

2012

## "Gift of the Word" Exhibit Catalogue

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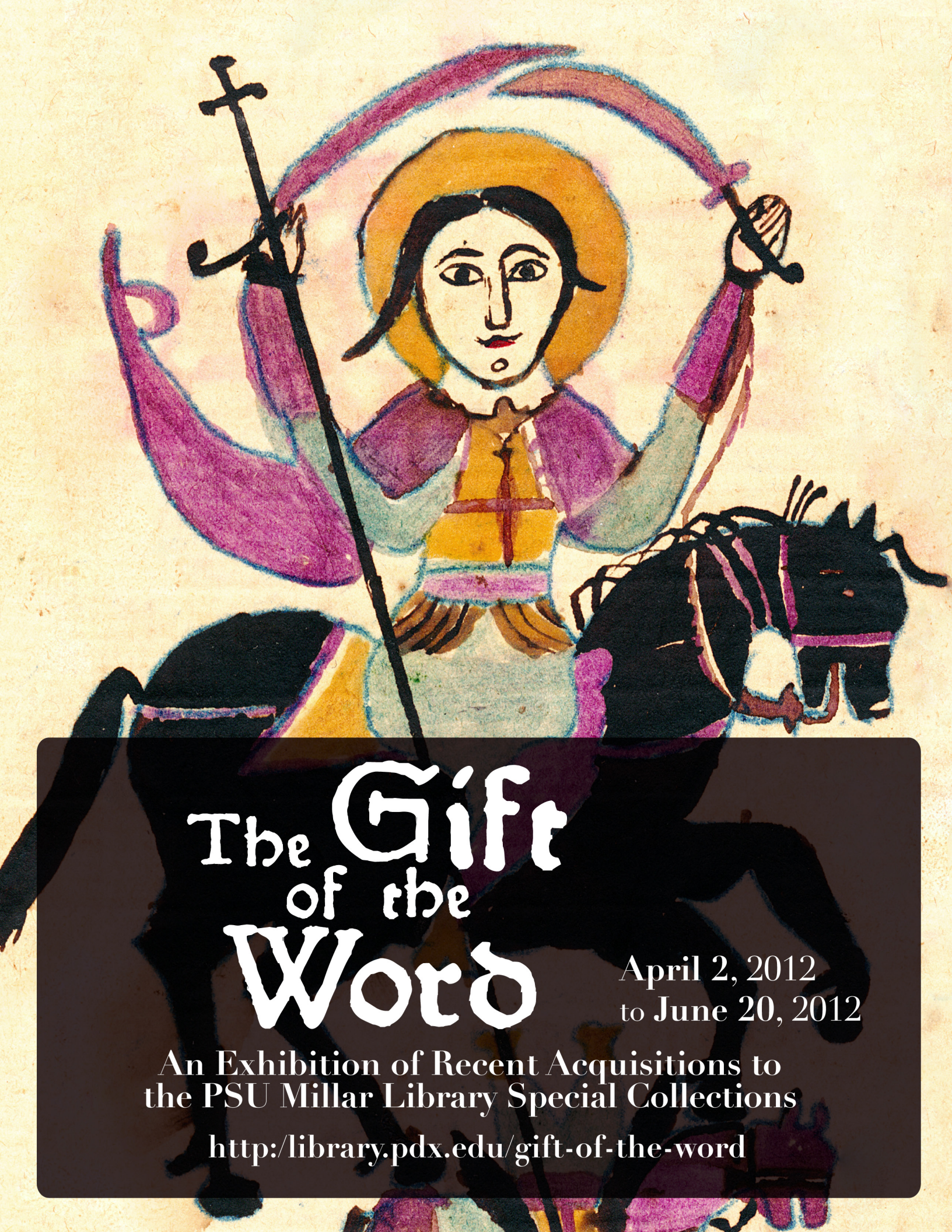
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# The Gift of the Word

April 2, 2012  
to June 20, 2012

An Exhibition of Recent Acquisitions to  
the PSU Millar Library Special Collections

<http://library.pdx.edu/gift-of-the-word>



# Gift of the Word:

An Exhibition of Recent Acquisitions to the  
Portland State University Library Special Collections

Exhibit made possible by the generosity of the Gordon Hunter  
Fund of the Oregon Community Foundation

April 2 to June 20, 2012

Essays contributed by Katherine Bass, Karena Bennett, Jeffrey Brown,  
Bronwyn Dorhofer, Normandie Holmes, Denise Loncar, and Darcie  
Hart Riedner

Edited by Darcie Hart Riedner

Catalog and other exhibit materials designed by Rhiannon Rasmussen-  
Silverstein

Portland State University Students of Professor Anne McClanan



# Contents

Introduction, Anne McClanan	Page 4
List of Illustrations	Page 7
Abbasid Qur'an Leaf in Kufic Script Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 36 Jeffrey Brown	Page 9
Mamluk Qur'an Leaf Special Collections, Mss 37 Normandie Holmes	Page 13
Italian Book of Hours Leaf Special Collections, Mss 32 Katherine Bass	Page 17
Coptic Prayer Book Leaves Special Collections, Mss 40 Overview of Text: Bronwyn Dorhofer Warrior Saint Images: Denise Loncar	Page 21 Page 26
Armenian Prayer Roll Special Collections, Mss 38 Darcie Hart Riedner	Page 29
Ethiopian Magic Scroll Special Collections, Mss 39 Karena Bennett	Page 33
Bibliography	Page 36

# Introduction

This catalog brings together research by Portland State students on a spectacular group of items recently acquired by our library through the generosity of one man, Gordon Hunter. He loved books and had a deep knowledge of the history of our local collections; he made his bequest to Special Collections at Portland State Library so that students could have the opportunity to learn from works such as those in *The Gift of the Word* exhibition documented in this catalog.

The six manuscript traditions challenge us to reconsider assumptions we might carry with us about the written word and our shifting relationship to it. The owners of the Ethiopian Magic Scroll, for instance, likely could not read it but the scroll was nevertheless a powerful emblem probably carried around daily in a special container. In a similar way, the Italian Book of Hours and the Armenian Prayer Scroll were also worn as much as they were read—these texts were an intimate part of daily lives. The Coptic Prayer Book and two Qur'an pages likely served in religious services and likewise testify in their distinctive ways to the power of the word.

I would also like to give thanks to the library staff and the students who have all worked so hard to bring this exhibition to fruition just months after the arrival of many of the works in Oregon. At the library, Cristine Paschild, Carolee Harrison, and Jennifer Wilkerson were indefatigable in their support of facilitating student research and planning the exhibit. The first phase of work on the new acquisitions was done by the summer 2011 University Studies Medieval Portland Capstone students: Mark Abby, Christopher Brummer, Kurt Carlsen, Natalie Hategan, Brian Horn, Mohammad Kohistany, Juanita Llamas, Jordan Long, Rhiannon Rasmussen-Silverstein (who also designed the exhibit poster and labels), Darcie Riedner, Ezra Roberts and Dawn Stevick. My fall 2011 art history seminar students, who likewise brought great tenacity and creativity to researching and writing the entries here in



this catalog and the other materials for the exhibit, include: Katherine Bass, Karena Bennett, Jeff Brown, Bronwyn Dorhofer, Normandie Holmes, Denise Loncar, Alexandra Park, Darcie Riedner, and Christy Valentine.

This catalog and exhibit are dedicated to the students of Portland State, both those who have devoted themselves already to unlocking the secrets of these works, and those who will continue to learn from these extraordinary items now in our collection.

Anne McClanan  
Professor, Art History  
Portland State University









# Illustrations

Photography by Carolee Harrison

Abbasid Qur'an Leaf in Kufic Script: Special Collections, Mss 36

*recto*

Page 8

*verso*

Page 11

Mamluk Qur'an Leaf: Special Collections, Mss 37

*recto*

Page 12

*verso*

Page 15

Italian Book of Hours Leaf: Special Collections, Mss 32

*recto*

Page 16

*verso*

Page 19

Coptic Prayer Book Leaves: Special Collections, Mss 40

*recto*

Page 20

St. Theodore

Page 24

St. Mercurius

Page 25

detail of St. Mercurius

Cover

St. George

Page 27

Armenian Prayer Roll: Special Collections, Mss 38

Sections 1-3

Page 28

detail from section 3 (St. Gregory the Illuminator)

Page 5

Sections 4-6

Page 31

Ethiopian Magic Scroll: Special Collections, Mss 39

Sections 1-2

Page 32

detail from section 1 (Gorgon)

Page 6

Sections 3-4

Page 35





## Abbasid Qur'an Leaf in Kufic Script

*Surah 87 (Al-A'la), verses 11-15 verso, verses 16-19 recto*

Late ninth or early tenth century CE / late third or early fourth century AH

Near East or North Africa

Vellum, Dimensions: 13 x 20 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 36

This manuscript bears many of the hallmarks of the Qur'anic manuscript tradition of the late ninth and early tenth centuries CE. This style of *Kufic* script, termed by renowned Islamicist Francois Déroche as "mature Abbasid," was widely employed from the mid-ninth through mid-tenth centuries, during the height of the Abbasid dynasty (750-1258 CE).<sup>1</sup> Despite the development and common use by the ninth century of a system of diacritical markings that aided the reading of Arabic, only one instance of letter pointing can be found in this present example (in the second line).<sup>2</sup> Vocalization, the indication of specific vowel sounds, is aided by red and green dots throughout the text. It is difficult to know with certainty whether these marks are original to the script, as many contemporary texts minimized the use of letter pointing and vocalization markers in favor of an overall aesthetic of austerity.<sup>3</sup>

The provenance of this manuscript is difficult to trace, although the style of *Kufic* resembles that of other contemporary manuscripts produced in Syria and Egypt. The ruling of the script is only slightly imperfect, indicating a practiced and competent hand. The exaggerated horizontal stretching of Arabic characters, known as *mashq*, appears on every line except for the first. The horizontality of the script is punctuated intermittently by the sweeping verticality of some characters, several of which cross into neighboring lines of text. Characters are evenly spaced, providing a sense of regular rhythm to the script. However, the seven lines of text appear rather tightly packed, giving the sense of a compact block of text, the dimensions of which bear the same geometrical ratio (2:3) to those of the page. The scribe's use of *mashq* to elongate certain words coupled with the arrangement of the text suggests a conscious attempt to achieve a unified geometric aesthetic. Many early Qur'anic texts from the eighth and ninth centuries demonstrate similar sensitivity to geometrical ratios.<sup>4</sup>

Verses are separated by a kind of floral rosette composed of red and green dots with an extremely fine line of brown ink linking each to a central gold dot. The fineness of the lines and the shape and color of these dots—especially the tint of green used—suggests that these were made by a different pen than that used to

execute the script. Another gold element, surrounded also by a fine line in brown pigment, appears in the last line of the text on this page. Resembling a lowercase “a” in the English alphabet, this is the Arabic character *ha*, which was commonly used as a fifth verse marker in Qur’anic manuscripts from this period: in this case, the *ha* denotes the end of the fifteenth verse of *Surah* 87. These decorative markers seem to interrupt the even spacing between words; two lie completely outside the formal rectilinear grid created by the text. The characteristics of these verse markers strongly suggest that they were added at a later time.

Therefore this appears to be a Qur’anic manuscript that was executed in two distinct stages. The original text was written according to a convention common to the late ninth century: one that favored an aesthetic of austerity through abstraction over legibility. At some later point, elaborated verse separators and perhaps some additional diacritical markers were added to assist the reader, thereby enhancing the functionality of the manuscript. This particular manuscript may have come from a type of prayer book known as a *juz’*, a single volume in a set of thirty—one for each day of the month—that comprised a complete edition of the Qur’an.<sup>5</sup> If so, it is tempting to consider how a pious Muslim might have appreciated and used this text over a thousand years ago to contemplate the power and majesty of the Divine.

Jeffrey Brown

<sup>1</sup> Francois Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 34-35.

The term Kufic derives from the city of al-Kufah, in modern southern Iraq, but examples of this script can be found in manuscripts from all throughout medieval Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia. See also: Widjan Ali, *The Arab Contribution to Islamic Art: From the Seventh to the Fifteenth Centuries* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Lings, *The Quranic Art of Calligraphy and Illumination* (London: World of Islam Festival Trust, 1976), 18. Francois Déroche, *Islamic Codicology: An Introduction to the Study of Manuscripts in Arabic Script* (London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2006), 222-24. Marcus Fraser and Will Kwiatkowski, *Ink and Gold: Islamic Calligraphy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 25-26.

<sup>3</sup> Fraser and Kwiatkowski, 39-40. For contemporary manuscripts of similar script style and execution, see Fraser and Kwiatkowski, 30-51, and Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, 67-107. In particular, see Déroche, *The Abbasid Tradition*, 97, for another manuscript that contains these same verses of *Surah* 87.

<sup>4</sup> Déroche, *Islamic Codicology*, 169-171. See also the later Qur’anic manuscript from this current collection for this attention to geometrical and mathematical ratios.

<sup>5</sup> Fraser and Kwiatkowski, 49.





٢٧  
الْكُبْرَى ثُمَّ لَا مَوْتَ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ

وَأُنْقَىٰ إِلَهُ هَذَا الْفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى

يُحْفَ ابْنِ هَيْمٍ وَمُوسَى

مَوْلَى الْعَلَمِ سِرِّهِ

## Mamluk Qur'an Leaf

*Surah* 87, *al-A'la*, verses 3-12 *verso*, verses 13-19 *recto*

700–710 AH, 1300-1310 CE

Cairo, Egypt

Paper, Dimensions: 19.4 x 14.2 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 37

The illuminator Sandal designed this fourteenth-century Qur'an leaf in compliance with a system of religiously-inspired geometric relationships that structured the work of Qur'an copyists. Adherence to these precise ratios for page layout, script and ornamentation, and emphasis on perfect calligraphy, was a sign of inward spirituality and cosmological orderliness.<sup>1</sup> Within these guidelines, however, individual illuminators or their students produced unique Qur'ans, often by commission. They are identifiable in the details of lavish ornamentation of frontispieces, end pieces and panels, but also by the smaller, but no less distinctive, illuminated devices used for verse markers, marginal rubrics and chapter, or *Surah*, headings. The devices appearing on this leaf permit an attribution to Sandal's atelier in Cairo, as similar illuminations are found on Qur'an pages located in the British Library and the Chester Beatty Library that are attributable by inscription to Sandal.<sup>2</sup>

The small, golden rosettes marking single verses, the larger, teardrop-shaped, fifth-verse markers, and an even larger tenth-verse roundel on the *recto* side, all have the precise, formulaic size relationships typical of Sandal Qur'ans. The internal decoration is floral or vegetal, and the tenth-verse roundels generally, as here, contain the Arabic word for ten, *'ashar*. Use of gold and blue paint, with touches of red, is typical of Qur'ans of this period.<sup>3</sup>

Almost all Mamluk Qur'an pages have an odd number of lines,<sup>4</sup> but the *recto* side of this leaf has six. There is also a mismatch in the count of single verses in relation to the fifth- and tenth-verse markers. These puzzling discrepancies can be resolved by a text comparison. Referring to *Surah* 87, it is evident that one and a half verses are not shown here but may have appeared on a previous page. However, lack of traditional margins and a fragment of text at the top of the *recto* side indicate possible cropping of this leaf. Cropping would explain both the verse marker and line count oddities.

Sandal, or perhaps a collaborating calligrapher, chose *naskh* script for this leaf. It was the most common copyist script, not limited by convention to Qur'an copies, but also used for government and commercial documents.<sup>5</sup> It was easy to write, even

though the copyist had to maintain both a geometrically determined spacing between letters and words and a set proportion of letter size to that of the most important letter *alif*.<sup>6</sup> This style was suitable for the small, portable Qur'ans of this period. With this fine black *naksh*, Sandal often used golden *surah* headings in condensed ornamental *kufic* script<sup>7</sup> as shown at the bottom of the *verso* side at the end of the *surah*, giving chapter title, number of verses and text derivation. A thin black outline emphasizes the solid structure of this script. *Kufic* script is also used in the tenth-verse roundel forming a visual and informational tie with the *surah* heading.

Little is known about Sandal, also known as Abu Bakr. The form and meaning of his name implies he was a slave or eunuch<sup>8</sup> but the quality and quantity of his attributed work and the prevalence of his atelier, even after the probable date of his death, indicate that he had influential patronage and was well regarded.<sup>9</sup> Sandal's Qur'ans were commissioned by Mamluks, originally military slaves, who became successful rulers in thirteenth-century Egypt and Syria and viewed traditional art and religion as stabilizing forces.<sup>10</sup> Such patrons would have respected Sandal's geometric precision, and also admired his distinctive designs, lavish ornamentation and golden accents as a sign of Mamluk wealth and status.

Normandie Holmes

<sup>1</sup> Martin Lings and Yasin Hamid Safadi, *The Qur'an* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, 1976) , 15.

<sup>2</sup> David James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 40, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Marcus Fraser, *Geometry in Gold* (London: Sam Fogg, 2005), 10-15.

<sup>4</sup> James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks*, 48.

<sup>5</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Abdelkebir Khatibi and Mohammed Sijelmassi, *The Splendour of Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 46-47.

<sup>7</sup> James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks*, 58.

<sup>8</sup> James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks*, 47.


<sup>9</sup> David James, *The Master Scribes* (London: Nour Foundation, 1992), 150.

<sup>10</sup> James, *Qur'ans of the Mamluks*, 27-30.



٢٦  
فَسَوِّى وَالَّذِى قَدَّرَ فَهَدَىٰ وَالَّذِى  
أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَىٰ فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَىٰ سَنُقْرِئُكَ  
فَلَا تُنْسَىٰ إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهَنَّمَ  
وَمَا يَخْفَىٰ وَنُبَيِّنُكَ لِلنَّاسِ فَذَكِّرْ  
أَتَقَعَتِ الذُّكُرَىٰ سَيَذَكِّرُنَّ خِشْيَ  
وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى الَّذِى يَصْلَى النَّارَ




 al omnipotēs **D**icimus  
 sempiternē deus qui  
 nos omnium sancto-  
 rum tuorum merita,  
 sub una tribuisti celebritate uene-  
 rare: quesumus ut desideratas no-  
 bis tue propiciationis abundā-  
 tiam multiplicatis intercessori-  
 bus largiaris. Per dominū no-  
 strum iesum christum filiū tuum  
 Qui tecum uiuit et regnat in unita-  
 te spiritus sancti deus per omnia  
 secula seculorum. Amen:

## Italian Book of Hours Leaf

Northern Italy

1500-1510 CE

Vellum, Dimensions: 18 x 13 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 32

This is a beautifully hand written, hand painted leaf from an Italian Book of Hours. The Book of Hours historically goes back to pre-Christian origin, with the Jewish Book of Psalms. These prayer books were often kept on the individual, due to the value of the gold leafed manuscript, but also for its use as an hourly prayer book used throughout the day. It was believed to have protective powers from evil and contribute to hope of their salvation. These ideologies of protective powers are similar to both the Ethiopian Magic Scroll and the Armenian Prayer Roll also in this exhibit.

This leaf, dated to the beginning of the sixteenth century, does not demonstrate the extent of detail and artistry that some manuscripts have, however, the quality of the decorated initials, detailed foliate borders, and gold lettering reveal that this probably belonged to an affluent family. This is confirmed by Pia Palladino, author and editor of several books associated with Italian manuscripts and Assistant Curator for the Metropolitan Museum of Art; “By the end of the fifteenth century, with the rise of printed books, the craft of manuscript illumination in Italy had become increasingly specialized and confined primarily to the production of luxury goods for the wealthiest class of patrons.”<sup>1</sup>

On the recto side of this leaf there extends from the decorated initial “O” a partial foliate border of rich colors of red, green, blue, and gold. The Latin text relates to the Feast of All Saints Day. This was an important day of prayer, celebrated on November 1st and would have been included in all Books of Hours. The translation is:

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given us in one feast to venerate the merits of all Thy saints; we beseech Thee through the multitude of intercessors to grant the desired abundance of Thy mercy. Through our Lord Jesus Christ Thy Son, who liveth and reigneth with Thee in unity with the Holy Ghost, God, world without end.

The *verso* side, shown in this exhibit, is more intricately illuminated, with the



same beautiful swirls and foliates extending from the decorated initials. The first and largest initial “O” displays a cross situated on a pink mound, with a blood stained crown of thorns, worn by Jesus at the Crucifixion, hanging upon it. Resting on the foliate border is a peacock, a Christian symbol of the Resurrection and therefore is appropriately placed next to the empty cross of Jesus and on a page with a prayer of salvation and praise of the Resurrection. The text on this side translates as:

O cross, our only hope in this time of suffering, grant justice to the faithful and mercy to those awaiting judgment.

According to the dealer from whom this leaf was acquired, its decoration is uncommon and difficult to localize, but is believed to be from Bologna. This is a logical assumption due to the fact that Bologna was an important center for the Dominican order and for the making of manuscripts.<sup>2</sup>

This beautiful leaf is hand painted with rich colors, decorative foliate borders and glorious details of the cross and the Peacock. The exquisiteness of these illuminations complements the beauty of the prayers and the ideology of the protective powers held within the *Miracle of the Word*.

Katherine Bass

<sup>1</sup> Pia Palladino, “Manuscript Illumination in Italy, 1400–1600”. *Timeline of Art History*. New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2000. [http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/iman/hd\\_iman.htm](http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/iman/hd_iman.htm) (October 2003) (accessed 15 Oct 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Kren, *Italian Illuminated Manuscripts in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2005), xii.









## Coptic Prayer Book Leaves: Overview of Text

Early eighteenth century CE

Egypt

Vellum, Dimensions: 19.5 x 13.7 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 40

Dating from the early eighteenth century CE, this hand-rendered manuscript fragment is an example of an *Agpeya*, or, a Coptic Book of Hours. Intended to be used as a daily prayer book, the manuscript contains twelve extant leaves painted on vellum pages and implements both bilingual liturgical text and ornamental iconography to emphasize the various stories told within its pages.<sup>1</sup> This particular manuscript contains the daily prayers associated with the Coptic cycle of canonical hours that relate to the various events in the life of Jesus Christ. The beginnings of the Third, Sixth, Ninth and Midnight Hours, as well as a protective nighttime prayer have all been identified with this text. Accompanying the hours are vivid illuminations such as ornamental chapter headings which clearly designate sections of the text, as well as compelling warrior saint imagery depicting Saint George, Saint Theodore and Saint Mercurius painted in a manner which aligns within Eastern iconographic tradition.<sup>2</sup> The twelve leaves contained within the *Agpeya* represent a limited but revealing example of the daily devotional life of a Coptic Christian and how the fragment may have been used and interpreted by its user.

Reading from left to right, the *Agpeya* features both Coptic and Arabic scripts, with Arabic translations featured prominently in the right-hand margins. The main text was written in Bohairic Coptic with Arabic placed in the right hand margins and is accompanied by limited headings in Greek. These bilingual texts are commonly found in the Coptic liturgical tradition, and are considered to be one of the oldest divisions of manuscript production examined by specialists.<sup>3</sup> Coptic, based on the ancient Egyptian language, continues to be used in church manuscripts to this day, although as a spoken language its use has been limited since about the seventeenth century. The Arabic contained within the text has been interpreted as vernacular Arabic, though there have been a few deciphered anomalies within the text which may be a result of the “Arabization” of Coptic words and phrases by manuscript copyists.<sup>4</sup>

While the majority of manuscript copyists working in this era were considered professionals, there are several sections within the *Agpeya* that can be described as exhibiting evidence of “sloppy transcription.”<sup>5</sup> Often, it was not necessary for a scribe of Coptic manuscripts to fully understand the language he was copying, and usually

the mastery of the shapes of Coptic letters in their proper positions was enough to attain the status of calligrapher.<sup>6</sup> This fragment may have been created by either clergy or lay members as both groups were involved with the copying, production and patronage of manuscripts during this particular period.<sup>7</sup> Historians refer to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as a time of Coptic religious resurgence that included a sharp increase in manuscript production.<sup>8</sup>

Within this *Agpeya*, the individual chapters of the Daily Office are clearly marked by beautiful illuminations of decorative archways similar to designs found in the Islamic tradition. Possessing a decided visual weightiness, these archways were rendered with a great deal of attention toward establishing a balanced overall geometry not just within the design, but throughout the entire manuscript. Each archway is unique in its appearance, though all share heavy interlacing, geometric repetition, dotted borders and a vivid array of coloring within the design. Among these pages, rubrication, or red highlighting, marks the overall transitions within the text as well as the subject headings and content.

Like the warrior saint images which accompany these leaves, the color palette of the illuminations are robust, yet limited to the hues of yellow, green, purple, red, black and blue. The manufacture of colored inks for manuscript production was typically in the charge of monks working in monasteries who often added gum arabic to the pigments as a stabilizing agent for watercolor paints. Paint was typically applied with slender wooden reeds, with black ink usually reserved for text and red for the writing of book titles and chapter headings such as it is in this artifact.<sup>9</sup>

While the *Agpeya* does possess various physical imperfections which can be credited to its age and intended function, the overall condition of the vellum paper of the manuscript is good. This can be credited to a Coptic tradition of boiling vellum pages with powdered fenugreek and salt in order to stave off the destruction by insects and other pests which may eventually compromise the integrity of the paper.<sup>10</sup> This feature is important as it is demonstrative of the perceived importance of the artifact and its intended use and function within a cultural context. The care the calligrapher took in creating both the illuminations and text, as well as how we know the *Agpeya* was intended to be used by its owner, speaks of its inherent preciousness and power.

Bronwyn Dorhofer

<sup>1</sup> Ra'ūf Habīb, *Classical Mythology in Coptic Art* (Cairo: Mahabba Bookshop, 1970), 2. Historically, Coptic manuscripts were printed upon a type of parchment paper derived from the skins of gazelles which was then cured until appropriate for the task of writing. It was not uncommon for old parchment papers to be erased and later re-appropriated by scribes, resulting in the loss of what is assumed to be a large amount of significant literary and historic texts.

<sup>2</sup> Suzanne Lewis, "The Iconography of the Coptic Horseman in Byzantine Egypt," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt*. (1973) 10: 27-63. Eastern Christian art was generally expected to adhere to a strict iconographic tradition wherein artistic adaptations to visual imagery were not generally approved. The horseman imagery present in this Agpeya fit in with this Eastern hagiographic tradition and may have been copied from pattern books.

<sup>3</sup> Habib, *Classical Mythology*, 2. Bilingual liturgical texts originally appear in the Coptic tradition before the recorded Arab Conquest of 642 AD.

<sup>4</sup> Dirgham Sbeit, Interview by Professor Anne McClanan and author. Oral Interview. October 31, 2011. Transcript available at PSU Library Special Collections.

<sup>5</sup> Sbeit, Interview by Professor Anne McClanan and author.

<sup>6</sup> El Shaheed Smiha Abd, El Nour Abd, "Copyists and the copying of Manuscripts in the Coptic Church," *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* 44, (2005): 81-84.

<sup>7</sup> Febe Armanios, *Coptic Christianity in Ottoman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-36.

<sup>8</sup> Armanios, *Coptic Christianity*, 8.

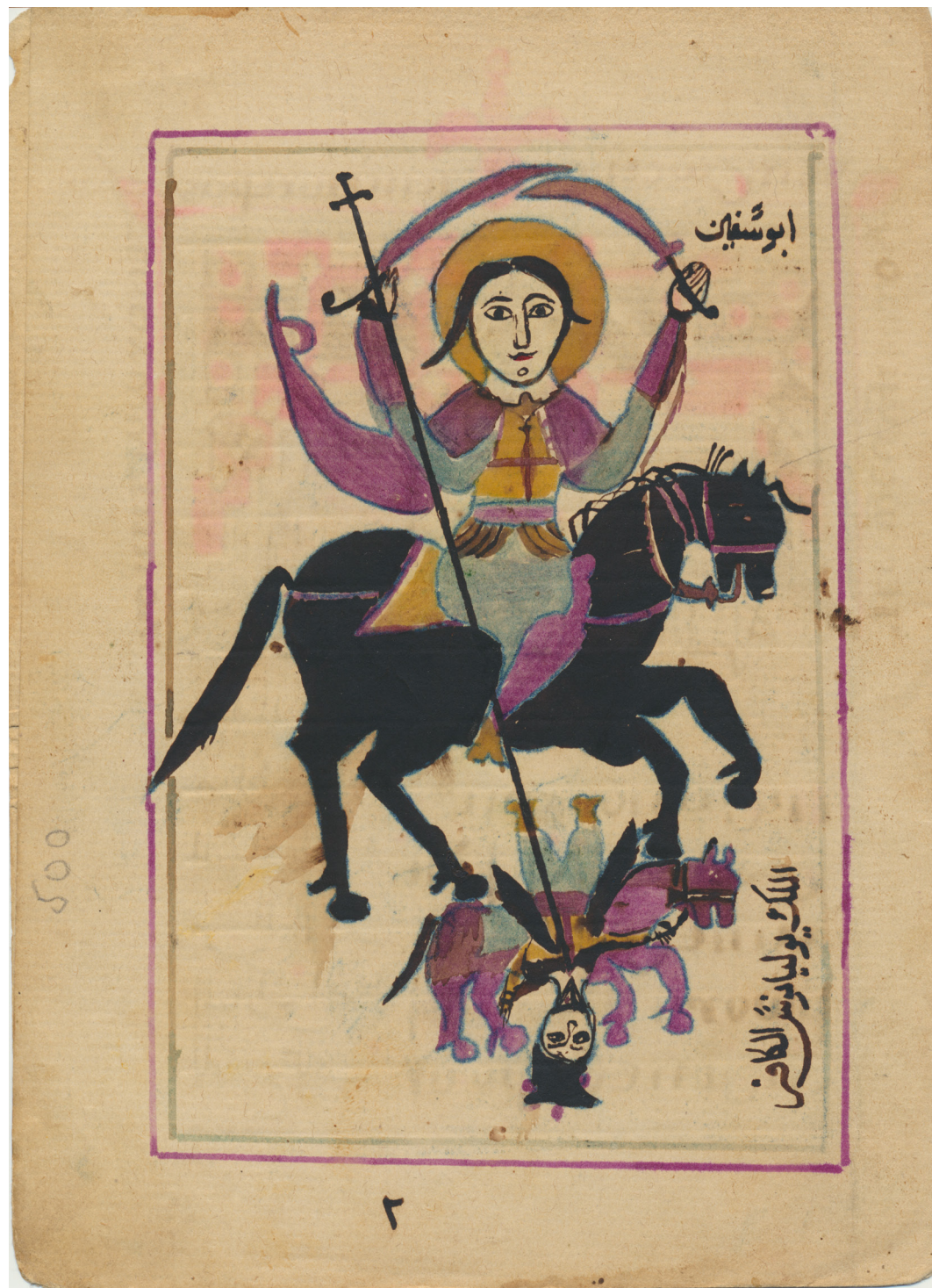
<sup>9</sup> Armanios, *Coptic Christianity*, 36.

<sup>10</sup> Armanios, *Coptic Christianity*, 5.









## Coptic Prayer Book Leaves: Warrior Saint Images

Early eighteenth century CE

Egypt

Vellum, Dimensions: 19.5 x 13.7 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 40

The images that accompany the readings from an early eighteenth-century Coptic prayer book, or *Agpeya*, are a testament to the nature of religious texts created in the Christian East. Eastern Christian religious art was generally expected to follow a strict iconographic code, within which adaptation or change was not viewed as desirable. Here the images of warrior saints, Saint George, Saint Theodore the Eastern, and Saint Mercurius, not only fit within the hagiographic tradition, but may have been copied from pattern books circulating during the period.<sup>1</sup> Especially popular in Coptic Christian Egypt, equestrian saint's images and relics were commonly believed to possess *apotropaic*, or protective powers. Others have also noted that rider saint figures often represented guardian imagery and were frequently rendered in pairings or groups.<sup>2</sup> This could be one possible explanation for the parallel images included in this manuscript.

On these pages, each of the three saints is represented by a particular set of symbolic imagery. The mounted Saint George is easily identified by the dragon underfoot which he spears with his pike. Saint Mercurius, also known in Arabic as Abu Sifayn, is recognized by the dual swords he wields overhead, while below, Julian the Apostate lays lifeless beneath the hooves of his mount. The final image portrays Saint Theodore the Eastern dethroning the Roman Emperor Diocletian, famed for his intense persecution of Christians, with a cross-topped spear. All three saints enter the scene piercing their targets from the left, while each victim occupies the lower right register on a blank field. Presented as simplified forms here, the warrior saint has become a legible "type" created with limited, but commonly understood signifiers.

Mounted warrior saints, especially prevalent in Egypt after the Crusades, had been portrayed in church frescos, sculptures, and woven into fabrics as early as the sixth or seventh centuries. But after the region became Islamicized, and Copts existed as part of the Christian minority, these images became increasingly important. One scholar notes that although Copts portrayed their most beloved martyrs as equestrian warriors, they themselves, were forbidden to own or ride horses under Ottoman rule. It is generally thought that to Coptic Christians, mounted warrior saint figures



represented spiritual victory over the forces of darkness, while symbolically guarding against religious persecution.<sup>3</sup>

Denise Loncar

<sup>1</sup> Tania C. Tribes, "Icon and Narration in Eighteenth-Century Christian Egypt: the works of Yuhanna al-Armani al-Qudsi and Ibrahim al-Nasikh," *Art History* 27, 1 (February 2004): 69, <http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.lib.pdx>, (accessed 2 Oct. 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Bas Snelders and Adeline Jeudy, "Guarding the Entrances: Equestrian Saints in Egypt and North Mesopotamia," *Eastern Christian Art*, 3(2006):107.

<sup>3</sup> F.A. Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages*, (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002), 33.







## Armenian Prayer Roll

Late seventeenth to early eighteenth century CE

Constantinople

Vellum, Dimensions: 12.7 x 487.7 cm

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 38

The Armenian prayer roll holds a special place in Armenian culture and worship. Prayer rolls such as this were highly treasured, theologically sacred manuscripts representing the very personal nature of prayer in devoutly Christian Armenia.

Amulet, talisman or magic scroll all identify the apotropaic nature for which prayer rolls were known and used for centuries in Armenia. Armenian people possessed a strong belief in the power of the written word. It was thought events could be influenced by writing the desired cause or effect on a long, narrow scroll called a *hymayil*, meaning literally “charmer.”<sup>1</sup> Utilizing the accepted format of a long narrow roll of vellum or parchment, calligraphers and artists produced scrolls with prayers or personal intentions specific to the owner. Text and illustration could include prayers for safe travel, good health, prosperity in business, or for the wisdom of the nation’s leaders. Personal requests might range from the relief of headaches or poor vision to intentions for a family member. Prayers for assistance might be directed to Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, St. Stephen the Martyr or St. Gregory the Illuminator. Prayer rolls were believed to protect, prevent or neutralize evil and gain favor with the saints.<sup>2</sup>

Sixteen panels of iconic Christian imagery and text comprise the contents of this scroll. The illustrations are drawn and colored in a primary color palette with blending and shading applied to create colors with religious significance, such as purple. Passages of text below each illustration are written in *erkat’agir*, an uncial script. Initial letters of paragraphs appear in either *erkat’agir* or stylized creatures such as birds, a traditional flourish in religious manuscripts. Black lettering was used for the script to symbolize the pain of original sin, while white space symbolizes the innocence of birth. Red ink was used to create what is known as a rubric, which provided information specific to an individual entry. The scribe might personalize the roll by adding anecdotes about working conditions or modest comments their skill and ability. Prayer rolls were important and valuable; it was standard practice for the owner to write their name within the script.<sup>3</sup>

Illustrations, traditional prayers and overall form are similar elements within every Armenian prayer roll, but the message is honed to reflect the individual nature



of each. The prayer roll in the Millar Library includes text from the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John all referencing miracles of Galilee, traditional prayers of the Armenian Church dedicated to St. Gregory the Illuminator and St. Nerses, illustrations of the Crucifixion, Virgin Mary with the Christ child and the Lamb of God.<sup>4</sup>

Notes provided by the antiquities dealer estimate the date of the roll at the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century based on the depiction of the Tomb of Christ, also known as the Holy Sepulcher, in one of the roll's illustrations. The last panel on the roll is missing a section, which would provide the colophon containing the name of the scribe, exact date and place of composition. The creation of a prayer roll by a scribe and artist was in decline by the mid-nineteenth century with the majority of these works produced on printing presses at that time. The practice, as a whole, died out over a century ago.<sup>5</sup>

Darcie Hart Riedner

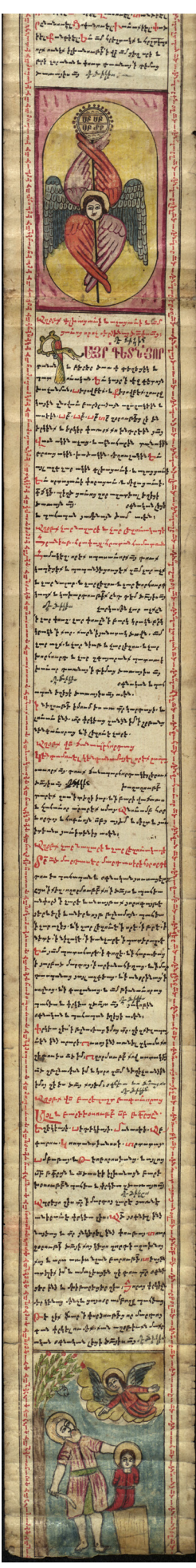
<sup>1</sup> Hamlet Petrosyan, "Armenian Folk Arts, Culture, and Identity." (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 58.

<sup>2</sup> Edda Vardanyan, *Arme'nie, la magie de l'écrit*, ed. Claude Mutaftian, (Marseille: Musées de Marseille, 2007), 123-125

<sup>3</sup> Dawn Stevick, "Notes." --(University Studies Capstone Course: Medieval Portland. 11 Aug. 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Father Garabed Kochakian, email correspondence with author, 3 Nov. 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. James Russell, Professor of Armenian Studies, Harvard University, email correspondence with author, 16 Nov. 2011









## Ethiopian Magic Scroll

Nineteenth century CE

Tigray region, Ethiopia

Vellum, Dimensions: 15 x 192 cm (composite)

Portland State University Library, Special Collections, Mss 39

This nineteenth-century Ethiopian magic scroll demonstrates the synthesis of sacred and heterodox elements: figures of angels appear alongside demon-like creatures; talismanic designs derived from Islamic, Judaic and pre-Christian folk sources blend with Christian prayers.<sup>1</sup> It is this unique convergence that invests the manuscript with its distinctive spiritual and medicinal function.

The creation of this object would have been relegated to a *dabtara*, a cleric in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. For the scroll's devout owners, the inclusion of highly individualized prayers, imagery and arcane details endowed the object with its protective or curative abilities. During periods of crisis or sickness, it would have been kept with its owner at all times.<sup>2</sup> It was understood that this close relationship allowed the scroll to draw out and absorb the patron's pain or illness, which was thought to appear in the form of demons.

The script is written in *Ge'ez*, the liturgical language of Ethiopia. Areas that reference the specific patron have been covered and written-over, indicating that ownership of the manuscript was transferred at least once. The name Walatta, daughter of Michael, now appears, identifying her as the most recent owner.

The text and imagery relate to St. Susenyos who is affiliated with protection during pregnancy and childbearing providing evidence of how it functioned for Walatta, as well as its previous owners.<sup>3</sup>

Its strong palette of blue, black and red is characteristic of talismanic art produced in the northern Tigray highlands of Ethiopia. The majority of the script consists of prayers that appear in black ink while the name of the owner and other important details are presented in red.

The scroll is comprised of four goatskin vellum sections that would have been originally joined vertically. The top register is occupied by a Gorgon. The figure's origin lies in the Greek Gorgon Medusa, as signified through the depiction of snakes, however this rendition recalls a later Byzantine version. The Byzantine Gorgon-like head is associated with the prayer of Susenyos, which is present within this scroll's text.<sup>4</sup> Two blue snakes outline the Gorgon's head, coiling to emphasizing the figure's overstated eyes. The motif of snake scales is repeated in the top-most decorative band

of the scroll. A processional cross sits atop the Gorgon's head signifying his piety. It can be surmised the Gorgon is in fact an angel masquerading as a demon. Scholars note the common inclusion of disguised angels to fool a demonic presence.<sup>5</sup>

The central section portrays two guardian angels that are unnamed, but could be Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel because of their association with guardianship of mother and child. Each figure wields a sword further signifying them as protectors. The lower right image contains three figures. The character to the left holds a processional cross and leans on a prayer stick. He possesses the features typical of a guardian angel.<sup>6</sup> As with the Gorgon, these figures also possess exaggerated eyes. In addition, stylized eyes appear throughout the ornamental border, alongside other decorative patterns, and are a crucial aspect of the object's protective power.

It is through the gaze of the owner and the illuminated eyes that the demon is ultimately defeated.<sup>7</sup>

Karena Bennett

<sup>1</sup> Holland Cotter, "Ethiopian Magic Scrolls: Talismanic Art of Ethiopia," *New York Times*, May 19, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/20/arts/design/ethiopian-magic-scrolls-talismanic-art-of-ethiopia.html> (accessed 1 Oct. 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Mercier, *Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia* (Munich: Prestel, 1997), 46.

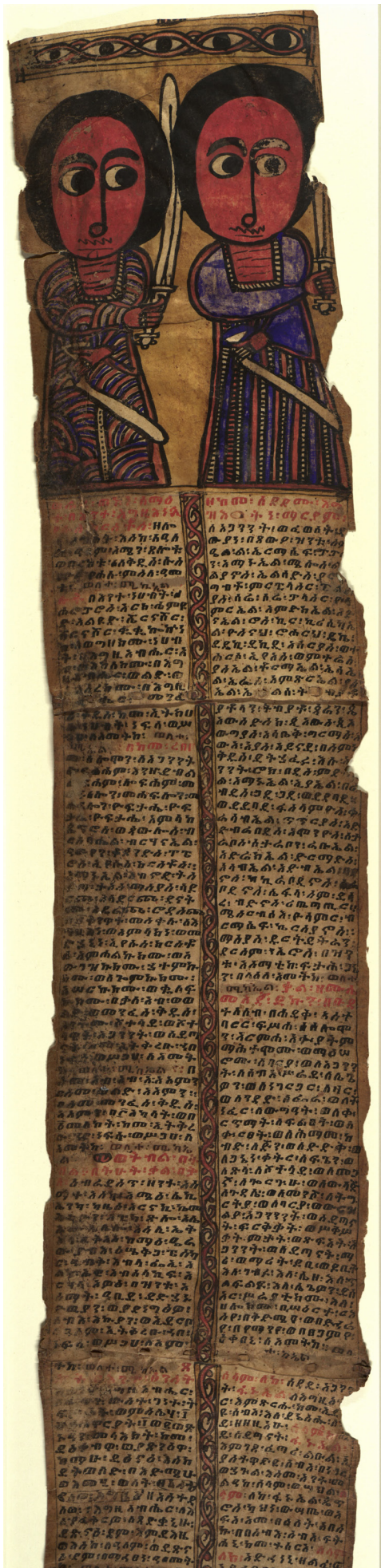
<sup>3</sup> Steve Delamarter, interview by Anne McClanan, 8 July 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Mercier, *Art That Heals*, 99; Delamarter, interview.

<sup>5</sup> Mercier, *Art That Heals*, 95, 99.

<sup>6</sup> Delamarter, interview.

<sup>7</sup> Mercier, *Art That Heals*, 94-95.





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