

Educator Guide

FEATURED WORK OF ART



HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource includes factual information, cultural context, glossary of terms, as well as prompts and discussion questions related to the *Gondarine Sensul*, 36.10. This resource is recommended for Elementary School audiences and ELAR subjects. Students will learn about the historical and religious context of this object to be able to interpret the story being told with this object. These suggestions were informed by the Maryland State Department of Education 2024 standards.

[St. George Slaying the Dragon](#)

Detail from *Gondarine Sensul* (see image below)

Unidentified artist

Ethiopia (Gondär), late 17th century

Ink and paint on parchment, with upper and lower board
undecorated hide stitched to ends of parchment strip

Museum purchase with funds provided
by the W. Alton Jones Foundation Acquisition Fund, 1996, acc.



BACKGROUND CONTEXT

Facts About the Work of Art

- This Ethiopian **sensul**, or “chained” manuscript, was made in the 17th century in the city of **Gondär** in the northern part of Ethiopia where the imperial court was based at that time.
- The **manuscript** is made of folded **parchment**. Two hide boards were placed on either end to create a booklet.
- The owner of this pocket-sized manuscript would have used it while practicing their religion.
- The book shows images telling the story of the Virgin Mary, as well as a scene from the story of Saint George slaying a dragon.
- The book can be used like an **icon** for prayer and devotion.

Cultural Context

- Beginning in the early 17th century, the city of **Gondär** became the political and cultural center of Ethiopia for two centuries. Gondär was the capital of Ethiopia from 1636 to 1855.
- There is a long tradition of bookbinding in Ethiopia. This manuscript is made of a single strip of paper without any stitching because it is folded. For stitched manuscripts in Ethiopia, many were made using a special sewing technique called chain stitch. This technique is still used today in Ethiopia as well as around the world.
- Large, heavily **illuminated** books could have taken a team of bookmakers up to 10 years or more to create.
- Many bookbinding tools are ancient, such as the **bone folder**, and are still in use today.

GLOSSARY

Bone Folder: A tool traditionally made from animal bone used to fold and crease parchment and paper.

Gondär: The capital of Ethiopia from 1636 to 1855.

Icon: A religious artwork that portrays religious themes and acts as a visual aid for worship.

Illumination: Illustrations and decorations added to manuscripts.

Manuscript: A book that is written by hand (rather than printed).

Parchment: A material made from animal skin that is used as a surface for writing.

Sensul: A type of Ethiopian manuscript that is made from a single piece of folded parchment, or multiple pieces of parchment sewn together, resulting in an accordion-style appearance.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The Bookmaker: An Ancient Craft in Ethiopia \(video\)](#)

[National Geographic Mapmaker](#)

[The Walters Ex Libris: Gondärine Sensul \(digitized manuscript\)](#)

[Exploring Sensuls: An Indigenous Manuscript Tradition in Ethiopia](#)

PROMPTS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Describe what you notice in this work (above).
2. This is a type of Ethiopian book called a sensul. It is made from one long piece of folded parchment. What is going on in the images in this book? How are the images similar? How are they different? Explain how you think they are related.



3. Look closely at this page (left) from the book. Identify 3 different things you see.
4. Describe what you think is going on in this image.
5. Imagine this image is a scene in a movie. Identify who the main character is. What can we tell about the character from looking at this artwork?
6. This image is from the middle of the sensul. Imagine this image takes place in the middle of a movie. Describe what you think happened right before and after this scene.