

Eritrean arts are as diverse as the number of dialects spoken in various parts of the country. Arts in Eritrea are not a new phenomenon developed with the coming of colonizers, but it has a long and concrete history. Up to now even though there are not many, there are some traditional artistic works discovered by different archeologists. Many places are yet to be exposed to this archeological research, but by the time this research is done; certainly it will reveal a number of artistic products.

As the different archeological researchers have indicated that, there are rock paintings in various parts of the country which show animal hunting. The first inhabitants of this region as it is believed were Nilots and Hamities; they made different kinds of artworks, which reflect their own socio-economic structure. The Semites also returned to their continent of origin bringing their own developed culture and art, among the works produced by the people were the Metera and artifacts found in the port of Adulis and Kohaito which were famous trade centers at this region on their time. When it comes to the field of painting, with the coming of Christianity a kind of painting: size less and depthless, with a very large eyes and using very bright colors, began to influence by Byzantine art, which mainly focused on the expansion of religious themes, this kind of painting is mainly found in the walls of monasteries, churches and in traditional religious books. With the coming of Islam from Arabia, different styles of paintings were introduced with geometrical structures complex patterns and the representation of vegetation. It was mainly restricted in the spread of the religion.

With the coming of colonization, the colonizers made numerous efforts to maintain their own values, among these were political oppression, social as well as economic pressure, so as a whole arts was also affected by this suppression. With the coming of Italian colonialism a new type of painting was introduced, realistic art (Realism). Even though there were a number of art works at that time, they were mainly reflecting only the best objectives of Italian culture, in order to dominate the culture and to erase the identity of people.

What may be referred to as “classical literature” in Eritrea is mostly Geez, the ancient Eritrean and Abyssinian language in origin dating back beyond the Axumite period. The major themes of these works were theology, philosophy, law and history. Some examples of these works are Metshafe Birhan (Book of Light), Fitha Negest (Legislation of Kings), Kibre Negest (Glory of Kings). Christian Eritrea and Abyssinian literacy suffered a setback as the result of two historical factors. The first was Gagn’s invasion. During this period many Churches and monasteries were destroyed by Gagn army and some important manuscripts were perished. Secondly foreign expeditions and travelers took many valuable items from monasteries, libraries, as evidence observing the many different manuscripts and documents in many European museums and libraries. During colonialism Eritrean literature showed a good indication of development, especially after 1940s with the beginning of newspapers.

Like many elements of Eritrean culture, indigenous music and musical instruments show a rich mix of both African and near eastern influence. Yet, as the result of relatively a long period of

isolation from the rest of the world, Eritrean music had developed a distinctive character to its own; full of patriotic sentiments and heroism. The secular music always of folk origin, flourished side by side with the devotional music of church. Church music traces its beginning to St. Yared, a musical genius that lived in the sixth century. He was not only composer of numerous songs and hymns of his own, but invented also special type of musical notation for the guidance of singers and dancers. Secular music has a rich heritage, depending on the setting, the melody of folk songs and dances. Various songs (derfi ) sung at weddings, religious festivals, group works and so forth-deal with the daily life of the people. For example, Mase and Awlo, which serve to praise, people to express the bravery of warriors? Liqso and measho which express sorrow are compositions, which are performed at funeral ceremonies.

With the coming of the Italians, modern secular music began to display elements of both traditional folk songs and western musical styles. Although traditional folk songs are often sung with one or two minstrels using traditional instruments-such as Wata (single string fiddle), Kirar, Shambiko (flute) and Kebero (drum), modern songs, which were introduced by the Italians performed by bands, equipped with a mix of traditional and western music instruments. To challenge these cultural infiltrations an association was formed by the name Mahber Teater Dekebat (Native Theatrical Association). It was formed during the British occupation, in 1944 in Asmara by sixteen people who were fed up by the infiltration of colonial culture and its works of art. The association also fought against colonial cultural domination especially through its musical band, which was called native association for musical and theatrical works.

They aimed at to strengthen the Eritrean culture, because at that time there was a strong Sudanese influence on the indigenous music. Sudanese songs were even performed at the Eritrean wedding ceremonies. As a continuation of this other associations such as Mahber Teater Asmara (AsmaraTheatrical Association), an association for national music and theatrical works, Zeray Deres Band and others were also established. For instance, the Asmara Theatrical Association was founded in August 1961, a cultural association composed of singers, composers, poets and others. Later, Asmara TheatricalAssociation served as a vanguard to aware the use on the situation of our country and motivating the youth to join the armed struggle for independence. It also used to provide the population to speak out their minds against the hardship and suffering it used to go through at the hands of colonizers through dramas, songs and other means of art works. Although every single work of art had to go through a tough censorship the artists were managing to deliver camouflaging the political messages in intricate of traditional ballads. In the cultural arena both the new and veteran nationalists were unified in their desire to combat Ethiopian hegemony. "Shigei Habuni" a popular song by Atewebrhan Segid in the mid of 1960's was a good example of the creative nationalism reasoning with the population. Give me my torchHow long can you deceive me? What have I done? That you deny my torch? There were a number of such songs, which called for the people to rise up for national independence and to aggregate the national feeling of the population directly or indirectly. Asmara Theatrical Association also included traditional folk songs, which appealed to the older generation. An excellent example a new ballad entitled "Aslamay Kistanay" (Moslems and Christians) which called upon on the Eritrean Moslems and Christians to unite and not to

give attention to the plots which were invented by the outsiders. It echoed the importance of unity between the two religious groups and reiterates the danger of outside intervention. Moslems and Christians Lowlanders and Highlanders To the enemies' counsel Don't give it value Don't listen it, or you may find yourself (Being sold) in the market. Social cohesion plays an important role in nation-building, it referred to those factors that had an impact on the ability of the society to be united for the attainment of a common goal, and could be measured by the extent to which members of a society responded collectively in pursuit of shared goals, and how they dealt with the political, socioeconomic, environmental and other challenges they faced. So as a conclusion the works of Asmara Theatrical Association can be seen as a preliminary foundation for the creation of social cohesion on the Eritrean people and as the cultural and national linkage of art between the older generation and the contemporary youth nationalist movement.