

**STUDIA
INSTRUMENTORUM
MUSICAE
POPULARIS
II**

(NEW SERIES)

Edited by
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2011



MV-WISSENSCHAFT

The Six-Stringed Bowl Lyre *Krar* of Ethiopia and its Function as a Melody Instrument

In many East African musical traditions, instrumental melodies are usually not abstracted from vocal melodies, whether they accompany songs or not. For instance, among the Baganda of Uganda, the close link of instrumental and vocal music and other forms of speech is found with nearly all types of instruments.¹ Referring to the *amadinda* log xylophone found in this culture, Kubik² suggests that although this instrument is not used to accompany songs, the music played on it derives from songs that were initially composed for the *ennanga* harp and later transferred to it. In her essay, which discusses the Ugandan bowl lyre *endongo* (or *ndongo*) Gray³ explains that in spite of cross-cultural variations, lyres seem to be commonly used for song accompaniment, thus principally duplicating or imitating vocal melodies. This is the case of bowl lyres that are widely distributed in East Africa, as well. Gray⁴ argues: “.... a study of the lyre is by its nature also a study of a song tradition – in fact, of the lyric style. An understanding of the music and text is deepened by a grasp of the style of accompaniment and playing technique”. Relating to the *obokano* lyre of the Kenyan Gusii, Varum⁵ discusses its use for song and dance accompaniment, noting that the Gusii “concept of music is more of a vocal orientation than instrumental”. Just to play the *obokano* will not be considered special by the Gusii without the respected song, which a singer is expected to master as part of a large repertoire of songs, while possessing a pleasurable voice.⁶

The various ethnic communities of contemporary Ethiopia are epitomized by their diverse musical idioms, the creation of which is based on their respective linguistic and cultural peripheries. Musical practices observed in these societies have been shaped, influenced and transformed in various ways and formed over a long period of time. One may also observe the melodic dialects of traditional music instruments. Based on their cultural dialects, these communities

¹ Cooke, Peter (1970). *Ganda Xylophone Music: Another Approach*. African Music Vol. 4: 62-80.

² Kubik, Gerhard (2010). *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 284.

³ Gray, Catherine T. (1993): *The Ugandan Lyre Endongo and Its Music*. British Journal of Ethnomusicology, vol. 2: 118.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Varum, John P. (1971): *The Obokano of the Gusii: A Bowl Lyre of East Africa*. Ethnomusicology, vol. 15, no. 2. University Press Illinois: 243.

⁶ Ibid.: 244.

have invented and constructed their own musical practices which incorporate songs and dances. This includes instrumental melodies that contain distinct playing methods and techniques, along with certain modes of narration by traditional musicians. Hence, instrumental melodies, through their particular features, directly represent a culture in general, or a cultural group, sub-group or a specific region within a cultural setting, in particular. This paper will discuss such relationships through instrumental melodies played on the bowl lyre *krar*⁷ of the Amhara in north central Ethiopia and their interrelation with vocal melodies (songs). In addition, the distinct feature(s) of melodic dialects that present the cultural and linguistic heritage of the respective musician(s) will be discussed in detail.

Among the Amhara, chordophones are largely used as melody instruments, primarily accompanying solo and/or group songs. The three chordophones, widely-known in this culture are the bowl lyre *krar*, the box lyre *bägäna* and the spike fiddle *masinqo*. The *krar* and the *masinqo* are secular instruments, whereas the *bägäna* is a paraliturgical box lyre, specifically played to accompany solo praise songs for the Lord during fasting seasons.⁸

In traditional Amhara music, instrumental melodies primarily support the prevailing role of vocal music: “the meter of the music is generally governed by the structure of the syllables and poetic considerations. Musical instruments largely imitate and duplicate the vocal melody”.⁹ This also refers to melodies played on the lyre *krar*, like many other East African lyre traditions where “the human and instrumental voices sound primarily in unison”.¹⁰ Therefore, an attempt will be made to find answers to the following queries: To what extent are *krar* melodies subordinated to vocal melodies? What is the musical function of the instrumental part in a song?

Before moving to the main subject it is important to acquaint readers with general remarks on the geographic distribution of lyres in East Africa, in general and in Ethiopia, in particular.

East Africa: According to scholarly accounts, the East African region is considered as the home of the lyre. Lyres are believed to have expanded from the Middle East via North Africa and the Nile to the present territory of East

⁷ The *krar* is also intensively used in the music of the *Tigray* of northern Ethiopia, as far as among the *Tigre* in the neighboring Eritrea.

⁸ Weisser, Stéphanie (2006). *Elle étudie les timbres des cordophones*. Le rythme dans les chants de bagana. La revue Musurgia vol. XIII/2: 51-61.

⁹ Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. Ethnomusicology, vol. 21, no. 3: 393.

¹⁰ Wegner, Ulrich (2001): *Lyre*. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol. 15. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London, Macmillan: 426.

Africa throughout its long history.¹¹ Nevertheless, it is not easy today “to reconstruct all the stations the lyre took during its millennia-long journey southwards from North Africa along the Nile. At some stations, its path is indicated by iconographical evidence (rock paintings, frescoes). Nubia will also have played an important role as a mediator between the Middle East and East Africa”¹². In later periods, the expansion of Luo populations from southern Sudan seems to have played a significant role for the introduction of the lyre to northern Uganda and western Kenya. Some sources assume that southern Ethiopian populations might, as well, have contributed to lyre playing traditions in Western Kenya. This assumption is based on similarities observed in names and types of instruments in this region. Kubik’s discourse¹³, which particularly dwells with historical and contemporary migrations of musical instruments to the East African region, can be considered as supplementary evidence. In parallel with other musical instruments, he attempts to give clarification about bowl lyres used in the various cultures of the Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, and Uganda including border areas of adjacent countries. Consequently, lyres known as *nytiti*, *iritingo*, *obokano*, *pagan* (or *pan*) and *litungu* of the Kenyan Luo, Kuria, Gusii, Pokot and Abaluhya communities; the *janarr*, *kisir* and *tom* lyres of the Ingassana, Nuba and Shilluk people of the Sudan and the *ent(h)ongoli*, *endongo* (or *ndongo*), *edungu*, *adungu* and *odi* bowl lyres of the Basoga, Baganda, Samia, Acholi, Madi and Lugbara of Uganda. The number of strings extends from five to ten (commonly made of gut), whereas the instruments’ shapes and sizes vary to a large extent, as well.¹⁴

Ethiopia: In Ethiopia lyres are found in the central, southern and western parts of the country, primarily among agricultural communities such as the Dorze, Gidole, Hamar, Kaffa, Maale and Berta. These are known by the names *dita*,

¹¹ Kebede, Ashenafi (1971): *The Music of Ethiopia: Its Development and Cultural Setting*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Wesleyan University: 140; Kebede, Ashenafi (1989): *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America*. Tallahassee, An Ethius Book: 82; Wegner, Ulrich (2001): *Lyre*. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol. 15. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London, Macmillan: 423; Varnum, John P. (1971): *The Obokano of the Gusii: A Bowl Lyre of East Africa*. Ethnomusicology, vol. 15, no. 2. University Press Illinois: 243.

¹² Wegner, Ulrich (2001): *Lyre*. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol. 15. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London, Macmillan: 423.

¹³ Kubik, Gerhard (1982): *Musikgeschichte in Bildern: Ostafrika*. Leipzig, Deutscher Verlag fuer Musik: 30.

¹⁴ Makubuya, James (1999): *The Ndongo Bowl Lyre of the Baganda of Uganda: An Examination of Its Sonic Properties*. African Music, vol. 7, No. 4: 23; Wegner, Ulrich (2001): *Lyre*. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, vol. 15. Edited by Stanley Sadie. London, Macmillan: 423.

dul, *shungui*, *goala*¹⁵ and *timba*, just to mention a few. Regional and cultural differences, of course, exist in terms of shapes, sizes, materials used to make the instrument, type of strings, playing methods, tuning models, performance styles, as well as music repertoire.¹⁶ Lyres from south Ethiopia usually have amorphous and shallow resonators made of wood or clay. Figures 1a and b display a museum specimen of the lyre *dul*.



Figures 1a-b: Front and rear side of the lyre *dul* with a huge wooden bowl; intestine strings tied Collection: Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Addis Ababa University (AAU); Photos: Timkehet Teffera, Addis Ababa 1993

The sound box is covered with animal skin (goat, sheep or ox) and tightened with leather strips in criss-cross patterns on the rear of the instrument (Figure 1b). The covering leather may also be sewed around its edge with gut or wire. The strings are fixed on the crossbar in certain intervals. In order to assure tightness of the strings, a strip of cloth is wrapped around the yoke several

¹⁵ See detailed information about the *Maale* lyre *goala* in Thubauville, Sophia (2005): *Maale Material Objects in Their Social and Ritual Context*, Arbeitspapier, Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien. Mainz: Johannes Gutenberg Universität (accessible via <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de/workingpapers/AP56.pdf>): 72.

¹⁶ Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 21, No. 3: 383; Gray, Catherine T. (1993): *The Ugandan Lyre Endongo and Its Music*. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol. 2: 118.

times for each string with a knot at the end of the string. In doing so, the cloth strips serve as a layer to isolate the wooden crossbar from the string¹⁷.

On the contrary, lyres from central and northern Ethiopian regions have smaller sound resonators, mostly made of wooden or metal bowls. The bowls are covered with goat skin, whereas the tightening method and patterns may vary from place to place and from one instrument maker to the other. Nowadays, lyres are made with boxes of various shapes, resembling box-lyres rather than bowl lyres. Thus, the shapes of their resonators are square, rectangular or box-shaped.



Figure 2 (leftmost): six-stringed *krar* (only four strings are left, museum specimen) with spherical resonator; wire strings; Collection: Yared School of Music (YMS), Addis Ababa University; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, 1993; Figure 3 (middle): five-stringed *krar* with rectangular resonator; wire strings; Photo: Timkehet Teffera; Meqelle, Tigray, August 22, 2006; Figure 4 (rightmost): six-stringed *krar* quasi-rectangular resonator, guitar strings and tuning pegs made of plastic material; instrument purchased in Addis Ababa; Addis Ababa; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, February 15, 2011.

The lyres shown in Figures 2-4 are entirely made of wood. Several wooden boards are nailed or glued together to make the resonating box. There is no skin applied to cover the opening of the resonator as in the case of traditional lyres. The different shapes, sizes and materials of the resonators indicate that there is no standard norm for instrument making, a very common practice in orally transmitted musical cultures. In this regard, every instrument maker applies his creativity and skill as a result of learnt and adapted behavior. The type of pegs used to tune the strings, their arrangement and the method of their fixing are other points to be considered and observed in lyre making. Hence, in the case of the lyres illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, the wooden twigs

¹⁷ Lyres with this type of strings (also called bulge wrapping; see Wegner 2001: 424-425) are very common in numerous East African cultures (see also Kubik 1982: 104-109; Wachsmann/Trowell 1953: 400-405)

are inserted into fitting holes that are drilled in the flat body of the crossbar. Nowadays, nylon or metal strings are also used depending on their availability, which are more common in urban than rural areas. Therefore, the traditionally used gut strings are almost no longer in use in urban areas. As to metal strings, there are options of using two types, namely wire strings (Figure 5) or commercially produced guitar strings (Figure 6) that are fixed in various ways.

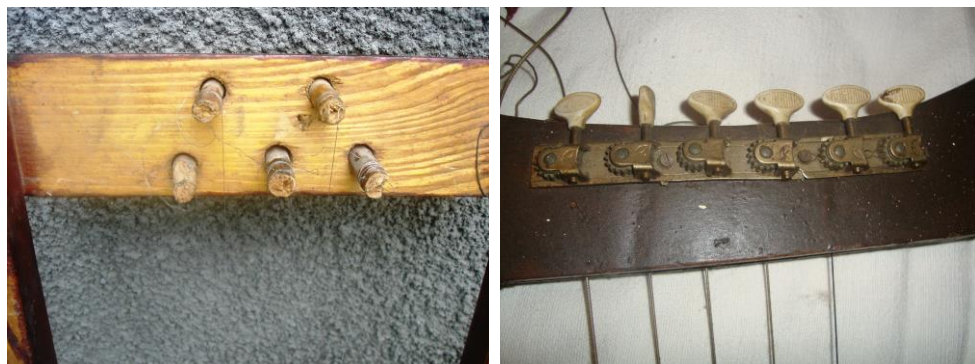


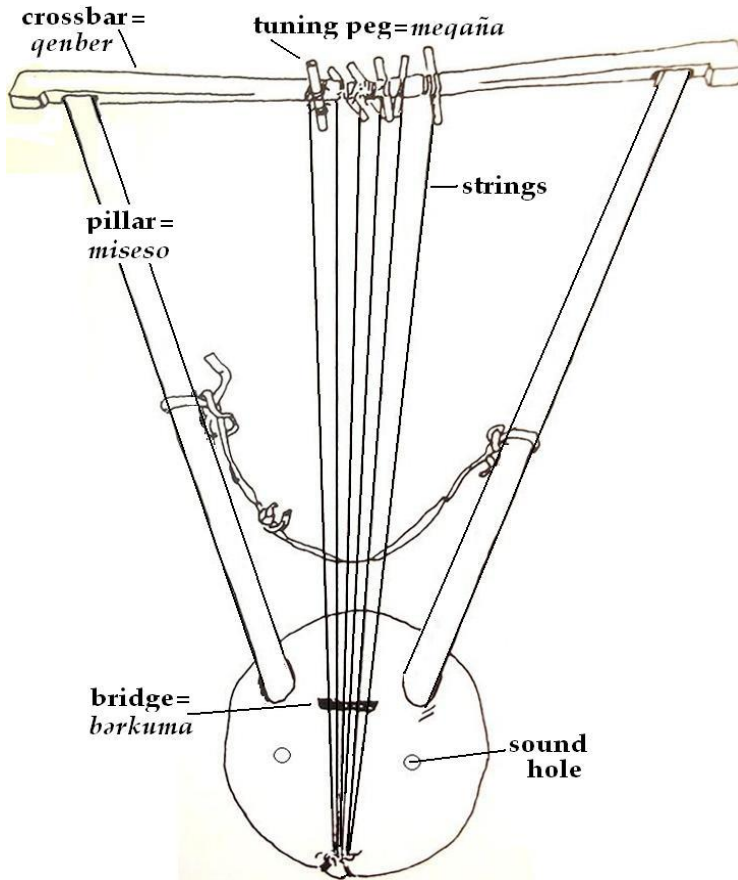
Figure 5: wooden tuning twigs attached with wire strings; Photo: Timkehet Teffera; Meqelle, Tigray, August 22, 2006; Figure 6: plastic tuning pegs attached with guitar strings; instrument purchased in Addis Ababa; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, February 15, 2011.

Physical Structure of the *Krar*

The traditional *krar* (Figure 7a) is made of a hollowed out bowl-shaped wooden or metal resonating box that is covered with goat or sheep skin and either sewed or nailed on its rear. The two wooden side posts or pillars called *misseso* run from the bottom of the sound box up to the wooden crossbar *qenber* forming a slight V-shape. The strings, traditionally made of gut, *jəmmat*, are stretched from the bottom of the resonator up to the crossbar. The five or six tuning pegs are wound around the peg levers, which, again, are set against the crossbar. They are always perpendicular to it when rotated to tighten or loosen the strings for the purpose of tuning. The wooden bridge, *bərkuma* (Figure 7b), is positioned on the stretched membrane. The strings run over the bridge, in order to lift up the strings so that they can freely vibrate when played. This method is deliberately applied in order to avoid buzzing sounds when the strings touch the membrane during vibration¹⁸. The wooden

¹⁸ There are some exceptions, though, where in some Ethiopian cultures, the buzzing sound is welcomed and/or preferred. See Kebede, Ashenafi (1971): *The Music of Ethiopia: Its Development and Cultural Setting*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Wesleyan University: 139-140. Therefore, lyres do not possess any bridges. This is also the case of a number of East

tuning pegs, known as meqaña (Figure 7c) are fixed in equal gaps on the crossbar. Each string has an individual peg.¹⁹



African lyres. An example is the eight stringed *endongo* lyre of the *Baganda*. See Makubuya, James (1999): *The Ndongo Bowl Lyre of the Baganda of Uganda: An Examination of Its Sonic Properties*. *African Music*, vol. 7, No. 4: 24. He explains that the timbre of this lyre is described as buzzing, aggressive and self-imposing. He elaborately notes the following: "The timbre characteristic of the ndongo is not just 'accidental'. The ndongo makers make a definite and calculated effort to ensure that the instrument sounds the way it does, focusing on a deliberate use of particular construction materials which provide its 'sonic properties' because of the significant role they play in the production of the ndongo sound. They are responsible not only for the generation of sound, but also for the tone quality that follows after the vibration is activated. The 'sonic properties' in question are the *lutiba* = resonator shell, the *eddiba* = sound table skin, and the *enkoba* = playing strings".

¹⁹ Kebede, Ashenafi (1971): *The Music of Ethiopia: Its Development and Cultural Setting*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Wesleyan University: 146-147.

Figure 7a: Physical structure of the *krar*.



Figure 7b: wooden bridge, *barkuma* placed in the center of the stretched membrane to lift up the strings;. Figure 7c: wooden tuning pegs, *meqaña* (strings made of nylon); Photos: Timkehet Teffera; Berlin, February 15, 2011.

Approximately more than 80% of the Amhara are farmers, the majority of which still plow with a pair of oxen. The work in the field is according to the traditional work division left to men, while women are responsible for taking care of the entire work in the household. Children on the other hand are habitually responsible to watch the family's cattle. Terms like *miseso* and *qenber* applied to denote parts of the *krar* clearly symbolize the social, cultural and economic life of the community. Confirming this realization, Kebede writes: "The...word *miseso* refers to the central post which supports the straw-covered thatched roof of a farmer's hut. The wooden crossbar... *qenber* is also the only appropriate Amharic word which refers to the yoke placed on a pair of oxen when farming the land. *Meqañas* or tuning pegs are tied on the *qenber*. It is in the agricultural localities that cattle are often butchered in the farms for the meat demands of families... women traditionally obtain the intestines of newly butchered animals; they use the large intestines to prepare a special delicacy, but gut strings are made of the small intestines...the process of making gut strings involves knowledge in cleaning, twisting, curling, scraping, stretching, twining, twisting, drying, and dyeing."²⁰

Krar* Playing Techniques: *Dərdər* and *Gərḥ

The *krar* is played by both men and women, although, originally, it was an instrument reserved for males only. Today women are also performing both traditional and popular music playing the *krar*²¹.

²⁰ Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 21, No. 3: 381.

²¹ Among famous female *krar* players the late *Merry Armide* and *Asnaketch Worku* may be mentioned, who served for decades as talented singers and instrument players, hence



Figures 8-9: Musician Asnaketch Worku, Photos: unknown date; Courtesy of Asnaketch Worku, Figure 10 (right): Dārdār style; Musician: Martha Teffera; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, Berlin, February 15, 2011.

The *krar* can be played in either a horizontal or oblique position, and the player may stand (Figure 8) or sit (Figure 9). Two playing techniques called *dārdār* (figure 10) and *gərf* (figure 11) may be distinguished²². In the *dārdār* style the strings are plucked alternately with the left hand fingers. The musician has the opportunity to ornament a *krar* melody in a sophisticated manner. Such melodic ornamentation is given a high aesthetic value in Amhara music, not only while playing instruments, but also when singing. This is one of the main criteria, in which the virtuosity of a musician can be measured. Kebede also explains that a *krar* performance in the *dārdār* style allows: “....the... musician to execute elaborately ornamented and varied melodic configurations that

inspiring their fans with their individual *krar* playing styles and their unforgettable songs, a large part of which have been released on music albums. See Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 21, No. 3: 381.

²² Pertaining to the two *krar* playing styles, I must make some remarks on the terms Kebede applied; it is my belief that they are not only misleading, but also do not make any sense as such. For the *dārdār* style, Kebede notes the term *bekignit* (with *kignit*) and for the *gərf* style he uses the term *bememcha* (= with plectrum). Both terms sound totally strange to me. I haven't heard about same even during my years of training at the Yared Music School, as well as during my researches, among others, carried out in the central Ethiopia among the *Amhara*. I also asked quite a number of traditional musicians and non-musicians if they are familiar with these two terms. However, nobody confirmed them. Even though I do not doubt the scientific works of Kebede as such, I must note that the usage of these very unusual terms in this particular case would cause some confusion to readers and/or scholars. See Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 21, No. 3: 387-389.

greatly appeal the musical sentiment of the Ethiopian”.²³ The *dərdər* style requires an intensive practical experience to master. When I was a student of the Yared School of Music in Addis Ababa, this style was given major emphasis by the traditional music teachers²⁴.

Unlike the *dərdər* style, the second playing technique, *gərf*, was not part of the core curriculum of the Yared School of Music, since it is considered as very simple to master within a short time. Hence, students were required to practice this technique during their spare time to master the lyre playing. In the *gərf* technique, a leather or plastic plectrum habitually serves to strum the strings with the right hand, while the left hand fingers take their positions behind the strings, about 5 - 8 cm below the tuning twigs, and stop one string to vibrate freely at a time while the other four fingers mute all other strings respectively.

It is the single pitches, which subsequently create the desired melody. *Krar* melodies are monophonic and not homophonic despite all strings are strummed in the *gərf* style.



Figure 11: *Gərf* style; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, Berlin, February 15, 2011.

There are just a few musicians who master both playing styles and execute one or the other technique depending on the performed song and its melodic-rhythmic construction. In many

Amhara regions, the *dərdər* style is preferred, whereas the *gərf* is rather largely used among the Təgray of northern Ethiopia as well as the Tigre people residing in the neighbouring Eritrea.

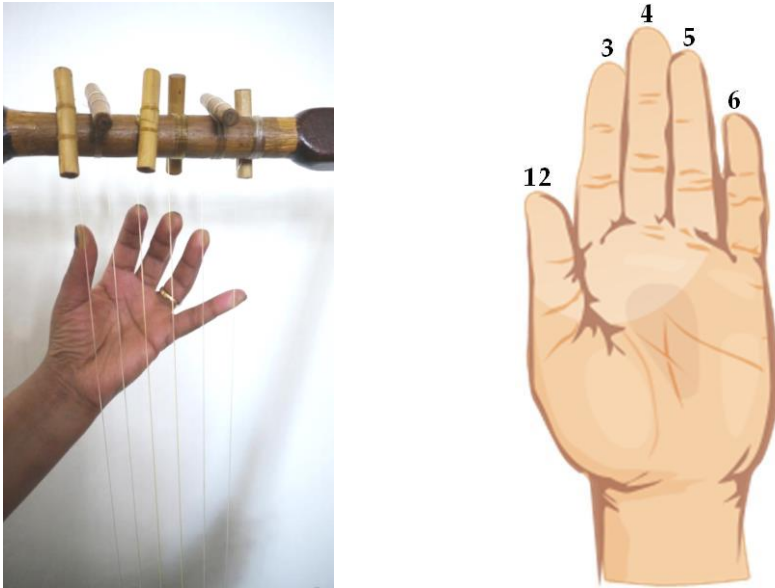
***Krar* Tuning Process and Tuning Models**

The close link of the *krar* with songs can be perceived in melody patterns or phrases which are usually played while tuning the strings. Different traditional scales called *qəñətoc* are applied in the Amhara music repertoire, where each of them is named after popular traditional songs. These are known by the names *təzəta*, *bati*, *ambassel* and *anchi hoye lene*. A *qəñət* consists of five pitches which have distinct intervallic relationships. While tuning the *krar*, the musician at first determines the departure pitch that fits his vocal range. This pitch is the fifth string of the *krar*. Following this, string number six is a duplication of fifth string, the departure pitch. Hence these two strings are

²³ Kebede, Ashenafi (1977): *The Bowl Lyre of Northeast Africa: Krar the devil's instrument*. Ethnomusicology, vol. 21, No. 3: 389.

²⁴ My music training at the Yared School of Music took place from 1978 – 1982.

tuned an octave apart, e.g. c – c' (Figures 11a-c). The departure pitch is habitually the lowest pitch of the scale. The fingers of the left hand are divided over the six strings. Hence, whereas the departure pitch is played by the ring finger (string No. 5), the thumb is reserved for strings one and two and each of the remaining four fingers play the following strings sequentially (forefinger = string three; middle finger = string four and little finger = string six).



Figures 11a-b: playing position and division of the left hand fingers among the six *krar* strings; Photo: Timkehet Teffera, Berlin, February 15, 2011.



Figure 11 c: numbers under each note refer to *krar* string numbers.

With reference to the tuning process, it is important to note that the musician does not think or imagine the qəñät pitches in their ascending or descending sequence. This feature is also observed in various studies. Pertaining to African music instruments, H.Tracey, Kubik and A.Tracey write: “African instruments are not tuned from note to note up or down the scale. It is done in a specific, but generally irregular way for each instrument. In studying a tuning, therefore, not only the pitches of each note are important, but also the order in which they are tuned and the relationship of note to note in the tuning

pattern”.²⁵ It should be mentioned that there are margins of pitch tolerance, when it comes to instrument tuning as long as we are not talking about tempered pitches in the sense of Western music.

The following example demonstrates a model I frequently apply to tune the *krar*. In this case it refers to the *təzəta qəñət*. The numbers given under the notes indicate the numbers of the *krar* strings.

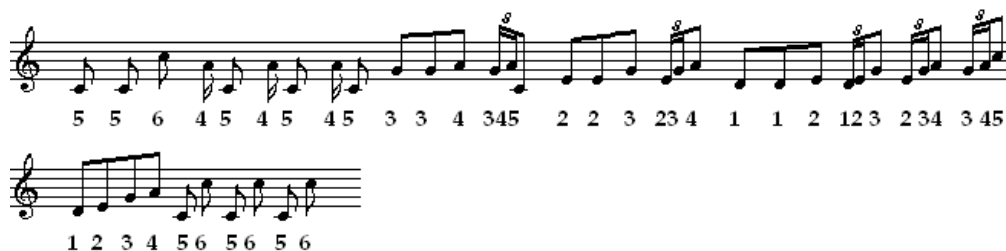


Figure 12a: An example of one *krar* tuning model in the *təzəta qəñət*

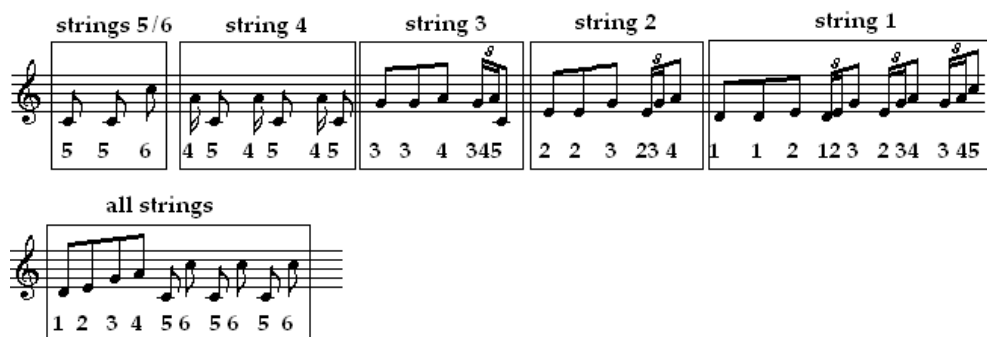


Figure 12b: An example of one *krar* tuning model in the *təzəta qəñət* showing the strings to be tuned and the adjacent strings that may be played to speed up the tuning process.

While tuning each string one after the other, the musician may play partly improvised melodic sequences, passages or fragments of a particular song on the adjacent strings (figure 12b). Applying this model will help the musician to ease the tuning process. One may also hum or sing certain passages of a song to accelerate the tuning process and consequently check and re-check the pitches and make minor corrections until the scale and its intervals meet the satisfaction of the musician.

It is very important to note, that neither fixed rules, nor uniform techniques exist to tune the *krar*. This is rather a subjective experience, based on the behavior of every *krar* player. H.Tracey, Kubik and A.Tracey confirm this point with the following statement: “Every tuner of an instrument, African or not,

²⁵ Tracey, Hugh, Gerhard Kubik und Andrew Tracey (1969): *Codification of African music and textbook project: A primer of practical suggestions for field research*. Roodeport, International Library of Music: 25.

appears to have his own inner tuning model, and it is this ideal model which he attempts to reproduce on his instrument. He may have more than one tuning model."²⁶ African musicians do not tune by comparison with a standard physical norm such as a pitch pipe or tuning fork, but rather by a psycho-physical process. This may be conscious or unconscious, but in either case gives rise to the correct pattern of intervals". Furthermore, Kubik states "... psychologically tuning is a kind of "focusing" in which the musician brings the notes he attempts on his instrument into congruence with his inner tuning model, an inner pattern of approximate pitches to which he has been trained from."²⁷

These attempts, in other words, are aimed at clarifying and affirming the importance of vocal melodies while tuning their musical instrument, in this case the lyre *krar*. The Western conception of scale (ascending and descending orders) is not applicable in the music discussed here.

Musical Function of the *Krar* Melodies in Song Performances

In the Amhara music the *krar* mainly accompanies songs as has been stated earlier. Specifically in solo performances the instrument player is, in most cases, also the singer. Amhara songs usually consist of one, two and/or more melodically and rhythmically distinct song sections (song parts). Many songs are arranged in cyclic form, thus recurring over and over again. The *krar* almost fully imitates the song melody. Breathing gaps of the singer which depend on the given song structure are substituted by the instrumental part. The melodic and rhythmic structures of instrumental introductions and interludes may duplicate certain passages of a song or they may be full reproductions of a particular song part of it like, for example, a refrain.

It is up to the musician to insert an instrumental interlude at a certain gap and determine how long to play it. Such interludes, which are very common in solo may for instance, appear between refrain and following stanza, or between strophic lines, verse lines and couplets. Instrumental interludes allow the voice part to rest and simultaneously give the musician a chance to think of the next lyric to sing. The *krar* player (who is usually also the singer) determines the duration of such interludes including the instrumental introductions, since one can take full control over the complete music performance. The virtuosity of a musician is judged by the attractive *krar* playing and singing style as well as by

²⁶ Tracey, Hugh, Gerhard Kubik und Andrew Tracey (1969): *Codification of African music and textbook project: A primer of practical suggestions for field research*. Roodeport, International Library of Music: 25.

²⁷ Kubik, Gerhard (2010). *Theory of African Music*, vol. 1. Chicago, University of Chicago Press: 263.

the melody ornamentations and instrumental improvisations he/she applies. In addition, the poetic beauty of the lyric plays a significant role in entertaining the audience, since it is the message of the song that adds flair to the musical performance, as such.

In the following is an excerpt (Figure 13) of a solo song entitled ‘*ʾəndegena*’ [Once again]. This song belongs to the *təzəta qəñət*, consisting of the pitch sequence *g’-a’-h’-d’’-e’’*. The musical performance begins with an instrumental introduction. The melody of the refrain is repeated twice, followed by the vocal part with the refrain and the stanza, consecutively. The stanza is melodically slightly different from the refrain. The refrain and stanza parts are repeated again and again, as illustrated in the transcription. It is important to note that throughout the entire song, the instrumental melody fully imitates the vocal melody. Gaps occurring in the vocal part are filled out with ending tunes of the lyre, in a manner that the instrument's accompanying sound stays all the way through the performance (audio example 19-01).

For the sake of comparison, in audio example 19-02, the same song, mentioned in audio example 19-01 is performed by the late traditional musician Ketema Mekonnen²⁸. This one will enable us to have further idea on how the instrumental introduction is executed in a much more elaborated manner than in the previous example, while the tempo is a slightly faster. The lyre playing style, along with the melody structure reveals the musician's style of performance. The major characteristics of the song, though, remain unchanged and the listener will easily recognize it. The close link of the instrumental with the vocal melody may also be perceived in the song. As the master of the *krar*, Ketema embellishes the *krar* melody, starting from the instrumental introduction which he plays in the *dərdər* style (plucking). After some phrases, the refrain melody is played twice on the *krar* only. Subsequently, the song begins with the refrain followed by the stanza parts which consist of the core message of the song with steadily changing song lines. With regard to the *krar* playing style, note must be made that while the first five strings are played with the left hand, the sixth string is plucked with the thumb of the right hand rhythmically, namely only at specific points along with the fifth string which is the departure pitch. This rare *krar* playing style is executed only by a few musicians, whereby the purpose of the octave duplications is apparently the strengthening and accentuating of this basic pitch (in both octaves). Although

²⁸ Ketema Mekonnen was one of the influential musicians of his time, who used to play the *krar* and the fiddle *masinqo*, the instruments of the *azmari* and has entertained his audiences for several decades. Ketema, like many of Ethiopia's prominent artists of his age, has left a substantial legacy of traditional songs, a large portion of which have been released and put on the local music market around the 1970s and 1980s. Quite a number of his songs have been and still today are broadcasted on the Ethiopian radio and TV programs.

this octave duplication occurs only once in a while, it gives the performance a unique flair attracting listener's attention.

 = M.M. 115

instrumental intro.



Refrain

lyre *ən--de--ge----- (e)--na mew-ded ən--de--(e)--ge--na*

voice *ən--de--ge----- (e)--na fə--qər ən--de--(e)--ge--na*

ən--de--ge--na a---yā--ge--ñā--mā--na

Stanza

ən--de--ge--na ya ye--tān--tu ze--me--n



Figure 13: Song *əndegena* 'Once again'; *Krar* player/singer: Martha Teffera; *dərdər* style; recording: Timkehet Teffera, Berlin, February 15, 2011.

Audio example 19-03 consists of the timeless tune of an astounding female musician, *krar* player and singer, Asnaketch Worku, entitled *Ende Eyerusalem* [Like Jerusalem]. In this song Asnaketch accompanies her voice by largely applying the *gərf* style with an exception of a short instrumental introduction, which she performs in the *dərdər* style. The instrumental introduction consists of short melodic fragments of various natures played in the *dərdər* style, which may roughly be understood as a demonstration of the five *qəñət* pitches. After a while, Asnaketch shifts to the *gərf* style that is, unlike the preceding free rhythmic part, played in a 6/8 time until the end. When listening to the song, one may perceive how the first eighth note of each triple group is accentuated, thus revealing the very common arrangement of the large portion of the Amhara traditional song repertoire, including the traditional shoulder dance *əskista*.

Referring to the rest of the song, the lyre, in this case, is not a duplicate of the vocal part. Unlike most of similar traditional songs, in this case, the *krar* is not played uninterruptedly throughout the music performance. On the contrary, its sound fully takes over whenever the vocal part takes a break and vice versa; i.e. the *krar* is in this case just played to supplement the vocal gaps.

In the last audio example 19-04, a 16 year-old boy plays the *krar*, without singing. Some lyre players do not sing songs, but can play any song melody on the lyre. Here the young man plays the melody of a widely-known traditional

song, entitled 'Hode Ney, Ney' [Come, my love]. Some lyre players are virtuoso musicians, while others play the instrument in traditional music groups in which they are working as active members. There they accompany other singers on the *krar* or other traditional music instruments. In the given musical example the lyre represents the melodic dialect of this well-known song through the sounds of the strings. Whether the *krar* accompanies a vocal part or not, one may easily identify or recognize the melody shortly after listening to the performance. This, of course, refers either to the culture bearers, scholars or people who are acquainted with the Amhara music.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion about the close interrelation of instrumental and vocal melodies, so far, one may encounter that vocal music takes priority over instrumental music, here examined by taking the lyre *krar*. Vocal melodies may be shaped in various ways based on the artistic and musical skill of an individual, while instrumental melodies, in their own way reveal the extent of the performer's talent, thus giving the musician a special identity. Hence, artists such as Ketema Mekonnen, Asnaketch Worku, Kassa Tessema and Mary Armide, through their unique *krar*-playing and singing skills and performances, have left indelible marks on the lyre-playing tradition in Ethiopia. Inspired by these veteran traditional musicians, some of the younger generation is stepping into the scene of *krar*-playing and singing. Martha Teffera, a great admirer of Asnakech Worku, is one of them, playing the *krar* and singing in her own way. Regardless of the lyre playing technique the musician applies to accompany a song, the vocal melody largely shines through in the instrumental part.

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