

Aneta Pawłowska

Selected motifs of Ethiopian iconography

Series Byzantina 7, 83-92

2009

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Selected Motifs of Ethiopian Iconography

Aneta Pawłowska, Łódź

Ethiopian cultural consciousness and its art is shaped to a large extent by a number of factors. First of all is the African origin of “the people who live on the Horn of Africa, which no matter how different and diverse these people are, they are united by the links felt by them as a community of common interests and tradition and which is described and felt by the explorers from outside world. It is this community of similar appearance of the people – who are beautiful, slender, with almond shaped eyes”¹. The second strong force uniting them is their Christian religion in the eastern, orthodox, Monophysitic mode². Until 1974 the church had a predominant influence on the social, political and cultural life of the whole country. It is also very important to mention the long tradition of the State of Ethiopia as an independent country, as well as the fight in its defense.

The distinction of the Abyssinian Highland culture from that of the other states of the sub-Saharan region is testified by the long existence of writing, and the well-developed art of painting, whereas for the most other parts of Africa, sculpture remained the predominant technique. Although the ancient state of Aksum, today's Ethiopia unlike Egypt and Maghreb states, was never part of the Roman empire, it did receive the strong cultural influence of the Mediterranean region. These cultural contacts soon brought about the acceptance of the Christian faith, which at first resulted in the development of the Aksum state and later Ethiopia emerged from among the surrounding bordering cultures: Arabic and Black African. During the late antique period Ethiopia received not only a set of religious beliefs but also a Christian cultural package, including sacred texts, literary gems, the calendar of the Mediterranean world, and the use of specific visual images to symbolize theological truths.

¹ *Róg Afryki*, ed. J. Mantel-Niećko, M. Ząbek, Warszawa 1999, p. 11.

² K. P. Błażewicz, ‘Ethiopian Monasticism’, *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne*, 12 (1999), no. 2, pp. 31–44.

In spite of her isolation on the African continent, the state of Ethiopia still kept vivid contacts over the ages with the Byzantium, Armenia, Portugal and India. The African origin of her citizens, as well as those close cultural contacts left a durable and lasting mark on the art of Ethiopia. Though Christianity came to Ethiopia in the early fourth century, there are virtually no existing Ethiopian paintings prior to the thirteenth century. The Ethiopians translated the Bible into the country's classical (and ecclesiastical language) Ge'ez, and copied the illustrations from the religious manuscripts they encountered. Some of this copying was done in Jerusalem, where the Ethiopian community in the early fourteenth century had a scriptorium for the production of manuscripts, but most would have been carried out in the country itself. The development of Christian painting reflects the various forms of contact —pilgrimages to Jerusalem, missionary work, trade—between Ethiopia and the worlds of Christianity, East and West, of Islam and the Far East³.

Ethiopian painters primarily copied the iconography of their models, which included illustrations in Greek, Coptic and Arabic manuscripts, icons, pictures by Western European painters, and prints, but they always reduced the representation to its essence. The Ethiopian artists, when copying foreign models, invariably transformed them. By emphasising the features which they felt were important, and by omitting details that appeared to them irrelevant, they “Ethiopianised” such works almost out of all recognition. Sometimes artists combined elements of different models in one painting or transformed a scriptural subject in terms of the indigenous oral tradition, and they always translated the models into their own local style. Other features of these works are that all saints are depicted in light colours and that the figures and themes are explained by captions.

The earliest Ethiopian paintings, are dated from Medieval Times, unfortunately no paintings have survived from the Aksumite period (c. first to tenth centuries AD)⁴. Among the better-preserved examples of the earliest painting are manuscript illustrations, especially Gospel Books from the late thirteenth and fourteenth century, influenced by the illustrations in Greek Gospels. Another important source of inspiration at that time was contemporary or even earlier Byzantine painting, mediated by the Christian art of Coptic Egypt, Nubia, Syria, Palestine, Mesopotamia and Armenia⁵.

The manuscripts of the fourteenth century usually begin with canon tables, which end with the *Fountain of Life*. Each Gospel opens with a portrait of an Evangelist, either seated or standing, and there are illustrations, varying in number, with the scenes of the Life of Jesus Christ. One of the most highly recognisable of fourteenth century Gospel Books from

³ O. A. Jäger, L. 'Deininger-Englhart, 'Some Notes on Illuminations of Manuscripts in Ethiopia', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, 17 (1961), pp. 45–57.

⁴ First known illuminated Ethiopian manuscript *The Gospel* abby Gerimy (10th/11th century with boards of canons very close to Armenian works from end of 10th century). The existence this manuscript signals among others, D. H. Buxton, *The Abyssinians*, London 1970, p. 137.

⁵ E. Balicka-Witakowska, *La Crucifixion sans Crucifix dans l'art éthiopen*, Warszawa-Wiesbaden 1997, pp. 5–19.

French Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris is limited to three illustrations of symbolic character, apart from the canon tables and portraits of the Evangelists. In the *Crucifixion* depicted in an architectural scenery painting, the bare cross (Golgotha Cross) stands at the centre as a symbol of Christ's victory over death. This depiction is based on the Palestinian predecessors, but the Ethiopian rendering also diverges from the Palestinian models: the Christ medallion at the point of intersection is replaced by the *Sacrificial Lamb* (John 1:29) in the tympanum. The sun and moon as ancient symbols of power, placed above god-like rulers, are a legacy of the Early Christian iconography (Fig. 1).

Typical stylistic features of book and wall painting were: frontal, hieratic representation of figures, which seem flat and without volume and are often reduced to geometrical forms, and a monochrome background. Pictures, were in some instances charmingly geometrical, boldly disregarded the laws of visual proportion. An even more characteristic aspect of Ethiopian stylisation, then and later, was that Biblical personalities, and especially the good ones, had to be depicted in full face, with two eyes visible, while the evil ones were generally depicted in profile, with one eye visible only. This was, it should be emphasised, by no means, however, a hard and fast rule, for there were often many exceptions. Paintings also lacked any shading, let alone perspective.

The basic colours in manuscript illumination are predominantly red, green, blue and yellow ; with gold only exceptionally. Pigments as well as ink were in many cases made from local stone, earth, plants, and especially flowers. The use of imported paints nevertheless in due course became increasingly common in the more important settlements.

From the time of the Muslim Arab invasions and their capture and rule over the Arabian Peninsula and Northern Africa in the seventh century AD, the Christians in Ethiopia began to live in full isolation. In the twelfth century Emperor Lalibela⁶ of the Zagub dynasty withdrew to the Lasta Mountains, where around Lake Tigra he constructed monumental

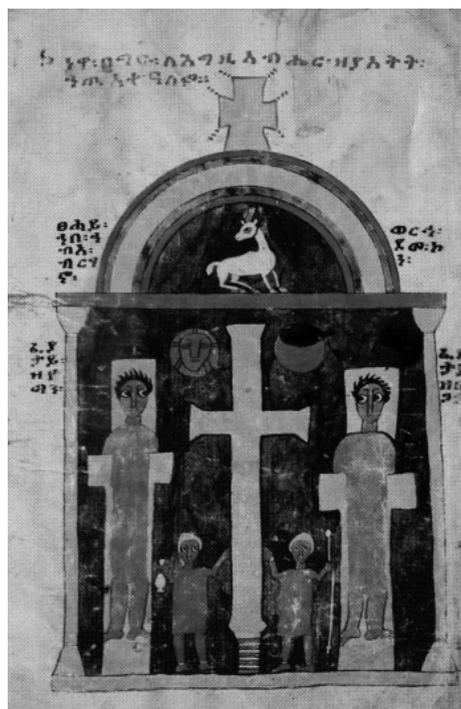


Fig. 1. Crucifixion, Gospel's Book, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, parchment, fourteenth century

⁶ Lalibela, reigned from 1167 until 1207.

monasteries which were virtually carved out of the rocks⁷. Even today they remain one of the most frequently visited and most popular places in Ethiopia. The fifteenth century, especially during the rule of Zar'a Yā'eqob (reg. 1434–68), and the beginning of the sixteenth century, under the rule of Lebna Dengal (reg. 1508–40), were periods of strong central power and flourishing art. This period is known as “the golden era of Ethiopian Middle Ages”⁸.

Jules Leroy, one of the first scholars to study Ethiopian art from the artistic point of view, was struck by a great improvement in standards of taste and a high level of accomplishment in technique. If the earlier works, according to him, were “lacking in the qualities that made up a genuine work of art”⁹, those of the fifteenth and early sixteenth century showed a refined concept of aesthetics.

Iconography and style in painting were enriched by new influences, which were absorbed and adapted differently by different scriptoria. The changes were a result of increasing contacts between Ethiopia and Western Europe in the fifteenth century¹⁰. There is documentary evidence of the work of three European painters: the Venetians Nicolo Brancalone (Brancalone; in Ethiopia from 1480 to 1520) and Gregorio Bicini, and the Portuguese Lazaro di Andrade Andrade (in Ethiopia from 1520), all of whom had arrived with European artisans at the ruler's court¹¹. Some of Brancalone's works in monasteries and churches in Gojam have been identified through signatures, which is a complete novelty for Ethiopian art.

The influence of West European painters is evident in the replacement of frontal by *en trois quarts* views, in a pronounced corporeality in the figures and in attempts to render light and shade and to give more volume to folds in clothing¹². More significant, however, are iconographic innovations that can be traced back to European painters and foreign models. The subject of the Trinity, popular in Ethiopia in the form of three identical seated men, was probably first depicted there by European painters at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Another type of devotional image was influenced by a Flemish painting of the sixteenth century, *Ecce Homo* (John 19:5), which shows the figure of Christ crowned with thorns and giv-

⁷ Cf. G. Gerster, *Churches in Rock: Early Christian Art*, London 1970.

⁸ A. Bartnicki, J. Mantel-Niećko, *Historia Etiopii*, Wrocław 1987, pp. 103–104.

⁹ J. Leroy, *Ethiopian Painting*, London, 1964, p. 22.

¹⁰ The Portuguese military collaboration with the Christian Ethiopians served their own strategic interests in their regional rivalry with the Ottoman Turks for control of the trade routes in the Red Sea and the north-western sector of the Indian Ocean. The Portuguese rulers, together with the Pope in Rome and the head of the Company of Jesus, had the additional intention of establishing a mission in Ethiopia to encourage the population to switch from their Orthodox faith to Catholicism – an intention that made sense in the light of the Counter-Reformation concerns in Southern Europe. In 1626, the Catholic Patriarch Afonso Mendes imposed a number of changes on the ancestral religious practices of the Ethiopians. Social unrest and civil war followed and Susneyos was forced to resign. His son Fasiladas, who succeeded him, rejected Catholicism upon his accession to the throne and, in 1633, expelled or killed all Jesuit missionaries. Bartnicki, Mantel-Niećko, *op. cit.*, pp. 98–103, 132.

¹¹ M. E. Heldman, ‘Creating Religious Art: The Status of Artisans on Highland Christian Ethiopia’, *Aethiopia*, 1 (1998), p. 131–147.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 138–142.

ing a blessing; it may have been brought into the country or painted in Ethiopia by a European (di Andrade). This painting was called *Kwer'ete re'esu* ("The striking of his head" is a paraphrase of Matthew 27:30 and Mark 15:19) and was much venerated; it was taken on military campaigns and adopted by Gondarine kings as their imperial Palladium¹³. Ethiopian artists used it as a model, and replicas were repeatedly copied with variations, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries¹⁴ (Fig. 2).

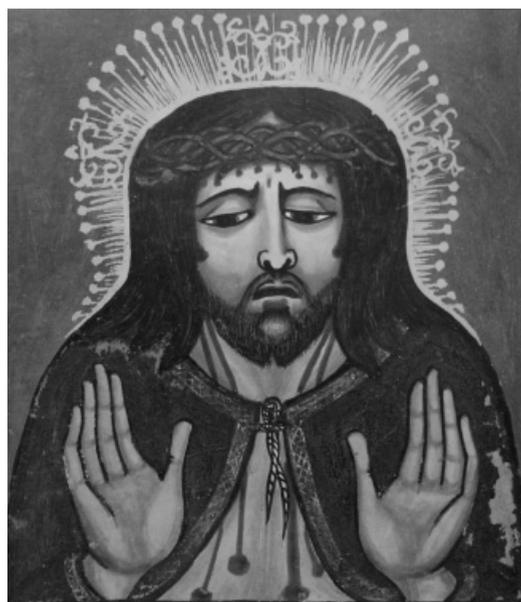


Fig. 2. Christ Crowned with Thorns, „Homiliary in honour of the Archangel Michael”, parchment, after 1730, Gondar (?), Church of the Trinity in Azbi

The iconography of the Virgin, much revered as *Theotokos* (Mother of God), was also enriched by new variants in the fifteenth century. Most representations from the fourteenth century were based on variations of the principal Virgin type, known as *Hodegetria* (The Guiding One), in which the Child may sit on the left or the right arm of the enthroned Virgin¹⁵. Most examples, of all dates, show two flanking angels, whose presence is intended to emphasize the royal dignity of the Mother of God. By the early fourteenth century a Greek influence was detectable in allusions to the type of the Virgin known as *Eleousa* (Merciful). Works based on Italian Renaissance painting include those in which the Virgin is shown crowned or holding a flower in her hand, and the Child is naked or playing with a tame bird. The type of the *Virgin Breast Feeding the Infant Child* seems to have been adopted only in the mid-fifteenth century, as a result of Western influences¹⁶. The main reason for the radical change of the type of Madonna in later centuries was probably the introduction by the Jesuit missionaries of the so-called “Virgin of St. Luc” at the beginning of the seventeenth

¹³ *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, eds. R. Grierson, M. E. Heldman, New Haven, 1993, p. 284, cat. no. 111.

¹⁴ See further: S. Chojnacki, ‘Flemish Painting and its Ethiopian copy’, *Äthiopistische Forschungen*, 26 (1988), pp. 51-73 and S. Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models and their Adaptations from the 13th to the 19th Century*, Wiesbaden 1983, pp. 385-398.

¹⁵ S. Chojnacki, ‘Notes on a Lesser-known Marian Iconography in 13th and 14th century Ethiopian Painting’, *Aethiopica*, 5 (2002), pp. 42-66.

¹⁶ See further: M. E. Heldman, ‘Frē Seyon: A Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Painter’, *African Arts*, 31, (1998), nr. 4, pp. 48-55, 90, [special issue: *Authorship in African Art*, Part 1].

century¹⁷. This became so popular that it has monopolised practically all representations of the Holy Virgin in Ethiopian art, and possibly contributed to the monotony of her iconography in the last two centuries of its development.

All these influences are particularly noticeable in panel painting, newly established in Ethiopia in the fifteenth century and probably received from the West.

The Virgin was depicted especially often, on single panels, diptychs and triptychs, after the institutionalizing of the Marian cult by Emperor Zar´a Yā´eqob¹⁸. The painted panel is known in all Oriental Churches as an icon, a devotional image, before which prayers are offered to the saints it depicts. The icons are also a subject of the veneration for believers¹⁹. Icons have a liturgical function, during the offices, the Eucharistic liturgy as well as during festival procession. Indeed, in Ethiopia, devotion to Mary had always played a significant role. King Zar´a Yā´eqob insisted on the presence of a portrait of Mary during Mass, and supported a system of courtly art patronage which led to the production of an increasingly large number of Marian icons, some of which were done in tempera on gesso wood panels by the talented monk Frē Seyon. The path to the modern recovery of the identity of this fifteenth century Ethiopian painter and the reconstruction of his oeuvre begins with his signature placed within an inscription painted upon a very large panel painting in the church of Saint Stephen at the monastery of Dāgā Estifānos at Lake Tānā. The note provides a securely dated period for the panel painting²⁰, as well as the identity of the painter, which is exceptional. Ethiopian painters, like artists elsewhere in Christendom in at that time, worked essentially in the service of God, and for the most part would have felt it presumptuous to sign their paintings. Only a few painters, such as Frē Seyon or Nicolo Brancalone²¹ did, however, record their identity on their pictures.

The scriptoria around Lake Tānā seem to have assimilated not only Greek and Western but also Armenian and possibly Indian-Islamic and even Japanese influences, but due to the thematic limitation of the conference, I will not investigate this subject here.

Two further stylistic traditions, which can be distinguished in Tigray and Eritrea, were connected with two religious orders active there and which developed during the second half of the fifteenth century. The Gunda Gundé style took its name from the site of the most important find, the monastery of Debre Gerzen in Gunda Gundé (Tigray), a monastery of the Estifānos (Estifanos; Stephanite) community. This rather heterogeneous style, documented

¹⁷ According to U. M. de Villard, 'La Madonna di S. Maria Maggiore e l'illustrazione dei Miracoli di Maria in Abissinia', *Annali Laterabensi*, 11 (1947), pp. 9-90; the Santa Maria Maggiore image, was introduced by the Jesuits in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. Cf: <http://pwp.netcabo.pt/patrimonio.sgl/sitebuild/art.htm>.

¹⁸ Heldman, 'Frē Seyon: A Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Painter'..., pp. 52-53.

¹⁹ See further: Ch. Chaillot, 'Veneration of Icons in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church', *Orbis Aethiopicus*, 10 (2007), pp. 254-263.

²⁰ Though the period of the abbacy of Yeshaq of Dāgā is unknown, Zar´a Yā´eqob reigned from 1434 to 1468. Cf. Heldman, 'Frē Seyon: A Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Painter'..., pp. 50-51.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

primarily in manuscript illustrations, developed before the fifteenth century and continued until the middle of sixteenth century. Among its characteristics are round faces with high foreheads and elongated eyes, possibly derived from Islamic or Armenian influences, and a wealth of geometric ornament (triangles, zigzags) covering the garments of the saints. The second style is linked to the Ewostatewos (Ēwostātēwos) Order, of which the most important centre was the monastery of Dabra Māryām in Kohayen in Eritrea, where the Psalter made for the local governor Belin Segged, was probably produced in 1476-7 (today in French Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris as MS d'Abbadie 105). The 33 miniatures show mounted saints and the two biblical kings *David and Solomon*, as well as scenes of the *Passion* and depictions of the *Virgin, Apostles* and *Evangelists*. The biblical kings are dressed like the contemporary rulers, and their status symbols (headdress, ear pegs) are shown in elaborate detail. In *David Playing the Harp*, the harp is in the form of an Ethiopian *begenā* (*baganā*). The kings are followed by a court official with the sunshade reserved for kings, and a fly-whisk, also a sign of rank. Many religious paintings reflect the hierarchical social structure in iconography and style, the size of the figures depending on their importance and rank, not on the rules of perspective. Some of the models for this Psalter were probably of Byzantine, possibly Syrio-Palestinian origin; others seem to have been popular western European prints. The three-quarter view and indications of movement are characteristic of this time. However, the figures are two-dimensional, and the drapery folds are decorative rather than naturalistic²².

Other important subjects which developed in panel paintings on wood in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century were, the aforementioned *Crucifixion*, the *Twelve Apostles* and the saints. The saints, who are numerous and venerated with fervor in Ethiopia, are form a kind of link between the Christian-Oriental superstructure and the animistic-Cushitic foundation. At the same time, their vitae are full of archetypal elements which are to be found all over the world and have been recounted again and again since time immemorial. General motifs are mixed with typically African ones. Most notably were knight-saints often depicted as mounted saints, such as Tewodros (Theodore) and Merkorewos (Mercury), and St George who is the symbolic representation of Good defeating Evil²³. From the second half of the sixteenth century onwards, the symbolic representation of the *Resurrection* also appeared, specifically the *Descent into Limbo*.

²² M. E. Heldman, 'An Ewostathian Style and the Gunda Gunde Style in Fifteenth-century Ethiopian Manuscript Illumination', *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art*, London 1986, pp. 5-14, 135-139.

²³ From the seventeenth century onwards, Tekle Haymanot, along with the ascetic saint Gebre Menfes Keddus, enjoyed growing popularity assuming in the eighteenth century a new iconographic form, which continues to endure. Tekle Haymanot is depicted with three pairs of wings and standing on one leg, the other leg, so legend tells, having withered through his rigid stance at prayer, and Gebre Menfes Keddus appears in the desert, surrounded by lions and leopards. Abba Samuel of Waldeba, for example, a hermit from the time of Emperor Dawit (1380-1412) is generally shown riding on a lion. Betre Maryam commands a leopard not to attack anyone and to go away. See: E. Hein, B. Kleidt, *Ethiopia - Christian Africa: Art, Churches and Culture*, Ratingen 1999, pp. 51-54.

The most prominent scholar of Polish origin, Stanislaw Chojnacki, proposed the term First Shoan Period (by analogy with the accepted period, namely the Gondarine) for this era in art ²⁴. The cultural flowering of this period came to an end in 1527–1543, when Christian Ethiopia was devastated by the Muslim Imam of Harar, Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Gazi (1506–1543), called by the Ethiopians Grāñ (the Left-handed), and many churches, monasteries and manuscripts were destroyed.

Ethiopian painting evolved significantly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. From the seventeenth century a homogenous style gradually evolved and, during the second half of the century, took the form of First Gondarian Style. These witnessed the foundation and growth of the city of Gondar, which became the capital of the realm in 1636, during the reign of Emperor Fasiladas. The activity of the Gondarian artists would perhaps have remained limited as regards the reproduction of iconographic characteristics according to Eastern Christianity, if not for the external influences which, over time, brought various changes.

At the beginning of eighteenth century a new style determined an evolution in the figurative style of Gondarian painters. Artists attempted to achieve three-dimensionality by light-and-shade effects and by folds of drapery, although they stopped short of striving for an illusion of space, and the saints were dressed exactly like the nobility in brocade and velvet garments. The background was no longer monochrome but painted in tones of yellow, red and green. Second Gondarian art tended moreover to have richer, deeper and more sombre colours with the enrichment of tones, of a more naturalistic quality than were earlier in use, and employed a more extensive variety of shades. Increasingly, schematically drawn churches and buildings, recalling the castles of Gondar, characterized the locality of an event, and elements of a landscape suggested Lake Tānā and its islands. Trees were represented only if they had symbolic meaning or served to articulate space; no true landscape painting emerged. One may also distinguish the Eastern tradition from as far away as the Indian Ocean, Moghul's India—especially in the refined quality of the decoration of clothes and accessories or in the shading of the face which is painted synthetically²⁵.

Personalities depicted on icon, miniatures and murals included not only saints, the Virgin Mary and Christ but also the donors of paintings; who were often shown in a prostrate, and subordinate, position at the foot of the work or standing below the figure of a saint with their arms crossed before the breast. These traditional gestures of submission and modesty echoed those performed in front of rulers. Initially, most donors were themselves rulers such as the fearsome Queen Mentewwāb²⁶ in the church of Nārgā Sellase (eighteenth

²⁴ S. Chojnacki, 'Notes on Art in Ethiopia the fifteenth and Early sixteenth Century', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 8 (1970), pp. 21–22.

²⁵ Cf. S. Chojnacki, 'New Aspects of India's Influence on the Art and culture of Ethiopia', *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici. Nuova serie*, 2 (2003), pp. 5–21.

²⁶ Empress Mentewwāb was one of the country's most renowned female rulers, who served as Regent first for her son, and later for her grandson.

century)²⁷ or Emperors Iyāsu I. Later they were also nobles and clerics. The most important motifs on the doors are the armed archangels (Michael and Gabriel, or Raphael and Uriel), the sanctuary guardians. The winged heads of angels, a popular motif of the Second Gondarian style, were inspired by Italian Baroque painting.

Paintings in Gondarian times tended to be both “Ethiopianised”, and secularized. We thus see representations of typical Ethiopian clothing, hair-styles, and crowns; horse and mule decorations; spears, shields and other weapons (including seventeenth century muskets anachronistically carried by the Pharaoh’s soldiers seen drowning frantically in the Red Sea!); drinking, cooking and other similar vessels. Agriculture is depicted with typical zebu cattle, and with oxen pulling the typical Ethiopian plough. All this, it should be emphasised, is invaluable for the economic and social historian no less than the art historian, as it gives us invaluable glimpses into Ethiopian life of the past. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries scenes from the lives of saints were common; new themes included the illustration of the martyrdom of St George. Legends and other themes, such as the *Flight into Egypt*, had been given actuality by the inclusion of genre elements as early as the seventeenth century; this tendency grew more pronounced from the eighteenth century, with the result that the paintings acquired a narrative aspect²⁸.

While the First Gondarian style retained the linearity of earlier stylistic traditions, particularly in Tigray, the Second Gondarian style showed features of an ostentatiously ceremonial court style. Although it shows an obvious orientalisising of taste — which is underlined by the preciousness of dyed fabric, shown in all its exquisiteness without any consideration for a realistic rendering of the folds — the whole still belongs to the Ethiopian tradition of race depiction, with its typically still, huge eyes, bull-like neck and bushy head of hair, traits of the local population.

From the nineteenth century onwards, religious themes were supplemented by historical details, such as portraits of rulers, battle scenes, hunts and banquets. At the beginning of the twentieth century painters, especially from Gondar and Gojam, were paintings for churches, they started to produce large canvases for sale to foreigners. Many features of these popular paintings are derived from traditional scriptoria techniques. From the 1920s, traditional paintings began to be produced in serial runs in commercial studios and also, from 1931, at the newly founded Empress Menen Handicraft School in Addis Ababa²⁹ (Fig. 3).

²⁷ M. Di Salvo, O. Raineri, S. Chojnacki, *Churches of Ethiopia: The Monastery of Narga Sellase*, Skira 1999.

²⁸ Cf. R. Pankhurst, ‘Secular Themes in Ethiopian Ecclesiastical Manuscripts: A Catalogue of Illustrations of Historical and Ethnographic Interest in the British Library’, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, 22 (1989), pp. 31–64 and *Anthology of African art: the twentieth century*, eds. N. Fall, J. L. Pivin, New York-Paris, pp. 74–75.

²⁹ For more about Modern Ethiopian Art: S. Chojnacki, ‘A Survey of Modern Ethiopian Art’, *Kulturaustausch*, (1973), pp. 84–94 [special edition devoted to Ethiopia]; E. Biasio, *The Hidden Reality: Three Contemporary Ethiopian Artists, Zerihitn Yetmgeta, Girmay Plhvet, W’orku Goshu*, Zurich 1989; T. Tadesse, *Short Biographies of Some Ethiopian Artists, 1869–1957*, Addis Ababa 1991.



Fig. 3. Priests' School, Araya Dawit (1893–1972), 103 x 72 cm, Fine Arts School, Addis Ababa

The themes and forms of religious paintings in Ethiopia have been handed down from one generation of clerical painters to another; the masters passing over to their students the themes and forms in strict accordance to local tradition. This accounts for the remarkable continuity that has been maintained for many centuries, yet not without an element of flexibility. The timeless practice of copying, coupled with the simultaneous process of adaptation is integral to past artistic endeavor in Ethiopia. As a result, a strong stylistic transformation of external models, has become a characteristic feature of the creative expression of Ethiopia's artists throughout its history.