum of Hohenbourg, London, British Library



Fig. 20. Church of Shemokmedi, Georgia

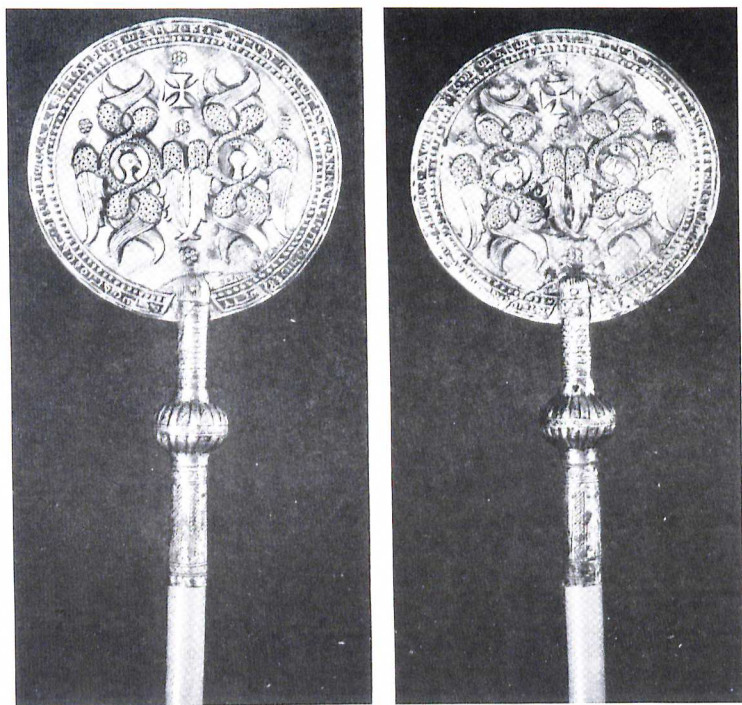


Fig. 21. New York, Brooklyn Museum

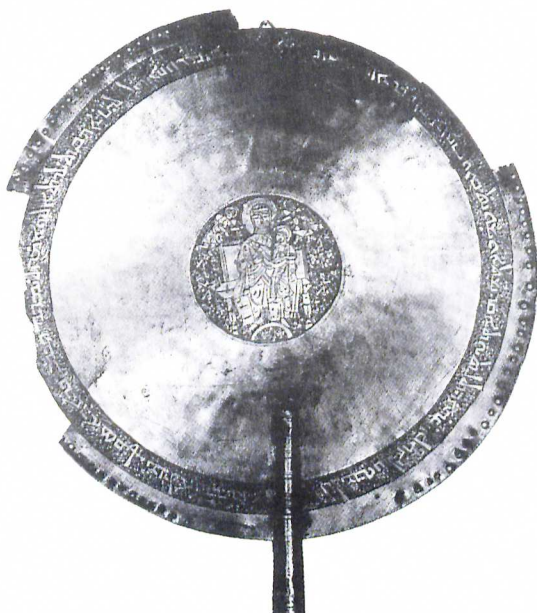


Fig. 22. Fan of Dayr as-Suryān, Mariemont, Musée Royal

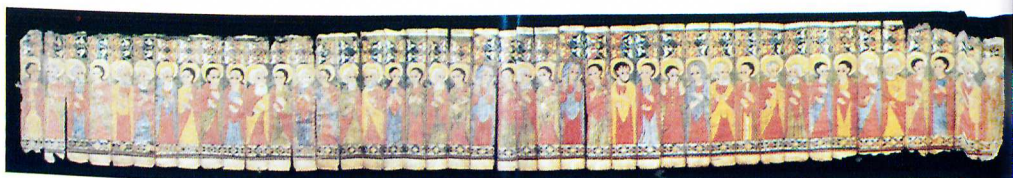


A

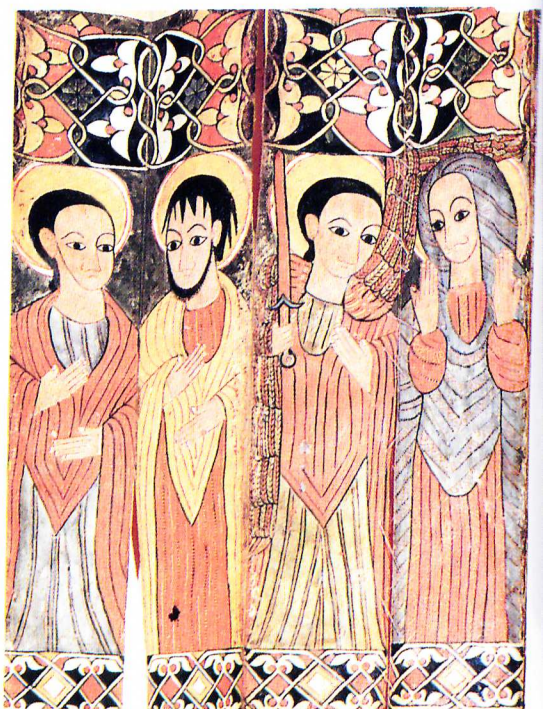


B

Fig. 23. Qirqos Church, Tana-sea

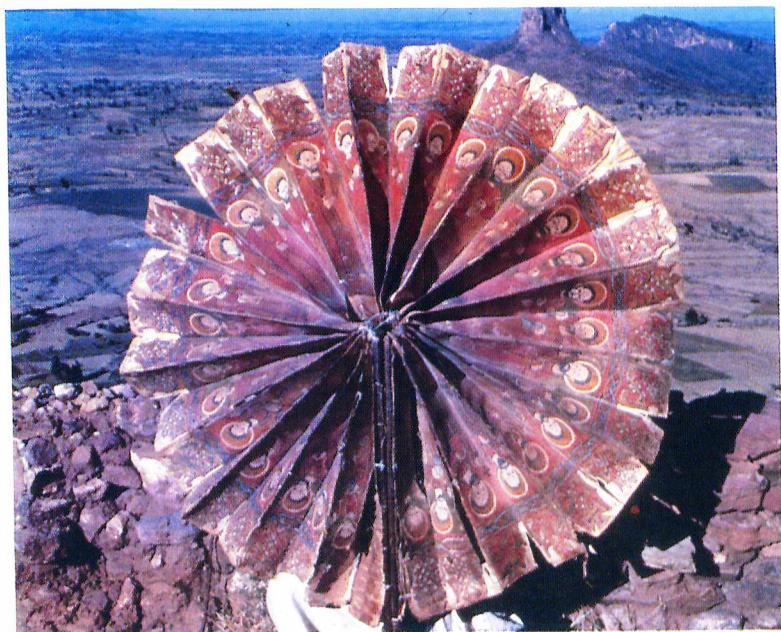


A



B

Fig. 24. Washington, Walters Art Gallery



A



B

C

Fig. 25. Däbrä Şayon Church, Gäralta



A



B



C

Fig. 26. Däbrä Sälam, Aşbi Dära



A



B



C

Fig. 27. ʿĪnda Abbate Woldä Yoḥannəs, old fan



Fig. 28. ʿĪnda Abbate Woldä Yoḥannəs, new fan



B



C

Fig. 29. Däbrä Eştifanos, Hayq



Fig. 30. Ćora, Söllase Church, Ćäläqot