**Zimarie and Meswa’it (Songs and Offerings)**

**Chapter One**

**Zimarie or Songs**

1. **History of Songs**

The term song is derived from the Ge’ez word meaning to sing or singing. Its meaning is tied to the concept of praise giving. The underlying meaning is the same in both Ge’ez and Amharic. Furthermore, it carries the same meaning in all Semitic languages but in some Semitic languages, song or singing carries the meaning of sound making. In its modern concept, however, Zimarie or chanting or singing means songs of praise. In this particular context, however, we refer to Zimarie or songs to the songs of St. Yared and not songs in general. According to scholars, St. Yared composed these songs in a monastery called Zur Amba. He composed these songs in cooperation with Atse Gebremesqel and Abune Aregawi and he taught the lessons to students for 3 years being in the same monastery. It is believed that these works are entirely those of St. Yaerd. We can prove these from evidences in such books like Dirsane Urael and Kibre Negest. Part of this song composition reads like this in Ge’ez, “Wemehare Bati sost Amet BeZimarie Kalomu Le Melaikt”. This is used as part of the liturgy services following Holy Communion.

**2. Parts of the songs**

Zimarie or songs are presented following the observance of the Holy Communion. It is categorized into five parts

A. Hibist

B. Tsiwa

C. Menfes

D. Akotet

E. Mistir.

While Mistir and Akotet are sung in the holy of holies inside the temple, the other three are sung outside the holy of holies.

The five parts of Zimarie or songs are said or sung in one day.

A. Akotet is sung in between the liturgical services.

B. Hibist Tsiwa and Menfes are sung after the Holy Communion observance.

C. Mistir is sung at the time of incense burning called itane moger. Previously, all five parts are sung all at one time. Nowadays only one is sung at a time.

The following poetry explains the need for all parts to be sung at one time. “Be Mistire Amlak Tekime Deme Akotet le Wold, tsiwa menfes Yitselil Weymilal Inze Hosana hibist Ned”. Like in all songs, these are also presented in all three Zema types called Ge’ez, Ezil and Araraay.

The parts also comprise dates of public holidays as well as time periods. They also contain special mysteries related to saints. The five parts are presented in detail as follows:

1. Hibist: The song or Zimarie of Hibist always begins with “Isme Le’alem mihiretu”. This usually explains the blessing of hibist or bread. It is about the Holy Communion. Hibist songs are 219 in Ge’ez and 132 in Ezil. Altogether there are 351 Hibist songs.
2. Tsiwa: Tsiwa songs begin with Isme Albo Neger Zeyse’ano Le’ Egziabher. This explains about the blood element of the Holy Communion called tsiwa or wine. Tsiwa songs number 225 in Ge’ez, 48 in Ezil and number 273 in total.
3. Menfes: Menfes songs begin with Halelujah. These songs also expound the bread and wine elements of the Holy Communion. They number 45 altogether.
4. Mistire: Mistire generally deals with the sacrament of the Holy Communion. These are 204 in Ge’ez and 53 in Ezil numbering 257 altogether.
5. Akotet: Akotet songs are 74 in number including the major six songs of kibir yi’ity and itane moger,

There are also two Awalid songs. But there are many minor ones and they number 1060 altogether. In Araraay Zema, we have 23 Hibist songs, 10 tsiwa songs and ten menfes songs. There are a total of 43 Araraay Zema songs of Akotet.

One needs to study for one year to become a teacher of this lesson. Such a person has to have thorough knowledge of Tsome Deggua and other songs. He also needs to have knowledge of the notations. In general, Zimarie or songs are music disciplines having their own uniqueness. They originated in the known monastery of Zur Amba.

**Chapter Two**

1. **Mesw’it (offerings)**

The meaning of the word Meswa’it is not clearly known. But seen from its services, it means offerings or services made at funeral times. This type of song or Zimarie is not usually used for regular church services on holidays and other days. However, it may be sung once in a year as part of the church service. This is done usually on the night of Saturday leading to Sundays, not as regular liturgical service but as a memorial song.

This is presented in memory of the Lord Jesus Christ who stayed in the grave that night. He died as a Son of Man and this song is devoted to him. This song is also sung in the days before the Resurrection and the song is devoted to all mortal human beings, dead or alive.

This song or prayer called Meswa’it is composed by St. Yared. It is said to have been composed alongside other compositions of St. Yared. It is also being taught in schools by Zur Amba monastery scholars. The scholars call these songs or prayers Zimarie Meswa’it. As explained above, they are sung at funeral services. Meswa’it Zema is a sorrowful song and it grieves relatives of the dead if it is not sung in that style.

This song is sung in the style of the Psalms of David and comes after the life history of the dead in read out. It is prepared in that fashion even from the beginning. This sounds exceptionally beautiful when sung by a disciple who is proficient in Mistir songs.

**2. Number of Meswait (Offerings)**

Meswait is prepared in such a way that suits the needs of the time. Secondly, it is prepared in commemoration of the dead. It is therefore classified into many parts and numbers. Meswait songs number 974, out of which 803 are in Ge’ez. There are 7 extra ones. Those in Ezil number 60. There are 104 Meswait in Araray Zema. All the Meswait songs begin with the Psalms of David. Sometimes Meswait begins and also ends with the Book Psalms. Such a one is called Kerse Dawit.

**3. Conducting a regular Meswait**

To say Meswait prayers, you have to first say Tselote Akotet. Then come the Psalms of David. Wudase Mariam then follows. The song begins in Ezil Zema followed by Inze Ne’akuto and Abun songs. Then, Meswait continues in five Ge’ez, one Ezil and one Araray. Ge’ez Meswait is always taken from the Psalms while, Araraay Meswait is sometimes taken from Psalms, especially the one which says, “Sibhiwo Le’egziabher Imsemayat, Sebhiwo Le’egziabher Sibhate Haddis, Sebhiwo Le’egziabher Bekidusanu.” Sometimes, it is taken from the prophets especially which says, “Yibarkiwo Kulu giber egziyo Le’egziabher.” Ezil Meswait is mostly taken from the prophets followed by Abun Zema. Other Zema like isme Le’alemoch is also sung one in the form of leta and the other in kiniwat. Then come selest and selam and the entire Fithat formality in that order.

**4. On Journey Fithat**

On Journey Fithat is the Meswait song that is sung while the dead body is on the way to burial. The Psalms and Wudase Mariam songs are inserted here and there in between Meswait song on the way. This is sung as the dead body makes rest at some points. This is likened to the seven resting places in heaven. The regular Fithat is the same for all but on journey Fithat differs from person to person. Sometimes, relatives complain that Fithat singers are showing partiality between the deceased.

Fithat assumes special glamour especially when a clergy member dies. This is because people mourn their clergymen in a special manner considering them as their brothers. A lot of poems are read out and this makes it particularly remarkable.

One such poem composed for a deceased clergyman says,” kahin ina doro simot newu kuratu, bequmenaw tire newu ratu”. This means that a clergyman is honored at his death only while going hungry all his lifetime. That is to say a clergymen is given special honor it his death.

**Special remarks**

1. Zimarie Mahlet is not sung in the absence of debteras, higher clergy. This is because ordinary clergy do not know this. Maybe some lower clergy may have recited and can sing in mass.
2. Meswait of Fithat cannot be conducted in the absence of a Merigeta. In the absence of the Merigeta, only some liturgical services are conducted along with the wrapping of the dead body.

All these services are conducted in line with the liturgy formalities in the belief that they are standard services conducted at special church places.

Ethiopian Church Lessons

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