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The Ethiopian calendar

Preliminary remarks

An examination of the Ethiopian calendar begins with the observation that, with one exception, the epigraphic tradition of the country - in South Arabian and Ethiopian script - from ca. 7th cent. BC to ca. 10th century AD, no time and date information can be found. The exception is the funerary inscription of Ḥam (RIÉ 232), in whose date all the important elements of the Ethiopian calendar - day of the week, day of the month and name of the month, name of the festival and date of the year with indication of the era - figure *in nuce*:

"Giḥo, daughter of Māngäša, died in the month Taḥśaś on the 27th of the morning of the eve of Christmas *gənnä*, on a Wednesday *rabu*´ and the year was 590 of our enemy = Diocletian, but also of grace = 23 December 873 AD (Kropp 1999); alternatively: 967 of the Incarnation Era = 23 December 974 AD (Bausi 2019; 2021)."

It is indisputable that this was the case: A Christian calendar was in use in Ethiopia in the 9th, at the latest in the 10th century AD, with names and dates for Christmas and the names for the months and days of the week that are still known today.

Climate, seasons and corresponding agricultural activities as reflected in traditional names

The Ethiopian calendar is based on the natural rhythm of the climate in the Ethiopian highlands. This is determined by the time of the monsoon rains, around the end of June - beginning of September. The rest of the year is organised around this fixed period. It is therefore significant that a descriptive name for this is still known today - *kərämt* - as well as an equally descriptive name for the month that concludes the rainy season: *mäskäräm*.

There are different seasonal cycles, some of which relate to the course of agricultural activities, others to the climatic cycle of the year. All components have Ethiopian names, only some of which can be interpreted etymologically. A form of the liturgical church year with four seasons has, in contrast to the Coptic church year, adopted this traditional form.

The names of the months

except for the intercalation month *paḡwəmen* - from Coptic or directly from Greek - are all Ethiopian words, although they cannot always be interpreted etymologically and morphologically.

The days of the week

are numbered according to Semitic / Middle Eastern custom, except for Friday and Saturday (eve of the Sabbath and Sabbath). An otherwise rare nominal form is used for this, which is also used for the numbering of the days of the month: əḥud - sänuu - sälu - räbu´ - ḥamus -

‘arb, next to sälus - sänbät.

The multiple terms for Saturday: *sänbätä ayhud*, *qädamit sänbät*, *qädami sänbät* and Sunday: *sänbäta krəstiyan*, *əḥud sänbät*, *sänbätä əḥud* reflect the medieval controversy surrounding the observance of the two Sabbath days.

The festive season in Ethiopia

are often common Christian, and there are also a number of Ethiopian festivals of the Virgin Mary and saints. Perhaps the cross festival *mäsqaäl* is a reinterpreted pagan custom.

The eras used in Ethiopia

Era after the years of grace, Ethiop. ‘amätä *məḥrät*, abbreviated a.m. Today this refers to the era after the birth of Christ in the Ethiopian manner. Year 1 corresponds to 5501 of the era after the creation of the world = 8 AD.

Originally, the Era of Grace denoted the year in the twelfth 532-year cycle of the Easter computus, beginning with the 77th year of the era of Diocletian or the Martyrs on 29 August 360 A.D. The cyclical computus means that the columns for historical events contain dates from early Christian history to those of the Middle Ages and the early modern period.