In memory of our colleagues

Fatuma Ibrahim Muhammed
Girma Kidane
Taye Tadesse
Seyoum Wolde
Gold in one's hand is like copper.
FOREWORD

The Twelfth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, held in East Lansing, Michigan, in September 1994, was enlivened by a skillfully designed exhibition, "Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity," concurrently showing at Michigan State University Museum. The exhibition celebrated the achievements of a number of Ethiopian creative artists and artisans and revealed Ethiopia's rich and varied cultural heritage. For the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa), which gave the logistical support for the collection of the objects and for the supporting research, the exhibition represented a gratifying outcome of its commitment to the promotion of the country's cultural heritage. This book is a product of the research conducted for the exhibition and further enhances our appreciation for these traditions.

In retrospect, the mid-1990s appear to have been significant years for the growth of American awareness of Ethiopia's artistic traditions. Two major exhibitions have brought home to the American public the high achievements and the richness of Ethiopian art, classical as well as modern. "African Zion," an exhibition organized by Intercultura and the Walters Art Gallery (Baltimore), which toured the United States from October 1993 to January 1996, introduced to the American audience the icons, crosses, and manuscript illuminations that have traditionally been regarded as the highest expressions of Ethiopian art. Viewed at a number of venues on the East Coast and in the South and the Midwest, it attracted record crowds.

"Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity," which opened in the summer of 1994, has shown the other side of Ethiopian art, the one that has traditionally been less celebrated and yet has been equally demonstrative.
of the Ethiopian creative genius. The two exhibitions should be viewed as complementary rather than antithetical, for they tell two sides of the same story. As Raymond Silverman has argued convincingly in the introduction to this volume, the exhibition and this book challenge the artificial dichotomy that is conventionally made between art and handicraft. By going behind the objects themselves and documenting the artist’s creative experience, the contributors to this volume give substance to this assertion.

This volume and the exhibition of which it is a product are also welcome contributions to the rectification of the northern bias that has so often handicapped Ethiopian studies. For quite some time, historical and linguistic studies have concentrated on the classical Ethiopian polities of northern Ethiopia. It is only in recent decades that historians and linguists, assisted by anthropologists, have begun to uncover the cultural wealth of the southern polities. Through the critical use of oral evidence, students of history have succeeded in reconstructing the history of the southern peoples, in some instances managing to push back the frontiers of historical knowledge many centuries. Likewise, the linguistic kaleidoscope and ethnological wealth of southern Ethiopia have been engaging the attention of many renowned scholars in recent decades. Ethio-Talassa of Creativity marks a fitting artistic cap to these scholarly endeavors.

In essence, the spiritually oriented classical art of southern Ethiopia and the materially grounded "crafts" of southern Ethiopia are not without some points in common. An inherent functionality permeates both. The icons were painted and the crosses carved not merely to satisfy the artist’s creative urge but to venerate saints. And they were in constant use in the churches. The idea of displaying them in an exhibition as disembodied pieces of art would have been considered anathema until recently. Likewise, the pots and baskets that are among the objects highlighted in a number of the essays and in the Michigan State University exhibition serve a supremely functional purpose. Yet, in both instances, we speak of art because their creators have given the best of what they have to produce them. And just as there are crude baskets, there are also rough and unattractive crosses. The beauty of Dorze or Garage houses is almost as spellbinding as that of the celebrated northern edifices. This phenomenon of "art in craft" is not confined to Ethiopia. The creations of a Florentine glassblower would certainly vie in beauty and artistic excellence with many works of art.

Another common feature of both categories is the anonymity of their creators. Ethiopian icons have been distinguished by their anonymity. Of the exquisite paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that have attracted the attention of art historians, only one is definitely known to have been executed by the great master Fre S’eyon. Many others have often been attributed to him, perhaps unjustly, merely by the similarity of style. For the equally great works of the Gonderine period (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), we do not have even one name. The same situation pertains to the crosses. The art objects portrayed in this volume generally are of an even more anonymous nature by virtue of their communal character. It is a tribute to this collection of essays that it has managed to go beyond this collective facade and uncover the individual artist at work.

This people-oriented (as opposed to object-oriented) casting of both the exhibition and this volume represents a healthy innovation. At the same time, one can hope that the kind of recognition thus afforded individual artists will help ease the stigma that has often been associated in Ethiopian society with quite a few of the craft traditions discussed in the essays that follow. And herein lies one of the crucial differences between classical Ethiopian art and the so-called crafts. Whereas painters of icons occupied an elevated position in Ethiopian society, craftsmen were generally looked down upon, some even being relegated to a kind of caste status. This was particularly true of tanners and potters. Biasto’s essay on the artist Zerihun Yeumeta, who enjoys considerable prestige as one of Ethiopia’s leading contemporary artists, and the inclusion of his work in the Michigan State University exhibition are in this sense symbolically significant. His presence serves to smooth over the traditional distinction between “low art” and “high art.”

The essays in this volume cover a lot of ground in terms of both regional representation and the selection of media of artistic expression. Nevertheless, they do not pretend to have covered all the ground. Nor do they claim to have told the full story of the evolution of these artistic traditions. That, as indicated in the introduction, remains a chal-
lenge for the future. It is a challenge that can best be met by historians, anthropologists, and art historians combining their resources and methods. It is a challenge that has been met admirably in the realm of political and economic history by The Sudan Mantes of Ethiopia, edited by Donald Donham and Wendy James. *Ethiopian Traditions of Creativity* is an encouraging step in the direction of producing a companion to that volume in the realm of art and social history.

Bahru Zewde, Director
Institute of Ethiopian Studies
Addis Ababa University

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This groundbreaking collection of essays is the culmination of a project begun in 1989 when Harold Marcus, professor of Ethiopian history at Michigan State University (MSU), learned that MSU would be hosting the Twelfth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies in the fall of 1994. He asked me to organize an art exhibition for the conference. Prior to this project, my research had focused on West African art and I knew little about Ethiopia. Overseeing the evolution of *Ethiopian Traditions of Creativity* (both the exhibition and this book) was a tremendous learning experience. It took me on several trips to Ethiopia and through some of the world’s great cultural-history museums. I had the opportunity to work with hundreds of people in Ethiopia, Europe, and the United States; I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge their contributions and thank them for their assistance.

The project began as a collaboration between Michigan State University Museum and the Fowler Museum of Cultural History at the University of California, Los Angeles. The advice offered by my colleagues at the Fowler Museum, especially Doran Ross, Betsy Quick, and David Mayo, proved invaluable during the early stages of exhibition planning. We also involved a number of scholars as consultants during the planning process: Donald Levine, Stanislaw Chojańcki, Richard Pankhurst, Paul Henze, Grover Hudson, Marilyn Heldman, John Hinnant, Girma Kidane, Elke Haberland, Kay Shelemay, Acharneh Debela, Brigitte Benzing, Marsha MacDowell, Kurt Dewhurst, Diane N'Diaye, Chris Prousy Rosefeld, and Neal Sobania. Later on, I also sought the advice of Jacques Mercier, Hermann Amborn, and Serge Tornay. I thank all of these scholars for their valuable insights into Ethiopian history, culture, and art.
thetic tradition and for their assistance in helping us develop the con-
ceptual framework for “Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity.”
A critical stage of the project included a survey of Ethiopian collec-
tions maintained in North American and European museums. Many
thanks to the curators who assisted during my visits to these museums:
Peabody Essex Museum (Salem, Massachusetts), Peabody Museum (Har-
vard University), American Museum of Natural History (New York),
University Museum (Philadelphia), National Museum of Natural His-
tory (Washington), Oregon State University, Natural History Museum
(Stillwater), Meiji Museum of International Folk Art (San Diego),
Fowler Museum of Cultural History (University of California, Los An-
geles), University of Oregon Natural History Museum (Eugene), Portland
Art Museum (Portland, Oregon), Field Museum of Natural History
(Chicago), Frobenius Institute (Frankfurt), Museum für Volkerkunde
(Frankfurt), Museum für Volkerkunde (Munich), Volkerkundemuseum
der Universität Zürich, Museo Pignorini (Rome), Instituto Italo-Africano
(Rome), Musée de l’Homme (Paris), University Museum (Manchester),
Pit Rivers Museum (Oxford), Museum of Mankind (London), Powell-
Cotton Museum (Birlingham, Kent).
Both the exhibition and the book have benefited greatly from a link-
age established in 1991 between Michigan State University Museum and
the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Museum at Addis Ababa Uni-
versity. Support from the International Partnership among Museums pro-
gram of the American Association of Museums (AAM) allowed Girma
Kidane, then Head of the IES Museum, and me to spend time at one
another’s institutions. This provided a firm foundation on which to pur-
sue the research for the book and exhibition. I thank Marili Wood and
Helen Wechsler of the AAM for helping coordinate this important pro-
gram. The IES played a vital role in the project, for it served as the base
for our research in Ethiopia. I express my thanks to the Institute’s di-
cricts, Bahru Zevede and Tadesse Bekele, for their support of the project.
I appreciated working with the curatorial staff of the IES Museum, namely,
Alemay Zekarias and Taye Tadesse, as well as the museum conservator,
Kenasa Marksos. Also important was the support of Leulie Selassie Tamano,
Ethiopia’s Minister of Culture and Sports Affairs, and Kassaye Begashaw,
Head of the Center for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage.

The core of the project was research conducted in Ethiopia from April
through June 1993. The fruits of this research are presented in this vol-
ume. Special thanks are extended to the scholars who led the research
teams and authored these essays: Jon Abbink, Ahmed Zekarias, Marco
Bassi, Elisabeth Biasio, Girma Fisseha, Abla Parkhurst, Worku Nida, Neal
Sobania, Tohur Berhan Selassie, Mary Ann Zelinsky-Cartledge, and
Daniel Cartledge. I also would like to thank Owen Moore of the Fowler
Museum, who assisted us on a number of our research trips.
We obtained valuable assistance from residents of the communities
in which we worked, in particular, Faruma Ibrahim Muhammed, Werg-
nesh Welamo, Father Emmanuel Fritsch, Gezahgn Amelaweyhu, Moges
Lezisa, and Amara Muhammed Ibrahim. A number of people in Addis
Ababa also helped us at various stages of the project: Dell Hood, Isaac
Rusell, Marc Baas, Mathewos Tesfay, Charles Schaefer, Margaret Chand-
ler, Belalwa Haile, and Works and Barbara Goshu. Special gratitude is
extended to Berhanu Wolde-Abnak, who generously provided assistance
on numerous occasions, and to Degafa Bana Bruf, who served as our
primary research assistant and interpreter in Ethiopia.
It goes without saying that there would be no exhibition or book if
it were not for the artists with whom we worked in Ethiopia. A special
note of gratitude is reserved for them. I thank them for their time,
patience, and the knowledge they generously shared with us (the
names of the artists featured in this volume are highlighted in italics):
Amina Ismail Sherif, Munira Ahmed Adish, Samiya Ahmed Adish, Amat-
ula Muhammed Ibrahim, Elma Bura, Jilo Hola, Jilo Dido, Dicka Hukka,
Bogie Shal, Gelis Fershe, Ito Inadley, Anu Aron, Malako Arba, Kalka Arba,
Tade Hama, Wagete Wedebo, Elizabeth Anejyo, Kumpe Shubano, Tumbe
Gare, Mannye Tana, Gebre Wolde Tadik, Nesqiye Andiyu, Abebech Tor-
cha, Tene Tafa, Bekele Belay, Sorri Tafa, Gashugn Gebr Hoyme, Abh Sahil
Qungis Jemjem Hadu, Marcos Jimbor, Zebhtu Yemgatta, Qo Alemu Eidin, Qe Legesse
Mengistu, Haile Alemseged, Berhane Mesqal Fisseha, Amba Gebr Med-
hin, and Belai Tedla.
Many people at MSU played key roles in the evolution of “Ethiopia:
Traditions of Creativity.” First, I would like to thank a number of grad-
uate students who served as research and curatorial assistants at vari-
ous stages of the project, namely, Andrea Boor, Teresa Gofoth-Piselli.
Tibebe Eshete, Shiferaw Assefa, Chris Plescher, Earnestine Jenkins, Rae Welch, Heran Sereke Briaan, Sabine Baratta, and Gerna Rubenstein. Two of my colleagues at Michigan State University Museum, Juan Alvarez and Kris Morrison, were instrumental in planning the exhibition and its ancillary programs. Thanks also to Grover Hudson for accepting the challenge of editing the book’s glossary. A special note of gratitude is reserved for Kurt Dewhurst, the Director of MSU Museum, who offered both administrative and intellectual support for the project. I am especially grateful for his assistance in publishing this volume.

Two other people deserve special thanks. John Eadie, Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at MSU, was keenly interested in this project from its inception and his support is greatly appreciated. My colleague and friend Neal Sohnia, of Hope College, played a vital role in our project, serving as a consultant and assisting in the direction of the research teams in Ethiopia in 1993. I extend deep-felt thanks to him as well as the administrators at Hope College, who supported his participation in our project.

None of this would have been possible if not for the financial support of a number of individuals and institutions. I would like to thank them for their generous contributions: the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University; and at Michigan State University, the Office of the Provost, Office of the Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies, Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, Office of the Vice Provost for Computing and Technology, Consortium for Intermural Institutional Collaboration in African and Latin American Studies (CICALS), Office of the Dean of International Studies, Office of the Dean of the College of Social Sciences, and the Center for Integrative Studies in Arts and Humanities.

The production of this book was no mean task. It took a considerable amount of specialized talent and effort. Grover Hudson, our local specialist in Ethiopian languages here at MSU, bravely took on the challenge of attempting to standardize the transliteration of the eight different languages spoken by the artists who are the subject of this volume. He did an excellent job of editing the book’s glossary. Kim Kauffman produced the elegant studio photographs for the book. The folks at the University of Washington Press played a key role in bringing this project to fruition. I especially wish to thank Naomi Pascal, Associate Director and Editor-in-Chief of the Press, who oversaw the production of the book, and Pamela Bruton, who did a superb job of copyediting the text.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my appreciation for the experiences shared with four Ethiopian colleagues who sadly have passed away recently: Fatuma Ibrahim Muhammed, Girma Kidane, Taye Tadesse, and Seyoum Wolde. This volume is dedicated to their memories.

Raymond A. Silverman
A Note on Orthography

This collection of essays utilizes terms from at least eight languages spoken in Ethiopia. A number of transliteration systems have been used by various scholars who have written on the cultures of Ethiopia, and no single standard for transliterating these languages currently exists. For the sake of clarity and ease of reading we have chosen to render the names of people and places and other terms without the use of diacritical marks. The only exception is the apostrophe, which is used to represent a glottal stop. We have attempted to transliterate Ethiopian terms so that the reader may pronounce them as accurately as possible; however, one should keep in mind that there are sounds in all of these languages that do not occur in English and that are difficult to reproduce using Latin script. Readers interested in a more accurate rendering of these terms may refer to the glossary found at the end of the book, which offers transliterations using the International Phonetic Alphabet.

Personal names have presented the greatest challenge because many Ethiopians have chosen to spell their own names in print or in everyday use in Latin script in ways that do not conform to a single transliteration system—for example, Tadese, Tadesse, and Tadesse; or Marcos, Marqos, and Markos. Where an individual has already used a preferred spelling, we have continued its use. Similarly, place names present a challenge because they have not been transliterated with any consistency. In most cases we have employed the most widely accepted spelling of such names.

Among many of Ethiopia’s peoples, individuals have two names. The first is the given name, and the second is the name of the person’s father.

Throughout the book, when referring to specific Ethiopians, the first name is used, not out of familiarity but because this is how people are addressed in Ethiopia. Similarly, the bibliography is organized using this same convention; Ethiopian authors are listed alphabetically using their first names.
ETHIOPIA

Traditions of Creativity
Introduction

Traditions of Creativity

Raymond A. Silverman

Most people tend to take for granted those things with which they are most familiar. The popular Ethiopian proverb “Gold in one’s hand is like copper” admonishes us not to forget that there can be great beauty and value in the experiences of everyday life. Taking this aphorism to heart, this volume offers a celebration of traditions of creativity found in various parts of Ethiopia. These traditions are generally taken for granted and in the eyes of the rest of the world are generally ignored as too mundane to warrant much attention. Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity focuses on the work and lives of a number of individuals who create objects—pottery, jewelry, paintings, baskery, woodwork, gourd containers, sorghum stalk models, and textiles—that are central to the physical and spiritual well-being of the communities in which they live.

Ethiopia is one of the world’s great crossroads where the peoples and cultures of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean have been meeting for thousands of years. One encounters a magnificent mosaic of culture, an ethnic and cultural diversity that has given rise to many unique and dynamic visual traditions. Yet, most books that have been written about Ethiopian art and material culture deal only with the paintings associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It is a magnificent tradition stretching back to the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia in the fourth century—a tradition that still requires much more attention than it has received. But this is just one of countless creative traditions that one encounters in Ethiopia—traditions that are virtually unknown to the rest of the world. One of the principal goals of this volume is to introduce some of these traditions and perhaps contribute to a better
understanding and appreciation of their cultural significance. In a
country with a population of sixty million people who are associated
with thirty different ethnic groups and speak seventy different languages,
there are virtually thousands of material traditions. Here we offer a
glimpse of the richness and diversity of a few of them.

Another goal concerns developing a sense of who makes the won-
derful objects that we associate with Ethiopia’s material cultures. All too
often the people who make the objects that are displayed in our muse-
ums are ignored and usually forgotten. Thousands of beautiful objects
made by Ethiopians are found in museum and private collections around
the world. Yet, with few exceptions, the identity of their creators is
unknown. These objects are not signed, but this does not mean they must
be anonymous. The makers are unknown because the people who origi-
nally collected the objects were uninterested in recording the names of
the people who made them. Regrettably, the anonymity associated with
the creative process now is erroneously perceived as a characteristic of
most Ethiopian, as well as other African, societies.

The essays in this volume confront this issue. Each author has
approached his or her analysis from a perspective that has been little
used in studies of Ethiopian material culture and art: living artists are
at the center of each essay. The authors attempt to offset the anonymity
stereotype by focusing on the creator of objects as an individual. This
is achieved primarily through biography and placing the individual in
the context of the community in which she or he lives and works.

This book is the product of research undertaken in Ethiopia during
the spring of 1993 for an exhibition organized by Michigan State Uni-
versity Museum. A number of small research teams, led by experts in
various aspects of Ethiopian culture, documented the life and work of
artists and artisans from different parts of Ethiopia who work in a range
of media. The researchers are affiliated with different academic disci-
plines, including history, anthropology, sociology, and art history. One
is an artist—a weaver. And they come from different countries—
Ethiopia, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Great Britain,
and the United States. In addition, each researcher was interested in learn-
ing specific things about the individuals with whom he or she worked;
each asked different kinds of questions. As a result, the essays included

in this volume offer a fascinating mix of insights gleaned from engag-
ing both object makers and the communities in which they live from
a variety of perspectives.

Though the essays deal with individuals from different parts of
Ethiopia, representing a number of cultures and working in a range of
media, they share a number of common themes. These include (1) the
challenge of interpreting other cultures, (2) occupational specialization,
(3) the social status of artists and artisans, (4) how people acquire their
special knowledge and skills, (5) creativity in Ethiopian culture, (6)
the sharing or borrowing of material traditions, and finally (7) the prob-
lem of dealing with the ideas of tradition and change.

The Challenge of Understanding Other Cultures
One of the major issues that emerges from these essays concerns the
preconceptions that we bring to our interpretations of other cultures.
Here we are especially interested in how we deal with material culture,
in particular, the values and attitudes that influence the ways in which
we isolate art from artifact and differentiate artists from artisans.

A distinction is often made between the work of artists and artisans.
Indeed, we received a good deal of criticism for not differentiating
between the two and presenting the products of both artists and art-
sans in the same context in our exhibition. The three painters featured
in the exhibition were viewed by these critics as artists, but the others—
basket makers, silversmiths, potter, model maker, and woodcarvers—as
artisans. We often heard questions like “How can you call this guy [Tol-
era] who makes the sorghum-stalk models and the lady [Tatiga] who
makes these potsticks?” Some interesting value judgments were being
expressed.

The concept of “art” is a recent introduction to Ethiopia even though
objects of exceptional aesthetic quality have been produced in all
Ethiopian societies for a long time. The reason that “art” has appeared
in Ethiopia only recently is because prior to the present century there
were no traditions that isolated specific things to serve primarily as objects
of aesthetic contemplation. This is a concept tied to a Western set of
ideas and values. In this system art is associated with notions of cre-
vative, uniqueness, and intellect. It is an exclusive category—only certain

Introduction
objects are worthy of being deemed art. For instance, there are specific accepted media or idioms for artistic expression, in particular, painting and sculpture. Exceptions certainly exist, but, by and large, if the object is not a painting or a piece of sculpture, then it cannot be art. Other labels are used for aesthetic objects that do not meet these basic criteria: "craft," "handicraft," "artifact," and so on. These terms, in fact, are used by some of the contributors to this volume.

This is admittedly a simplification of a complex set of ideas, but it does underscore that we are grappling with a value system that is heavily grounded in a specifically Western cultural setting. What happens when one is considering societies that do not produce paintings or sculpture? Do we assume they have no art? Do we assume that aesthetic expression and creativity do not exist in these societies? This is generally how the West has viewed much of Africa. Entire regions of Africa (specifically, the southern and eastern parts of the continent) are seen as having little, if any, art and, until recently, have been virtually ignored in books and exhibitions dealing with African art. The same holds true for Ethiopia.

With the exception of contemporary academic art and a figurative-sculpture tradition associated with the Konso people of southern Ethiopia, the only formally recognized art that exists in the country are the paintings associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. All other modes of aesthetic expression are regarded as handicraft.

There is nothing wrong with categorizing objects. The problem concerns the values associated with the categories. Limiting our definition of art and being interested only in people who have art (according to this definition) prevent us from appreciating and understanding modes of creativity that fall outside these narrowly defined parameters. This is not a new problem; scholars of African art have been grappling with this for some time. In Ethiopia the wealth of beautiful objects used in daily life requires confronting this problem. The need for a more comprehensive, a more inclusive category of art provided a major impetus for developing the specific framework for this book and the exhibition.

All of the essays in this volume deal with producing works of art of one sort or another—that is, production that involves aesthetic decisions being made by both the maker and the consumer of the object. But many of the traditions would not be classified as art by most modern-day observers, nor would the people who participate in these traditions be considered artists. Abbink’s work with Bogine and Gelta offers the most obvious example. Abbink observes that among the Me’en there are no artists; in fact, with the exception of blacksmiths, there are no individuals specializing in the production of specific types of objects. All men, as part of growing up in Me’en society, learn to work with various natural resources, like wood and gourd, to fabricate the things that they and their families need to survive. Abbink also notes that there are a number of criteria used in evaluating an object, such as its functionality (i.e., its ability to fulfill the utilitarian purpose for which it was created) and its history. This, however, does not mean that Bogine and Gelta do not make aesthetic choices while fabricating their wood and gourd containers, nor does it mean that the people who make and use such containers do not appreciate their aesthetic qualities. Though all men make wood and gourd containers, Abbink points out that some may be perceived as being particularly good at doing so. This type of community assessment can be associated with almost all the object makers appearing in this volume. Indeed, selecting artists based upon community consensus served as a basic strategy supporting our research for the exhibition and this book. Though the researchers were familiar with the communities in which they worked, in most cases they did not know a specific artist with whom they wanted to work. The first stage of research involved going into a community and talking to people about who they felt was the best potter, basket maker, jeweler, etc.

Though aesthetic decision making is not always a conscious act, it is something that all people do. Most people, however, have difficulty talking about the aesthetic choices that they make. How many times have we heard the expression "I can’t tell you why I like it, I just know what I like." Whether performed consciously or intuitively, we all engage in a selective process involving attending to the nonutilitarian, formal qualities of an object.

One of the arenas in which these processes can be easily observed is a marketplace. Anyone sitting in a market anywhere in Ethiopia can observe women selling and buying pottery. Most customers pick up a pottery container, turn it over and over in their hands, tap it with their knuckles, look at it, and then set it down, only to pick up another and

Introduction
repeat the process until they find a pot they wish to purchase. The rapping determines whether the pot is cracked, but the buyer also looks closely at each pot’s proportions, surface decoration, and finish—aesthetic decisions are being made.

Another challenge confronting anyone who attempts to understand another culture concerns seeking an emic, or inside, perspective—attempting to understand a tradition on its own terms. A shortcoming of much of the scholarship that deals with Ethiopian material tradition is that it does not employ this critical approach. Most scholars have chosen not to engage the people who produce and use the objects they study. Earlier, the observation was made that there are thousands of Ethiopian artifacts sitting in museums and private collections around the world. With few exceptions, these objects are mute; we know almost nothing about them because they were collected with little, if any, documentation. The only way one can even begin to grasp the functional and symbolic significance of an object is by experiencing the culture from which it emerged and by talking to the people who made and used it. Once again, the need for this kind of approach provided the impetus to develop an exhibition and book devoted to investigating both the artist and the products of his or her creativity.

I had many experiences while conducting research in Ethiopia that attest to the value of this approach. Here is a single example. Prior to working with artists and artisans in Ethiopia, I spent a good deal of time studying Ethiopian artifacts maintained in museums in Europe and the United States. I became quite familiar with the woodwork produced in the Gurage region of west-central Ethiopia. The wood objects I examined in museums included headdresses and a variety of domestic utensils, and all had a deep brown patina. Those that carried an ethnic attribution were labeled “Gurage.” I found these quite beautiful. When I began working in Ethiopia I saw similar objects in the souvenir shops of Addis Ababa. I also saw, in walking around the capital, especially in the Mercato (the large city market), similar objects that were crisply carved using a light-colored wood and painted with bright colors, usually pink and magenta. I assumed they were objects made for the tourist market. I found them a bit garish, not as refined as the authentic “Gurage” wood objects I had seen in the museums. In May 1993, I accompanied Pankhurst and Works to the Gurage region, where they were working with Menjiye, a woodcarver and member of a special (caste) group known as the Fuga, and we visited the market at Afar. There in the market were hundreds of wood objects carved by the Fuga that were painted the same colors as the “tourist” pieces I had seen in Addis Ababa. I thought, “How strange—this market is far off the tourist circuit. Why would all these tourist pieces be for sale in a rural Gurage market?” Then the obvious occurred to me: these were not tourist pieces at all. This is what Gurage woodwork looks like when it is new.

Over the next few days, I visited a number of Gurage homes and observed Menjiye carving and painting combs and pottery stands, and my “revelation” was confirmed. I learned that the brown patina comes from use. Indeed, when we showed Menjiye some of the darkly patinated woodwork that we had been collecting, he remarked, “The black ones are old, while mine are new. It is not because of the nature of the wood but a question of age.” All woodwork is hung on the interior walls of the Gurage house, cooking is done inside a house, and the house fills with smoke at least twice a day. Over a short period of time the porous wood absorbs the soot and oils from the cooking fire and develops a brown patina. My preconception, reinforced by my own aesthetic preferences, was thus overturned. I also learned that most of the wood objects used in Gurage homes are in fact made by the Fuga, and therefore the “Gurage” attribution that is usually given to the woodwork of this area needs to be modified to recognize the ethnic identity of the objects’ creators, the Fuga. This information simply could not have been acquired without engaging the culture and people that produce the object. Why the woodwork looks the way it does and who actually makes these objects represent just two dimensions of a larger phenomenon, which we may refer to as “the life of the object.”

We are used to looking at objects that are maintained in museums and that have been preserved in a particular state; their forms remain static, unchanging. The objects that most of the artists featured in this book produce are things that are meant to be used. In the process of being used, an object’s form or appearance changes. These wood utensils are just a single example. A number of the essays in this book include references to other traditions where this occurs. The fine baskets that
Amina weaves are destined for display on the walls of Harari homes. When new, a basket’s colors are bright and vibrant, but over time the colors fade and become muted. The surfaces of the gourd containers that Gelita produces darken over time and acquire a deep orange-brown patina. Elena’s woven milk containers develop a smooth, dark surface on the inside, as well as a distinctive odor (the combination of smoke and milk), as a result of use. The appearance of Tania’s pots continues to change after they leave her hands. She pointed out that the specific seasoning technique used by the owner of a pot changes the color and often the pattern on a pot’s surface. So it is with virtually all objects. But it is not only the physical form of an object that changes as a result of use; its symbolic value can also change over time. Often there is nothing inherent in the object that reveals its symbolic import. Abbing points out that the only way this information is acquired is by talking to the people who own and use the object. He refers to a stool that he collected that was regarded as a particularly “good” piece because it had been owned by Banja, the “rain-chief” of the southern Me’en, a very important figure in the area.9

An interesting variation on this theme involves the production of traditional painting. Some artists, like Adamu and Jemhore, who learned to paint within the setting of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, produce paintings for both churches and secular markets (e.g., museums and tourist shops). The notion of “authenticity” is another preconception that has impeded attempts to understand Ethiopian material culture.10 Often things that are not regarded as authentic are ignored by those who seek an understanding of Ethiopian culture. The fact is, anything and everything that is made and/or used by a people is part of their culture and is therefore authentic. The essays that deal with the artists whose products are sought by foreigners touch upon this problem, which stems from attitudes about culture change, especially change associated with the assimilation and transformation of Western ideas and objects—an important subject that I will address a bit later.

Specialization: Who Makes These Things?
Throughout Ethiopia the creative process is limited to specific groups; few traditions are practiced by everyone. The two most significant factors relating to specialization are gender and ethnicity. In most societies a clear distinction exists between the activities of women and men. In fact, one’s social identity is often based, in part, on the things that one produces. For instance, weaving baskets is a critical part of being a woman in Borana and Harari society. The importance of basket making in the life of a woman in Harer may perhaps best be characterized in Amina’s own words. When asked if there was some point in a woman’s life when she would stop making baskets, she replied: “Unless her eyes weaken she does not stop making baskets until she dies.”

In Ethiopian communities, with the exception of those in the eastern part of the country, women make clay pots. They also spin cotton to produce thread and are often, but not always, responsible for making baskets. Men usually weave textiles, work metals, carve wood, and engage in leatherworking. Men paint murals and book illustrations. Among the farmers of the highlands, men are the architects and builders, but amongst the herding peoples of the south, like the Borana, women own and are responsible for building homes. There are of course exceptions to all of the “rules” of gender specialization, but for the most part they are maintained throughout much of Ethiopia.

Specialization is not so much related to the production of specific types of objects as it is to employing specific technologies. In fact, one of the themes that emerges from a number of the essays is that many objects require the involvement of both men and women. Such complementary roles reflect the interdependence of man and woman and the importance of the most basic social unit, husband and wife. For instance, in Doko Lishia men weave, but it is the women, usually the wives and daughters of the weaver, who procure the raw cotton and spin the weft threads. If not for women, there would be no cloth.

The Borana use basically two types of containers: those woven from fiber, which are made by women, and those either carved from wood or formed from animal skin, which are made by men. There are, however, specific types of wood containers, like the butter and snack, that are
peoples he conquered, and he ordered large numbers of these specialists to the empire's newly created capital, Addis Ababa, where they played a critical role in producing the clothes, domestic utensils, furniture, tools, and weapons for the city. Today, "Dorze" is a term synonymous with weaving throughout much of Ethiopia, especially in Addis Ababa. Though the name of a single group of people belonging to a larger culture cluster known as Gamo, their name is used as a general label for any weaver coming from the Gamo highlands. The Gamo highlands of southern Ethiopia were conquered by Menilek II in 1898, and a large number of Gamo weavers were subsequently brought to Addis Ababa to produce textiles for the capital's growing population. Many Gamo weavers continue to migrate to Addis Ababa, where they become full-time weavers. Arba, for instance, spent a good deal of his life in Addis Ababa before returning to Doko Losha, and four of his sons still live in Addis Ababa, where two are professional weavers. A similar situation exists for the potters of Wolayta. Though pottery is produced virtually everywhere in Ethiopia, the potters of Wolayta are known for their well-made pots. Menilek II conquered Wolayta at the end of the nineteenth century and relocated several villages of potters from Wolayta to an area close to his capital. This community of Wolayta potters still exists and continues to produce pots for the markets of Addis Ababa. It is interesting that both the weavers and the potters, in addition to producing the wares popular in their homelands, learned to make the textiles and pottery preferred by the Amhara ruling elite.

The Social Status of Artists and Artisans
The social status of the object maker is an issue touched upon in most of the essays. With the exception of blacksmiths, and perhaps tanners, the status of the people who produce the material objects that a society uses varies from culture to culture. Tabita and Menjiye belong to special groups and maintain a special status within the societies in which they live. The term most often used to describe these groups is "caste." Among the Wolayta, potters like Tabita belong to a group commonly referred to as chimasha, a pejorative term used by the dominant group, who are farmers. Tabita indicated that she and other members of this special group prefer to call themselves hilamsha—simply "people who
carved by men but have a woven fiber lip made by a woman, often the wife of the carver. Bassi points out that these composite containers echo a recurrent theme in Borana society: the differentiated but complementary roles of man and woman.

In Wolayta potter communities, women collect the clay and model the pots, but husbands and sons play an important role in the firing and marketing of pottery. Tsehai notes that all children, whether male or female, learn to make pots. Tabita has given birth to six boys, and all know how to make pots. This makes sense when one understands that it is the mother who is primarily responsible for raising children and that, because pottery making is part of her daily routine, it is not surprising that all young children learn to make pots. When boys become old enough to join their fathers in farming and hunting activities, they cease "playing" with clay. However, husbands or sons will often assist in the firing of pots. Involved in removing the pots once the firing is finished, they often take the pottery to market, especially if the pots are large. For instance, Busho, Tabita's husband, carries the large pot (beer-brewing pots) that she makes to market.

Among the Fuga, men and women work with bamboo to produce a variety of baskets and large mats. Men cut wood from trees and carve various domestic utensils and furniture, but women often become involved in finishing the objects. While we were working with Menjiye's wife, Anchehat, helped him prepare the pigments used to paint the combs and pottery stands he was making. It is common in the markets of the Gurage to see Fuga women applying fine incised designs to wood objects.

Specialization along ethnic lines is another issue some of the essays touch upon. With the exception of painting, and perhaps sorghum stalk model making, all of the material traditions appearing in this volume are found throughout Ethiopia. Nevertheless, since the turn of the century, various ethnic groups have become associated with specific material traditions. The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the expansion of the Amhara-ruled empire of Abyssinia. By the end of the century much of the territory that today is included within the borders of Ethiopia was conquered and brought under the control of Emperor Menilek II. He was aware of the special skills possessed by many of the peoples he conquered, and he ordered large numbers of these specialists to the empire's newly created capital, Addis Ababa, where they played a critical role in producing the clothes, domestic utensils, furniture, tools, and weapons for the city. Today, "Dorze" is a term synonymous with weaving throughout much of Ethiopia, especially in Addis Ababa. Though it is the name of a single group of people belonging to a larger culture cluster known as Gamo, their name is used as a general label for any weaver coming from the Gamo highlands. The Gamo highlands of southern Ethiopia were conquered by Menilek II in 1898, and a large number of Gamo weavers were subsequently brought to Addis Ababa to produce textiles for the capital's growing population. Many Gamo weavers continue to migrate to Addis Ababa, where they become full-time weavers. Arba, for instance, spent a good deal of his life in Addis Ababa before returning to Doklo Losha, and four of his sons still live in Addis Ababa, where two are professional weavers. A similar situation exists for the potters of Wolayta. Though pottery is produced virtually everywhere in Ethiopia, the potters of Wolayta are known for their well-made pots. Menilek II conquered Wolayta at the end of the nineteenth century and relocated several villages of potters from Wolayta to an area close to his capital. This community of Wolayta potters still exists and continues to produce pots for the market of Addis Ababa. It is interesting that both the weavers and the potters, in addition to producing the wares popular in their homelands, learned to make the textiles and pottery preferred by the Amhara ruling elite.

The Social Status of Artists and Artisans

The social status of the object maker is an issue touched upon in most of the essays. With the exception of blacksmiths, and perhaps tanners, the status of the people who produce the material objects that a society uses varies from culture to culture. Tabita and Menjiye belong to special groups and maintain a special status within the societies in which they live. The term most often used to describe these groups is "caste." Among the Wolayta, potters like Tabita belong to a group commonly referred to as chinsa, a pejorative term used by the dominant group, who are farmers. Tabita indicated that she and other members of this special group prefer to call themselves chinsa—simply "people who
make things." In the Gurage area people like Menjiiye belong to a group known as the Fuga.

Caste groups are found throughout Ethiopia and are associated with the production of certain types of objects. There is no single social profile that describes all caste groups, but among most of Ethiopia’s peoples, potters, leatherworkers, and especially blacksmiths usually belong to a social group (sometimes a distinct ethnic group) that lives apart from the rest of society.

One of the common characteristics of caste groups is that they are perceived by the rest of society as wielding special supernatural powers and esoteric knowledge. This power and knowledge allow them to “create” useful things, for instance, to transform earth (clay) into pots, or rocks (iron ore) into tools and weapons. These powers are perceived as dangerous, potential sources of illness and even death. As a result, the creators of objects, especially those who manipulate the primeval elements of earth and fire, are isolated from the rest of society. They hold an ambivalent status with the peoples among whom they live: they are respected for their knowledge and the important contributions they make to society, but they are also feared and despised. They often live in separate communities and are not allowed to marry with the dominant group, who are usually farmers.

At times members of specific castes will perform other specialized tasks. They are often ritual experts who play critical roles in circumcision and funeral rites. Among the Wolayta, blacksmiths perform as singers at weddings and funerals. Butcher-tanners in Doko society produce a special type of animal-skin cape, the insignia of leadership for a balaka (an elected leader in Doko society); they are also musical performers at important social events, such as the installation of a balaka. In the Gurage area, the Fuga are ritual specialists who play a vital role in what Pankhurst and Worku refer to as “social reproduction”—the transformation of children, both boys and girls, into adults.

Because of their lowly status they have traditionally been denied many of the privileges afforded the majority, “commoner” population. For instance, formerly they were not allowed to own land and had to either rent the land on which they lived and farmed or rely heavily on patronage from the landowning farmers. However, after the 1974 Revolution, land reforms were imposed by the Marxist regime known as the Derg that redistributed property taken from the ruling elite. People affiliated with caste groups were given their own land and thus were among the few to benefit from the otherwise oppressive and destructive strategies of the Derg. In 1993 both Tafari and Menjiiye expressed concern that policies introduced by the government that had recently overturned the Derg might result in the loss of their land: property was supposed to be given back to those from whom it had been taken by the Derg. It is not surprising that those who belong to caste groups are often among the poorest residents of a community.

Once again, this brief consideration of caste is a simplification of a complex social phenomenon found not only in Ethiopia but throughout much of Africa and in many other parts of the world. In fact, one could argue that it is a universal social phenomenon, and it raises some interesting questions concerning how humankind, in general, responds to creativity and those who create.

Among the Amhara of central Ethiopia, virtually all manual labor not associated with tilling the soil (farming) is looked down upon. But this stigma does not exist in all societies. We learn from Zelnisky-Carldedge and Sarldedge that among the Doko, weaving is not a caste-related occupation. Here we find many farmers who weave in their spare time as a means of generating extra income for the family. There is no stigma attached to weaving in the Doko-Gamo highlands; however, a weaver’s status changes when he moves to Addis Ababa. Upon arriving in the capital and becoming a full-time specialist, the Doko weaver assumes the lower status generally reserved for artisans—a reflection of the cultural values of the ruling group, the Amhara, who, as mentioned earlier, founded the city in the late nineteenth century.

The historical evidence is inconclusive but suggests that there might be a differential status afforded various types of metal specialists in highland Ethiopia. Blacksmiths (those who work iron) represent the quintessential caste group throughout the highlands. But precious-metal specialists (those who work gold and silver), like Gezahagn and Abba, seem to be financially better-off. This may be due to the intrinsic economic value of the metals they use and the development of various means for (literally) extracting their fees from their commissions and the fact

Introduction
certain types of objects was acquired simply as part of growing up in
a specific community and culture. Abbink, Ahmed, Bassi, and Tsehai
inform us that the artists they worked with all began learning the tech-
nical processes associated with their métiers while very young, for in
their communities all children were expected to learn to produce specific
types of objects. Bogine and Gelta, like all men in Me’en society, learned
to carve wood and gourds, weave baskets, and work with leather. Amina,
like all women in Harari society, learned as a young girl to weave an
array of baskets. The same is true of Elema. And Tabita, growing up in
a potters’ community, learned to make a variety of pots. In these con-
texts, learning to make these things is a cultural “given,” part of what
one needs to know to be a productive member of the community. The
seamless relationship between the acquisition of specialized knowledge
and the role it plays in everyday life is poignantly summarized in Tabita’s
terse reply to a question Tsehai asked her about productivity: “Work is
knowledge, is it not?”

The informality and ubiquity of this process were demonstrated while
working with a family of potters in the Wolayta community of Gurumu
Wayde. One day, while observing Kumpe Shubamo and her eldest daugh-
ter modeling pots in front of their house, we heard a young child cry-
ing inside the house. Kumpe stopped working and brought the child,
hers three-year-old son Kule, outside and put a small mound of clay in
front of him. Kule proceeded to begin pulling up the walls of a pot. His
mother occasionally left her work and turned her attention to his little
pot, making “corrections” and helping him as he played with the clay.
This is how potters learn to make pots in Wolayta. Simple observation,
coupled with imitation and practice, is a common process for learning
to make certain types of objects. Abbink points out that among the Me’en,
a similar learning environment exists, in which children learn to fab-
ricate all that is necessary for living by imitation and trial and error.
Indeed, the same sort of process is echoed in the biographies of several
of the other artists we worked with in 1993.

In many cases, the specialized knowledge associated with creating
objects is passed from generation to generation, from mother to daugh-
ter, from father to son, and occasionally from mother to son. Amina
learned from her mother, as did Elema. When Bassi asked Elema how
that many of their clients come from the upper echelons of society.

Except in cases where it is practiced by a caste group like the Fuga, basket making seldom seems to have a stigma attached to it. In cultures like that of the Harari and Borana, learning to weave baskets is a requisite for all girls. Baskets serve vital utilitarian and symbolic functions in their cultures and it is therefore important that all women know how to make these woven containers. Abbink informs us that among the Me'en, perhaps the most egalitarian society discussed in this volume, all men, as part of growing up, acquire the knowledge to work in virtually all media, including wood, gourd, leather, animal horn, metal, and vegetal fiber (i.e., basketry). Clay pots are the only objects made by women. There are no real craftsmen, no "caste" of artisans, and the only artifact specialists are blacksmiths. Abbink asserts that Me'en material culture is a "democratic art," known by all.

Woodworking is a specialty that may or may not be associated with lower social status. The Fuga are often associated with woodworking, but Parkhurst and Worku point out that this occupation does not define their social status, for there are Gurage, among whom they live, who also carve wood objects. Indeed, all of the material technologies employed by the Fuga may be performed without stigma by Gurage. Parkhurst and Worku note that other factors, such as a special art or religious beliefs, define the Fuga as a special (caste) group, and they tentatively conclude that the Fuga may in fact form a distinct ethnic group.

Compared to the other artists featured in this volume, Zerihun Yetmgeta is exceptional because he occupies a high status in the community in which he lives. He is a product of a new twentieth-century tradition, an academy-trained artist who maintains strong ties with his past while functioning in a global arena. He has an international reputation, his paintings sell for thousands of dollars, and he is regarded as one of Ethiopia's most distinguished citizens.

Learning to Make Things

With the exception of Zerihun, all of the artists featured in this book acquired their specialized knowledge either through formal apprenticeships or by observing and imitating the actions of family members and friends. In many cases the specialized knowledge needed to make certain types of objects was acquired simply as part of growing up in a specific community and culture. Abbink, Ahmed, Bassi, and Tshaih inform us that the artists they worked with all began learning the technical processes associated with their metiers while very young, for in their communities all children were expected to learn to produce specific types of objects. Bogine and Gelta, like all men in Me'en society, learned to carve wood and gourds, weave baskets, and work with leather. Amina, like all women in Harari society, learned as a young girl to weave an array of baskets. The same is true of Elena and Tabita, growing up in a potters' community, learned to make a variety of pots. In these contexts, learning to make these things is a cultural "given," part of what one needs to know to be a productive member of the community. The seamless relationship between the acquisition of specialized knowledge and the role it plays in everyday life is poignantly summarized in Tabita's terse reply to a question Tshaih asked her about productivity: "Work is knowledge, is it not?"

The informality and ubiquity of this process were demonstrated while working with a family of potters in the Wolayta community of Gurrumu Wayde. One day, while observing Kuppe Shubanno and her eldest daughter modeling pots in front of their house, we heard a young child crying inside the house. Kuppe stopped working and brought the child, her three-year-old son Kule, outside and put a small mound of clay in front of him. Kule proceeded to begin pulling up the walls of a pot. His mother occasionally left her work and turned her attention to his little pot, making "corrections" and helping him as he played with the clay. This is how potters learn to make pots in Wolayta. Simple observation, coupled with imitation and practice, is a common process for learning to make certain types of objects. Abbink points out that among the Me'en, a similar learning environment exists, in which children learn to fabricate all that is necessary for living by imitation and trial and error. Indeed, the same sort of process is echoed in the biographies of several of the other artists we worked with in 1993.

In many cases, the specialized knowledge associated with creating objects is passed from generation to generation, from mother to daughter, from father to son, and occasionally from mother to son. Amina learned from her mother, as did Elena. When Bassi asked Elena how
she learned to make the beautiful basketry containers used for storing milk in Borana communities, she answered, "I learned to make milk containers from my mother and friends and I'm teaching my daughter—it's the same thing as going to school." Meblye learned to carve from his father, and at least one of his sons, Yeraci, is carving. Abh learned to produce silver jewelry from his father, and he has begun to teach his young son. Tahci learned from her mother, and she has taught her six sons (she has no daughters) to make pots (as mentioned in the discussion of gender specialization, this is not uncommon in Wolayta potters' communities). Ito learned to weave from his father, but Arba did not. It was not until later in life, when he was in his early forties, that Arba learned to weave from a neighbor, but Arba has taught four of his five sons to weave.

A few other artists did not acquire their knowledge from relatives but served apprenticeships with a "master" artist or artisan. Both the traditional painters, Adamu and Jembere, as part of their church education worked with mentors who were accomplished painters. They began by assisting their teachers in the most basic tasks, and then, as they learned the formal and iconographic canons of Orthodox Church painting, they were given more and more responsibility and finally began receiving their own commissions. Gezahegn acquired his knowledge of the various technologies used in fabricating gold and silver objects in the workshop of Halle Abraham in Addis Ababa, where he spent nine years as first an apprentice and then a wage-earning jeweler. He recalled that at the beginning of his apprenticeship he carried out the most mundane tasks, such as fetching tea for the workers and customers and sweeping the shop, but then Halle set him on a graduated course of learning how to produce a wide variety of jewelry.

Zerihun received much of his formal education as an artist at the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa, which is modeled after a European school of art. It is a modern, twentieth-century institution that offers a specific curriculum to train "artists," that is, individuals who produce works that are first and foremost objects of aesthetic contemplation. Zerihun, in addition to being one of Ethiopia's leading contemporary artists, also teaches at the School of Fine Arts.

The Creative Process and the Creative Person

Ethiopian material culture and the processes used in creating it are often characterized as being very conservative, slow to change. The reason frequently given for this is that social and cultural norms often leave little room for creativity and innovation in Ethiopian cultures. Relative to modern Western society, this is true. But this is an overstated and oversimplified observation that can lead one to fail to seek and recognize creative genius in Ethiopian material traditions. It is commonly assumed that the pots, baskets, and wood objects made today are like those made fifty or a hundred years ago. Again, this may be a valid assumption, but changes have occurred in these traditions that have been the result of an exceptional person introducing a new idea or treatment of a particular type of object. There are individuals who are born with or develop an exceptional drive to make things, to create, and perhaps to think about what they are creating in ways that lead to innovation.

As mentioned earlier, the model used for identifying the artists featured in this volume is based on the premise that there are in all communities object makers who excel at what they do, and may even be perceived as exceptional. In almost every case, the artist that we chose to work with possessed a special interest, at times even a passion, for their respective métier. Adamu offered the strongest evidence of such an outlook. After having invested over twenty years in study to become a priest in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, he chose to leave the clergy and devote all of his time to painting. His rationale for doing so was crystal clear: "I have an interest and love for painting, in fact, dream about it most of the time."

A number of the individuals with whom we worked were quite self-conscious about their interest in their métier and their ability to be creative. In talking about how he develops his compositions, Jembere indicated, "I know about historical events and paint them using my imagination." The first time I visited Zerihun's studio I notice a Miles Davis record album sitting among his paints and brushes. I soon learned that Zerihun loves listening to jazz music. Basso points out in her essay that one of the key characteristics of Zerihun's paintings reveals an affinity with this music. Like a jazz musician, he often improvises around a cen-
tral theme, such as history, the strength of the church, and the unity of Africa. Zerihiun expresses his thoughts about his experiences in his work, but as he freely confessed, “I always transform things, things I see, things I hear, and things I feel.” Though Tolela probably does not think of himself as creative, his sorghum-stalk models reveal considerable ingenuity. The deftness with which he interprets photographic images of buildings like the Leaning Tower of Pisa to construct marvelous three-dimensional sorghum-stalk models is quite remarkable. Two traditional painters, Marcos and Adama, when asked about painting the same theme over and over again, emphasized that they treat each composition as a new problem. They do not copy previous paintings but call upon their knowledge of the subject matter (iconography) and the medium (oil pigments) when interpreting a given theme. This is easily seen in the comparisons of Adamu’s renderings of Saint George Slaying the Dragon (Figs. 7.3 and 7.5, pl. 12) and Marcos’s depictions of The Battle of Abu (Figs. 8.8 and 8.9).

Needless to say, the attitudes of these contemporary object makers about creativity, about being able to use one’s imagination, may be a product, at least in part, of having been exposed to Western ideas about art and artists. But there is no doubt that there have always been exceptional individuals living in communities at particular times who have been able to exercise creative genius and give new expression to their own ideas as well as those of the societies in which they live.

Sharing Traditions
A few of the essays consider the external sources for the ideas that have driven the evolution of certain material traditions. Those dealing with the traditional painters (Adamu, Jembere, and Marcos) and the contemporary academic artist (Zerihiun) deal with this issue at some length. This is because the subject has received much attention in previous scholarship, in which one of the dominant themes has been the introduction and subsequent assimilation of foreign models. These studies offer a historical scheme divided into two periods. The first begins with the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia in the fourth century and lasts to the end of the fifteenth century. During this thousand-year period, the primary source of artistic inspiration for the painters of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church came from the Byzantine world. The inspiration for paintings of the second period, which dates from the sixteenth century to the present, is Western Europe. Many important ideas did come from outside Ethiopia, but this point perhaps has been overstated and overemphasized. Though a dynamic process of integration and transformation is acknowledged as having played an important role in the evolution of Ethiopian painting, it has not received much attention.

There is a great deal of evidence in other media that Ethiopia has been and continues to be a great crossroads of cultural tradition. The essay dealing with Gezahegn and Abib refers to the presence of Greek and Armenian silversmiths in Ethiopia in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, who were probably responsible for introducing gild filigree-work. And the silver jewelry of Abib and the Muslim jew- elers of eastern Ethiopia reveals close affinities with the work of their counterparts on the Arabian Peninsula. Menfiye, in his discussions with Pankhurst and Worlu, mentioned the introduction of certain types of objects, such as beds, large chairs, and cupboards, by the Italians. And Tolela, in response to recent commissions from European and Amer- ican visitors to Addis Ababa, is now making sorghum-stalk models of Western monuments, such as the Leaning Tower of Pisa, the Palazzo Vecchio, the White House, and the Jefferson Memorial. The essays that deal with these trends, though only scratching the surface, begin to explore the reasons why and the dynamics of how these foreign ideas were integrated and transformed into Ethiopian tradition.

Very little attention has been given to the sharing of ideas on the local level. This is a subject that is more difficult to deal with, for it demands an even greater understanding of society and culture. Abbin is the only author to refer to this area of inquiry. In his comments about whether one can delineate a Me’en “style” he observes that “there are individuals from all ethnic groups who ‘cross the boundary’ and learn from neighbors and assimilate techniques, decorative patterns, or object types.” He notes that this phenomenon would be a fascinating arena for study and he asks the familiar question “How, why, and by whom are specific artifacts ‘borrowed’ from other people?”

We seldom learn about traditions that have been introduced but have failed to take root. If we seek a better understanding of the process of
assimilation, then it is important to study these "failures." A very good example is offered in Tabita's recollections of the introduction of the potter's wheel to Shento in 1976. One would assume that this technology would have been quickly accepted, because it offers a more efficient means of producing pots. But today, no one in Shento is using the potter's wheel; women are still creating their pots solely by hand. Tshebi offers a fascinating recounting of this episode. The reason for the failure had nothing to do with the technology but pertained to the specific social and political context in which the potter's wheel was introduced.

Though we cannot at this point offer much in the way of insight into the nature of the process, we can suggest that the marketplace is perhaps the single most important setting for the exchange of information, the sharing of ideas and tradition. Many of the essays include descriptions of the markets and references to the importance that they have for the artist. The market at Asey Anba brings together the peoples of highland and lowland, the market in Harer is a meeting place for rural and urban peoples, and the markets of the Bodana region bring together farmers and herders. It is in markets like these that the object maker becomes aware of the tastes and the demands of his or her customers. It also is where new inspiration is found in the ideas and things of other peoples and places.

**Tradition, Innovation, and Change**

A final theme, which takes us back to some of the issues considered at the outset, is the notion of change. There is always tension between things of the past and what is new. The essay that considers the life and work of Gebere and Marcos includes a brief discussion of the problems this has caused for the interpretation of traditional painting in Ethiopia. Scholarship dealing with the topic has divided traditional painting into two distinct units, one historical, the other modern, and as a result they are often dealt with as separate phenomena. In fact they are not, at least not from an Ethiopian perspective. We are again faced with a distortion originating from the use of a Western idea, in this case the notion of tradition, to interpret Ethiopian expressive culture. A solution to the problem is to accept the fact that "traditional" is an ambiguous label, because traditions are fluid; they are constantly changing.

The two previous sections dealt with various sources for change. The changes that drive tradition can come from the creative spirit of individuals or from ideas borrowed from other people. But it is important to emphasize that all of the artists we worked with are well aware that what they are doing today is firmly grounded in the traditions of their ancestors—and they all have a great respect for the past. This reverence is very nicely articulated in a comment made by Bogone: "The things I make are like those that were made in the past. Everybody does it like this. This is Me'en work, Me'en style." This same view is echoed in Basfi's essay, in which he explains that the Borana have a term, adaar, that has to do with the notion of a norm, a custom, or traditions—a sort of "cultural heritage." It can be used in many contexts; in all of these it alludes to something that is part of the heritage of a community, something that is transmitted from generation to generation. It is significant that the concept of adaar does not exclude change. The Borana, in fact, distinguish it from the concept of ama, a term having a meaning associated with the idea of strictly maintained rules or "laws." Basfi points out in her analysis of Zerihun's work that despite the artist's "modern" outlook, much of what Zerihun does is grounded in Ethiopian tradition. The studio he recently built for himself is modeled after the circular Ethiopian Orthodox church. Indeed, Zerihun strongly believes that "Ethiopian and other African traditions should not be forgotten," and his paintings offer testimony to his convictions. One of the central themes in Zerihun's paintings is tradition, and we see, for example, not only traditional motifs but entire traditional idioms, like the magic scroll, fully integrated into his "bamboo-strip" paintings.

Existing side by side with revered traditions of the past are new traditions. Most of the essays offer evidence of changes that have occurred in existing traditions and in a few cases describe the invention of new traditions. The checkerboard red and blue cloth called fan that Arba and his son Malako weave apparently is a relatively recent innovation said to have originated in the Gamo highlands roughly twenty years ago. It is woven on the same loom used to produce "more traditional" cloths like the takal and gah, but the pattern, colors, and source of thread (factory-made) are all new. Mention has already been made of the introduction of new furniture designs in the Gurage area by Italian carpenters.

**Introduction**
during the Italian Occupation. More recently, Fuga carvers have been making a new type of coffeepot stand (they "traditionally" are made from emer fiber), and a Fuga carver named Gebee proudly showed Pankhurst and Werku a new type of oil lamp stand that he had created. Yet, no matter what the new creation, Menjiye and Gebee continue to use the tools and techniques for working wood, as well as the decorative design vocabulary, that they learned from their fathers.

The advent of academic painting in Ethiopia in the twentieth century has given rise to a major change in an ancient tradition. Painting used to be exclusively the domain of men, but there is now a female presence in the artistic community of Addis Ababa. Biasio mentions in her essay that a number of women artists, such as Desta Hagos, have attended the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa and are now actively pursuing careers as exhibiting artists. We also learned while talking to Adamu that he has been working with one of his daughters, Weyneshet, and that she is very keen on becoming a painter like her father.

The sorghum-stalk model tradition that Toleru is associated with is an excellent example of a totally new and unique tradition. Sohania’s research revealed that it originated in the late 1950s or early 1960s with a couple of boys who were playing with discarded sorghum stalks. The boys began making toy waterwheels and soon were modeling toy trucks, cars, and airplanes. These ingenious models soon captured the interest of visitors to Ethiopia, and a market was created for not only sorghum-stalk models of toy vehicles but churches and, recently, famous European and American buildings.

Conclusion

This brief introduction cannot do justice to the variety and depth of ideas that are considered in the essays presented in this volume. It is important to reiterate that this collection of essays is offered as an initial foray into an exciting and extremely important dimension of Ethiopian cultural studies. Some essays are the first scholarly interpretation of a previously undocumented tradition, and it is hoped that future studies will build on these contributions. Though attempting to understand contemporary tradition is no mean task, and is a justifiable end in itself, this line of inquiry should be seen as the first stage of the much more challenging task of reconstructing material-culture history. Pursuing such a course of inquiry would certainly yield important insights into the social and cultural history of Ethiopia’s peoples.

Perhaps the most important message that this book carries concerns the importance of broadening one’s gaze when considering the material or aesthetic traditions of other people. If nothing else, we hope that these essays engender an appreciation for even the most common of objects, for there is beauty and value in all things that people create. If this is accomplished, then perhaps the gold in one’s hand will never turn to copper.
Artifacts as "Daily Art" in Me'en Culture
The Life and Work of Bogine Shala and Gelta Foroshowa

Jon Abbink

Introduction
Does every human society have "art," artistry, or at least artisans? In this essay about the Me'en people of southwestern Ethiopia, I will challenge some received ideas about "tribal" arts and crafts and thus provide a kind of counterpoint to many of the other traditions described in this volume.

When I was working with Bogine Shala and Gelta Foroshowa (figs. 2.1-2.2), two Me'en artifact producers, several questions presented themselves in view of the comparatively simple material culture which they, as average Me'en persons, produced and used: (1) Do the Me'en have an "art" tradition? (2) Do they apply ideals and conceptions of "beauty" to the material objects they possess and use? (3) Are those material objects in themselves—be they household utensils, tools, or personal decorative items—carriers of "meaning"? In other words, is their world of artifacts a domain of symbolic culture, of the cultural ascription of value? I pondered these questions while I was in the field conducting research on the artifacts and their wider significance in Me'en culture. It seemed

I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the help and openness of Bogine Shala and Gelta Foroshowa, the main subjects of research, as well as the invaluable practical assistance and friendship of Wolobya Adem and Gontio Worku in Ch'ebra village. I also thank my friends Berhanu Worku, Argawchew Teleira, Tadese Yaye, and Beritola Galauch. I dedicate this essay to the memory of Mengesha Kabsmir, a man who is sorely missed: me de buya, me de buya...
to me that the Me’en, a group of predominantly shifting cultivators living in a remote, hilly bushland area, did not appear to have an elaborate material culture or any acknowledged experts or artisans known all across their land. Neither did they have spectacular pieces of figurative or decorative art (masks, carved images) like we find in West or Central Africa.

We know that people in Africa or elsewhere may not adhere to the same definitions of “art” and “beauty” as a matter of fact, these notions are tied up first and foremost with our own cultural history and our “high” literate arts, which are often detached from everyday life (see Gell 1992: 40–41). The concept of “the arts”—as denoting a class of objects or activities which invite “contemplation,” from the viewer—is itself a cultural category (cf. Maquet 1979:14). Ethnologists and specialists in “tribal” and traditional arts have long emphasized that we should look at the entire sociocultural and historical context of material culture traditions. The production, distribution, and use of artifacts have various functional and social aspects and often cannot be considered in isolation, nor should they be measured with our external criteria of artistic or aesthetic quality.

But what about things like aesthetic feeling, affect, or artisanship? For example, don’t objects in societies in which are “poor in art forms” have any minimal underlying notions of good form, extraordinary skill, or pleasant visual/aesthetic effect? And aren’t some persons recognized as being more capable or skilful than others in producing “good objects” (see DeCarbo 1977: 28–29, 169–70)? Or is an artifact perhaps invested with meaning mainly because of its character acquired over time, its background, the history of its production and circulation (however mundane and common this object may be)?

During research on the relatively simple and nonelaborate material culture of the Me’en, I tried to answer these questions through observation and via interviews with several artifact producers, among them Bogine Shala and Gelta Foroshowa. What they told me and showed me has provided many of the answers presented here. Bogine and Gelta are two typical Me’en men in their forties, married and with children in their teens. Bogine is a member of the Koya lineage of the Gelit clan. Gelta is a member of the Afala clan and a son of a famous (now deceased) spirit medium. They live in separate homesteads, some two hours’ walk from the small, mixed Amsara-Me’en market village of Ch’ebra in the Me’en highlands. Their houses are modest, one-room dwellings made of wood and straw. Some of their fields and gardens (for maize and cabbage) are around their houses and are tended by their wives. Their other cultivation sites (for sorghum and fl) lie at some distance, in lower areas. Gelta recently moved his home from the lowland area to his present location because he missed his relatives and “could not stand the heat.”

Both men are capable of producing various objects such as gourd containers and decorative items and can work in wood and do basketry. They are “average” men: I could have selected many other Me’en men in their stead. Significantly, Bogine and Gelta describe themselves, not as “craftsmen” or “artists,” but simply as “cultivators,” like virtually all Me’en do. They make hardly any extra income from their craftwork.

Partly on the basis of my experience with these two artifact producers (and, over the past few years, with many others as well), I will develop my discussion of their work and of Me’en artifacts in general from the following assumptions: (1) The term “art” is difficult to handle when considering the artifact traditions of non-Western, preliterate subsistence societies like that of the Me’en. “Art” is often encompassed by “material culture” and should first be considered as technical “artifact production and use,” not as an ideal of decorated beauty in and for itself. (2) Artifact production and use is a social process embedded in the exigencies of daily life and interpersonal relations. (3) Artifacts—even if appearing prosaic or mundane or only functional-utilitarian—always have a tacit dimension of visual aesthetic, or of what I would call anness of form, which emerges out of their grounding in a sociocultural context.

Thus, an ethnographic point of view on the matter of the “value” of Me’en artifacts would emphasize that they should be judged on the basis of (1) their sociocultural role in a society in which they gain their meaning and aesthetic value for the users and (2) the context of the relation between available technical means and materials and personal effort and intention. The simplicity of technical means in working the basic material does not imply that the crafting of artifacts is easy. I am always reminded of Amborn’s remark (1990:53) about his experiences among the Konso.

Artifacts as “Daily Art” in Me’en Culture
and Banji blacksmith craftsmen. He admits that although he was educated as an engineer, he did not succeed in producing even one acceptable iron object with the “simple” local means available to him.

Viewed in this light, even objects like a wood stool, a knife, a gourd container, or a personal drinking cup can not only appear functionally efficient and aptly formed but also attain a dimension of beauty if we think of “beauty” as the radiance of something authentic, true or real, or if we speak “from the inside” of the culture from which the objects emerge, that is, if we know and feel something of the rich context of use of the objects and their sometimes quite individual histories. The primary point I wish to make is that the category of “art” should be broadened into one of technical “artifact production”: the making of any object by humans for “aesthetic” and/or “utilitarian” purposes (see Gell 1992: 43). “Art” traditions are only one possible elaboration of this general process of applying mind to matter, or, in other words, of transforming nature into culture.

The Me’en People
To appreciate and understand Me’en material culture in general, Bogine’s and Gelta’s work in particular, some background knowledge about the people is helpful. The Me’en are a rural population of about 50,000 people, divided into two branches: the Bodi (ca. 5,500) are agro-pastoralists living with their cattle herds in the savanna plains east of the Omo River, and the Tishana (ca. 46,000) are mostly shifting cultivators in highland areas (Fig. 2.3). Both groups descend from a common stock, but the Tishana have incorporated a large number of people from neighboring ethnic groups (Dizi, Bench) (see Abbink 1992a). They also keep cattle, but in much smaller numbers than the Bodi. The Tishana and the Bodi have a fairly dispersed and mobile lifestyle, living in family compounds rather than in villages. Every two to three years at least, they rotate fields and places of residence. Politically, they are partly integrated into Ethiopian political structures like the kebele peasant associations, and in early 1993 they formed the ethnically based Me’en Organization. But they also maintain their own traditional leaders (elders, spirit mediums, and ritual leaders called kemen). They have a rather egalitarian social structure, with few differences in power or in

Fig. 2.3 View of Tishana Me’en countryside.

wealth between adults. Elders and kemenos enjoy respect and normative authority, but they have no executive power: they are not chiefs. It is important to keep in mind that the Me’en ancestors were a typical East African pastoral (herding) population, among whom independence and equality were always highly valued (see Abbink 1990). In addition, we know that such pastoral peoples always have a relatively simple material culture, with a limited range of artifacts (see Von Gagern et al. 1974: 38–39), compared to sedentary societies. Indeed, my guess is that the total number of objects used by the Me’en is only about 130, that is, the objects they themselves produce locally. When we count the imported items, like razor blades, cotton cloth, soap, shoes, rifles, etc., the number is higher (see Abbink 1992b).

Today, the Tishana Me’en—to whom both Bogine and Gelta belong—are subsistence cultivators, no longer real pastoralists. They keep some livestock (cattle, goats, sheep, chickens), but most of their labor time is spent in growing crops such as sorghum, corn, beans, and some wheat, barley, and rye. There are markets, but most “trade” takes the form of

Artifacts as "Daily Art" in Me’en Culture
batter. Men have favorite exchange partners with whom they often have established a ritual friendship bond called lang. Women do most of the daily work (food and beer production, planting and weeding the fields, tending the gardens, and petty marketing of foodstuffs they have produced). Significantly, women (including the wives of Bogine and Geltu) do not engage in any production of material objects, except pottery; they make the earthenware cooking plates, called nitch, and the three kinds of pots (dheir, diek, and ja) which the Me'en use. As in many other south Ethiopian cultures, it is believed that when men observe the production process of these wares, the end product will be brittle and useless. These pottery items are also the only artifacts which women sell in the market. The reason women do not make more objects is not clear, although observation of Me'en daily activities over a long period suggests to me that women have much less leisure than men in which to sit down and work on an object. They also do not readily use iron tools. Thus, only the vital cooking pots, used daily, are fashioned by them—with their hands, without tools.

The Nature of Me'en Material Culture and Its Valuation

The artifacts that we find in Bogine's and Geltu's homesteads are virtually the same as those found in any Me'en household. There are no great differences in the nature and number of their material possessions. For example, when visiting the houses of Geltu and Bogine, one would not conclude that they are "craftsmen," although Geltu had a larger than usual number of gourd plants growing in his garden, the fruits of which he would make into containers. Also, Me'en do not really differentiate between, for instance, utensils used for food preparation and decorative (or what we would probably identify as more "artful") items like their intricate beaded belts, leather bands, or earrings: all these things are called et, "goods" or "stuff," things needed in life. The ritual firesticks needed for harvest rituals are as much part of the system as cups and gourd containers used in daily food preparation. There is, however, a differentiation of artifacts according to age and gender. Among the Me'en, the desire to possess or use certain objects depends on one's stage in the life cycle (younger or elder) and whether one is a wife or husband. For instance, young men absolutely want decorative items like bead or leather chains, bracelets, metal earrings, and knives with an ivory and buffalo-horn handle. Girls want their own wood cups or bowls, brass bracelets, and colorful bead chains for the neck, arms, and ankles. Wives want all the household utensils, the full range of gourd containers (the Me'en distinguish at least ten types of gourd container), wooden spoons, strong clay pots and baskets, and also good clothes (which, today, means imported garments), bracelets, chains, and possibly a wide, multicolored beaded belt (called etak), perhaps the most expensive and flamboyant Me'en material object (fig. 2.4). Elders want a chakam (a small wood stool carved from hardwood), a tobacco container, or a ceremonial spear.

It is through these varying preferences according to age-group and status that we not only see the communicative function of artifacts but...
also discern the basis for the Me’en valuation of objects and the framework for a visual aesthetic. What makes young people want to have these things? Because they want to catch the eye of their age mates of the opposite sex, they want to appear attractive. And why these particular objects rather than others? Because they made them themselves, or because the objects were made of prized material. So there are concepts of beauty or “aptness” of material items. In Me’en, these items are related to personal appearance as a whole and not valued primarily in themselves. The “aesthetic of adornment” consists of the complex of coiffure, scarification patterns and skin color (“red” versus “black”), stature, song, and dance skills, and also facial and physical traits. Once young people get married and start a family, this aesthetic and its underlying concept lose some of their significance as the demands of functional efficiency of other goods like tools, bows, baskets, etc.—necessary for sustaining the household—slowly take over. Indeed, one does not see adult married men wear the kind of personal adornments the young men have. But they occasionally carry trophy-like items, like bands made of skin or small bones of animals such as monkey, wild hog, or leopard. Gelta wore a leopard bone on his left upper arm, a reminder of his successful kill some years ago.

In most other categories of artifacts, like tools, weapons, and household items, the functional element predominates, not the “aesthetic.” Here the object is valued for its durability, ease of use, size, strength, and shape, apart from its color or aptness of form. Like Bogin said while working on a wooden bowl: “A good one is one which stays, which is strong and can be used for a long time. If you have the right kind of wood, it’s possible. The form should be straight, equal.” However, like decorative items, these “utilitarian” objects can also acquire a special meaning or importance in the course of time. A nice dark red patina suggests age and durable value. The Me’en attach importance to how an object was acquired, who owned it previously, where it came from, and what was done with it. An object has a life history that is never immediately visible (see Ravenhill 1991: 6). This is a dimension of the object that we as outsiders often do not see but that has significance for the Me’en.

Both decorative items and utensils, tools, and ceremonial items possess a recognizable “Me’en style.” This was always pointed out to me by both the Me’en and their neighbors (Amhara, Bench, and Dizi people) and illustrates the fact that their tradition is indeed a culturally specific one. For example, no Dizi or Bench will carry a chulam, nor will one ever wear Me’en buffalo-skin sandals (chaych) or leather bracelets (liko) on the upper arm. It is also asserted (although incorrectly) that the Dizi and the Bench “cannot make” good gourd containers, woodwork, knives, etc., and have to buy them all from the Me’en. Despite this Me’en style, there are individuals from all ethnic groups who “cross the boundary” and learn from neighbors and assimilate techniques, decorative patterns, or object types. This is an interesting topic for further study: how, why, and by whom are specific artifacts “borrowed” from other people?

Me’en Artifact Production as a Technical Process

The limited range of Me’en objects is in accordance with the relatively low level of material development and environmental control found in Me’en society. We can formally distinguish several classes of objects: household utensils, tools, weapons, decorative items, items of personal status, and ceremonial items. It is very important to realize that the Me’en are self-sufficient in the production of almost all of these material objects. There are no real artisans, and consequently, there is no “caste” of artisans or craft specialists such as, for instance, the Fuga among the Gurage or, formerly, the Falasha among the Amhara of Gonder. In their work of producing “daily art,” Bogine and Gelta are matched by virtually all adult Me’en men (although their personal touch, especially Bogine’s, in certain things is recognized by relatives and neighbors in their immediate area). Hence, among the Me’en, there is no dependency on other people for material goods. For us, members of an industrial-technological society completely dependent on highly educated technical specialists for all our daily goods, it is hard to imagine what this means.

The Me’en still have to deal, almost on a daily basis, with the challenge of transforming nature’s raw materials into tools, utensils, and other objects that have to work and are used to solve the problems of making a living—and almost all the Me’en can do it.

The materials used are wood, tree bark, grasses, reeds, clay, gourds, iron, the skins of cattle, sheep, goats, and game animals, and pieces of discarded objects like aluminum tins and empty cartridge shells. The
adoption of "modern," imported goods has been very limited in the Me'en area; for example, they do not use furniture, radios, flashlights, or bicycles. This means that for their basic means of production, house- hold goods, and decorative and ceremonial items they are dependent on no one. Within their own society, the only "specialists" are the iron-workers/blacksmiths (arit), who do not, however, form a special, separate group, let alone a "caste" (as they do among the neighboring Dutu). They fashion knife and spear blades, hoes, and picks and hammer out bracelets from old cartridge shells or metal debris and decorate them with the standard figurative patterns. Bogine and Gelza do not know this work. Apart from this ironwork craft, Me'en material culture is a "democratic art," known by all and observed by children from an early age. The techniques of production are familiar and acquired through imitation and trial and error.

The Artifact Producer and His Work

Bogine Shala is a quiet, unassuming Tishana-Me'en man, about forty-five years old. He is married and has four children. His wife does not engage in craftwork, although, like most Me'en women, she can make clay pots and cooking plates. Bogine describes himself not as a "crafts- man" but as a farmer. I came to him because several people told me that he had been producing a fair amount of woodwork, basketry, and gourd containers lately. However, when I asked, he denied that he was making a living with such work: he had sold only a few things. Originally, he did not make objects for sale. Once, when he had made a big wooden beer tray, some people in his area asked him if they could have it. They agreed on a price and after that he made another. From talks with other artifact makers, I have the impression that lack of money as well as problems with crops (i.e., bad harvests) prompt them to take up some handicraft work. Nevertheless, they can never make a living from such work. Even the one Me'en blacksmith I met said he also cultivated his fields and gardens "just like anybody else."

Bogine lives in a small compound in the clan area where his father and some of his paternal uncles used to live. When they used to work on artifacts, he always had plenty of opportunity to observe them. The production of artifacts was a matter-of-fact thing, like building a house or going to clear or weed the fields. It was not an activity steeped in supernatural or ritual awe. Knowledge to produce an object did not demand any link with gods or spirits or even ancestors; the technical aspects always dominated, like it does now. In the limited period during which I was able to observe Bogine work, I had the opportunity to see some of his woodwork and basketry. He is able to make most Me'en wood products, like bowls, cups, spoons, and stools. I will first describe his work on a food bowl: the rough one seen in plate 1.

Wooden Bowls

When I asked Bogine to make a wooden bowl (ngap!) for me, he told me to come back the next day. In the meantime, he searched for the wood and notified me when he had found it. When I arrived around midday the next day, he was already busy cutting a large branch from a Sudan teak tree (Guiera senegalensis). He used an ax (called bokho). The other tool he used to fashion the bowl was a machete (banga). For a smaller, square type of bowl, he uses a knife also, for the finer work on the rims and the handle. Lowland Me'en use the leaf of a tree called gavol for polishing the wood so that its surface becomes very smooth. But this leaf is not available in the area where Bogine lives. When highland Me'en compare their products with those of the (more isolated) lowlanders, they point to things like the availability of certain natural materials as the reason for the difference in quality and not to differences in skill. Whether their claim that they are "as good as the lowlanders" is true is doubtful; my impression is that apart from using different materials, the lowlanders do produce more attractive objects; that is, they give more time and thought to producing them and are more creative. For instance, the light-colored wooden cup with black lines in plate 1 is an object not often found in the highlands. Instead, one finds dark-colored, undecorated cups (pl. 1). The same holds true for grass baskets: the lowland ones are more popular, for reasons of both durability and form (fig. 2.6). Bogine claimed that he could make any object that the lowlanders make, including the stools (chibm), if only he had the right kind of hardwood and the polishing leaves.

After he had cut off the branch (fig. 2.5), Bogine began roughing out the form of the bowl, which this time was to be square. He did this.
with a machete (fig. 2.1). In less than two hours I could see the form of the bowl and handle. The outer bark was removed and then the small trunk was hollowed out, with both the machete and the ax (Bogine had removed the ax's wooden handle). While carving, Bogine chatted and joked with people who happened to be around, exchanging news and gossip and replying to questions. A few hours later, he took the almost finished product to his house and sat down on the grass to give it the finishing touches and to do some polishing, all the time observed by his children. His wife was present only part of the time and did not seem to be very interested in the work. After being carved, the jar was dried for a week or two and was then polished again, especially its interior. The exterior can be rubbed with castor oil. No decorations were made on the wood surface—this may be a personal preference.

When I showed Bogine a wooden bowl (pl. 1, back row, right) with a kind of wave pattern, seemingly simple but difficult to carve, he recognized it as "typical lowland style," which was true (it does not yet have the patina of use). It is indeed a type not readily found among the highland Me'en, but he said he could make one like it. Nevertheless, demand for such specific forms is low, which seems to point to a certain "erosion" of notions of aesthetic form among highlanders, who tend to be more "functionalist" in their production and use of objects.

Basket
The Me'en have a very limited number of basket products: a beer sieve (amuch), a plate (wash), and two kinds of food baskets (goji). All are simple in design and execution; unlike Oromo and Harari baskets, there is neither decoration to speak of nor coloring. The bowl-shaped basket called goji is a product of the lowland Me'en, because, again, it uses materials only found in the lowlands, such as leaves from the Hyophane thalea palm. For this reason, Bogine, though he is an all-around artfact maker, only produces the beer plate and the beer sieve, not the goji. The example illustrated here (fig. 2.6, left) is a variation on the common basketry plate (wash). Although most highland basketry plates are made using the checker-weave technique, Bogine used the coil technique to produce his plate—the technique used by the lowlanders for their goji. This example is smaller than normal and is made of materials not often used for this object. Bogine produced it in one day, from the flexible branches of the gat-te-kamo bush and from the tough, moist bark of the ban'alch plant. First, a few suitable branches were cut from the gat-te-ham bush. Second, the coiling of the ban'alch bark around the branches was started. Bogine began from the inside, wrapping the bark strips around the branch toward the outer rim. Care was taken so that the shape would be perfectly round and slightly convex—the shape of a plate. This simple-looking piece is made with resistant, difficult material and is much more complicated than it looks. Other Me'en (as well as some Amhara and Dizi people) admitted that they certainly could not have made such a piece as skillfully as Bogine.

Gourd Containers
In daily life, the Me'en use various types of gourd containers made from the fruit of the gourd plant (Lagenaria siceraria or L. vulgaris). Indeed, this item seems to be the most widespread material object. There are many types of gourd containers. They are one of the few categories of Me'en artifacts that are decorated (combs, bracelets, knife sheaths, and occa-

Artifacts as "Daily Art" in Me'en Culture
When the freshly cut gourd has dried enough, the maker (invariably a man) incises geometric patterns on the exterior with a small iron pick (mule). Then charcoal is rubbed into the incised design to give it its black color. The designs consist of a variety of nonfigurative triangles, lines, and circles. Although the patterns suggest representations of roads, snakes, rows of houses, or granaries, direct and indirect questioning of producers of these containers, including Gelta Foronchawa (whom I interviewed several times), did not reveal any deeper “meaning.” These patterns (which are also found on the dona, the colorful beaded belts worn by women) do not represent houses, roads, or any other concepts or objects. They apparently have no culturally standardized meaning. The origin of these motifs, which could perhaps tell us more about their significance, is no longer known to the residents of the village

Fig. 2.7 Gourd containers: (left) a bhagul, (right) a qabu made by Woenqis Kebitirum.

Me’en producers. Interestingly, they also occur among the Surma, a neighboring agropastoral group, historically related to the Me’en.

Making a gourd container may seem even easier than making a basket or a wooden bowl. Doesn’t it involve simply cutting open the full-grown, already shaped gourd and then just carving the decorations on its surface? I put these and other questions on gourd container making to Gelta (fig. 2.2). He is an active, talkative man, about forty years old, who belongs to the old Afak clan. After spending several years in the Lowlands, he now lives in a highland zone of the Tishana-Me’en. In his small house, he has a larger than average collection of gourd containers, from small drinking cups to big honey containers, all made by himself. Like Bogome Shala, who sells wooden bowls and baskets, Gelta has started trading and selling some of his products, but he cannot make a living from the proceeds.

Every year, Gelta plants gourds. During the growing period, the gourd fruit can be tied with rope to influence its shape. A type of container called bhagul, for instance, usually has a slender waist (fig. 2.7, left). A qabu is bottle-shaped and made from an unripe fruit (fig. 2.7, right). Twice a year, in July and especially in September, Gelta harvests the gourd fruits. Although well-made gourd containers last much longer than one year, with every harvest new gourd containers are produced in every household, especially when the fruits are of good quality.

After having been cut from the plant, the fresh fruit (called qeqeh) has to dry for at least a week. Then the fruit is carefully cut open. Gelta showed me how he can make two coffee bowls by splitting open a small gourd. He drew a line across the fruit, measured it, and started making small holes along it. Then with a machete he slowly split the fruit into two halves. If this is not done carefully, the halves will be damaged and rendered useless. Inside, one finds the whitish, inedible flesh of the fruit, often too fresh and tough to be removed immediately. Gelta loosened it with a pick, then (a week or so later) took it out with a knife (at times he uses a small spear). The seeds are stored and dried, to be planted later in the season. Gelta then cut the edges of the two cups with a knife and put them away to dry, often in a pile of grass or refuse to ensure that the containers dry slowly and evenly so that they don’t crack. A few weeks later, he took them out to be polished and finished. The remnants
of the thin outer skin were removed with a knife, and the exterior was rubbed clean with sand and leaves. The edges were again cut straight. Once again, Gelta put the gourd aside for a few days. Finally, the exterior was decorated with the familiar Me’en line patterns. If Gelta produces the container for someone else, he does not incise its surface with design; the new owner will do that for himself or herself. In the course of time the gourd container acquires a distinctive patina, changing color from brownish green to an attractive deep yellow or dark red. They are not easily thrown away when damaged. Several of the gourd containers used in Gelta’s household were cracked but had been delicately repaired with plant-fiber threads.

**Function and Form in Me’en Artifacts**

The three types of objects that we have just considered are utensils used in everyday life. They are not ascribed any ritual or ceremonial value, nor are they highly prized by the Me’en themselves as “beautiful objects” (in Me’en, an-dr-eh’i). So, if we wish to use the Me’en concept of abdurin (“beauty” or “goodness” or “aptness”), how do we assess the quality of these objects? For these objects it must simply lie in the equal presence or overlap of functional efficiency and aptness of form. Bogtine, Gelta, and other Me’en told me about “good” material objects: an object is good or beautiful when it does what it is made for and it does it well. This implies that it must be made of good and strong material and must be adequately shaped and prepared. For us this is a simple, straightforward answer, but we must realize that applying the seemingly simple techniques to natural materials with simple tools requires an original, careful sequence of decisions to achieve an acceptable result in terms of the function(s) an object is destined to serve.

Many other objects of the Me’en show a beauty or aptness of form that goes beyond “mere” functional efficiency, or, to put it properly, they enhance their efficiency by their outstanding aptness of form. Such objects are the small lowland tobacco containers of horn and leather and the small stools, for which the Me’en justly have a local reputation (fig. 2.8). When asked about the beauty of these kinds of objects, the Me’en often say that they should not only be well formed and adequate but also be handled with care and respect “by the right people.” These very personal objects cannot really be bought with money: they are exchanged with a person who has established a “noncommercial” relationship with the producer or owner. We see here that “value” accruess to an object chiefly because of its life history. For example, the chalum (stool) illustrated in figure 2.8 on the far right was formerly owned by the Banja, the foremost kamundii (hereditary “rain-chief”) of the Tishawa-Me’en, and was made by his father’s brother quite a number of years ago. It is also important to know that the wood used was penke, a lowland tree said to have “power” and reserved for such important persons. Another example that should be mentioned in this context is the wooden cup made of lowland wood and with line decorations that is shown in...
Plate 1. It was carved by a lowland man, Woyday Dorichali, who always carried it when visiting relatives or friends in remote places. I met him when he was visiting a Me’en highland family. Such a cup, a very fine individual product, is not often seen and was much admired by other Me’en.

Significantly, these latter artifacts are also the type of Me’en objects that most directly appeal to outsiders such as ourselves. Possibly this is because they reveal a certain “panhuman” aesthetic preference for symmetry, clarity, recognizable space, and self-containedness that conveys a sense of visual harmony and balance. In this respect, a simple, non-technological and nonspecialized culture like that of the Me’en may be seen as possessing the same basic aesthetic sensibility that exists in Western cultures.

Conclusion: The Equality of Affect Engendered by Me’en Material Culture

Me’en material culture is the product of a nonhierarchical, mobile, and relatively self-contained society. The absence of “chiefs” of institution- alized groups of craftsmen, and of an autonomous domain recognized as “art” has stimulated an “equality of affect” in the production and social use of artifacts within this culture. By this I mean that the “force” of artifacts, their mobilization of sensibility or of affect among persons in Me’en society, is fairly uniform, and that evoking that affect by making these artifacts is within the scope of almost everyone. From the life history of a Me’en person (male or female) within his or her culture, it is possible to anticipate the material objects he or she will need and try to acquire in the course of life. Without denying change from within and from without the society (especially in a political and economic sense), the material culture of the Me’en is still largely dominated by “tradition.” Challenges and problems of Me’en daily life could, until recently, largely be met on the basis of their present level of technology and craft- work, the norms and forms of which have been handed down by preceding generations. What we see in the “careers” of Bogine and Gelta as artifact makers does not (yet) sing them out from the mainstream. However, if they would fully devote their time to making objects and would learn more of the methods and use of materials of lowlanders, they could quickly become “specialists” and develop a personal style. As I have made clear, current Me’en daily aesthetic and social organization mitigate against this. Although the Me’en material traditions have remained fairly constant, it can be concluded—not only from what artifact producers like Bogine, Gelta, Woyday, and many others said but also from observing the Me’en objects in their proper context—that there is always an underlying sense of apness and goodness in the artifacts, a visual aesthetic that unites form and function and that makes the objects satisfactory and pleasing in their simplicity and authenticity.
Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismael Sherif

Ahmed Zekaria

Harar is located in east-central Ethiopia. The old walled city, known as Jugal, has a population of over 30,000. Jugal is pear-shaped and covers an area of 48 hectares. It is the home of the indigenous Harari as well as other peoples—Oromo, Somali, and Argobba. Indeed, people from virtually all parts of Ethiopia may be found in this great walled city.

Much has been written about the natural beauty of Harar. More than forty years ago John Buchholzer commented: “It doesn’t matter whether you go there when the coffee bushes are in flower and the air is heavy with their strong, bitter scent, or when the ripe fruit of the orange trees glow in the sunlight, it is always lovely in Harar; there is always something blooming, always something being harvested” (1955: 101). A mountaintop view of Harar reveals a mosaic of diverse scenery (fig. 3.1).

At the top of my acknowledgment list I must mention Amina Ismael Sherif, who willingly provided much information about Harari basketry. Next on the list comes Fatuma Ibrahim Gera, who filled in the gaps. Amanah Ibrahim (Fatuma’s mother) and Monita Ahmed (Amina’s youngest daughter) also contributed by providing their knowledge of basketry from two perspectives, that of an old woman and that of a young girl. And finally, I thank the Harari historian Abdelmuhimin Abdunaizir for sharing with me his unpublished manuscript, an important document that sheds light on the historical songs and sayings concerning baskets.
sees primarily whites and grays and a diverse range of geometric shapes of varying size (figs. 3.3–3.4). The hill on which the old city rests is a constantly changing organic form, shaped and reshaped by the hands of masons for over a millennium. The houses, mosques, churches, marketplaces, and narrow streets form this magnificent work of art.

Moving from a micro- to a microview of the city reveals an abundance of aesthetic traditions that echo this beauty. The Harari house is warm and inviting and displays a sense of proportion and a mastery of a building technology perfected over the centuries. Inside the house, one is overwhelmed with the balance and color composition of the traditional display of baskets on the walls of the living room (fig. 3.5). The colorful dress of Harari women is another dimension of the beautiful aesthetic that permeates Harari life.
The primary driving force behind the development of Harari art has been the convergence of a number of major cultural traditions within the city. It is a veritable melting pot. Harar has been the center of trade and learning for a vast region of the Horn of Africa for at least one thousand years. Various crafts and art were introduced by people who came from near and far, from all directions of the compass, and who contributed their knowledge and expertise to the collective culture of Harer. This interaction and exchange has fostered the development of Harari art. Jewelry, calligraphy, bookbinding, embroidery, architecture, and basketwork are just a few traditions that enrich the aesthetic environment of Harer.

The dominant artistic influences have been associated with Islamic culture. Geometric patterns and designs are favored over figurative representation. Two traditions in which this influence is seen are calligraphy, produced by men, and basket making, which is in the domain of women. Let us visit the house of Amina Ismael Sheriff and consider one of these traditions in greater detail.

In Harer there is a saying, Sheel jite gete huneen yit fekshund, roughly translated, “Among three Hararis, you cannot speak ill of anyone.” It implies that in Harer each person is in some way related to everyone in town. Indeed, Amina is my aunt. Amina Ismael Sheriff, often called Amina Sitti (“Sitti” is an honorific title for a member of the Sheriff family), is a daughter of Harer, born around 1940 (fig. 3.1). Her father (and my maternal grandfather) was Ismael Sheriff, and her mother was Khadija Muhammad Wahir. Amina was raised alone, her mother’s only daughter. Unfortunately, Khadija lost her eyesight, and Amina, while still a young woman, shouldered the responsibility of caring for her. This contributed both directly and indirectly toward her becoming a professional basket maker, for she was forced to stay in the house to care for her mother and therefore had more time to devote to weaving baskets. Amina lost her husband in 1990. Fortunately, two of her five daughters are married. One of the married daughters and an unmarried daughter are living abroad. In 1993, two daughters, Munira and Maria, were still residing with Amina.

Amina is not an unusual Harari woman. She is a member of an afshe (a community association), has no special role in the community, tends her house, and supports herself and her daughters by producing baskets for sale. Her daughters who live abroad occasionally send gifts to help support the household. Amina and her daughters are playing an important role in sustaining the art of basket making in Harer. Even her daughter living in Australia has not abandoned basket making—Amina sends her the necessary raw materials from Harer.

Basket making is an ancient art found in many societies throughout the world. Nevertheless, every basket tradition has its unique dimensions and not all traditions share equal weight in the realm of art appreciation. Many who have visited Harer have appreciated the beautiful baskets that the city’s women have produced for centuries (see, e.g., Hecht 1992). Today, the famous baskets of Harer are one of the old walled city’s major tourist attractions. Whether the baskets of Harer should be regarded as art or not is difficult to say. After all, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder,” and it is up to the individual to define what is art and what is handicraft. This is not the place to deal with this complex issue, nor to criticize the West’s use of a classification system that labels aesthetic objects as primitive, low and high art, or handicraft. Suffice it to say that there is great beauty in Harari baskets and they are aesthetic objects that deserve careful study.

The Harari basket, however, is far more than a beautiful object to be purchased by tourists and studied by art historians. It is a sign of identity loaded with social and cultural meaning. The Harari basket may be studied in both a physical and a symbolic context. In her analysis of Harari basketry Hecht (1992: 11–12) offers a hierarchical list of the significance baskets hold in Harari society. Here I paraphrase the various functions she enumerates:

1. Baskets are a symbol of identity for women.
2. They are a symbol of Harari women’s sphere of life. Men have nothing to do with baskets or basketwork, and although baskets may be handled from mother to daughter, they are not referred to in a will.
3. They demonstrate that luxury is affordable (without being ostentatious); they reveal a refined aesthetic sensibility on the part of the owners, as evidenced by owning many delicate...
baskets of the same type and same decoration.

4. They have decorative value and demonstrate that the housewife
   knows how to properly configure baskets following Harari
   conventions for basket display.

5. They serve distinctive functions in social activities, in particu-
   lar, in the ceremonial exchange of gifts, especially food, during
   life cycle festivities.

6. They are objects of daily use.

Amina was kind enough to sit down with us for several hours in May
1993 to explain the basics of basket making: how one acquires the ma-
terials that are used in fabricating baskets, the technique of dyeing the
fiber, the different types of baskets, and the functional, decorative, and
symbolic meaning of baskets in Harari society. She also provided some
interesting insights into new trends in the local and the international
baskets market.

The learning process for basket making is part of the female’s world.
It is a female-specific tradition in Harari society. This, of course, does
not exclude men from using baskets. Indeed, there used to be a special
basket called mo se, “father’s basket,” produced for a bridegroom to
be carried around with him when visiting his relatives.?

I find Hecht’s view that baskets are exclusively the domain of women
too narrow. Amina told us about an incident that occurred at a wedding
she attended in Dire Dawa that demonstrates this point. The wedding
ceremony went well, without any hindrance. Afterward, the bridegroom,
following tradition, escorted his bride from her family’s home. All was
fine until he learned that some important objects were missing: when
they reached their new home, he discovered that his bride had not
brought any basketry with her. This omission was taken as an unfor-
givable offense and eventually led to the dissolution of their marriage.
I have observed similar incidents in the Harari community in Addis
Ababa.

It is true that men do not interfere with the process of making bask-
ets, but it seems that the symbolic value of baskets is an important ele-
ment of male identity within the context of marriage. This is a deeply
ingrained tradition in Harari society that may be difficult for an out-
sider to appreciate. Basketry is important for both men and women. The
main differences pertain to the process of production and the frequency
of symbolic usage. The basket’s decorative and utilitarian functions are
more or less the same for both husband and wife, but it has greater
significance for women within the realm of rites of passage.

Formerly, daughters, at an early age, were encouraged by their moth-
ers to train their hands how to weave baskets. Basket making used to be
a lifelong skill learned in early childhood and practiced until old age by
almost all Harari women, rich or poor. Traditionally, a girl’s first basket
was burned to ashes, and the ashes were rubbed on the girl’s hands.
This custom signified a transition to a more skilled level of basket mak-
ing. Even today, daughters master the basic concepts of basket making
before they join the gudh, a society of young women of similar age who
live in the same neighborhood. This occurs at around the age of nine.
The gudh meets at the home of one of its members, which is then known
as a mo yor, or “house of work.”

For every girl, Amina recalls, the daily routine started early in the
morning when the cock crowed. First, she made breakfast for the fam-
ily. After breakfast, she swept the whole compound, including the street
in front of the house (Harari used to be very clean and one could always
smell the fragrance of incense coming from every house). Then it was
time to go to the farm. It was common for a Harari girl to be praised
by the young men she encountered on her way to the farm. Their admira-
tion was voiced at a distance and in song. Here are examples of a few
verses recorded by Dari Mohammed (1955: 17):

Talent me, hurir tidhile ku marage melooyaa tolkot uu.
Hiiimaya hemmii diyku ku mansay melooyaa.
Dad gu yishuurahii uu, oo uke tooone ku yirhyaddii uu.
At her loom she weaves silk, a coat for her lover.
Her beauty is [like] one of the waterfowl on the
lake of Haramaya.
She is a rose.
I am drunk on her love; I leap like the deer on the
hills of Aw Shab.

Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismail Sheriff
She responded, either with friends or alone, to the love song with a gentle sweet voice, competing in the early morning with the songs of the birds.

Formerly, Harari women were economically independent. The urban-based farming community of Harar devised a system of liberating women from economic dominance by their husbands. Women acquired plots of farmland as part of their bride-price from the groom’s family. This plot could be as small as one or two rows of ch’at trees. This arrangement gave Harari women a good deal of economic freedom and thus provided a stable economic foundation for the marriage. Every wife and her grown daughters had to visit the farm each day. It was regarded as a bank from which a woman could withdraw some bundles of ch’at for the expenses of the day. On her way home from the farm she sold the ch’at for cash. She was back home by nine o’clock in the morning.

After taking a short rest, she joined her friends at the moy gur for most of the day. The members of the gish spent their early years at the moy gur, which served as a training ground for Harari girls where they learned not only basketwork but also hak mehul, the important lessons associated with social etiquette. Many of the lessons have been encapsulated in proverbs. For instance, here is one that admonishes latecomers: Zikakum zikakana zitshone zikinda, meaning “One who comes on time succeeds while one who comes late freezes.”

The value placed on friendships forged in the moy gur is expressed in different couplets. Amina sung a few of them as she nostalgically recalled her youth.

Gely del l’khey,
Sint tölpinjineh wa.
Moy gur béky.
Get geëbo girebbi hino gely.

My friend, you are my debt of love,
You are my expert in art.
In moy gur you are my friend.
In wedding you are my best maid.

The atmosphere of the moy gur was warm and secure. Each member shared her knowledge to build up a strong collective experience. The young women often sat as a group working on baskets. Each brought her oggan (a type of straw used like thread for weaving), migir (a type of sturdy grass used for the core of the coil), and qirra (barley stalks used for wrapping the coil) (fig. 3.6). Every girl had to have her own

Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Ismail Sheriff

Fig. 3.6 Amina and her youngest daughter, Munira Ahmed, weaving baskets. Note the various types of grasses on the floor in front of the women.
waf, or awl. In the center of the group they placed a small wooden bowl (today a small enamelware bowl is used) with water in it to soften the gẹm and ọgẹm. The bowl also served as a receptacle for receiving coins, a tradition known as mọmọ mahan. The coins were primarily collected from visitors, both male and female. Male visitors occasionally visited the moy gẹr to observe and admire the basket making and for counting. During their visits they often commented on the quality of the baskets. The members of the gẹr and their female visitors exchanged ideas for new techniques and designs, as well as more general news and views about their families and life in Harer.

Amina became lost in memories of her youth when we asked her about the availability of raw materials. She recalled that all her supplies were readily available in and around Harer except for the powder used in dyeing the fiber. The farmers used to grow ọgẹm to serve as a dividing line between plots of land and to impede soil erosion. The mig grew wild outside the farming zone, and the gẹm was collected after the barley harvest. Today, all are imported from different places. The gẹm comes from the nearby Hakim Mountains, the ọgẹm is transported from Jigiga, 120 kilometers to the east, and the mig comes from Addis Ababa. There are merchants in Harer who supply these raw materials. Population pressures and ecological changes have contributed to the scarcity of raw materials. And the scarcity of raw materials has been one of the factors contributing to the atrophy of the basketmaking tradition. In the past, everyone could collect their own grass for free from the farm, but now the cost of a small bundle varies from season to season, ranging from 2 to 5 birr, and is affected by fluctuations in the cost of transportation. The axis, which are used to pierce holes between the coils while weaving the basket, are produced locally by a blacksmith.

The work space should be blessed with prayers praising Allah and his Prophet, Muhammad—prayers learned at Qur'anic school while growing up. Every girl had to repeat a specific prayer before starting to weave. Then the young women in the moy gẹr could commence work on their baskets, meanwhile discussing current events and news of marriage engagements. When the group had had enough of current affairs, singing took its place. The group often sang together; sometimes two particularly good singers would exchange couples praising Allah, his

Prophet, and the moy gẹr. They also praised their friends in song, singing about their good qualities.

The work environment was lively, full of activities and enjoyment. Once a week, on Friday, the group bought grain with the coins they had collected in the water bowl and prepared shahum, boiled grain. A straw was stuck at the center of the shahum, so that everyone would learn table manners. Whoever made the straw fall over was obliged to contribute a certain amount of money to the water bowl.

The weaving of hitt hitt, a small flat basket, is the beginning of a long journey to acquire expertise in basket making. The first stage involves only natural, undyed grass. After mastering the weaving process, one gradually learns to manipulate ọghẹm ọgy, “red and black,” a term used for dyed grass, to produce a wide range of complex patterns and designs.

Initially, everyone had to buy from individuals who prepared dyed ọghẹm and gẹm. Amina remembered “the good old days” when mothers used to share their dyed grass with their daughters in exchange for the service of splitting ọghẹm. Both natural and artificial powdered colors are still essential components for the making of dyes. The most commonly used colors include ọghẹm (red), ọghẹm (green), ọghẹm (yellow), and ọgy (black). These are called gẹm. Harari colors, whereas pink and orange are considered tourist colors. The essential ingredients are plants, such as ọghẹm (yellow spice); imported powdered dyes; water; and lemon juice. The dyeing process involves dissolving the natural plant material or the powder in boiling water and then soaking the ọghẹm and gẹm in the solution. Lemon juice is added to set the color.

Color dyeing requires special skill. It is not something any basket maker can do. Although the technique of dyeing may seem easy, it is an intricate process requiring careful timing and measurement of ingredients. Every dyer has her own way of producing dyed grass. Most of the time the techniques are kept secret by the specialists so that they can maintain an influence on the market. Today only one house in Harer specializes in dyeing basket fiber for market. However, there still are professional basket makers, like Amina, who prefer to do their own dyeing.

Different colors are combined to form patterns and designs of varying complexity. One starts with simple designs like the usf bula, the “foot-
of a bird." More complex arrangements include qal'a (run (tie and release), fuch'iq (splash), fush nathiq (coin), ghar nath (slave needle), muthqi (belt), husef (rug), and mosh (bread table). Today there are more than twenty-five designs and patterns. Some of the designs are named after building and place names, such as Mushmali qat, a building built inside the city walls by a wealthy Indian merchant (ca. 1910), and "Borday," named for the textile of similar design that is imported from Bombay. Many of the design names refer to animals, like the previously mentioned sif bird and also adiru in (the eye of a cat) and adon san (the trunk of an elephant), etc.

To produce these designs Amina demonstrated the painstaking steps of counting coils and interweaving qurqis and qares. She adorns the oref, the "good" side of the basket, with thin, refined weaving. Thin weaving is used to produce high-quality Harari baskets. The other type of weaving, called san ith, or unrefined, is mainly used for tourist baskets. The ador, the "bad" side (inside), is the functional side of a Harari basket; the ore with its iridescent qares, is decorative.

Harari basket designs usually integrate geometric patterns of triangular, rectangular, and lozenge shapes. There are also zigzag patterns that imitate wavelike movement. Some of the basket makers have integrated calligraphy in their basket designs. Amina, for instance, has used both Arabic and Amharic letters in her baskets. Most of the inscriptions are either the personal names of owners or specific Qur'anic quotations. Amina told us that there is room for creativity, for introducing new designs and patterns, but that the conservative demands of the market for traditional dowry baskets do not favor innovation. Thus, the collective aesthetic values of the community in Harar have discouraged individual expression and creativity.

The six basic basket shapes may be classified as follows: flat circular, flat at the center and flaring out at the edge, triangular, rectangular, conical, and hemispherical. Before the wedding, every Harari girl must prepare the following baskets: one ghafa malas (hairnet container), two ifis malas (incense containers), two bish malas (chewing gum containers), four dafa uftis (conical lids), four fajin gars (a small held container), and six ufan agar (a small plate). Today some of the larger sets of baskets have been reduced to sets of two because of the high cost of baskets. Amina commented that the introduction of the modern school system, which requires a major time commitment, does not allow girls enough time to prepare the necessary items for their dowries. It is used to take about a year to complete a set of dowry baskets. This situation has brought about the establishment of a new occupation: professional basket making. Today, in the city of Harar there are fewer than ten professional basket makers, who are responsible for producing almost all the dowry baskets. Each professional has her own specialty. Amina's specialty is the dafa ufti. Now, a girl's family must spend a substantial sum to acquire the baskets needed for marriage. In May 1993, Amina quoted us these prices:

- ghafa malas 1,000 birr
- bish malas 125 birr
- ifi malas 125 birr
- dafa ufti 350 birr
- fajin gar 225 birr
- ufan agar 250 birr

This new trend has affected both the social and the symbolic significance of baskets, as well as the market for Harari baskets. Although it remains an important symbol of identity, the basket does not play the central role it used to. Nevertheless, a minimum standard is still maintained. Every bride must bring a minimal set of baskets to her marriage. The continued social import of baskets in Harar is manifest in a number of traditions. At the end of the honeymoon both the bride's rooms and the bride's relatives come together and compete in song. The bride's side mentions the quality of the baskets that the bride has made. It is therefore critical for pride's sake that every bride have some baskets.

Amina is known for the quality of her work. With an expert eye one can distinguish her work from that of other basket makers. Her skill may be appreciated by examining the dafa ufti that she makes—veritable works of art (fig. 3.7, pl. 2d). Those familiar with the art of basket making will know how difficult it is to coil a conical form and will appreciate the exquisite proportions and the perfect execution of the design patterns.
The income derived from basket making is not enough to live on but it is better than it used to be. The aphorism Merfi siki wdim alkaa, meaning "A piece of an awl does not raise a child," instructs one not to indulge in basket making as the sole means of making a living. Producing baskets should supplement one’s primary mode of subsistence; one should never rely on it as a primary source of income. Amina was forced to stay at home when she became responsible for caring for her blind mother. Her limited mobility influenced her decision to become a professional basket maker. Amina spends roughly five hours a day working on baskets. She told us that her income is barely enough to survive. It takes a lot of time to produce a t'lin basket. The traditions of production have changed over the last twenty years. The impact of the last regime (i.e., the Derg) on social organization was devastating. One casualty was the may gaa. The group effort has been replaced by the individual effort.

Most of Amina's baskets are used within Harari society. She does not involve herself with tourist-oriented basketwork. The main reason she has avoided the tourist market is because there is better remuneration for commissioned dowry baskets. Only the best basket makers, like Amina, receive these commissions. The less-skilled basket makers focus most of their production on less-demanding tourist baskets. The demand for Amina's baskets is both local and international. These days, many Hararis living abroad in Europe, North America, and Australia commission their dowries. The introduction of international currencies has substantially inflated the cost of baskets.

A standard Harari house has one living room, called a gullur gar, with five raised seats (pl. 3). These seats signify social hierarchy. The seat immediately to the right of the entrance is called arm nolda; it is the place reserved for the owner of the house or for an elik (a learned person). The second seat is gullur nolda; it is for the elderly. The third is sum nolda, which functions as a bed for the owner of the house. The t'li nolda and the gullur nolda are seats for ordinary people. Traditionally, almost the entire wall surface was covered with basketwork and wooden bowls. Today most gullur gar also contain enamelware hanging on the same walls, often interspersed with the more traditional baskets and wooden bowls. The different niches serve as bookshelves and cupboards.

Formerly, every Harari woman was supposed to know basket arrangement—if she did not, she could be bitterly criticized. A wife who did not possess this knowledge was considered a bunti, "a careless or lazy woman." Every basket has a specific place on the wall. If it is hung in the wrong spot, its symbolic meaning might be confused. One never sees a lunt (a large flat basket) hung from a pillar, or a lunt n-mort (mother-in-law’s basket) in the place reserved for the khot Mort (a bread
(basket). The presence of a hamst met in a house indicates that a son has been married, and it must be hung in a specific location to signify this important event.

The role of basketry in Harari society is threefold: utilitarian, decorative, and symbolic. Utilitarian baskets like sibun met, afata, and squd are made in Oromo communities near Harer and bought in the Harer market. They are made using simple coiling techniques and are devoid of any decorative pattern. The sibun met, the bread basket, has been replaced by inexpensive Chinese enamelware. But some women still prefer to use the basket, especially when they take bread to a house that is in mourning. The afata, or sieve, is also being replaced by plastic or metal sieves. The squd, a special container for grain measurement, might remain as a utilitarian basket for some time because it represents a specific unit of measure.

Harari basketry also serves a decorative role in the Harari house. This function has been affected by the recent introduction of factory-made cement. Many Harari house walls are now plastered with cement, which makes them difficult to pierce for basket hanging. Nevertheless, some of the essential dowry baskets have not lost their decorative function; they are displayed in other contexts, for instance, on tables.

The third role of Harari baskets involves their symbolic significance in rites of passage. Here also the new wave of cultural change has affected the importance of these baskets. Each decorated Harari basket used to play a pivotal role in important social events like the birth of a child or a marriage, but now traditional rituals associated with these events are giving way to modern ones and this has had an impact on the production of most types of baskets. The only basket that continues to maintain a special social significance is the hamst met, or mother-in-law basket. Every mother-in-law still expects this basket from her daughter-in-law.

In the past, the daughter-in-law would make this piece during the first year of marriage, but now professional basket makers have started producing this beautiful basket. Mothers-in-law still carry bread for social events in the hamst met, denoting that they are on good terms with their daughters-in-law.

The future of Harari baskets is uncertain. Amina is now primarily producing the baskets required for the dowry, and some of her friends specialize in hamst met, but no one has taken responsibility for the larger baskets such as the lemst (a flat basket), wakaline (a conical basketry lid), and k'ey menes (a basketry plate used as a cover for another basket). They certainly will soon disappear. Nevertheless, there is reason to hope that the tradition of Harari basket making will be sustained by the next generation. Amina's daughter Munira Ahmed is an excellent example of this hope (fig. 3.6). When we worked with Amina in 1993, Munira was seventeen, and already she was a skilled basket maker and adept at making all of the baskets that form a bride's dowry. Perhaps young women like Munira will sustain this magnificent tradition.
Every Woman an Artist
The Milk Containers of Elema Boru

Marco Bassi

The Oromo-Borana
The Borana live in southern Ethiopia and northern Kenya. They are a pastoral group speaking a southern dialect of the Oromo language (fig. 4.2). According to the "History of the Galla," written at the beginning of the seventeenth century by a Christian monk (Bahrey 1954), they are one of the two major Oromo groups who have expanded from the southern part of present-day Ethiopia into the Ethiopian highlands, beginning in the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century the Oromo controlled most of southern, central, eastern, and western Ethiopia, but they did not build a centralized empire. Rather, during the process of expansion they reproduced their own egalitarian society with only limited structural and cultural changes—the result of integrating autochthonous people into their society and adapting to new geographical environments. Thus the Borana, despite their strong cultural homogeneity with other Oromo groups and their incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire at the end of the nineteenth century, still regard themselves as a unique people. Their autonomous ethnic identity is expressed in various ways and contexts, including the distinct style of their milk containers (fig. 4.3).

The Artist
During our study of Borana milk containers our research team established a privileged relationship with Elema Boru (fig. 4.1). She was intro-

I would like to thank Neal Soehnke for his comments on an earlier version of this essay, and Boka Tache Didu for checking the Oromo words to ensure that the spellings conform to the Qube transliteration system.
duced to us by the people of Dolollo Makkala, located about twenty kilometers south of Mega, when we asked for a skilled milk container maker. We found her busy weaving a container, sitting on a stool outside her house. She immediately impressed me because, unlike other women, she did not pay much attention to us; she simply went about her work while replying to our inquiries with short answers. She was dressed in typical Borana fashion, in a colored cotton cloth imported from Kenya. Despite her age and the hardship she had experienced, which could be seen in her eyes, her thin but clearly strong body revealed an extraordinary energy.

Elena was born in Romso (located southwest of Mega) during the gusii of Guyyo Boru, which, according to Asmarom Legesse's (1973: 190–91) gusii chronology, corresponds to the period 1944–51. After
The Limits of Creativity

The main features of Borana milk, butter, and water containers are described in the table (table 4). A general classification of these containers is given 
standardized forms. A few examples of the category 'general purpose' can be 
retrieved. Each type of container has a defined category, and these categories may overlap. For example, the 'general purpose' category includes all 
containers that do not fit into the specific categories. The table shows that 
most containers are used for both transportation and storage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Gender distinctions</th>
<th>Material and workmanship</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Capacity (liters)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gofita</td>
<td>Storing fresh milk or curdled milk;</td>
<td>Made and used</td>
<td>Woven natural fiber,</td>
<td>Upper part: truncated cone; lower part:</td>
<td>2-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ritual; making butter</td>
<td>by women</td>
<td>decorated</td>
<td>an oval truncated cone above the midline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ciloca</td>
<td>Storing fresh milk or curdled milk;</td>
<td>Made and used</td>
<td>Woven natural fiber</td>
<td>Round horizontal sections, oval vertical</td>
<td>1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ritual</td>
<td>by women</td>
<td>section</td>
<td>section</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gudleli</td>
<td>Carrying milk or water on journeys</td>
<td>Made and used</td>
<td>Carved wood covered</td>
<td>Like a sphere compressed on top and bottom</td>
<td>0.8-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>by men</td>
<td>with cow leather,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>leather strap holder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sosseta</td>
<td>Storing and carrying fresh milk,</td>
<td>Made by men,’</td>
<td>Carved wood, decorated</td>
<td>Sphere lengthened on top</td>
<td>1.5-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>curdled milk, or water; making butter;</td>
<td>used by women</td>
<td>with incised work;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ritual</td>
<td></td>
<td>sometimes with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>woven natural-fiber neck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>koppa</td>
<td>Simple milk container; also used as</td>
<td>Made and used</td>
<td>Ground, simply dried;</td>
<td>Ground shape</td>
<td>0.4-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feeding bottle</td>
<td>by women</td>
<td>sometimes encased in</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>leather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skile</td>
<td>Open milk and water container</td>
<td>Made by men, used</td>
<td>Two pieces of giraffe skin</td>
<td>Cylindrical with round lower corner,</td>
<td>3-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>used for milking and drawing water from</td>
<td>by men and women</td>
<td>sewn together with skin</td>
<td>able to stand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wells</td>
<td></td>
<td>and slowly dried by</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>smoking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skile gudoli</td>
<td>Holding and carrying milk</td>
<td>Made by men and</td>
<td>Same as skile but with</td>
<td>Cylindrical with round lower corner</td>
<td>ca. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
<td>wooden lid and leather-strap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhibber</td>
<td>Storing butter in the house</td>
<td>Made by men and</td>
<td>Carved wood, with</td>
<td>Open spaces between an oval main body and</td>
<td>0.5-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
<td>incised decoration</td>
<td>a base</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doebe</td>
<td>Storing butter in the house for long</td>
<td>Made by men,’</td>
<td>A single piece of cryx skin;</td>
<td>Corrugated sphere with cylindrical neck</td>
<td>3-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>periods</td>
<td>used by women</td>
<td>sometimes having</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>a woven natural-fiber neck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>baddumu baddum</td>
<td>Storing butter; polishing and mixing</td>
<td>Made by men, used</td>
<td>Carved wood, with</td>
<td>Same as dhibber</td>
<td>0.2-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stones with butter (cosmetic)</td>
<td>by women</td>
<td>incised decoration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>buula</td>
<td>Storing aromatic butter used</td>
<td>Made and used by</td>
<td>Section of cow horn closed</td>
<td>Cylindrical</td>
<td>0.2-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>to smear the hair of women</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>at bottom and top with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>leather</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bume shakili</td>
<td>Fetching and storing water</td>
<td>Made and used by</td>
<td>Woven natural fiber</td>
<td>Same as cilo</td>
<td>8-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bume</td>
<td>Fetching and storing water</td>
<td>Made by men,’</td>
<td>Carved wood, with</td>
<td>Same as sosseta</td>
<td>8-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>used by women</td>
<td>a woven natural-fiber neck</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1The container is encased in the umgalu holder, consisting of leather straps, sometimes adorned with cowries. Straps are used to secure the lid and to suspend the container. Also used to carry milk to market for sale. 2The natural fiber neck is made by women. Sometimes the thickest part of an or bull skin or the skin of another wild animal is used. 3Leather straps are used to secure the lid, passing between the base and the main body and through openings on the wooden lid. Also used to carry butter to market. 4The cowrie semi-spherical frame is used for holding the container; the cowrie is made with wood twigs and leather straps. The container and the lid are tied with straps to the frame.
to generation. Very often the term ełak is uttered in association with Banna—ełak Banna—thus underscoring something that distinguishes the Borana cultural heritage from other people’s.

Within the broad categories described in the table, the maker has room for personal choice. For example, we spent a lot of time observing the work of Dodi Hukka, a very well known carver living in Dolol Makkalo (Fig. 4.4). Dodi explained that he learned the patterns of incised decorations on wooden containers from his teacher but later modified them according to his own wishes and to the demands of the market. Regarding woven milk containers, Elena Boru told us that she can freely combine a number of weaving styles to give to each container a unique surface design. She showed us a number of containers she had made, all different from each other.

Fig. 4.4 Dodi Hukka carving a wooden container.

An individual can also decide to make a container that dramatically varies from the norm. One day Elena Marnu showed our research team a gurka that was spherical and much smaller than usual (pl. 5, left). She justified this “deviation” by saying that she made it as a toy for her small daughter. However, when asked why she did not maintain the typical proportion between the upper and lower parts, she admitted that she had seen her mother make a similar gurka and simply liked the shape.

Let us assume that many people admire the “nontraditional” gurka, as our research team did. In this case there is no reason why other women should not reproduce the spherical gurka in response to the new demand. The gurka type of milk container may, in this way, evolve into a wider range of possible shapes, and eventually a new type of milk container, with its own name, may result. It is perhaps through just such a process that the gurka and niik, which are rather similar in shape, material, workmanship, and size, became differentiated, especially when cowrie shells became more accessible in the area (Fig. 4.5). A creative act by an individual may thus become part of the cultural legacy of the community, its ełak. The concept of ełak does not exclude change.

Fig. 4.5 A gurka and a niik made by Elena Boru.
Gender and Container Making

Among the Borana there is a strict sex distinction in container making. Wood carving is restricted to men. Consequently, all carved containers (sororo, giinji, asibe, budana dhal-e, butte) are produced by men (fig. 4.6). Similarly, weaving is restricted to women. All woven containers (gera, ciibbe, butte alaffe) are therefore made by women (fig. 4.7). During my long stay among the Borana I did not record a single exception to this rule.

Working with skin, especially that of hunted wild animals, is also a male prerogative. Containers like alaffe, asibe gibilade, and doola are therefore made by men, but I have sometimes seen women smoke-drying animal skins. Lastly, small containers like basa, made with a section of cattle horn closed at the top and bottom with cowhide, and boppa, made from a dried gourd, are produced by women.

Some containers (basu, sororo, doola) involve both carving and weaving or working with skin. They therefore require the work of both a man and a woman, usually husband and wife, or at least family members living in the same household. Such containers reflect a recurrent feature of Borana society: the differentiated but complementary roles of man and woman, whose effect is that a man cannot live without a woman and, conversely, a woman cannot live without a man. Men are associated with all activities involving relations with human groups outside the family, whereas women have full responsibility for all domestic activities. Cattle, central to Borana culture, exemplify this set of relations. Cattle belong to men. They can be exchanged or given as gifts...
or loans beyond the family boundary and yet have to be protected from
outsiders. The milk produced by cows, which provides for the family’s
subsistence, falls within the domestic sphere, and consequently, women
both milk cows and are considered the absolute owners of milk.

Milk containers, particularly woven milk containers that are used for
storing milk inside the house and are therefore part of the domestic
sphere, fall within the female domain (see Dahl 1990; Prussin 1987).
We find, in fact, another very important gender difference in container
making: although the male container maker is a specialist, in that only
a few men are able to carve, all Borana women are expected to know
how to make woven milk containers. The superior cultural value attributed
to containers made by women becomes evident when the ritual
meaning of woven milk containers is considered.

**Milk Containers and Ritual**

Most Borana ceremonies include ritual practices that involve the use
of woven milk containers. To my knowledge carved containers serve no
ritual role. During the name-giving ceremony for a firstborn male, called
galbis, every participating married woman brings a _geff_ full of milk or
_ntusu_ (curdled milk) and hangs it on a section of the _gala_ (the large
ceremonial house) roof. During such ceremonies one often sees more
than a hundred _geffs_ hanging together. One after the other, the _geffs_
are taken to feed the guests, who continue singing through the night.
Just before sunrise a bull is slaughtered. Part of the meat is cooked and eaten
by the guests. Some is put on top of the _gala_ and later taken away by a
_wamis_ (ritual assistant belonging to the hunter-gatherer caste) and by a
_tammna_ (blacksmith). A third portion is divided into small pieces which
are tied to each of the _geffs_ once they have been emptied. Every woman
returns home with her _geff_ and a share of the meat. Similarly, before
every sacrifice, which occur at all important ceremonies, a small amount
of fresh milk is poured on the lid of a _ciowo_ and offered to the sacrificial
animal.

As mentioned by Father Leus (1988) in his dictionary, on the occasion
of the _galuumloggi_ ceremony (a rite related to the complex _galu_
generation-class system of the Borana), the _galuumloggi_ elder will
receive from a sister a _ciowo_ containing fresh milk. In return she receives

a _cow_, which is called _dhisayru_. A small amount of fresh milk is poured
from a _ciowo_ on the ground on several other occasions, including during
the _dhisayru_ rite, which occurs at a well before the beginning of
its seasonal utilization, and during the _soollu_ ritual, which commemorates
a death.

When used in ritual, _ciowo_ and _geff_ are called respectively _miusu_ and
_mali_. These two terms indicate both the container itself and the milk
or curdled milk that must be inside. For the Borana, milk and butter
serve as metonymic symbols of abundance. The containers themselves
also have symbolic meaning. They are woven. When a girl marries, she
makes two plaits in her hair. When she becomes pregnant, all of her
hair is plaited. Only women can do the job of weaving. All this seems
to indicate that weaving in Borana is associated with fertility. Thus, the
container and the milk inside it symbolize the ideal combination of fer-
tility and abundance, two fundamental prerequisites for the reproduc-
tion and prosperity of the group.

Woven milk containers, however, are not merely objects necessary
for the performance of some rituals. When a bride is taken to the groom’s
village (intogo _faalduu_, “marriage,” literally “to take the girl away”), she
must bring a _miusu_ (a _ciowo_ containing milk) with her. This container
was made by the girl’s mother when the latter decided it was time for
her daughter to marry. The making of such a container provides a very
clear message to the community and signals that the engagement
process can start. On one occasion, many years ago, my closest friend’s
daughter called me to her house. She showed me the _ciowo_ that her mother
was weaving and explained that it was for her marriage. This was a very
direct counting gesture—a message that I should contact her father and
ask to marry her before someone else (someone she didn’t like) did!

The association between _ciowo_ and marriage is so strong that it is
believed that giving away a _ciowo_ made for marriage will bring great mis-
fortune on the daughter’s marriage. Any action involving the _ciowo_
represents an action in the marriage, as is evident in the funerary ritual of
a married man. At death, the corpse is buried very deeply, with many
stones piled in a cylindrical configuration atop the grave. Some of the
dead individual’s most significant personal objects are broken and put
on top of the stones, including the _ciowo_ of his first wife, which is cut

Every Woman an Artist
in two. At death, the man's reproductive capacity ceases; his wife's clitoris, which both stands for and promotes reproductive capacity, no longer has any reason to exist. But why is the clitoris of the first wife chosen? In Borana the firstborn male of the first wife, enga, inherits all the special rights and prerogatives of his father. In all respects the enga takes over the social position of the dead man, thus representing his social continuity in the group.

When a married woman dies, her gebs is cut and put on top of the stone burial mound. At marriage, the family of the groom has to present at least one gebs to the newly established family.

Woven milk containers, therefore, metaphorically represent the reproductive capacity of the family. No wonder Elena Boru refused to sell the clitoris from her own marriage and was reluctant to sell the clitoris she had already completed for her last daughter's marriage (fig. 4.5, right).

The physical reproduction of a man, hence the reproduction of the society, depends on his wife's fertility; similarly, a man's marriage, the social setting for reproduction, depends on women-made objects. Simply put, there cannot be any marriage without a clitoris and there cannot be any reproduction without woven milk containers. That is why every woman must be able to make milk containers. Woven milk containers represent her own fertility. They are round, full of milk and nourishment, just like a pregnant woman—inside the woman's womb is a life that will sustain the social continuity of her husband and family. The identification of the woven container with the female body is again stressed, in my opinion, by the cowrie shells attached to the gebs container, symbolizing, by formal analogy, the vagina.

Woven Milk Containers: The Learning Process
Elena Boru explained that she started to learn the art of weaving at the age of ten. She watched her mother, and when she felt like it, she asked her mother to allow her to weave. Her mother first guided her in the basic work of weaving, allowing her to make only a few stitches. With increased practice she was allowed to assume a greater share of the work, and at the same time her mother taught her the other lessons associated with container making, including the identification and collection of materials, the techniques for maintaining the almost perfect symmetry of the container, and the methods for proper decoration. When she married and left her mother's house, she was not yet an accomplished container maker. Only with further practice did her skills improve. In time she began to supplement the basics learned from her mother with ideas of her own.

Each woman we asked confirmed that she had learned the art of container making from her mother or from a woman she had lived with prior to marriage. Jilo Hela, a woman who was making a gebs during our last visit to the Borana, showed us how she was teaching Elena, her twelve-year-old daughter. Although Elena was quite adept at working on her mother's gebs, she had not yet completed anything by herself. Maintaining the proper shape and proportions can be achieved only when someone is extremely skilled and knowledgeable.

Making woven milk containers is, therefore, part of the daily educational process, learned by every woman before marriage, in the same way milking, collecting firewood, and making butter are learned.

Milk Containers as an Exchange Commodity
Most often women make milk containers for their own families, either for daily use or for the marriage of their daughters or sons. It is, however, not only recognized but also ritualistically prescribed that they may also make them for relatives outside their own nuclear family, as in the already mentioned case of the gashaasaa ceremony.

To give an example, during her lifetime Elena Boru has produced two gebs for her own use, three gebs for the marriage of her three daughters, and several other milk containers for her male and female relatives. She explained that she never sold milk containers for cash. Instead, she acquired gifts, a sign of gratitude, consisting of either women's clothing or a cow. The same pattern of exchange was confirmed by the other women interviewed. Again, in this respect woven milk containers differ sharply from the containers carved by men, which are regularly sold in the market.

Jilo Dido, who claims to have made about thirty milk containers in her life, explained that she sold for cash five woven containers to CARE International, a development and relief organization. This new practice...
was introduced recently by CARE International as a means of alleviating poverty. Jillo explained that all commissioned milk containers have been resold outside the Borana region.

It is very interesting to analyze the goods given as gifts. If a relative needs a milk container, it means that he has enough cows and therefore can afford to give either a cow or clothes. On the other hand, a woman will agree to make a milk container if she is in need, particularly if she needs cows to reconstitute a lost herd. Thus, the practice of giving milk containers outside the nuclear family is one of many mechanisms for redistributing wealth among the Borana. A man whose wife is a skilled milk container maker has an additional resource for reconstituting his herd in time of need. The husband, who possesses property rights to the incoming cattle, will derive most of the benefits from his wife's work, but the wife also will acquire prestige and power in her relationship with her husband.

From this perspective, CARE's activity is a logical extension outside Borana society of a traditional internal mechanism for reconstituting herds. It has proven effective during the present difficult situation of generalized destitution, when no Borana family needs extra milk containers and no family is in a position to give cows away.

Making Woven Milk Containers

As previously noted, there are two types of woven milk containers, gofr and ciosa. They are both made with the same materials and the same weaving techniques. But they differ in shape, size, and decoration.

Three types of natural fiber serve as the basic material for weaving (Fig. 4.7). Musa (pronounced “sana”) provides the core material for all the milk containers. It is derived from the bark of small branches of the quinoa tree (Stizolobium tijucam). The musa fiber is woven with either eguma or halsa. The word eguma signifies both the small plant and the fiber made from its root. Halsa is the name of both the theoretic small tree itself and the fiber derived from its root. A fourth type of fiber, skoller, is obtained from the root of another small tree, but it is only used for the better skoller, a big water container.

These plants are all found in the Borana lowlands (the southeastern and southwestern fringes of Ethiopian Boranaland and in adjacent regions of Kenya). The women living in the higher territories, especially in the area between Xavello, Arero, and Moga, have to either spend several days traveling to find the plants or buy the fibers in the markets, where they are rather expensive.

Elenna Boru showed us the weaving technique. A number of musa fibers are bunched together to form the horizontal coil that moves in an upward spiral from the base, where all woven containers begin. Small pieces of halsa or eguma fiber are wrapped around the musa at regular intervals on each horizontal row so that they form decorative vertical lines on the container surface. The diameter of the container increases as the weaving progresses from the base to the middle and then decreases from the middle to the top. To maintain parallel vertical lines it is necessary to occasionally add or drop a halsa or eguma stitch. Working from the base, as the diameter increases the weaver, at a certain point, will have to add a new halsa or eguma stitch and thus begin a new vertical line. Conversely, as the diameter decreases toward the top of the container, she will have to drop a stitch at some point. This technique results in unique raised surface patterns on every container.

The work is done with two different kinds of awls (Fig. 4.7). Once the eguma or halsa tuft is passed over the musa, it must be turned down inside the container and passed through the already woven surface from inside out. A hole is made with a sharp awl, called musu wamans (the awl of the hole). The second awl, musu mila (the awl to make), has a notch cut into its point. It is passed through the hole from the outside and is used to catch the fiber and pull it through the hole. Both awls are made by local blacksmiths, the nambu, and are easily and inexpensively obtained in the market.

There are two primary weaving techniques: bbelilo and misttimo (from misttimo, “to twist”). The bbelilo style involves simply passing the fiber around the musa. The second style requires twisting the fiber before passing it around. The second style results in a tighter weave, and the decorative vertical lines are thinnier. Of course, the misttimo technique is more time-consuming.

Usually eguma fiber is used with the misttimo style of weaving. The bbelilo style is usually adopted when halsa fiber is used. The reason is quite simple: the halsa fiber is much stiffer, and if it is to be twisted,
it must be soaked in water for a few hours to soften it. The combination of the micimba style and holina fiber, however, is considered the best work, but our research team saw only a single example of such a container, a geři made by Elema Mamu (fig. 4.8).

To supplement the aesthetic impact of these basic weaving techniques, the surface of both geřiś and cišwi may be enriched with the obisna decoration. This consists of a number of thicker vertical lines made by means of cross-stitches. Although most women are able to make only one type of obisna, Elema Boru showed us two different containers having different types of designs (fig. 4.5, right and left). The first design, very common, is called obisna kebi (obisna of the cattle). The second one is obisna nqve’s tuli, meaning the obisna of the dik-dik hoof, because it resembles a dik-dik hoofprint. Elema mentioned that she knows at least five different obisna motifs. The obisna decoration is associated with the micimba, or “twisted,” style. Although Elema Mamu claims that it is in theory possible to integrate obisna on a bibollo background, our research team never saw such a combination. It is very likely that the obisna would lose its decorative effect on the bibollo background because of the latter’s characteristic thicker vertical lines. Because holina fiber is usually worked in bibollo style, it is also very unusual to see obisna on a geři made from holina. The only exception we observed was the geři mentioned earlier made by Elema Mamu.

When available, women like to weave giraffe tail hair, maa (pronounced “mara”), into the geři surface to add a black decoration. This is especially common on bibollo geřiś, to enrich their otherwise subtle surface. Recently, colored plastic cord has begun to replace the maa, because plastic is more readily available and because it is perceived as having a greater visual impact. For instance, one can see blue plastic thread used in the unusual spherical geři made by Elema Mamu (pl. 5, left).

Beyond the basic differences in weaving technique, cišwi and geři milk containers also differ in other respects. For example, the cišwi is smaller than the geřiś. Its beauty lies in its symmetry, its simple but elegant elliptical profile. The lid, called pahidh cišwi, does not break the continuity of the profile. Cowries are used to decorate geřiś but are never attached to cišwi. This is probably due to the fact that the profile itself is regarded as having significant aesthetic impact—it would be spoiled by high-relief decoration. Elema Mamu showed us the cišwi made for her marriage. Its cowrie pattern displayed diagonal, rather than the more common vertical, lines. She explained that this cišwi was started as a geřiś and at some point her mother turned it into a cišwi for Elema’s marriage (perhaps,
while her mother was working on the container, someone asked to marry Elena). The parallel diagonal lines are, according to Elena, old-fashioned. The effect, to our eyes, was very pleasing, because it gives more movement to the plain surface. But the Borana seem to be of the opinion that such extra effects on a small container's surface are visually too busy. On the other hand, diagonal lines are the norm in the large bone skilfie water containers, which otherwise have the same shape as ciiso and are devoid of any relief decorations.

Whereas the ciiso may be characterized as a single-volume shape (i.e., there is a continuity of line in all directions), the gdfs is composed of two volumes. This is probably due to a perceived aesthetic necessity to visually break the larger form at some point. The lower portion is similar to the ciiso. The elliptical form, however, ends slightly above its midpoint. The lower part is called the l bezpośi (down from lابيس); the lاب is a horizontal band of egumus or bolsus stitches. Lاب is, according to everyone we spoke to, a required element of all gdfs. The upper section, called mome (neck), is a truncated cone surmounted by a lid. There is a standard proportion between the lengths of the lower and upper parts, which the Borana measure using reference points on the palm of the hand to particular finger joints. Elena demonstrated this and noted that there can be two different sizes, with different points on the palm used as reference. To ensure that the proper proportions are maintained, Borana women can either measure or estimate, depending on their skill and experience at weaving. About one or two centimeters above the lاب another horizontal band should be woven using either egumus or bolsus. Slightly smaller than the lاب itself, this woven band is called riffo and is considered another constitutive element of a gdfs.

The function of both lاب and riffo became clear when we observed Jilo Dido fixing the cowrie shells, defana, to the surface of a gdfs (fig. 4.9). The cowries are sewn with giraffe tail hair, māsu, to the riffo and lاب, which serve as structural supports for attaching the shells. Jilo selected each cowrie very carefully, so that each was the same size. Before affixing them side-by-side, she punched a hole through the round part of the shell using one of the awls. The circle of cowries on the lاب sharply demarcates the lower from the upper part of the gdfs, a division that is the primary characteristic of the gdfs design. Cowries also have a special place on the gdfs lid (gi-butu gdfs). The lid has a horizontal line of either bolsus or egumus stitches, called lاب munsut, on which cowries can be sewn.

Many gdfs have no cowries, usually because the maker had problems obtaining the shells. Cowries are expensive (they are bought in the shops or markets of the large towns), and they are not necessary for the utilitarian function of the container. A woman often starts using a container before she has added the shells. Whenever we asked a woman why she had not added cowries, she always replied that she was going to do it soon.

Because they have round bottoms, gdfs and ciiso cannot stand on their own, with a few exceptions. Each must have a holder, sehafa, made out of several leather straps. The straps are used both for tying the lid down and for hanging the container on the house wall. The holder, which is made by the woman owning the container, may or may not have cowries (fig. 4.10). The sehafa, a semispherical frame, is used to hold the butte skilfie, a large water container.

Fig. 4.9 Jilo Dido, with her young son looking on, attaches cowries to a gdfs.

Fig. 4.10 Four gdfs hanging in the house of Elena Mamu.
Making a woven milk container takes a long time. It is usually done when there is free time. Elenna told us that it takes her about one or two years to finish one. Of course, it could be completed more quickly if she dedicated more time to it, but even if she worked on it every day, it would probably take three or more months to finish one.

**Daily Use**

Despite their ritual functions, gelfi and sennis are basically objects of daily use, just like carved-wood milk containers. Milk is taken from the cow using an akka container set on the ground. The milk is then poured into a closed container (kollaa is the general term for all small storage containers with lids). Since new milk is never added to old milk, an empty container must be found. However, before use, all empty containers have to be cleaned and purified.

The cleaning operation, called gomasa, is performed shortly before milking. The container’s owner (a woman) puts pieces of aromatic wood or of charcoal made from this wood on the fire until they become hot (gomasa). Meanwhile she pours a little water inside the container. Using a stick with a cut at one end, she picks up a gomasa and drops it into the container. The contact with the water immediately produces a lot of steam. The woman closes the lid and turns the container end to end with rhythmic movements so that the charcoal comes in contact with all the interior surfaces. When the charcoal is completely extinguished, she puts it back in the fire. She again adds a little water and takes another piece of hot charcoal. The operation is repeated at least six times for each container.

The gomasa operation burns the inner surface, which becomes black, dense, smooth, and aromatic. The operation completely purifies the container and gives the milk a wonderful fragrance. It may also aid in its preservation and its transformation into curdled milk.

Once the milk is put into the purified container, it is stored by hanging the container on the back wall of the house (fig. 4-10). Some milk is drunk fresh within a couple of days; some is stored. Slowly, it turns into itiinsu, curdled milk. Itiinsu lasts for several weeks. Before the itiinsu is consumed, it is mixed with a special stick, called isbaa.

**Every Woman an Artist**

Borana milk containers provide a wonderful environment for preserving milk. Woven natural fibers allow both transpiration and evaporation, which lower the temperature of the liquid. Wooden containers allow some transpiration and thermal isolation.

If there is enough milk, some of it is used for making butter. Both gelfi and sennis can be used, but the latter is considered the more appropriate container. Some sennis have a lid with a small hole, kept closed with a piece of resin. The container is filled to three quarters of its capacity with milk. The woman, sitting on a stool, holds the container on her lap and rhythmically shakes it back and forth. She regularly stops to open the hole on the sennis or to partially open the lid when using a gelfi, to allow air to escape. The butter is collected from the surface of the liquid and stored in special butter containers (see table) and later used either as food, to fry coffee beans, or as a cosmetic.

All the small containers categorized as kollaa are also used for carrying milk to market for sale. The gomasa is made and used only by men. It is not used for storing milk but is ideal for carrying milk or water on long journeys. It is used, for example, in the mobile cattle camps (loma), when young boys take the livestock from place to place, traveling without shelter for several months, or on raids, when warriors may have to walk several days with little time to rest and eat.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Since all milk containers are different, they are subject to evaluation by the community. This process, as already discussed, will influence the evolution of the object type. The Borana distinguish between functional and aesthetic evaluation criteria. For example, when Elenna Boru showed us her gelfi made with holstu fiber (fig. 4.5, left), she explained that holstu is better than yegamu both because it lasts longer (functional criterion) and because of its reddish color (aesthetic criterion).

Most of the newly made containers conform to certain canons pertaining to shape and media. The artist, however, must always make aesthetic choices, such as those regarding incised decoration (wooden containers) and raised design (woven containers). The implication is that whereas all containers are subjected to aesthetic evaluation, functional evaluation applies only to those containers that sharply deviate from shape, size, or material standards. The case of the introduction of
plastic cord is an interesting one. At one level, the cord is an aesthetic innovation, and yet on another level, plastic is functionally incompatible with the practice of burning the internal surface of the woven milk container. Which evaluation criterion will prevail? Will the new practice survive or will it be abandoned?

In order to better understand the aesthetic criteria, our research team presented three different woven milk containers for evaluation to a group of women in the village of Sallo, a traditional Borana village located south of Mega, less than sixty kilometers north of the Kenya-Ethiopia border. All three containers were, to our untrained eyes, equally good. To be honest, until that day we had no idea how to judge a container.

Each woman took the first gift and checked the proportion between the upper and the lower part using the palm-of-the-hand-to-finger measurement. After a more detailed examination, they all agreed that it was a decent gift. When asked why, they replied that everything was there: good shape, massa (black decoration), dafani (cowries). They also admired the long neck, which was evidently longer than the standard measurement. In short, they said, nothing was wrong with it, which, in Borana society, is a diplomatic way to say that it was nothing extraordinary.

They observed that the second gift was made by an expert, someone with a good hand and a lot of practice. However, they did note that it lacked cowrie shells. The women all agreed that the third container, a gift, was the best. I actually could not see any difference from the other containers and, therefore, I again asked why. They explained that its lines were straight and evenly spaced. In conclusion, they said, all three were nice—but they added, even in their village there were containers better than the three we had asked them to look at.

In order to gain a better understanding of what is unacceptable, we asked to see a poorly made container. After a short discussion, the women sent a girl to get a gift (fig. 4.11). When it was presented to the group, everyone started laughing—even I could see that it was not a good container. The surface was uneven; the decorative enameled lines were irregular, and the general shape was awkward. After this encounter with a poorly made gift, Qabbale Elena, our host, showed us her own gift as an example of excellent work (fig. 4.12). The contrast was very apparent: it had an elegant profile and straight, thin, and tightly rolled lines that were regularly spaced, and the surface was very smooth. Each line was a perfect arc.

Clearly, different people tend to agree on the aesthetic evaluation of milk containers. A technically perfect execution is the most appreciated quality, even more than the richness of decorative motifs. But technique and functionality are closely tied to the overall aesthetic. In their judgment, Borana women are guided by models, by the ideal of what a certain container should be. There are, however, an infinite number of possible aesthetic choices within a technically perfect execution. The model is itself flexible.

To summarize, milk containers are basically objects of daily use that are the result of a dynamic interaction between the group's cultural heritage and the individual's creativity. They reflect a continuous process of both aesthetic and functional innovation (mainly by individuals) and evaluation (mainly by the group). Within this framework, woven milk containers have assumed a special symbolic and ritual role among the Borana.
Back to the Roots!
I met Zerihun Yetmgeta for the first time in 1986, almost accidentally. I was engaged in research on contemporary traditional painters in Addis Ababa, and I had been asked to bring Zerihun a videocassette by one of his friends living in Zurich. When I first saw Zerihun's work, I was struck by the way he transformed traditional motifs into a modern idiom. When I prepared the 1989 exhibition "The Hidden Reality," which featured three Ethiopian artists, for the Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, there was no question that Zerihun should be represented. Back in Addis Ababa in spring 1989, I became better acquainted with him, and since then I have on many occasions enjoyed his hospitality (fig. 5.1). Zerihun is a warm, open, and strong personality. His Western-style clothes, including a leather vest and a leather cap, express his free behavior as an artist. He does not care about suits and ties and he

Fig 5.1 Zerihun Yetmgeta working on one of his bamboo-strip paintings.

An important basis for this essay were the interviews with artists and talks with directors of cultural institutes in the spring of 1993 in Addis Ababa. I would like to thank all those who helped me with my project, especially the following artists: Abebe Zedelew, Abdelfrahman M. Sherif, Bekele Bekele, Daniel Touaéle, Getachew Yosef, Leal S. Mariam, Luleged Retta, Megebo Tesema, Samuel Sharaw, Tadesse Mesfin, Teye Tadesse, Teshome Bekele, Tibebe Tesfia, Worku, and Barbara Goshu, and Zerihun Yetmgeta. Furthermore, I would like to thank Tadesse Belonch (director of the School of Fine Arts), Jean-Michel Champagné (Alliance Ethio-Française), Ms. Gugenberger (Goede Insitut), Giovanna Iturri (Istituto Italiano di Cultura), and Jacques Dubois (Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprise). Special thanks go to Dr. Peter R. Gerber, who accompanied me and took photographs for me. Many of his ideas have been incorporated in this essay. Thanks are also due to Sabine Baccata, who translated this essay from the original German.

Zerihun Yetmgeta and Ethiopian World Art

Elisabeth Biasio
does not conform to the rigid social conventions of modern Addis Ababa. More than twenty years ago, Chojnacki characterized him as follows: “Above all, he wishes to be independent, free from complexes, free from the rigidity of positions and grades so rooted in Ethiopian society.” (1973c: 89).

In 1989 Zerihun lived with his extended family in a small Western-style house surrounded by an uncultivated garden in Gullele, a section of northwest Addis Ababa. At that time he and his wife, Etangganeyehu Welde, an Amhara from the region of Menz (Shewa Province), had three daughters: Eti (b. 1973), Leyu (b. 1978), and Chi’ora (b. 1985). In 1989 and 1990 Zerihun and Etangganeyehu’s two sons, S’egga and T’emya, were born. In 1990 the family moved to the bigger villa formerly owned by Etangganeyehu’s deceased mother. Etangganeyehu’s divorced sister, Bete’aalisha Welde, and her son have lived with the family for many years. She is the owner of a bar, which was given to her by her mother. Since 1990, a widowed sister of Etangganeyehu, Te’egest Welde, who runs a small taxi business, and her daughter have also lived with them.

The new house is also situated in Gullele but is nearer to the center of the city. To be invited for lunch in Zerihun’s house is unforgettable—the Ethiopian meal demonstrates how deeply Zerihun and his wife are still rooted in tradition. The guest can try all the specialties: injin (pancakes made from t’ir, a millet-like cereal grown in the highlands of Ethiopia), aro we’t (chicken and eggs with hot pepper sauce), and tibs (roasted meat). After lunch, Etangganeyehu or one of her sisters, wearing traditional Ethiopian dress, celebrates the coffee ceremony, and soon the smell of roasted coffee and incense wafts through the house. The children are rarely seen; they prefer to eat separately. But Etangganeyehu joins us for the meal, and I like to talk with her. She is the owner of a small taxi business, and in 1991 she began a business selling African clothes designed by one of her friends in Nigeria. On 16 December 1993 at the Alliance Ethio-Francaise, Etangganeyehu held her first fashion show, and Zerihun exhibited some of his paintings at the same time. Zerihun told me that it was a big success, and Etangganeyehu plans to open a boutique. As in all middle- and upper-class families, a mammita (housemaid) and a asekna (guard) perform a lot of the work around the house, so that not all the household duties rest on the wife’s shoulders.

After lunch, Zerihun takes his guests to the studio he has built in the compound: a marvelous traditional round structure whose outer walls are decorated with motifs from magic scrolls. A finial similar to those atop churches crowns the roof; its metal bells ring mysteriously even in the slightest breeze (figs. 5.2, 5.3). Zerihun refers to his studio as his “church.” The walls are covered with his works, and paintings are piled up in a small adjoining room, bearing testimony to his enormous creative drive (fig. 5.4).
After his first one-artist show in Addis Ababa in 1970, Zerihun had numerous exhibitions in Ethiopia as well as abroad. In late 1991, he represented Ethiopian art at the Cuattre Biennal de la Habana at the Centro Wifredo Lam in Cuba with twenty of his works (Essaye Gebre Medhin 1991: 184–85; Gonzalez Mora 1992: 6–7), and in December 1992, he exhibited two of his works at the DAK-Art ’92 (second Biennale Internationale des Arts de Dakar) in Senegal, where its exceptional talents as an artist were recognized—he and the Senegalese sculptor Moussadja Dimé shared the Prix de la Biennale (Beau Art Magazine 1992: 18; Ansdel 1993; Chauvy 1993). Zerihun’s participation at the Kenya Art Panorama at the French Cultural Center in Nairobi in November 1993 was also a success. Zerihun was one of 110 participating artists from eastern, central, and southern Africa as well as from some Indian Ocean islands, and he won the second prize for one of his compositions on bamboo strips (wa Gacharu 1993).

Today, in international circles, Zerihun is probably the best-known Ethiopian artist, and his pictures find admirers and buyers at his numerous one-artist shows in Addis Ababa. Some of his patrons have become his personal friends, visiting him regularly at his studio. The biggest and most important collection—more than forty works—is owned by Helene Sokoloff, an artist and art historian from Vienna who is currently living in Addis Ababa. Thanks to her continuous patronage, the collection is representative of the artist’s work. Another extensive collection was acquired by the Swiss physician Dr. Herman H. Wohlgemut, who worked at the Black Lion Hospital in Addis Ababa from 1973 to 1976.

Zerihun’s success can be explained in part by the fact that his work has the touch of “authenticity” (as viewed as truly Ethiopian and African) and is favored by a Western audience. Works in a purely Western style are often dismissed as imitation or derivative. His inspirations, the high technical level of his work, and the complexity of media, techniques, and stylistic devices also find praise: Zerihun is a talented wood engraver; he also works with oil, tempera, acrylic paints, pen and ink, and mixed media on hardboard, canvas, skin, and wood. The multitude of his media of expression captured the attention of Stanislaw Chojnacki many years ago: “He started with woodcuts, of which his series of the Passion of Our Lord is the best known, then he moved to painting. At first strongly influenced by Skunder’s modes and moods, he then tried other styles, one of them consisting of integrating into a composition brightly-painted gourds and pumpkins; this method seems to be close in concept to Gibril Krestos’ use of vividly-colored canvases” (1973c: 89). Zerihun’s works in mixed media were especially lauded by Edmund Murray after Zerihun’s first one-artist show at Addis Ababa City Hall in 1970: “Perhaps the most interesting works . . . were the several box-like structures in which carved and painted wood functioned both as a frame for the set-back canvas and part of the painting itself. Mixed media to achieve effects not possible in one medium alone is a significant innovation among modern artists” (1970: 46).

Zerihun Yemegeta was born in Addis Ababa in 1941, the son of Orthodox Christian parents of Amhara-Oromo descent. His father, Yemegeta Beleta, owned a small transportation business, and his mother was a housewife. Zerihun spent his childhood in different parts of the capital, where he accomplished his primary and secondary education. Asked how he became a painter, Zerihun relates that in boarding school he acquired the nickname “Scientist” because he was often found busy with some type of handicraft. Then, at the age of fifteen, he won first prize in a national art competition, he sensed his destiny as an artist. Thus inspired, after Zerihun finished high school, he enrolled in painting classes at the Empress Menen Handicrafts School for one year and then studied at the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa from 1963 to 1968. The first artist who made a lasting impression on him was the German wood engraver Hansen-Bahia (Karl Heinze Hansen), who had initially emigrated to South America in 1949 and later moved to Addis Ababa, where he taught graphic arts at the School of Fine Arts from 1963 until 1966. Zerihun was fascinated by his expressive, colored woodcuts, and the young artist was greatly saddened when Hansen left Ethiopia. Zerihun admired his second teacher, Gebre Kristos Desta, for his free use of colors. Zerihun believes that Gebre Kristos is Ethiopia’s greatest artist. Zerihun teamed up with Skunder (Alexander Boghosian), whose work fascinated him, and they worked together in the same studio. Zerihun claims that the interaction with his teachers was more a mutual exchange of ideas than a one-sided influence. “One recognizes Hansen’s technique
in my woodcut; nevertheless, I attempt to find my own way. Skunder and I worked together in the same studio, where we used to share our ideas. The result was a mutual, creative process."

After his graduation, Zerihun chose to stay in Ethiopia and has been teaching graphic arts at the School of Fine Arts since the early 1970s. He deliberately did not attend a foreign art school to continue his studies, unlike many of his contemporaries. In an interview with Sebat G. Egziabher, he explained: "Had I studied abroad, my studies, which know nothing of Ethiopian art, would have filled me with rules and beliefs which would prevent me from being fully Ethiopian and unabashedly African, which is to say I would not have been able to be fully myself as an artist." (1983: 28).

Although Zerihun never studied abroad, he does travel often. On the occasion of exhibitions in Africa, Europe, the United States, and Cuba, he has been invited for openings and workshops. Zerihun travels with an open mind and an open heart, and he likes to experience other realities and to converse with people of other countries: "Wherever I go, I always have an explosion of my mind." He liked Zurich "because all was so bright and clean" and he transformed his impressions of the city and the exhibition into the painting For Memory. In the foreground, the canvas shows the three artists represented in the exhibition in a wooden boat on Lake Zurich: Zerihun in the middle, Works Geshu on his right, and Girmay Hiwet on his left. In the background, the clean streets and houses of the city can be seen, rendered as paintings of the respective artists, and at the top of the composition is one of Zerihun's bright Ethiopian suns. Zerihun was also fascinated with the rich supplies in the shops, and he enjoyed buying pigments and other painting materials not available in Ethiopia. In Dakar Zerihun was impressed by the strong feelings of identity that Senegalese artists have as Africans, and he believes that some of these artists are freer than Ethiopians. In his opinion, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is responsible for this: "Ethiopian religion always puts you down, calms you down. It is a big chain around your mind psychologically. So, one has to break out. That is the difference between Ethiopian and West African artists."

In spite of his traveling, Zerihun derives his cultural identity from his home country, Ethiopia, without losing sight of the connection with Africa as a whole. His work is centered on these two thematic points of focus, and Zerihun, much like Cheikh Anta Diop, stresses the unity of Africa and links Ethiopia to the other African countries in his evolutionary theory: "African art, mostly Black art, is important in my work. Man and early civilization started in Ethiopia but they exploded in Egypt. And concerning national and international African art, one has to think of interior first and then exterior: first the inside world and then the outside world."

Among the themes of the "inside world" are motifs from the churches of Lalibela (ca. thirteenth and fourteenth centuries), Ethiopian cultural history, and especially magic scrolls. Magic scrolls are magico-religious devices made of strips of parchment containing prayers, magic formulas and images, and Christian images (eye motifs, eight-pointed stars, crosses, angels, and saints), which were used to heal sick people and to scare away demons. Ethiopian cultural history is depicted in Zerihun's painting Haney (pl. 6). The first stage is represented by a 3.2-million-year-old hominid skeleton found in the Afar Valley in 1974, and the last stage shows the influence of the Western world by depicting a modern-day fashion—a boot—along with a question mark, on one of the steles of Aksum. The composition includes renderings of the statue of the sitting woman of Hawerit, which dates back to the Sabaeo-Ethiopian period (ca. fifth century B.C. to first century A.D.); the stele of Aksum, representing the Aksumite period (first to seventh centuries); and a coin picturing the Aksumite ruler Ezana, which recalls the period of Christianization in the fourth century. A scene from the legend of the Queen of Sheba—one of the queen's messengers on his way to Jerusalem—refers to the etiological myth of the Ethiopian ruling dynasty, and the lion symbolizes the ruler and the nation. The cruciform church of Qeddus Gıyorgis (Saint George) represents the churches of Lalibela, and together with the procession of priests at the festival of Timkat (19 January), the Christian era of the country. One sees eye motifs, the guardian angel, and Solomon, who represents Jesus Christ in the magico-religious traditions of highland Ethiopia.

Cultural history, especially magic traditions, has long been of interest to Zerihun. His works in mixed media on parchment recall the illuminations that priests and monks have for centuries produced for holy
books, but the techniques that Zerihun uses to develop his rich surface textures are modern.

In a series of bamboo-strip paintings, formally modeled on the magic scrolls, the painter tells stories in pictures (fig. 5.1). Often his images are captioned, a common feature in traditional painting, or Amharic characters or magic prayers are added. Sometimes these pictures depict magical themes, but often they tell the story of humanity, frequently combining the “inside world” with the “outside world.” In Yesterday and Today (pl. 7), the first strip represents early or prehistoric times with motifs from petroglyphs found in Ethiopia. The second strip shows the development of Egyptian culture, followed by the Disciples at the Last Supper in the third and seventh strips. Jesus Christ dominates the center in a magical representation: surrounded by rocks and satellites, he towers over computer chips, symbols of modern civilization. The Islamic East, symbolized by the full moon and the crescent moon, is incorporated in the last two strips. The first “bamboo-strip” compositions were created as early as 1968, although the strips were then painted on canvas. In 1987, when Zerihun discovered comb forms for looms made from wood and bamboo in his father’s store, he had the idea of putting several combs side by side, gluing strips of parchment on top, and then painting on the parchment surface. Since the first showing of this series in 1988 at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, these bamboo-strip compositions have been extremely successful.

His series of wood reliefs is dedicated to the “outside world,” specifically to the masks of Africa (pl. 8). Zerihun explains: “I have been involved with African masks for quite a long time and suppose I will be my whole life. We have no masks in Ethiopia; so that’s why as an artist I am trying to make them known, not as sculptures, but as flat reliefs, corresponding more to the Ethiopian tradition. I saw masks in Kenya and at the Alliance Ethio-Française and I have a book about the subject. However, I do not copy specific masks, but I create one according to my own ideas.” Often he uses images derived from the small mask of the Baga (Guinea) or from the Asante drum figure (Ghana), both of which are related to fertility traditions. These motifs are important to the artist because of the famines in Africa. However, he frequently creates his own masks, and sometimes he integrates a beautifully adorned African woman and an Ethiopian sun into his compositions. It is his intention to revive the religious ideas formerly associated with these masks: “I perceive in particular the soul of the masks and the belief that links people to these masks. I am Black, I am African; and I feel indebted to African art in these compositions.” The production of these wood reliefs is labor intensive, especially the carving and creating the elaborate texture.

Frequently the works in this series are entitled African Mask Research. Another series, in different media and using different techniques, is called Research from the Art of Magic. These titles indicate that Zerihun understands that his focus on certain themes in his work not only is an intuitive process but is an intellectual act as well, which is why he can articulate (in words) the ideas behind his compositions. Asked about his creative process, the artist comments: “I always transform things, things I see, things I hear, and things I feel. I listen to the international and national news and to music, mostly to jazz music. I put all this together with my own imagination and I put it on a canvas, on a board, or on anything. My works are like poems, like ‘wax and gold.’” (“Wax and gold” is a form of Amharic poetry with both an obvious and a hidden meaning.)

The strong influence of magic scrolls started after the revolution of 1974, says the artist. Since he felt less free, his works had become more figurative and decorative. In some of his pre-1974 works the figures emerge out of an animated background due to his elaborate mixed-media techniques. Since the change of the political situation in 1991, he has returned to his earlier, more abstract style, as documented by some of his recent works on canvas or parchment. The painting Perspective Plans (fig. 5.5) incorporates representations of many small ornaments like those found on traditional African clothes or on masks. The return to African ornaments is typical of many artists who consciously deal with African traditions. Viewed from a distance, one can see other motifs in the picture as well: priests and a mother with her child. The title, explains Zerihun, suggests that the work must be viewed from different perspectives in order to reveal itself to the viewer in all its aspects.

Many of Zerihun’s works focus on a central theme of traditional values and their changes. They often transmit the message that Ethiopian and other African traditions should not be forgotten, that they are still
current and valid. As in a musical piece, Zerihun improvises around a central theme, which surfaces time and again in different variations. This is typical of many Ethiopian and other African artists. The Western conception that each piece of work has to be new and original has little bearing here, and African artists do not object to creating reproductions of earlier works that have been successful.  

The Development of "Academic" Painting

Zerihun Yetmgeta is a typical citizen of Addis Ababa, which is a cultural and multietnic center and a locus for the introduction of Western traditions. Many of the city’s inhabitants still live in traditionalEthiopian houses (houses built of mud and straw); the middle and upper classes live in their Western-style villas, which display all the achievements of Western civilization. An important impetus for modernization was the modern school system, which is independent of the Orthodox Church and was established in 1935 by Ras Tefari Mekonnen, who was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1930. The Western-oriented school allowed Ethiopians to study abroad and painters were able to acquire their training at foreign art schools and as of 1957 at the Western-oriented School of Fine Arts of Addis Ababa.

Chojnacki (1973c) has divided the development of “academic” art into two phases: the first phase stretches from the 1930s to about 1960, and the second phase lasted until 1974. The period of the socialist regime can be identified as a third phase. Signs are present that the coup of 1991 may have signaled the beginning of another phase in the development of art.

In the first phase of painting, artists were educated at foreign art schools and they had to execute numerous commissioned works by the state upon their return. Besides wall murals for churches and public buildings, they had to make portraits of the emperor and designs for street signs, bank notes, and stamps, or they were employed as art teachers. Their private works dealt primarily with scenes of traditional everyday life, portraits, and landscapes. Their style was influenced by the academic traditions of the last century. Aferwerk Tekle (b. 1932), the most prominent artist of the 1950s and early 1960s, who received his artistic training in London, holds a transitional position. The manner in which he idealizes the Ethiopian establishment and romanticizes Ethiopian life is partly responsible for Aferwerk Tekle’s fame. He has produced numerous commissioned works for the state, like the paintings in the church of Qoddus Gıyorgis in Addis Ababa (Fig. 5.6).

The School of Fine Arts of Addis Ababa, founded in 1957, offered painters an opportunity to obtain their training locally. In the beginning, the school offered only a few academic fields besides drawing and painting. Foreign instructors then inspired new possibilities of expression and expanded the school’s curriculum. Since the early 1960s until 1974, more and more Ethiopian artists worked as instructors, and after 1974, the instructors were exclusively Ethiopian.

During the second phase, especially in the 1960s, a fundamental social and cultural change took place that fostered an acceptance of modern
The establishment of a system of higher education and the founding in 1961 of Haile Sellassie I University (since 1974 Addis Abeba University) brought an international as well as national academic elite to the city. This academic elite became the audience for, as well as the potential buyers of, art. The taste of this audience, who increasingly questioned the paternalism and the autocratic rule of Haile Sellassie, differed greatly from the taste of the ecclesiastical and state elites.

Now there were numerous possibilities for artists to present their works. Exhibitions were organized, for instance, at the Creative Arts Center of the university (today called the Cultural Center), founded in 1963; at the gallery in City Hall, finished in 1964; and, since 1970, at the J. F. Kennedy Library at Addis Abeba University. Private galleries were operated as well, among which the Belvedere Art Gallery, founded in 1963 and closed after the 1974 Revolution, was the best known. In addition, the foreign cultural institutes, such as the Alliance Ethio-Française, the Goethe Institut (German Cultural Institute), and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, started organizing exhibitions. Professional art criticism thrived in this environment and played a critical role in the establishment of modern, abstract art.

The "father" of abstract art in Ethiopia was Gebre Kristos Desta (1932-81). With his first exhibition in Addis Abeba in 1963, which did not win acclaim everywhere, Gebre Kristos became the groundbreaker for modernism. Among his most famous works are abstractions created with circles and lines as well as the paintings from his so-called Skeleton Series (Fig. 5.7). This painter, influenced by German Expres-
sionism in Cologne, refused to present an idealized Ethiopia—many of his works deal with the lives of the underprivileged.

Unlike the first phase, during which traditional Ethiopian themes were predominantly depicted in European styles of the last century, the artists associated with the second phase drew upon twentieth-century art movements, like Cubism (e.g., Besrat Bekele), Expressionism, and work in mixed media (e.g., Abdelrahman M. Sherif), or Surrealism (e.g., Daniel Towa). There was practically no interest in dealing with contemporary Black African art until Alexander Boghossian (b. 1937), who calls himself Skunder (Eskeneder). Boghossian had his first exhibition in Addis Ababa in 1966. Although he was inspired by Surrealist artists and theorists during his years of training in Paris, more important influences were Léopold Sédar Senghor’s cultural theory of négritude, especially as manifest in the writings and lectures of Cheikh Anta Diop, and contact with Black African artists and their works (see Diop 1974). In Ethiopia he took inspiration from old churches, illuminated manuscripts, magic scrolls, and depictions of legends; and he used goat skin or tree bark as a painting surface. Similar to the Sudanese artist Ibrahim El Salahi, he integrated the calligraphy of his language into his pictures. The critics were enthusiastic about his first exhibition—Skunder’s paintings suited the taste of the academic elite (Fig. 5.8).

Both Gebre Kristos Desta and Skunder taught at the School of Fine Arts: Gebre Kristos from 1963 to 1978; Skunder, who lives in Washington, D.C., today, from 1966 to 1969. Both of these leading avant-garde artists had an enormous impact on the thought and style of their students, an impact still seen today. When Skunder left for the United States, most of his disciples followed him.11 Zerihun Yetmgeta is the only member of Skunder’s former circle who lives in Addis Ababa; he still represents the genius of that time, when the rigid social conventions, also perceptible in art, started to ease and gave way to a more creative dealing with reality.

The overthrow of Haile Selassie and the social revolution (1974) were followed by a cultural revolution. In this third phase of painting, art was used as a weapon in the fight against oppression by feudalism and imperialism and as an instrument for political education of the masses in the spirit of socialism and for the development of social consciousness. Realistic art became popular again because it was commonly held that modern art is rarely understood by the people and because, true to Lenin’s teachings, art was supposed to belong to the people.

Poster and slogan art was developed to reach the masses effectively. Graphics and slogans that praised the achievement of the revolution could be found on the walls of public buildings and on the arches built just for this purpose in the center of Addis Ababa and other towns. In order for the artists to fulfill these new tasks both formally and in terms of content, a vivid cultural exchange took place with the former GDR, the former USSR, and North Korea (Aleme Esbete 1982; 28; Sahlinström 1990: 66–67).

The state organized big art exhibitions in conjunction with important public events. They were group exhibitions, which presented a selection of the artistic creativity across the country. The last of these national exhibitions, “Ethiopia in Fine Arts,” was presented in the annex of the National Museum in the spring of 1991 (Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs et al. 1991; Biassio 1991). Seventy-three pieces, partly senior then-senior work of new graduates of the School of Fine Arts, were presented on the first floor. All the work was figurative painting and adhered to the tenets of Realism, the primary idiom of artistic expression taught at the School of Fine Arts since the social revolution of 1974. Ideas were

Fig. 5.8 The End of the Beginning. by Skunder, 1972–73. Oil on canvas, 122 × 170 cm. National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Zerihun Yetmgeta and Ethiopian World Art
borrowed from academic Realism of the nineteenth century as well as from Impressionism—only a few works showed Expressionistic or abstract tendencies.

The second floor of the museum was dedicated to the "senior" artists and showed an overview of the development of art since the 1920s. Here it became clear that elements of avant-garde art (of the sixties and early seventies) had been sustained and were beginning to coalesce once again. Zerihun Yemgeta's work, for example, was represented by the wood relief *African Mask Research* and the painting *13 Months of Sunshine C* (mixed media on bamboo strip). Other manifestations of this "rebirth" are found in the very personal, expressive works of Tibebe Tefella (b. 1947) (fig. 5.9) and in the compositions of Teshome Bekele (b. 1950), which show affinity to Skunder's techniques (fig. 5.10). Both Tibebe and Teshome graduated from the School of Fine Arts shortly before the outbreak of the revolution in 1974 and did not study abroad. In addition, one should mention the semiabstract works of Lusseged Retta (b. 1952), as well as the dramatic, heavy oil paintings of Getachew Yosef (b. 1937), who draws from Rasta philosophy. Although both of these artists attended art schools in the former Eastern Bloc, they have freed themselves of the academic style (i.e., Social Realism) and are looking for a pictorial language of their own. Even though Getachew Yosef is a colleague of Zerihun Yemgeta—he also teaches graphic arts at the School of Fine Arts—he does not try to imitate his friend's mode of expression. A certain affinity to Zerihun's wood reliefs can be seen, however, in some of the works of Abebe Zelelew (b. 1964).

**The Situation of the Artists**

Every year, some women graduate from the School of Fine Arts. Nevertheless, only one woman was represented in the whole group of forty senior artists in "Ethiopia in Fine Arts": Desta Hagos (b. 1953). Women worldwide have to deal not only with the problems they share with men but also with their gender-specific problems. If one compares the biographies of female and male artists, it is striking that with the exception of Desta Hagos no other woman was able to study abroad. When women marry and have children, it is more difficult for them to reach artistic maturity or even to find the time for painting and having exhibitions.

Most artists have a job: they are teachers at the School of Fine Arts or at another school, they work as restorers in museums or as designers in one of the ministries. But wages are low and hardly pay for necessities, not to mention art supplies, which are very scarce and expensive in Ethiopia. Whenever possible, the artists try to get their supplies abroad.

Zerihun Yemgeta and Ethiopian World Art
usually through foreign acquaintances and friends. But the prices are high even abroad, and the state demands large customs duties.

Apart from the lack of arts supplies, since 1974 artists have had to fight other problems as well. For most artists, except for those few who were able to study in the former Eastern Bloc nations or for well-known artists like Zerihun Yetmgeta, who were invited to the openings of their exhibitions abroad, trips and therefore visits to art museums were impossible due to a lack of hard currency. Artists could hardly keep up with new Western trends; even art books or prints were no longer available in the country.

The repressive atmosphere during the socialist regime did not encourage creative experiments, and censorship ensured that no criticism of the state would become public. However, the "abstract" painters seemed to have had less difficulty because their art was often incomprehensible to the censors, according to the statements of several artists. Some artists were not even afraid that one of their undesirable pictures might be removed from an exhibition but also that they would be punished by serving time in jail. Thus censorship created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity.

At the beginning of the 1974 Revolution all private artists associations, like the Association of Young Artists, whose president was Tibebi Terfita and whose vice president was Teshome Bekele, were prohibited. Consequently there was no debate about art except for the occasional discussions among artist friends. Artists, just like other professionals, had to organize themselves under the state's aegis. All established artists had to join the Ethiopian Artists Association, especially if they worked for a public institution. In response to the question whether this organization had supported artists, all artists answered reluctantly or cynically. The organization only helped the state, not the artists. The artists were controlled by the organization, and all the meetings were a waste of time.

The Arts Market
During the socialist regime, foreign cultural institutes, led by the Alliance Ethio-Française, liberally contributed to the support of artists. The Alliance offers an informative program that introduces less well

known artists to a wider audience. Members of the diplomatic community (i.e., employees of embassies and the Organization of African Unity) meet at opening nights. In June 1992, one year after the Ethiopian People's Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power, another private gallery, the St. George Interior Decoration and Art Gallery, was opened and acquired pictures by Zerihun Yetmgeta, Tibebi Terfita, Tessem Bekele, and Luitedget Retta. Tessem Bekele had an opening at this gallery in May 1993. Here, too, the foreign community congregated, and by the end of the opening reception, most of the pictures had been sold. Many artists realize that their works, with few exceptions, are acquired by foreigners. Abebe Zelelew, whose compositions were presented at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, accurately describes the situation: "Foreigners have a lot of [Ethiopian currency]; they can buy easily. But the artworks go to other countries. But we have no choice. We cannot live, and when you don't have money, you can't make pictures. That is the problem." The socialist state never officially supported the private art market, but it was tolerated because the sales of artworks secured the artists' existence.

New Trends with a New Regime
There are signs that another phase in the development of the arts has started with the takeover of the EPRDF in 1991. New galleries may follow the opening of the St. George Art Gallery; various plans are in place, and Richard Pankhurst has strongly argued for a museum of modern Ethiopian art, "so that Ethiopians and foreigners alike may witness modern Ethiopia's artistic achievements, creativity and progress" (1993: 15).

Like Zerihun, most artists feel that they have more freedom and that this is reflected in their work. In contrast to my earlier interviews, conducted in 1989, they speak more freely about their situation. In March 1993, Zerihun Yetmgeta, for instance, organized a workshop for painters at the Cultural Center at Addis Ababa University together with the European cultural institutes in order to provide a sense of "the freedom of art." New graduates of the School of Fine Arts have started to form associations again; the Point Group, founded in 1993, consists of nine artists who recently graduated from the school. Their first exhibition took place in May 1993 at the Alliance Ethio-Française. Their goal is to break with
What Is Ethiopian World Art?

Lastly, the title of my essay requires an explanation. None of the artists educated at the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa consider themselves ethnic artists, that is, as representatives of a specific ethnic group. All artists describe themselves as Ethiopian artists and, at the same time, point out that their art is international, universal, a part of world art. Werku Gohu (b. 1941), for instance, defines his artistic identity as follows: "I am an Ethiopian artist because I was born here, I was educated here, and my roots are here. But my way of expression is more or less European or international." Zerihun takes a similar position but he feels more engaged in Black African art: "I am based in my culture, but I paint more or less international styles and themes of Black art." This attitude is strongly connected to the typical artist's biography. Artists sometimes are affiliated, through their parents, with more than one ethnic group; they are Ethiopian Orthodox or Catholic Christians or Muslims, and the profession of a painter is not, as used to be the case with traditional painters, passed on within the family. Even if artists do not grow up in the capital city, they all receive a modern education and further training in the multicultural capital at the School of Fine Arts and sometimes at a foreign arts school. Vists to European art museums and studying the great masters are among the strongest formative experiences for these artists. Asked which European artist impressed them the most, many named Pablo Picasso and his work with the formal aspects of African masks. Sometimes, in the work of younger artists, one can detect hints of Picasso's Cubist paintings.

The common denominator of Ethiopian world art is Ethiopian culture, which has shaped the artists. That culture includes not only their physical environment but also religious painting and especially contemporary traditional painting (or popular painting). In the latter, major themes are legends, historic events, and scenes of everyday life. The transformation of the real world into a picture often takes place under the influence of different European stylistic traditions. Choja (1973: 94) correctly points out that this happened in traditional painting as well and that Ethiopian painters translated those influences into their own idiom. Therefore, within Ethiopian world art, we find artists ranging from the most conventional to the most modern, the latter not always finding acceptance. However, Gebre Kristos, who was criticized in Ethiopia for not speaking the "language" of the people any longer, countered in an interview: "We create ultramodern houses in our developing countries... We use all sorts of up-to-date international styles in technology, science, education, medicine... Why in the world should art be any different?" (Hood 1969: 22). Zerihun Yengeta, like other artists of the "Skander school," went in another direction. He transforms Ethiopian and other African motifs into a modern idiom without adopting European styles. He does so by combining Ethiopian and European materials and techniques as well as by commenting on contemporary life. Zerihun is deeply rooted in Ethiopian culture, but his mind is open to the rest of Africa, to the rest of the world, and to modern life.
APPENDIX

Exhibitions of Zerihun Yetmgeta (as of 1993)

One-Artist Shows in Addis Ababa
1970  City Hall
1972, 1974, 1975  Belvedere Art Gallery
1976  German School
1977, 1978, 1979  Istituto Italiano di Cultura (Italian Cultural Institute)
1979  Alliance Ethio-Française (French Cultural Institute)
1987  Alliance Ethio-Française
1988  Istituto Italiano di Cultura
1990, 1992  Alliance Ethio-Française

Group Shows
1966  "Graphic Art," travelling exhibition through Europe
1977  "Afican Contemporary Art," Cultural Center, Addis Ababa
1979  "The Well-Known Ethiopian Artists," Cultural Center, Addis Ababa
1980  "The Hidden Reality," Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich (three-artist show)
1991  Cuarta Bienal de la Habana, Centro Wifredo Lam, Cuba
1992  DAK'ART 92, La Biennale Internationale des Arts de Dakar, Senegal
1993  Kenya Art Panorama, Centre Culturel Français, Nairobi, Kenya
Menjiye Tabela—Artist and Actor
The Life and Work of a Fuga Woodworker

Alula Pankhurst and Worku Nida

Portrait of an Artist
When we first met him, Menjiye Tabela was sitting astride a piece of wood he was carving into the leg of a bed for a man in whose compound he was working. Peering out from under a cap rakishly tilted sideways, and with a quizzical, slightly roguish expression, Menjiye enthusiastically began to tell his story, continuing all the while to chip at the wood with a sure touch (fig. 6.1).

Menjiye was born in Dalocha, eastern Gurageal. While still a young boy he migrated with his father, Tabela Tamiya, and mother, Serget Lere, to Chaha in Sebat-bet Gurage, where they settled in the village of Yadawego on the land of General Welde Selassie Bereka, who became his father’s patron. Menjiye later moved to Qwoshe village, where he lived on Qenyazmach Amarga Oqubato’s land until the 1974 Revolution (fig. 6.2).

Menjiye has two sisters and four brothers, all involved in wood-working. One brother, Bejed, is a famous house builder renowned for his large "modern"-type houses with windows and porches. Another brother, Ishag, who lives near Menjiye, taught him how to carve. He too has specialized in building houses together with his sons. Menjiye was already carving when the Italians occupied Ethioopia, which would put his age at about sixty-five. However, he does not look that old and has the sprightly manner and jovial behavior of a man half his age.

Menjiye is proud of his marital record: five wives in succession. His first wife, Desquat, came from Eha. His latest, Anchewati, who sometimes helps him paint, comes from Geta. She has had ten children, three of whom died. Yerchi, one of his sons from an earlier wife, follows in
his father's footsteps as a carver. Anchewat makes baskets and pots; she apparently learned the latter craft from one of Menjiye's former wives, Mehrut, whose mother was a potter.

Menjiye takes pride in his craft and was delighted that foreigners were interested in his work. He liked to boast that he was better than others and could show us everything, although when we asked who was the best woodworker, he had the humility to answer, "Ask the others."

We soon discovered that Menjiye was quite a character and an accomplished storyteller. He confidently informed us that he knew many of the foreigners who came to Gurageiland and had taught them many things. He spoke of the pianist (Peace Corps) and William Shack (the anthropologist). There was an element of make-believe in his talk. List-

ing the objects he makes he mentioned in all seriousness a fabulous chair with a sunshade and footrest (which nobody else has ever heard of). He made the extraordinary claim that an American friend, whom he called Liben, had taken two hundred of his beds to the United States. Menjiye was clearly given to hyperbole. On another occasion he claimed that he had been to America and had been given a fifty-dollar bill by the president! When we inquired about his experiences in America he retorted: "How should I know? I was locked up like a dog!" As for American food, he asserted: "They eat chickens with the skins on!"

Another aspect of Menjiye's personality is an inability to take things seriously. He would respond to questions with other questions in a rhetorical style or sidetrack to some apparently irrelevant story. He joked about the microphone from our tape recorder, calling it the wire he was tied to.

This was a strange sort of master artisan; one who took himself lightly and acted the clown, sometimes standing to attention for the camera or placing an object he had carved on his head. Yet Menjiye was a man with skills recognized far and wide in this part of Gurageiland. He had been given the title Abba Zenab, or "Father of the Rain," apparently because of his generosity. His craft has not earned him a fortune and he leads a simple life. He wears tattered clothes and was too ashamed to show us his decaying house, preferring to meet us in the houses of richer clients. He also exhibited a tendency to self-denigration and an ambivalence toward himself, epitomized in a phrase he often interjected when there was a pause in the conversation: "Menjiye good, Menjiye leh [thief]." He called one of his sons goju meqen, which means "the despair of the hut."

However, Menjiye is not overcome by bitterness with his lot, nor is he depressed by the way his skills are undervalued by his society, which despises woodworking Fuga and treats them as a low-caste group. He makes light of his plight, resorting to joking and the bottle. He hinted that a little liquor would loosen his tongue. He once commented, "If I get drunk I will become a radio!" He also possessed a bawdy sense of humor. When we asked whether he had children from his former wives, his current wife answered, "Yes," and Menjiye added: "Yes I have many. Otherwise what is the use of having a penis. When it becomes unpro-
ductive, it should be cut off and thrown away. Why should it be heavy? Let Menjiye die (when he can no longer have children)."

Who Are the Fuga?
The Fuga have been described as "a low-caste occupational group of hunters, artisans and ritual specialists" living among the Gurage (Shack 1966: 8). The term has been used to refer to artisans as a whole among several ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia. Following this usage, Shack (1964: 50; 1966: 8) treats the term as generic, referring to all occupational castes. However, as Shack is aware, among the Gurage, smiths and tanners are not referred to as Fuga, a term reserved for a caste group that specializes in working with bamboo and wood and that performs certain ritual functions.1

The Hunting Background
The Fuga maintain strong hunting traditions. Although hunting is becoming rarer because of the scarcity of game, Menjiye reenacted a realistic hunting scene, and Shack’s book has a photograph of "Fuga hunters stalking game" (1966: 64, pl. 1a). Menjiye’s father was a renowned hunter who killed three leopards; his brother Ishaq also killed one. Menjiye told us that Fuga hunt large game in groups of 75–100 as far as the Gibe Valley and in groups of 10–20 men for more local hunting of small game.2 In the past, when a Fuga and a Gurage met, the latter’s response to the former’s respectful greeting shyn, meaning "master," used to be "Kill the animal!" for a man and "May he kill the animal for you and may you eat it!" for a woman (Leslau 1950: 62). Thus the linguistic interaction in greetings refers directly to this hunting background. It seems likely that at least part of the ostracism of Fuga can be explained in terms of this hunting past: they are accused of eating wild animals considered taboo and are said to eat animals that have died without being ritually slaughtered. However, by removing dead animals, which are considered polluting, the Fuga perform an important function for their patrons. Like many caste groups, the Fuga are believed to possess the "evil eye," and supposedly, they have the ability to transform themselves into hyenas at night, attacking children and eating their entrails (Shack 1966: 10).

The Fuga hunting background lends a measure of credence to Shack’s view that they were among the "so-called ‘primitive hunters’ of the Horn of Africa" (Shack 1964: 50).2 Other evidence relates to alleged physical or linguistic differences. Shack claims that "Fuga mainly resemble the Bantu Negro, in color and physique," and that the Gurage "consider themselves to be ‘racially’ different from Fuga, because Gurage have strong Semitic features as a rule, with colors ranging from light to dark brown" (1964: 50). On the basis of observing only a few individuals it is difficult for us to conclude that such physical differences exist. Menjiye pointed to one of his daughters, who was indeed darker than the rest, and said in his characteristic style: "She is black, she is a slave, she is a thief!"—a clear instance of the social construction of color as much as observable reality.

The Fedewet “Ritual” Argot and the “Language” of the Games
The question of linguistic evidence for a separate identity is much more complex. Shack writes: "The Fuga have adopted the language of the dominant group, while retaining their own ‘language’ or ‘jargon,’ which in certain ritual observances is highly esoteric, being understood only by those belonging actually and symbolically to their case" (1966: 9). The issue of a Fuga "language"4 needs to be distinguished from the ritual "language" called fedewet, which is used in the initiation of Gurage girls into an age-group called mwyt (Shack 1966: 132–33).5

During our visit to Gurageland several Fuga told us that a Fuga "language" existed (they were not referring to the fedewet), a fact Menjiye was proud of. He called it the language of the Games, the name the Fuga use for themselves, adding: "Is there anyone without a language? Our education is our language; we created it and learned it by ourselves."

Other Fuga at first denied knowing this language. Some were unwilling to tell us much, and several younger Fuga only knew a handful of terms. Altogether we were told some fifty terms by four Fuga men. Most were names of wild and domestic animals, which is significant given the Fuga hunting background.6 Other words were for wood, houses, domestic objects, food, and so on.7 We were also told of terms relating to sexual intercourse and, interestingly, words for "circumcision," "evil eye," and "thief," and two violent expressions: "hit him," and "take his

Menjiye Tabetas—Artist and Actor
money." It seems clear that this Fuga argot is partly used as a means of communicating in a way that Garuge do not understand. Menjiye made this point explicitly: "We speak it among ourselves when we want to hide things from the Weleba [the Garuge]." He added that the language was "dangerous" since "it sells you as you sit down not knowing that you are being sold!"

These few terms have not been studied and the subject requires further research. However, it is clear that special words and expressions are used by Fuga, and perhaps these constituted a dialect in the past. It is also clear that these are different from the fapet ritual argot used in the mwayt rites. Menjiye also claimed that the Fuga have their own songs and a rich repertoire of proverbs.

Fuga "Religion?"

Another factor that could lend credence to a separate Fuga identity would be the existence of distinct religious notions. Shack suggests that the Fuga religion "most probably has had some effect on the beliefs and practices of the Garuge since certain magical practices and sorcery are in the hands of Fuga" (1966: 9). However, he adds: "Fuga rituals and beliefs, apparently, have been completely merged with the religious organization of the Garuge. If the Fuga have ritual observances of their own, I have no knowledge of this, but the Garuge believe that Fuga ritual experts possess rich powers of magic and their sorcery and maladies are greatly feared" (1966: 9; our emphasis).

While it is true that Fuga take part in traditional Garuge cults, this does not mean that they do not have their own beliefs. They have a shrine in a place called Gorara. Menjiye explained: "Like a mosque is for the Muslims and the church is for the Christians, our shrine is at Gorara." He added: "The shrine is in Walsho, and the head of the religion is a man known by the [traditional Garuge] title dem. The office is hereditary." Menjiye explained that some of the meat from animals sacrificed at the time of the Mesgel feast is set aside in honor of the shrine, and that Fuga from all over Garugeland go to the shrine bringing "everything we promised to bring: meat, money."

Menjiye goes regularly every year with his wife. He assured us that Fuga take the matter seriously: "The dem is also our administrator. We observe his ritual decrees. We follow the directives from the head. It is no joke; it is very strict. If one violates the decrees, he dies. Whenever and whatever injustice happens to a Fuga, he presents his problem before the head. Then the dem calls upon the accused person and gives him a trial."

This Fuga shrine under a Fuga leader is a pilgrimage center, to which Fuga take votive offerings. The shrine is also a judicial center where arbitration takes place.

The Fuga Role in Garuge Ritual

Some Fuga are ritual experts in Garuge society. They circumcise boys and perform clitoridectomies on eight- to ten-year-old girls (Shack 1966: 131–32). Furthermore, certain Fuga play a crucial role in the initiation of girls into the mwayt, an age-group associated with the cult of Denwamn, the Garuge fertility goddess. The administration of the cult is divided between the leader and his assistants.

The initiation ceremony is carried out annually after the girls have been circumcised. All the initiates are taken into the "bush" and secluded for about one month under the tutelage of the mwayt leader and his assistants, who teach them the "secrets" and fadat, the ritual language used by women and girls in songs at religious festivals (Shack 1966: 133). The mwayt provides women with a sense of solidarity, and later in life at times of crisis they may enter trances and speak in fadat and call upon the assistance of the mwayt leader.

The intimate involvement of Fuga in the social reproduction of the Garuge poses some interesting problems about their status. They circumcise boys, marking their transformation into men. After a period of seclusion, the young men are publicly paraded through the marketplace (Shack 1966: 132). Fuga are also required to turn Garuge girls into women, whom they cannot marry. They are the only men, apart from the non-Fuga leaders of the cult, to be involved in the women's initiation ceremony and the only men to know the secret language, which they teach the girls. These Fuga are therefore an intimate and indispensable part of Garuge social life, entrusted with the very transformation of Garuge from children into adults. They also perform essential services at funerals. They construct the burial vaults and inner chambers.
(Shack 1966: 128) Menjiye noted: "We carve the box for the corpse, chop wood, dig the grave, and we perform the traditional mourning." Fuga also act as bone-setters and as uruwa and teeth extractors, though Garage experts also perform these activities (Gebru 1973: 51).

Contrary to observations by Leslau and Shack, possibly arising from miscommunication between researcher and informant, the current leader of the Dammawit cult in Chaha is not Fuga. However, it is also clear that many of the ritual leaders of the mewet are Fuga. According to Menjiye these Fuga are not allowed into the inner spaces of the sanctuary and are assistants of the cult leader.

Making a distinction between craft and ritual Fuga is unsatisfactory since the Fuga involved in circumcision, burial, and medical practices are also the craft Fuga. The craft Fuga, not exclusively ritual specialists, nor are the craft Fuga solely artisans. In fact, the difference is more one of degree. The male mewet are primarily involved in rituals connected with the cult. Menjiye told us that the Fuga mewet do not carve and are dependent on the people who buy them raw liquor in exchange for their services initiating girls. However, apparently they also make baskets. The woodworkers are actively involved in circumcision, and some are bone-setters, dentists, and other medical specialists. We were told that the craft Fuga are not involved in cult Fuga. The Fuga involved in the cult seem to have a higher status and ranking among the Fuga themselves, while the craft Fuga are undifferentiated. The Garage consider both to be caste groups, like the tanners and smiths.

Caste and Craft in Garage Society

In Garage society, three groups are considered craft practitioners: Fuga engaged in woodwork, bamboo work, and pottery; Nefwe engaged in ironwork; and Gizhe in leatherwork. However, one must resist the assumption that they are castes because they are engaged in these occupations. Of the caste groups, only the Fuga have a ritual role. Moreover, many wooden items are made by the Zhera, the ordinary Garage. Fuga women sometimes make pottery; but most potters are ordinary Garage, not Fuga women. In Garage society potters are not despised since they are Fuga. Therefore, the occupation does not seem to be the core of the caste status. Fuga women assist Fuga men in making bamboo baskets and mats. But ordinary Garage women often decorate these baskets with leather strips. This does not make them Fuga or Gizhe.

The castes are apparently largely endogamous, with status ascribed by birth. But the idea that they marry close kin, "even brothers and sisters," as Shack was told, may be a Garage perception. Of the three artisan groups, the smiths have the highest status, as exemplified by occasional instances of Nefwe women marrying ordinary Garage men, and one case mentioned by Menjiye in which a Nefwe man married an ordinary Garage woman. Both Fuga and Zhera consider the Fuga to be inferior. Garage and Fuga respondents told Gebru that this was either because of tradition or God's will (1973: 40, 56). Asked what "Fuga" meant, Menjiye replied: "It means despised." He added that Fuga was their clan, which he contrasted with Garage clans. For Menjiye the Fuga constitute a racial, not a social, entity. As he put it: "When a Fuga is born, he is born Fuga."

The Livelihood and Status of the Fuga

The Fuga were estimated by Shack to number some 5,000 people out of a total Garage population of 500,000 (1964: 50). The proportion of 1 to 100 may be fairly accurate. Considering the current Garage population of over 2 million, this would suggest a figure of about 20,000 Fuga.

In terms of Fuga settlement Shack suggests two patterns: "either a small plot of common land is set aside on the edge of the village on which huts can be erected and crops grown; or a wealthy Garage will permit a Fuga to erect a hut on his land at a 'safe' distance behind the homestead so that the landowner enjoys the right of priority over the service which the Fuga performs for the village" (1964: 50). In the first case the Fuga can live together, with their social distance reflected in their geographical isolation. In the second we see a patron-client relationship. A third possibility seems to be several Fuga living in the vicinity of shrines or as clients of cult leaders.

The Fuga could not own land prior to the 1974 Revolution. However, Fuga could become clients to Garage patrons, whose land they would work. Likewise, Fuga apparently did not own livestock. However, they could look after the livestock of Garage patrons in exchange.

Menjiye Tabeta—Artist and Actor
It seems that Fuga were rigidly excluded from property ownership and relied heavily on patronage. As Menjiiye put it: “A Fuga had no property except his spear.” The Fuga were, however, integrated within Gurage society. At festivals they were given “the Fuga’s share.” According to Shack, the Fuga were feared as having special powers. 14

Since the 1974 Revolution the Fuga have been able to own land. However, we did not come across any wealthy Fuga. Most Fuga we spoke to had very few belongings in their houses since they produce mainly for sale. The roof of Menjiiye’s house was collapsing. Apparently the previous landowner has recently been attempting to reclaim his land, and Menjiiye is in danger of losing his plot.

It seems likely that in the past the Fuga performed a wider range of tasks as clients of Gurage and were not restricted to working in wood and bamboo. 15 Asked what a Fuga did for his master, Menjiiye answered: “Chopping wood, digging out the root plant for harvest, cutting grass. We did everything, for we depended on them.” In exchange, patrons provided land, food (including meat for the Mesqel celebration), and cloth. 16

Fuga Resistance

Although Menjiiye may seem an eccentric joker, he is probably by no means unique. Indeed, such a personality is an excellent protective mechanism, allowing talented persons among the “despised castes” to excel. They can even joke about their former masters without offense. For a group of people who are ostracized by the people among whom they live, there are several ways for the brightest to retaliate. One way is by playing the jester. Menjiiye typified this. For the benefit of the camera he adopted a slow-motion, jerky, parodic movement when working, which annoyed us until we began to see that it was part of his style.

Another form of resistance is having their own “language.” Menjiiye proudly told us of expressions used by the underdog Fuga to outwit the Gurage overlords. He also enjoyed telling us stories of Fuga burning the houses and belongings of their masters. 17 He told us of a Fuga who became a thief and stole cloth, sheep, and goats. Menjiiye would often interrupt his speech to call himself or one of his family a thief. 18

Fuga Craft and Art

As Shack notes: “Gurage technology is based on the Fuga” (1966: 11). The respect for Fuga skills and know-how is summed up in the Gurage saying “A Fuga is one who knows” (Shack 1966: 12). The Fuga craftsmen are the only Gurage exclusively involved in bamboo work; other Fuga have specialized in woodwork. However, non-Fuga Gurage men also work with wood without being stigmatized.

The Fuga play a crucial role in the construction of houses (fig. 6.3). Some Fuga specialize in house construction and have a leading part in this activity, which requires the involvement of dozens of people. Such traditional builders are called qam. It is said that in the past they used to be exclusively Zhera Gurage and that Fuga have gained this status only in recent times, perhaps only during the present generation. Zeleq and Bejedri, two of Menjiiye’s brothers, are said to be pioneer Fuga qam among the Sebat-bet Gurage. Bejedri is reputed to be the most famous qam in the area and is acknowledged to have skills surpassing those of Zhera Gurage. Fuga builders often make the edha, the house’s central pole, which has important symbolic and ritual significance (fig. 6.4). 19 Fuga also carve and fit seda, the supporting beams that are peculiar to Gurage housing and that radiate off the central pole and hold up the roof. Fuga

Menjiiye Tagenta—Artist and Actor
sometimes make walls and fit rafters and beams (Shack 1966: 11), as well as doors, door frames, and lintels (Shack 1974: 112).

In addition, Fuga make traditional two-pronged digging sticks (went) and single-pronged iron-tipped ones (yenchma), without which cultivation is impossible. In other words, the products of Fuga labor are essential for agriculture (Shack 1964: 52). Fuga also make objects required for processing ema, including the yenbma, wear, and ehine, implements used for scraping the plant’s stem; the ahlu, the wooden platform used to chop soda, the ema-based staple food; the yenchma keh’, the end piece used in chopping; and the wooden handle of the yenbma ema, the knife used to chop the ema. Fuga also make three sizes of mortars (mep’ap’), the smallest for coffee, a medium-sized one for pounding hot pepper, and a large one for grinding grain such as barley and ghee, used in fermentation. Another Fuga-made item associated with food preparation is a wooden bowl called yibem ihe’s (pl. 10c), which has a division in the middle and is used for chopping raw meat to make khh, a famous Gurage specialty.

Fuga also produce three types of seats: a three-legged stool (noo umu), a two-legged benchlike seat (qwents), and a legless round board (qoqosh) (pl. 9d). In the past they also produced seats with backrests and openwork designs, though these have become extremely rare (Shack 1974: 112). Menjiye claimed that he made seats (okh) with footrests and sunshades, though we were unable to find any evidence of this. Fuga also make wekiyema, small low tables used for food and drink; yenbma yewen, stands for coffee or enq cups; and yenbma ihe’s (pl. 10b, d), footed trays for coffee cups. Other items include waqema, bowls for washing the hands and feet (pl. 9a). The largest trays are known as ghebre (pl. 10c) and are used mainly on special occasions, notably Mesqel. Fuga also make yew maa, dug-out salt lick troughs for animals. Personal items include mua, combs (pl. 9e, f), and, in the past, kefe, flat wooden-soled shoes.

Among the most interesting items are the gekkha, headrests (pl. 11). There are different kinds for men and women, though it seems that they are mainly made as presents for bridess.

Fuga have always been and still are innovators. During the Italian Occupation (1936–41) they learned to make beds, chairs, cupboards, and shelves. Borrowed words, such as kamal (cupboard) and sif (large chair) testify to this. Beds, made without a single nail, are often intricately decorated, as Menjiye’s superb examples show (fig. 6.5). Currently, Fuga sell small cupboards (yigtiti yewen). We also saw signs of recent innovations, such as Menjiye’s wooden coffeepot stands, chib (pl. 9b, c), traditionally made from ema fiber. Gekkha, another Fuga, showed us oil lamp stands (yeknum yewen), which he claimed to have invented.

Some items follow traditional designs, while others display new forms. For instance, traditional coffee cup trays had a single leg, whereas recent ones have three or four legs. Likewise, there are both traditional and modern designs for headrests, and new fashions are observable in the markets.

The main trees used for making wooden objects are tigh (Phoebe amara), wann (Celtis africana), tacle (Ficus sycomorus), kow (Hagenia abyssinica), wen (Clusia angustifolia), and imported eucalyptus. Menjiye told us that the best were wana and tigh, since they are hardwoods. The wood should be cut on a moonless night when there are few insects and should be left for a couple of weeks before being roughly hewn. Then it should be left to dry for another fortnight before the final carving.

Traditionally Fuga used to produce wooden objects for their patrons. They also made objects as offerings for shrines. Fuga were apparently forbidden to sell their wares in markets, where Gurage sold them at a
prof (Shack 1966: 10). Nowadays, Fuga produce goods on commission or for sale in markets. However, larger objects such as beds are carved at clients’ houses.

Many objects produced by Fuga are decorated with paint and incisions, often with geometric designs. The main technique consists of painting stripes or sections in different colors and then chiseling lines to form rectangular or triangular designs, which stand out as white against the colors until these fade. Shack (1974: 112) noted that the principal colors were red, green, and purple. Nowadays, the preferred colors are pink and purple. However, Menjiye asked us to buy him red, yellow, green, and purple paints (fig. 6.6). Traditionally, red was obtained from a certain clay and black from soot rubbed off pots, as Menjiye demonstrated. Fuga often may be found applying the final incised designs to their products in marketplaces while waiting for customers (fig. 6.7). This is done with great dexterity using a narrow gouge not just by men but also by women and even young boys.

Fuga are best known for their bamboo work known as mas, the sole craft in which only Fuga engage. Bamboo objects Fuga produce include qarar, a basket used to serve roasted grain; mim’tar, a sieve used for filtering cheese from whey; n’gape, round baskets for keeping belongings (fig. 6.8a, d); qe’chi, large baskets used to carry grain, vegetables, quine, etc.; qe’t, granaries; mep, doors; and ubar, bamboo woven mats. The smaller mats are used for food, middle-sized ones for small doors, and large mats for house floors (fig. 6.9). Large mats take several people more than a week to complete. Smaller bamboo items are made by women; men help with larger items. A husband and wife often work together on a large mat.

The Fuga and the Future
Fuga origin remains a puzzle. However, with their hunting traditions and their own beliefs and distinct vocabulary, they maintain a separate identity. Their status as the only craft group also involved in ritual is ambiguous. They are clearly looked down upon but are valued as essential for Gurage technology, notably house construction, and agriculture. However, with the exception of bamboo work, the craft activities of Fuga men in woodwork, and of Fuga women in pottery, are not exclusive to
them and are performed without any stigma by ordinary Gurage. Thus, craft is not the defining feature of caste status.

The roles of the Fuga as circumcisers and in rites of passage render them crucial for the transformation of Gurage children, especially girls, into adults. Within the cult, some Fuga can attain relatively high status, though they are barred from entering the inner sanctuary of the shrine.
in Chaha, Fuga involvement in social and religious life therefore suggests that they are an integral, rather than a marginalized, part of Gurage society.

Certain signs indicate that the Fuga case status may be changing. During the Italian Occupation Fuga crafts were admired and sought by the occupiers. More recently not just foreigners but Zhera Gurage themselves have gained a greater appreciation of Fuga crafts. Since the revolution and the land reform in 1975, Fuga have been able to own land. During the present generation some Fuga have attained the status of qin, master house builders. The beds made by professionals like Menjiye are appreciated to the extent that one man refused to sell his at any price. Zhera Gurage sometimes refer to Fuga as “Amarica,” implying that they are skilful and ingenious like Americans.

When Shack was carrying out fieldwork in 1957, there was little evidence of European goods in Gurage land. Imported articles had not “supplanted the need for potters, weavers, or the arts and crafts of the Fuga” (Shack 1966: 201). On the contrary, he noted that “the business of the artisan as a whole has improved as a result of an increase in the flow of currency” (1966: 201). Today, however, imported cloth has largely replaced woven materials, plastic containers have reduced the need for pottery, and imported tools are displacing local ones. Fuga woodwork is in decline with increasing deforestation, and master craftsmen no longer make many of the beautiful objects such as traditional chairs with headrests. However, the need for house building is permanent, and the demand for large “modern” houses with windows and large decorated beds has increased.

New designs for stools and headrests have become popular. Woodworkers paint their wares in bright colors, and there is still an important demand for basketwork. Fuga crafts are alive and responding to local needs and fashion. As Shack wrote, the Fuga “reinforce the aesthetic values of the tribe through their art, which is an extension of their craft activities” (1966:11–12).

The social status of the Fuga is also changing. Shack (1966: 9) noted that Fuga could only recently enter Gurage houses without asking permission. It seems that there is a greater permissiveness and less social distance between the Fuga and their former patrons. Since the monetization of the Gurage economy, Fuga have been allowed to pay contributions in cash to joint burial associations called oru, while the Zhera Gurage contribute in kind, since restrictions on eating together persist. Some Fuga have converted to Christianity or Islam. These Fuga may eat with Gurage and contribute to burial associations in kind. When we were talking with Menjiye's Muslim brother Ishaq, we learned that his wife belongs to an irak, a rotating credit association, together with Gurage women. However, restrictions on consanguinity remain. Intermarriage is still unthinkable, and a degree of ostracism still persists. Like the work of artisans in other parts of Ethiopia, Fuga crafts remain undervalued, and notions of caste die hard.

Menjiye Tabeta—Artist and Actor
Qes Adamu Tesfaw—
A Priest Who Paints
Painting in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Raymond A. Silverman

I traveled to Ethiopia for the first time in 1991. The visit included a good deal of time spent at the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University, where I viewed paintings spanning more than five hundred years. I remember being particularly impressed with the work of a contemporary artist, Qes Adamu Tesfaw, and was intrigued by his title, qes, which indicated that the painter was an ordained priest in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It was not until two years later, thinking that I might include some of Adamu's work in an exhibition I was planning at Michigan State University, that I decided to meet him.

I was introduced to Adamu in 1993 at the home of his old friend and fellow artist Wendemu Wende. I found Adamu to be a warm, gentle man (fig. 7.1). When I told him how I admired his paintings, he expressed appreciation for the compliment but informed me that his skill was a gift from God. At the end of our initial meeting at Wendemu's house, I drove Adamu home.

My interviews with Qes Adamu Tesfaw were conducted in Addis Ababa during the spring of 1993. I would like to thank Qes Adamu for the time and knowledge he shared with me during these interviews. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of Neal Solomon, who helped document Adamu's paintings; Degafa Rufu Eteza, who served as interpreter during my discussions with Adamu; and Tibebe Estete and Shiferaw Assefi, who assisted in translating the tape-recorded interviews. Thanks also to Marilyn Heldman for her comments on an earlier version of this essay.

Fig. 7.1 Qes Adamu Tesfaw.
Adamu lives in a modest house located on the southwestern outskirts of the sprawling capital city of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa (fig. 7.2). When I entered his house for the first time, I was overwhelmed. Walking through the front door I was immediately confronted with a 5-foot image of a priest painted directly on the plaster surface of the wall. Turning to the right and walking into the dining area, I saw images of Saint George slaying the dragon and the Madonna and Child (fig. 7.3), and moving into the sitting room, there were paintings of King David, the Queen of Sheba, Menelik I, and priests playing various musical instruments. Every wall in the house is covered with paintings. Adamu told me that he had painted them roughly twenty years earlier, soon after he built his house. I had visited many Ethiopian homes but had never seen anything like this—I knew I was in the presence of a truly exceptional person. This essay is based on a series of interviews with the artist and while focusing on Adamu—his paintings and his life as a priest and an artist—attempts to place him in the broader context of the painting traditions of the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia.

A Brief Biographical Sketch

Adamu was born in 1933 in Bich’ena (Gojam Province). His father, Tesfaw Getahun, was a priest, and like the children of most clergymen, Adamu pursued a church education. He began by attending a nibb bet (lit. “house of reading”), equivalent to a primary school where children are taught the Ge’ez alphabet and to read various religious texts, including the Psalms of David. After completing this basic training, Adamu proceeded to a gjido bet (lit. “house of mass”), where he first studied gelen duqan, the functions of a deacon. He then served the church as a deacon for twelve years while continuing his studies of gbn qislom, the functions of a priest. Much of this study was undertaken under the supervision of a single teacher-priest, Qes Gebez Anteneh Gehrhu, who was also a painter. Adamu explained that Anteneh had been a student of Adamu’s uncle, Aleqa Kassa Getahun, and was therefore obligated to take Adamu as a pupil. It was while working with Qes Gebez Anteneh on a number of painting commissions that Adamu first learned how to paint. His teacher soon realized that Adamu was a “natural”—the young artist quickly developed a keen interest in painting, an interest that became a passion. During one of our discussions Adamu confessed that he has a “love for painting” and that he “dreams about it most of the time.” Qes Gebez Anteneh was aware of Adamu’s “gift” and encouraged him to follow his dreams.

Adamu was ordained when he was twenty-six years old. But four years later, in 1963, he decided to abandon the life of a priest and move to Addis Ababa. When I asked him why he moved to Addis Ababa, he replied: “I came here to strengthen this profession, to promote my work.”
There is a better supply of materials, the demand for the product is high, and you can also become well known here." The young priest knew that there was a larger, more diverse market for his paintings in the nation's capital. In Gojam he could only work for the church and its patrons, but in Addis Ababa, a large community of foreign diplomats, merchants, and tourists sought "traditional" Ethiopian paintings. Adamu knew other Gojami artists, like his friend Wendemba, who had moved to Addis Ababa and were supporting themselves and their families by painting for both churches and foreign visitors.

Upon arriving in the city, he lived with his godfather, Yohannes Tessema, a well-known artist who taught painting at the Empress Menen Handicrafts School. Like Adamu, Yohannes was born in Bich'era, and his father was a priest. Yohannes and Adamu were kindred spirits. In an interview with Richard Pankhurst (1966: 45) Yohannes indicated that "when still a child he was consumed with the desire to draw and would use anything that he could find." Yohannes moved to Addis Ababa in 1933 to seek his fortune as a painter. Over time he became recognized as one of the leading "traditional" artists in the country. Adamu acknowledges Yohannes as having had the greatest influence on his development as an artist. For the last thirty years Adamu has been actively engaged in Addis Ababa painting both for churches and for shops that cater to tourists in Ethiopia.

An Overview of Religious Painting in Ethiopia

In the Orthodox churches of Ethiopia, painting functions in three contexts: on walls inside churches, in books as illustration, and as icons (i.e., devotional images on portable panels of wood). Religious painting, especially that appearing on the walls of churches, has played a critical role in introducing and sustaining religious thought and practice in highland Ethiopia (fig. 7.4). Since the vast majority of Christian worshippers in Ethiopia have been illiterate, paintings have served as a means of conveying the message of the Holy Scriptures. Virtually all Ethiopian church paintings dating from before the end of the nineteenth century illustrate various subjects from the New Testament and, to a very limited extent, the Old Testament. Most of the exceptions depict local (Ethiopian) saints; a few represent historic events and notables. Manu-

script illuminations, though a more private mode of communication, have served a similar function in reinforcing the ideas conveyed in the religious texts they illustrate (e.g., Gospels, Psalms of David, Miracles of the Virgin Mary). Icons (single panels, diptychs, and triptychs) have served as devotional images for the clergy and aristocracy. Larger icons have been taken out of the church on holy days and carried in processions by the clergy, and there are traditions that in the past some were
carried to elicit divine assistance in battle. Smaller, personal icons, usually configured as double diptychs, could be suspended from the neck on a cord and were used by clergymen as portable devotional images and as spiritual protection against evil and misfortune.

Students of Ethiopian art over the last fifty years have offered various models for approaching the study of Ethiopian church painting. The basic framework for these schemas is based on the view that the major catalyst for change in Ethiopian church art came from outside Habesha (i.e., highland Ethiopian) society. Two broad periods may be delineated. The first, lasting until the end of the fifteenth century, is based on Late Antique and Byzantine stylistic and iconographic conventions. The second, lasting to the present, has been stimulated by Western European traditions. This is not the place to offer a detailed critique of this approach. May it suffice to say that its fundamental weakness is a biased premise. Ethiopian art is more than a series of assimilated external influences. It, like the art of all societies, needs to be understood from an Ethiopian perspective before it is set in a broader regional or global context. This problem will be discussed at greater length in the essay’s conclusion.

At the moment, attempting to place the art of the Ethiopian Church in a unique social or cultural setting is difficult since so little work has been directed toward this end. The brief discussion that follows reflects the current state of Ethiopian art-historical studies.

The magnificent paintings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church represent a tradition that reaches back almost a thousand years. Christianity was first introduced in Ethiopia at the court of the king of Axum in the early fourth century. The most difficult challenge to historians of Ethiopian church art concerns reconstructing the early stages of the tradition. There are only a few known examples of paintings dating earlier than 1270, the date for the founding of the Solomonic dynasty. Many scholars believe that it was not until the sixth century that the artistic idioms associated with Late Antique and Byzantine traditions were first introduced in Ethiopia. The earliest reference to Christian painting in Ethiopia is found in the hadith literature, traditions that recount the life of Prophet Muhammed. One of the traditions reports how two of the Prophet’s wives, Umma Hafahbah and Umm Salama, described the won-

derful murals found in the Cathedral of Mary of Zion to the Prophet as he lay on his deathbed. The two women had been members of a community of Muslim exiles in Aksum in the 620s (Sergew Hable Selassie 1972:186).

Most studies of Ethiopian church art begin with the earliest known examples of painting, which date from the period of the Zagwe dynasty (1137–1270). The best-known monuments from this period are the rock-hewn churches found in and around the ceremonial center of Roha, today known as Lalibela. Because virtually no contemporary accounts from the period are extant, it is extremely difficult to say much about the circumstances under which the art and architecture of this era were produced. Most of the paintings found on the walls of the stone churches at Lalibela are, in fact, impossible to date. It is generally accepted, however, that the paintings in Beta Mariam (Church of Mary) date from the Zagwe period and represent some of the earliest extant examples of Ethiopian painting. A few manuscripts, like the Abba Gerima Gospels (from the Monastery of Abba Gerima in Tigray), are also believed to date from before 1270.

These early works reveal the basic stylistic and iconographic canons that have governed Christian painting since its introduction to Ethiopia in the sixth century. A thorough study of these canons has yet to be undertaken. Nevertheless, it is possible to specify some of the formal characteristics associated with the earliest known paintings. In general, the art of this era may be characterized as geometric with an interest in decorative pattern. Narrative scenes are reduced to a few key figures and objects. Compositional symmetry is employed to create a static, balanced effect. Paintings are flat; there is no attempt to create an illusion of space. There is no modeling, no use of light and shade, and backgrounds are usually rendered in a single color. Figurative imagery is usually frontal. Painters had little interest in naturalism, for we see the human body often reduced to geometric forms. An emphasis is placed on eyes and hands; fingers are often elongated. Social perspective is employed that represents an individual’s status by his or her size relative to other figures depicted in a composition. Conceptual clarity is enhanced by outlining figures and objects using a dark pigment. And an accurate reading of the narrative is ensured with strategically placed inscriptions that iden-
ify the key actors in the composition. Many of these characteristics have been maintained over the centuries and can be seen in the work of contemporary artists like Qes Adamu.

It is generally acknowledged that Ethiopian religious painting has its roots in Late Antique and Byzantine tradition. Though there is no concrete evidence, it may be assumed that Coptic and Greek icons and manuscripts were brought to Ethiopia, that artists from various parts of the Middle East and the Mediterranean world visited the royal courts and the monasteries of Ethiopia, and that Ethiopian monks and priests traveled to various holy sites in the Middle East (e.g., Jerusalem). 18

Beginning in the late thirteenth century, with the founding of the Solomonic dynasty, more paintings, especially manuscript illuminations, are available for study. Examples of manuscript illumination from the fourteenth century, like the Four Gospels of Kristos Tesfana (dated to the first part of the century), reveal that most of the tenets that governed earlier work were still prevalent. 19

Though there is some documentation from the early Solomonic period, it is still difficult to learn much about artists and their patrons. Almost nothing is known about where and how artists were trained and art was produced. 20 A few scant references to art-related activities occur in the hagiographies composed during this period. It is generally thought that most manuscripts and icons were produced in monastic settings and that monasteries were therefore the primary loci of artistic activity associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. 21 We also know that most of the murals found in churches, as well as illuminated manuscripts, were commissioned by the ruling elite.

The fifteenth century appears to have been a particularly fertile period in the history of Ethiopian church art. During this period a number of monastic houses developed distinctive styles—variations on the stylistic and iconographic themes that had been developed centuries earlier. 22 In one of the few studies that attempts to deal with painting in a specific cultural and religious milieu, Marilyn Heldman (1994) examines the life and painting of the monk Fre S’eyon, who was associated with the court of Emperor Zara Ya’qob (r. 1434–68). Fre S’eyon is one of only a few painters for whom there is limited information; most of Ethiopia’s religious painters remain anonymous. 23 Heldman’s work considers

Pl. 1. Wooden bowls (gagul) and drinking cups: (front row, left) gagul made by Bogine Shala, (front row, right) drinking cup made by Osnay Dargeba, (back row, left) drinking cup made by Woyday Dorchali, (back row, right) gagul.
Pl. 2 Various types of baskets produced by Amnia and her daughters Munira and Samiyya in 1993: (a) finjam (pear),
(b) saab modug, (c) ethne ogar, (d) afiki afle, (e) buke modug.

Pl. 3 (Opposite page) Gaddis yar in the home of a former gi (judge) of Harer.
This house and its contents are now preserved as part of the City Museum of Harer.
PL 4 Rossana containers: (a) hutte skull in a emeou, (b) goriki, (c) sseou, (d) diibe, (e) dibe, (f) bulema, (g) bulema diubou, (h) cивou, (i) goriki, (j) goriki, (k) goriki, (l) skibe, (m) sseou, (n) golonbou, (o) boudi.

PL 5 Three goriki: (left) made by Elena Mama, (center) made by Jillo Dido, (right) made by Sake Dido.
PL. 6 (Left) Histri, by Zerihan, 1990. Oil on canvas, 90 x 70 cm. Collection of Dr. Carl Robson, Cleveland, Ohio.


PL.9 Wood objects recently made by Menjije: (a) ngie wąam, (b) chitt, (c) chitt, (d) t'apha, (e) misk (f) misk

PL.10 Older objects made by Menjije: (a) gusse, (b) yasa sh'h, (c) ghett, (d) yeeb sh'h, (e) yeeberr sh'h

PL.11 Gussse (headrests), both new and old. Objects d and h were made by Ghebre Wolde Tefellek.
135 × 173 cm. Michigan State University Museum.

PL. 13 Saint Menas Slaying Emperor Julian, by Adamu,


91 × 135 cm. Michigan State University Museum.

Pl. 17 Silver jewelry produced in Gershegyn’s shop: (a–e) neck crosses, (f–h) finger rings, (i) pin, (j–l) bracelets, (m) pin, (n) pendants, (o) earrings, (p) hairpin, (q) neck bead, (r) necklace, (s) hair comb, (t) earrings.

Pl. 18 Silver jewelry produced by Abbâ Sâid: (a) neck pendant made from a coin, (b) necklace with coin pendants, (c) earrings, (d) bracelet, (e) neck pendant made from coin, (f) neck pendant made from coin, (g) anklets.
Pl. 19 Models made by Tolea in 1993: (from left to right) airplane, ship, gasoline tanker truck, wijjuy (taxi-truck), mokun (automobile).

Pl. 20 Various types of pots produced in the village of Gurumu Wayde, near Shento: (a) pitcher (mekoruku), (b) pitcher, (c) shallow footed bowl (gahrt) for serving babs (a food made from one), (d) pot (shane) for collecting water, (e) footed pot, (f) shallow footed bowl (amara), (g) pot (gahansu) for transporting t'iq (honey-wine) or gida (beer) from market, (h) pot (amara) used for cooking, (i) pot (gahno) for boiling coffee, (j) small pot (bitiya) for drinking, (k) frayed bowl (kachhure) for serving food, (l) bowl (dennya) for serving set' (stew).
how the emperor, aware of the didactic power of visual imagery, engaged Fre S’eyon and his circle of painters to give material form to his theological treatises involving the veneration of Mary. New iconography and a distinctive style of painting were developed that influenced the production of Marian icons of the second half of the fifteenth century. Heldman notes that Fre S’eyon’s “figures are depicted with round faces, almond-shaped eyes, and pursed lips, and the edges of their garments fall in a cascade of ripples. He developed this style from a synthesis of elements taken from Byzantine and Italian quattrocento devotional images” (1993: 182).

It was at this time that Western European art and artists began to have an impact on Ethiopian religious art. The earliest recorded European diplomatic missions to Ethiopia occurred during the first few years of the fifteenth century. As early as the first decade of the fifteenth century, artists from Italy were traveling to Ethiopia (Heldman 1994: 139–52; Chojnacki 1983a: 376–78). The most celebrated is Nicolò Bascaleon, a Venetian who was attached to the court of Emperor Lebna Dengel (r. 1508–40) and lived in Ethiopia from about 1480 to 1526. 23 He is credited with having introduced new modes of representing certain religious themes in painting. A number of the icons and manuscript illuminations that are either signed by or attributed to him are still maintained in Ethiopian churches.

There is also evidence that specific Western European works of art had considerable influence on Ethiopian religious painting. Beginning in the sixteenth century engravings and popular prints of European religious works were carried to Ethiopia, where they served as models for local artists. Three celebrated examples may be cited. The first is the Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore, a venerated icon said to have been painted by Saint Luke, is maintained in the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Copies of the famous painting were brought to Ethiopia around 1610 by Jesuit missionaries. 24 The second, the Evangeliar umrum, is a copy of the Four Gospels written in Arabic that was printed in Rome at the end of the sixteenth century. Its engravings, inspired by miniatures from Albrecht Dürer’s Klein Passion, served as a model for Gospels illumination produced in the church workshops of Gonder during the second half of the seventeenth century. 25 And the third is the late-fifteenth-
or early-sixteenth-century image of the fox Harm, probably produced in a workshop in Flanders or Portugal and carried to Ethiopia. It is known in Ethiopia as the Keenu Be'e (lit. "the striking of His head") and depicts Christ wearing the crown of thorns, hands uplifted, and blood streaming from wounds on his chest.  

The next florescence in painting, the First Gonderine period, came in the middle of the seventeenth century when Emperor Fasldas (r. 1632–67) established his court in the market town of Gonder. It remained the capital of the Solomonic dynasty well into the nineteenth century. In addition to serving as the political center, Gonder became the religious and artistic capital of the empire. To date, no paintings associated with the reign of Fasldas have been identified; the earliest examples of the First Gonderine style are found in manuscripts produced during the rule of Yohannis I (r. 1667–82). Workshops where painters were trained and where icons and illuminated manuscripts were produced appear to have been associated with churches and monasteries near the capital. European art and artists continued to influence the evolution of Ethiopian religious painting. Though the basic stylistic and iconographic tenets developed earlier still predominated, compositions became more complex, and modeling was introduced, but it was used as a decorative device—apparently Gonderine artists were uninterested in exploiting its intended effect (i.e., to develop a sense of three dimensions). The themes of paintings were still almost always religious, but the repertoire of subjects was expanded to include scenes from the Old Testament and local (Ethiopian) saints.

What is generally referred to as the Second Gonderine period started at the end of the seventeenth century and has continued to the present day. It reached its peak between the reigns of Emperors Iyasu I (r. 1682–1706) and Iyasu II (r. 1730–55) and has proven to be the most durable style in Ethiopian painting (Chojnacki 1973b: 82). Some scholars feel that by the middle of the eighteenth century the tradition had deteriorated into a "decadent" or "degenerate" phase brought on by the onslaught of new Western models and values (see, e.g., Chojnacki 1964: 11, 1973b: 82). This is an interesting perception that requires further comment and will be discussed below.

Icons, manuscript illuminations, and church murals from this era reveal the influence of Renaissance and Baroque painting from Europe. In addition, one may see elements of Mogul painting in some of the work produced during the Gonderine period. Eighteenth-century compositions are more animated and the human actors, depicted in a growing variety of religious scenes, are rendered with greater corporeality—they are fuller, rounder, flesher. There continues to be little sense of depth in most paintings; only the simplest devices—overlapping and vertical positioning—are used to create an illusion that action is occurring in a three-dimensional space. Backgrounds remain flat and artists still demonstrate little interest in a naturalistic organization of the composition. Painting is still largely conceptual—it's primary function remains the clear, concise visualization of religious doctrine.

Before turning to Adamu's paintings, it is worthwhile to consider briefly the social status and training of painters in Habeshia society. Only a limited amount of information is found in hagiographies and European travel accounts about either of these subjects. There are a few references to painters in the hagiographic literature, such as an account of the life of the fifteenth-century abbott Maba’s S’yon, but none of the hagiographies include descriptions of how artists were trained, the technical processes they used, or the status they held in the church community and in society at large (Heldman 1994: 81, 83).

Today artists like Adamu commonly sign their work. But prior to the present century, painters' names only rarely appear on icons, occasionally in the colophons of manuscripts, and it is only since the eighteenth century that artists have inscribed their names on mural paintings. It is the patrons rather than the artists who are occasionally identified in paintings. There are a few exceptions, like the mid-fifteenth-century work of Fre S’yon and Maba’s S’yon. When they do occur, signatures can yield important insights for setting the painting in a specific time and place.

What we know of the social standing of church artists is very limited. Throughout highland Ethiopia artists and artisans held a lower social status than farmers and the clergy. It is noteworthy that the little evidence that does exist suggests that these values did not apply within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. It seems that in addition to painting, monks and priests produced church lamps, hand and processionals, and

Qes Adamu Tesfai—a Priest Who Paints

142

143
chalices and patens—objects made of brass, bronze, silver, or gold. Saint Iyasu Mo'a, the thirteenth-century monk who founded the monastery of Debre Hayq Estifanos, is said to have made a number of lamps (probably of brass or bronze) with his own hands. Local tradition also credits him with producing one of the earliest extant copies of the Four Gospels, dating from 1280-81.

Little has been written about the training of church artisans. We know that before the present century, there were no schools of painting (Heyer 1971: 54). Historically, the production of religious art occurred in monasteries and it is likely that this is where one learned to be a painter. Other opportunities may have existed outside the monastery, like Adamu's experience as an apprentice with a master priest painter.

Patronage is another important aspect of artistic production. In the past, emperors and provincial rulers supported painters attached to various monasteries and churches. As indicated above, we know, for instance, that Emperor Zar'a Ya'qob was a major patron of the five Gondar and that Emperor Lebna Dengel actively sought and supported the talents of European artists. But what was the nature of their support? Adamu recalls how Ras Hallu Teklehaemanaot, the ruler of Gojjam Province from 1901 to 1932, used to order imported paints for the monks and priests whom he commissioned to paint murals for churches and royal residences. We also know that artists, especially those who were working in a church or palace, were often housed and fed and, when finished, rewarded with gifts, which included clothes, money, and occasionally land.

In summary, it is important to emphasize that little is known about the context in which religious paintings were produced and functioned in Habeshia society. Our lack of understanding is not necessarily due to a dearth of information on the subject. I will argue later in the essay that the problem lies with how scholars have approached the study of this tradition.

The Paintings of Qes Adamu

Adamu is very much part of the long and rich tradition of Ethiopian painting. However, his primary patron is not Ethiopia's aristocracy or the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; it is the visitor to Ethiopia. Individu-
paste the cloth to the wall and then work in situ or the cloth can be stretched on a wood frame and painted. When the painting is finished, it is cut from the frame and attached to the wall of the church. The latter technique is the one Adamu uses most often—it allows him to work in the solitude of his house.

Adamu stretches his canvas on a frame made from tree branches (fig. 7.6). This provides a rigid surface on which to paint. He first draws the composition on the cloth using a pencil or piece of charcoal and then proceeds to apply large areas of pigment to the cloth surface, one color at a time, beginning with the lightest colors. He thus builds areas of color. It is only during the final stages of painting that he applies detail (fig. 7.7). Like his predecessors, he outlines many of the forms so that they can be easily read.

The reproductions of Adamu’s paintings that accompany this essay reveal they generally conform to the canons of the Second Gonderine period. However, his works possess a monumentality not often seen in contemporary traditional painting. The figures in his paintings are boldly drawn. It is a distinctive style. Adamu’s rendering of faces, for instance, is easily discerned. The forehead and long straight nose are drawn on the same flat plane, and the brow line runs perpendicular to the nose, creating an angular, almost faceted effect that contributes to the monumental nature of the figures in his compositions.

Adamu used the same basic palette for all of the Michigan State University Museum commissions. The colors red, blue, and green predominate. Yellow is used to a lesser extent, often for highlighting important features, like the halos of holy personages. For this series of paintings Adamu seems to have mixed a good deal of white in the pigments, and the colors therefore have a pastel-like quality. This treatment gives the paintings a luminosity that is rather unusual for Ethiopian traditional painting. Additional information about the iconography and style of Adamu’s paintings can be found in the appendix to this essay, which offers some comments about four paintings that we commissioned while working with Adamu in 1993.

Conclusion: A Skewed View of the Past, a Sad View of the Present, a New Direction for the Future?

Most art-historical inquiry in Ethiopia has been devoted to searching for the iconographic and stylistic origins of Ethiopian religious art. Most scholars have approached this challenge from outside Habesh culture. Their studies leave one with the impression that the sources of creativity, innovation, and change always come from outside Ethiopia. Scholars have successfully identified various foreign sources, and they duly acknowledge the creative genius required to integrate these ideas into an Ethiopian setting, but there is little written on how or why these models were assimilated and transformed to become part of a distinctive Ethiopian canon. What was (and still is) the nature of the syncretic process that students of Ethiopian religious art have acknowledged as being such a vital element in the history of religious painting in Ethiopia? To ascertain this it will be necessary to seek a better understanding of
the tradition in an Ethiopian context.

Ethiopian religious art has yet to be interpreted on its own terms, that is, in the unique social and cultural setting of central and northern Ethiopia. Years ago, Berhanu Ababa (1961:164–65) argued that Ethiopian painting needed to be examined from an Ethiopian point of view. Many authors have described distinctive Ethiopian traits that emerge from the practice of rendering religious themes within a specific (Ethiopian) context (e.g., portraying holy figures in Habesha dress), but only a few studies attempt to move past the descriptive and consider why, for instance, Ethiopian priests and monks chose to integrate specific foreign models while rejecting others. Indeed, there has been very little discussion of the internal forces that served as catalysts for innovation and change. 46

It is not surprising that Ethiopian art scholarship characterizes Ethiopian religious painting as conservative, suggesting that the artist, as part of his aesthetic training, is taught to present a subject in a very specific manner; that he does so time and again, and that there is little room for creativity and innovation. 47 Though this certainly is a factor associated with the Ethiopian tradition (indeed, conservatism is a trait associated with the religious arts of many cultures throughout the world), it has been overemphasized and has contributed to a somewhat skewed interpretation of the tradition. 48 This, however, is a logical complement to the perception that the impetus for change always comes from outside Ethiopia. It is true that uniqueness and individuality may not have been valued as highly as they are in modern European society; nevertheless, it is apparent that social and cultural factors in Habesha society have served as stimuli for change. How does one explain the creative genius that spawned the works attributed to Fre S‘eyon in the fifteenth century?

Today, we know that Adamu consciously approaches his paintings with some degree of creativity. Adamu’s philosophy, at least in part, is a product of his living in the twentieth century and in Addis Ababa, where he is likely to have been influenced by modern Western attitudes about art, but one wonders if Adamu’s outlook has been shared by other priests and monks who have painted in the past.

Another common perception, alluded to earlier, deserves comment. It is generally held that by the middle of the eighteenth century Ethi-
opian religious painting began to deteriorate and entered a “decadent” or “degenerate” phase. Some scholars believe that by the early twentieth century the tradition was dead. Chojetjuki (1978a: 74) suggests that several factors contributed to the demise of church painting in Ethiopia, namely, the influence of foreign models, the introduction of foreign pigments, and the change of artists’ attitudes toward their craft—in his words, “the creative spirit of Ethiopian art based on faith” was lost.

There is no denying that Ethiopia has experienced many social and cultural changes over the last hundred years. But these changes have not resulted in the demise of Ethiopian church painting. The “creative spirit of Ethiopian art” is alive and thriving throughout the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. It is true that artists are not painting like their predecessors did five hundred years ago. It is true that the aristocracy and church are no longer the primary patrons of religious painting. It is true that many artists who today work in the traditional idioms were not trained in a church or monastic setting. Many of them are self-taught and some received formal training in state-supported trade schools. Indeed, even Adamu augmented his knowledge and skills by studying with Johannes Tessema at the Empress Menen Handicrafts School. And it is true that many “traditional” painters work by rote, producing the same compositions over and over again with little, if any, variation—admittedly, there is little, if any, “creative spirit” in such a context. But this is not true of all artists; it certainly is not true of Qes Adamu.

It is significant that most studies of Ethiopian painting end in the eighteenth century. The scholars who have studied these traditions have created a dichotomy between what they see as two related but distinct traditions, one historic, the other modern. Most scholars do not deal with the later, “modern” phase of Ethiopian art. I would like to suggest that this dichotomy is a Western construct that has been an impediment to the study of Ethiopian art. We, in fact, are dealing with a continuum. Some modern paintings (especially those desired for use in churches and religious texts) and the contexts in which they are produced may upset the aesthetic sensibilities of Western scholars, but they are part of the same tradition that produced the revered works of five or ten centuries ago.

The dichotomy and the values associated with it are unfortunate. The
discipline has in effect denied itself access to the richest sources for interpreting religious painting on its own terms. It is not until the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth century that there is a proliferation of European accounts of highland Ethiopian society full of information that surely would enhance our understanding of the social, religious, and cultural milieux that spawned religious art.\textsuperscript{50} Failing to acknowledge this continuity has denied scholars an even more valuable source of insight—living artists and their patrons.

If students of Ethiopian art accepted twentieth-century "traditional" painting as a modern-day manifestation of a 1,500-year tradition, we might consider a research agenda that requires coming to grips with the recent past, to attempt an understanding of what is most accessible. Surely, such an exercise would yield significant insights into the meanings of art from more distant eras. This of course assumes that students of Ethiopian art are interested in understanding Ethiopian art on its own terms and that they seek to write a social or cultural history of it.

To do so, scholars are going to have to engage culture, society, and the people who make art much more than they have in the past. This is nothing radical; I am simply suggesting that scholars who seek an understanding of Ethiopian art have to talk to people—priests and monks who paint, the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy and wealthy individuals who commission(ed) religious paintings, the people who worship at churches that display mural paintings and icons, and even the tourists who buy "traditional" paintings. They are going to have to become more familiar with the society and culture that produced these paintings.

Some might argue that talking with today's artists and patrons of religious painting would yield scant insight into the past—things have changed too much. Significant changes have occurred during the last thousand years, especially in the last hundred years, but there is a good deal from the distant past that survives in the paintings of today. Most of the formal and iconographic canons prevalent a thousand years ago are still intact. In addition, many of the basic religious and social values that have driven the tradition for the last thousand years are still prevalent.\textsuperscript{51}

An initial step in achieving this goal might be developing in-depth biographies for living painters who received their artistic training under the auspices of the church.\textsuperscript{52} No one has yet documented the entire oeuvre of a single traditional artist. We have no sense of how an artist evolves over the course of his career. Nor do we know much about the forces that motivate an artist to introduce an iconographic element or a new stylistic treatment of a traditional subject.

This essay has been offered as an introduction to the work of a single Ethiopian artist. The product of only a few interviews, it is far from exhaustive. Many more questions need to be asked, and many more insights need to be gleaned from talking to Adamu and examining not only his contemporary work but his earlier work. It would be worthwhile, for instance, to travel with him to Bish'era, to visit some of the churches where he and his teachers, Qes Gebez Anteneh and Aleqa Kassa, produced paintings before Adamu moved to Addis Ababa. It would also be useful to learn more about the programs at the Empress Menen Handicrafts School and about the artists who taught there, like Yohannes Tesema. Many lines of inquiry need pursuing if we are to build a thorough biography for Qes Adamu and begin to understand religious painting from an Ethiopian point of view.
APPENDIX

Four Paintings by Qes Adamu Tesfaw

Saint George Slaying the Dragon (pl. 12)
Saint George, especially his feat of slaying the dragon, is the most popular subject in Ethiopian religious painting, with the exception of Saint Mary. It is found everywhere, on the walls of churches, in manuscripts, and on icons. 13 Ethiopians have a penchant for the victorious equestrian saints, especially Saints George (Gyorgis), Mercurius, and Tewodros. 14 Usually they can be easily distinguished by the color of their horses: George rides a white horse, Mercurius a black horse, and Tewodros a red one.

Chojnacki (1973a, 1973b, 1974, 1975) has examined the evolution of the iconography associated with Saint George from the thirteenth through nineteenth centuries. Adamu’s paintings of the saint are consistent with the characteristics of the Second Gonderine period—they possess the iconographic attributes found in works produced after the last few decades of the seventeenth century. 55

In the Michigan State University Museum painting, we see Saint George riding a white horse. He is depicted as a young man thrusting a spear through the snout of the dragon. The theme, popular throughout both the Eastern and the Western Christian world, is here “Ethiopized.” George wears the sumptuous dress (including a luxurious red cloak) of a Habesh nobleman, and his horse’s trappings (including the distinctive “toe-stirrup”) are products of highland Ethiopia. 15 Earlier representations of the theme portray George killing a snake (not a dragon) and do not incorporate all of the ancillary characters present in modern-day renderings of the drama. Chojnacki (1973b: 57–58) argues that the transformation of the snake into a dragon and the introduction of the maiden, Birutawi, can be attributed to foreign influence dating from the end of the fifteenth century. 56 In early (i.e., sixteenth- and seventeenth-century) paintings Birutawi is depicted standing in front of the horse. Later, during the Second Gonderine period, another mode of interpretation was introduced, in which the maiden is depicted tied to a tree—as seen in Adamu’s painting. The visage of the devil (representing evil) emerging from the body of the dragon is an iconographic element that Chojnacki (1978a: 69) suggests developed in the eighteenth century and is unique to paintings produced by artists from Gojiam. 58 George’s faithful servant, Saqa’rat, is first integrated into the scene during the First Gonderine period (i.e., seventeenth century). He follows the mounted saint on foot carrying the weapons (spear and shield) and wearing the garb of an Ethiopian warrior. In Adamu’s painting two additional attendants accompany Saqa’rat. Chojnacki (1973b: 89) locates this development in the Second Gonderine period and suggests that the additional figures may represent the servants Lolis and Herpas. 59 However, in the Michigan State University Museum painting, Adamu does not identify these three figures in an inscription.

Saint Mercurius Slaying Emperor Julian (pl. 13)
Since Mercurius is one of the victorious equestrian saints, his slaying of Emperor Julian is one of the more popular themes in Ethiopian art. The earliest extant image of Saint Mercurius dates from the end of the thirteenth century and is found in the Church of Gennata Mariam, located about 9 kilometers east of Lalibela. 60
Saint Mercurius was a Roman army officer martyred in the third century in Caesarea in Cappadocia and is credited with a number of miraculous appearances. 61 In Ethiopia, his most popular miracle is his appearance at a battle between the Roman forces of Emperor Julian (the Apostate) and the Persians in 363. Prior to the Persian campaign Julian had destroyed the monastery at Edessa, killing all its inhabitants, including its abbeys, Sofia. According to Christian tradition, God sent Mercurius to kill the emperor. 62

The formal arrangement of this composition is similar to Adamu’s Saint George Slaying the Dragon, but of course the iconography is different. We see Saint Mercurius on a black horse; in place of the maiden are the

Qes Adamu Tesfaw: A Priest Who Paints

152
figures of Saints Basil and Gregory (two monks imprisoned for confronting Julian who are said to have had visions of the emperor’s imminent demise at the hands of Mercurius); the fallen body of emperor Julian has taken the place of the dragon; and the three attendants that follow Saint George are replaced by three ferocious dog-headed soldiers who accompanied Mercurius on his mission of retribution.

The painting carries inscriptions that identify the various characters in the scene. On the left we see the cynocephalous soldiers identified as "dog face"; Saint Mercurius is identified by an inscription over his horse’s tail; "Ulianor" (Julian) is written above the abdomen of the fallen emperor; and the names “Basilio” and “Gorgorios” are written just to the left of the two monks. Again, the “Ethiopianized” version of the tradition portrays the various actors wearing the dress and carrying the accoutrements of highland Ethiopia.

**Abba Geber Menfas Qiddus (Fig. 7.8)**

One of Ethiopia’s most popular saints, Gebre Menfas Qiddus, is thought to be a historic figure who lived in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. He is the subject of an extensive hagiographic tradition that recalls his many miracles—alleged to be the saint’s piety and special affinity with animals. He was born in Egypt but is said to have lived most of his life in the wilderness around Mount Zeqwala in central Ethiopia.

Adamu’s painting incorporates the distinctive iconographic elements associated with Gebre Menfas Qiddus that, according to Heldman (1993: 251), developed during the seventeenth century. We see the figure of an elderly man with a halo. According to one tradition, “he lived standing upright like a pillar for six months, and he gazed into heaven, and he neither dropped his eyelids nor bowed his head, and his hands were stretched out towards heaven” (Budge 1928: 3.765–66). Gebre Menfas Qiddus is usually depicted with his long, flowing hair (said to be 7 cubits long) covering his body. He carries heavy chains as an act of mortification. He is flanked by lions and leopards, who were “tamed by his holiness” and who were his companions during his long life in the wilderness. His special relationship with animals is further affirmed by the white bird, a creature he encountered while living in the desert and he fed with water from his eyes.

An inscription, “Abba Geber Menfas Qiddus,” appears below the right elbow of the saint. The only other writing is Adamu’s name, which appears at the base of the painting.

**Saint Yared Greeting Christ, Mary, and the Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Fig. 7.9)**

Yared is said to have lived during the sixth century and is reputed to have introduced music to the Ethiopian liturgy. The figure of Yared occupies the right third of Adamu’s composition. Adamu has depicted him wearing the vestments of a deacon of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and carrying a prayer stick (maqsimis) over his left shoulder and a sistrum (émsèd) in his right hand. Yared is identified by an inscription. The scene depicts the episode in the saint’s life when three birds (seen on the far right) from the Garden of Eden came to Yared “and took him to the heavenly Jerusalem,” where “he learned the songs of the Four and Twenty Priests of heaven.” Yared encounters the Virgin Mary (also identified by inscription) with the infant Christ sitting on her lap, flanked by two sword-bearing figures, the archangels Michael and Gabriel. The group of holy figures is distinguished by their halos and by their elegant garments, reminiscent of highland Ethiopian dress.

![Fig. 7.8 Abba Geber Menfas Qiddus, by Adamu, 1993. 176 x 91 cm. Michigan State University Museum.](image)

![Fig. 7.9 Saint Yared Greeting Christ, Mary, and the Archangels Michael and Gabriel, by Adamu, 1993. 172 x 93 cm. Michigan State University Museum.](image)
Jembere and His Son Marcos
Traditional Painting at the End of the Twentieth Century

Raymond A. Silverman and Girma Fisseha

This naturalistic trend has become more and more pronounced in paintings of this century, the period of growing Europeanisation, and has resulted in a new era of painting. Nowadays the traditional production has reached the last stage of the Gondarine style, “degenerate” as the historian of art would classify it, and to a great extent naturalistic. Starting with the last years of the 19th century and especially during the period from 1930 up to now, the Ethiopian traditional painters have turned out a very impressive number of paintings on various topics, ranging from the Queen of Sheba to the battle of Adwa, from the traditional saints to various subjects taken from everyday life... this mass production has not much in common with the great achievement of the past, but it is, just the same, a delight for tourists thirsty for exoticism. (Chojnacki 1964: 11)

This brief characterization of twentieth-century traditional painting offered by Stanisław Chojnacki, a leading authority on Ethiopian art, touches upon many of the issues that confront anyone who seeks an understanding of modern Ethiopian art. There is a genre of painting that...

We would like to thank Marcos Jembere for his interest in our inquiries and for the time he spent talking with us about his life and work. We would also like to recognize the time and knowledge that his father, Qengeta Jembere Hailu, shared with us just half a year before his death. We dedicate this essay to Jembere’s memory.
produced in Ethiopia today that has its roots in the ancient artistic traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Its subjects include traditional religious themes, episodes from Ethiopian history, and scenes of everyday life in Ethiopia. It is viewed by many students of Ethiopian art as representing the end of a long and magnificent tradition of painting. As such it has been described as "debased," "decadent," or, as Chojnacki suggests, "degenerate." Many, in fact, feel that it has little if anything to do with the religious art of the past. Many changes have come to Ethiopia over the last hundred years and the religious art of Ethiopia is generally considered one of the casualties of modernization, or "Europeanization." At best, the "traditional" paintings of twentieth-century Ethiopia are accepted as delightful souvenirs for "tourists thirsty for exoticism."

It goes without saying that this is a rather bleak picture. It is, however, a picture painted by European and American scholars who have chosen not to examine the tradition on its own terms. Their perceptions are heavily influenced by Western notions of authenticity. Viewed from another perspective, twentieth-century painting is a dynamic, vital tradition that has produced works of art that are every bit as stunning as those produced in former eras. It is, in fact, a latter-day manifestation of an ancient artistic tradition. This essay attempts to reconcile these two views through the work of two Ethiopian traditional painters; Gengeta Jembere Hailu and his son Marcos Jembere (fig. 8.1). The essay begins with overviews of the lives and work of Jembere and Marcos. Then place their work in the broader context of traditional painting during the twentieth century by exploring some of the factors that have shaped the tradition over the last hundred years. Finally, we examine the bias against twentieth-century traditional art and the challenges of interpreting the modern art of Ethiopia.

A Short Biography of Jembere Hailu

Before his death in January 1994, Gengeta Jembere Hailu was the best-known "traditional" artist working in Addis Ababa. Richard PaulhIRST referred to him as "perhaps the most versatile of Ethiopia's old-style artists" (1989a: 98). Gengeta Jembere Hailu was a priest in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. His title gengeta indicates that he was responsible for the priests who stand on the right side of the altar during Mass. For over sixty years, Jembere was also an artist who painted religious and historical themes for various patrons, including provincial rulers and visitors to Ethiopia. Today his paintings can be found in churches in Begemdir, Wello, and Gojam Provinces, as well as in museums and private collections in Ethiopia, Europe, and the United States. In 1993 we had the opportunity to meet with Jembere and talk to him about his life and work. Our inquiries were far from exhaustive; nevertheless, we were able to learn a good deal about the experiences that shaped Jembere’s life and drove his career as an artist.

Jembere was born in October 1913 near the Church of Jamal Mikel in Andulet, a little village southwest of Debra Tabor. He is one of a number of traditional Ethiopian painters living in Addis Ababa who received a traditional church education. It is in this context that he acquired the knowledge and developed the skills of a painter. During Jembere’s youth, this was the only way one could pursue a career as a painter in Ethiopia.

Jembere, in accord with Ethiopian Orthodox tradition, was baptized forty days after his birth and given the Christian name Welde Maryam (Servant of Mary). He informed us that he started school a year after the Battle of Segelle (i.e., in 1917) when he was four years and four days old. He received a traditional church education, first learning to read by studying Davit (the Psalms of David) and various aspects of melk (religious music) near his home. He completed this first stage of his education in seven years and in accordance with Ethiopian custom was rewarded with gifts and a big celebration from his family.

Jembere then traveled to the famous monastery of Dega Washa Mariam in Gojam, where he studied qene (liturgical poetry). He proceeded to Welda to continue his study of qene. Finally, he moved to Kidane Mehret in Gaynit, where he studied ammar (hymns sung at the end of the Mass), mesneit (hymns sung at funerals and memorial services), and qereqem (choir performance). In this monastery he was under the tutelage of the famous priest Merketa Welde Libanos.

In 1927, his uncle Alega Alemu, who was an accomplished painter, asked Jembere to join him in Amhara Sayan. Alemu had been commissioned by Empress Zawditu to paint the church in Teghabe Mariam. It was here that Jembere began to learn how to paint. Jembere’s uncle guided the young artist as he studied the Old and New Testaments and
the art of writing (i.e., calligraphy). At his uncle’s side, he learned the canons that govern Ethiopian church painting. Jembere told us these rules included knowing that the Madonna should be depicted wearing a “heavenly” blue cape; the devil should always be depicted in dark colors; Saint George is painted riding a white horse whereas Saint Mercurius rides a black one; Saint Michael protects Mary on the right and Saint Gabriel stands on the left; nonbelievers are portrayed with one eye but believers have two big eyes, and angels are rendered in panel colors. Undoubtedly, these are but a few of the many rules that he learned from his uncle, for Jembere’s paintings conform to the compositional and iconographic tenets of traditional Ethiopian painting.

Two years later, Aleqa Alemu and Jembere were asked by the governor of Begemdir, Ras Gugsa Welle, to paint Guditu Mariam, a church in Debra Tabor. They worked with three other painters until 1930, when their work was interrupted by the rebellion led by Ras Gugsa against Ras Tefari Mekonnen (Haile Selassie). Gugsa was defeated and killed in the Battle of Anchem. General turmoil ensued, and Jembere, then seventeen years old, returned to his parents’ home. By this time he had acquired some reputation as a painter and within a year he was asked by the new ruler of Begemdir, Dejazmach Wendwosen Kasa, to paint the reception hall of his palace. As payment for this Jembere was presented, as was customary, with a set of clothes given only to honored personalities by the emperor. During his work on the palace he was also given, every month, a sheep, 3–5 dawla of wheat, 1–2 gendso of butter, 1–2 gendso of honey, and 10–20 birr. He also received 10 injis “cakes” and part of a slaughtered deer. After the job was completed, Wendwosen, in appreciation, offered Jembere a position as a secretary.

Jembere met his first wife in 1932 and they were married the following year. In 1934 his first daughter, Tesfaye, was born, and a year later, his first son, T’oba.

In 1936 Jembere and his father went to fight against the Italians, who had occupied Ethiopia. His father was killed that year in the Battle of Maychew. Jembere spent the next five years fighting as a guerrilla against the Italians in Begemdir. Girma Kidane’s account of his life indicates that during this period Jembere did not paint, “he did not even dream of drawing” (1989: 74). In 1939, his uncle Aleqa Alemu died on the battlefield—Jembere was devastated by this loss. Then in 1940 Jembere accompanied Fitawari Yalagel to Belelya on the Sudanese border to receive Haile Selassie, who was returning from exile in England. Jembere accompanied Fitawari Biru to Gonder, where they fought against the Italian general Nasi. With the assistance of the British they finally succeeded in defeating Nasi in 1941.

Girma Kidane (1989: 74) reports that in recognition of his patriotism, Jembere received medals from the emperor and the British. He should have received a government appointment, but he had some difficulties with the law. The next few years of his life are difficult to discern. Two conflicting accounts of the problem have been recorded. One rather vague reference claims that he had to leave Gonder for “family reasons” (Girma Kidane 1989: 74). Another suggests that he became involved in a quarrel during which he accidentally killed his adversary and that he was forced to flee the scene and lead the life of a thief (a renegade or outlaw). Both versions indicate that Jembere traveled to Welio, where he painted in the famous monastery church of Gergera, near Lalibela. According to the second account he sought refuge in the church of the monastery and, in gratitude, Jembere painted the church. He apparently encountered another problem around this time. In our 1993 discussions with Jembere, he related how he was arrested in 1946 for allegedly participating in the activities of the Muslim League (Rabita al-Islamia), an organization founded in 1946 that sought Ethiopian independence. He was imprisoned for two years. During this troubled period Jembere divorced his first wife, or perhaps she divorced him.

In 1948 Jembere came to Addis Ababa and settled in Arat Kilo. He felt he deserved to be rewarded for his service to his country as a patriot during the Italian Occupation and he appealed to Emperor Haile Selassie. He was given some land and funds for building a house. Around 1953, he married his second wife, Bezunesh Zeleke. Only one of their children, Marcos, born in 1958, followed in his father’s footsteps and became an accomplished artist. After Jembere’s arrival in the capital, he met the famous artists Balatichew Timner (1869–1957) and Hailu Weldeyesus, as well as other painters who had been trained in the church but now, living in Addis Ababa, produced paintings for visitors to Ethiopia. Jembere also began painting for this growing market.
He earned a good living from his paintings until 1974. According to Jember, after the 1974 Revolution most of the people who purchased his paintings disappeared—tourists stopped visiting the country. The Derg confiscated most of Jember's property. The painter, greatly demoralized, produced very little until Mengistu Hailie Mariam was overthrown in 1991. When we spoke with Jember in 1993, he observed that there were few tourists coming to Ethiopia but he had hopes that the traditional-painting market would soon be resurrected. During the last few years of his life he produced a limited number of paintings.

**Jember's Paintings**

Like most of the church-trained painters who emigrated to Addis Ababa to engage the expatriate and tourist art market, Jember had a repertoire of religious, historical, and secular themes that he painted. He is especially known for his scenes of daily life set around the shores of Lake Tana, the area where he grew up and lived as a young man (fig. 8.2). In addition to these idyllic scenes he is remembered for his interpretations of various religious subjects like the birth of Christ (pl. 14), the Crucifixion (fig. 8.3), and the popular equestrian saints, George and Mercurius (pl. 15). His renderings of historical events, especially famous battles, have attracted the attention of collectors and scholars. Pankhurst, for example, in his studies of paintings depicting the Battles of Adwa and Maqbele, has commented on the artist's innovative treatment of these subjects. Like the traditional artists who preceded him for well over a thousand years, Jember's work has a strong narrative element. Most of his paintings incorporate inscriptions identifying the key characters in the composition; occasionally he provides a sentence or two describing the action. He proudly signed many of his paintings "Jember Hailu from Gonder."

Though Jember followed the basic canons of Ethiopian traditional painting, he felt that his compositions were distinctly his own. He was very much aware that the themes, style, and techniques that he employed were part of an ancient tradition, but he insisted that it was his own imagination and creativity that made his paintings unique. Indeed, Richard Pankhurst recently commented that Jember is particularly noted for his reinterpretation of traditional themes" (1994: 287). This

---

Fig. 8.2: *Daily Life on the Banks of Lake Tana*, by Jember, 1993. 90 x 150 cm. Michigan State University Museum.

Fig. 8.3: *Crucifixion*, painted by Jember in the Church of Qarnino Medhane Alem, Addis Ababa, in 1986.
outlook does not conform to the general perception of the traditional Ethiopian artist. Ethiopian traditional art is generally characterized as extremely conservative. But changes have occurred and there is room for innovation, especially since the turn of the century.\textsuperscript{15} Jembere is not alone; there are other twentieth-century artists working in the "traditional" idiom, such as Qes Adamu and Jembere’s son Marcos, who see themselves as artists, that is, creative individuals. A number of factors have contributed to the evolution of this attitude over the last hundred years. Addis Ababa, an international city with a large expatriate community and tourist presence, has certainly been a fertile area for the introduction and assimilation of Western ideas concerning art and creativity. Over the course of the last century, artists like Jembere have offered a bridge between the “traditional” and a modern “global” culture.

Examining Jembere’s recent work, like his "Stones, Geese and Menace" (pl. 15), one is struck by the bold, almost Expressionistic brushwork, as well as by the somber colors. Viewed next to other Ethiopian traditional paintings, these are quite unusual. Examples of the same themes painted by Jembere less than ten years earlier reveal that his style has changed dramatically.\textsuperscript{16} The change was not a conscious effort but was due to the elderly artist’s failing vision.

In addition to his traditional-style paintings, Jembere worked in another idiom. Like many of the artists who found their way to Addis Ababa, he developed a more naturalistic style reserved for portraiture. One of the most compelling works that we purchased from Jembere was a portrait of Emperor Haile Selassie that he painted about forty years ago (Fig. 8.4). It is modeled after one of the emperor’s official photographic portraits dating from the era during which the painting was made. Jembere painted it for himself and never signed it. When we first saw the painting, it was hanging in the living room of his house. As mentioned in his biography, Jembere was a staunch supporter of the emperor and a patriot. Jembere loved Haile Selassie and was deeply saddened when he was overthrown in 1974 and died in prison in 1975. The creases found in the painting are the result of Jembere folding and hiding the portrait for seventeen years during the period of the Derg. He was happy to take it out again and put it back on the wall in 1991 after Mengistu Haile Mariam fled the country (Fig. 8.5).

We showed the painting to a number of colleagues, specialists in Ethiopian art. It is interesting that several of them insisted that Jembere could not have painted the portrait. Stylistically this portrait and his paintings of religious and historical themes are very different. Our colleagues’ assessments were based on the assumption that the traditional artist works in only one style. Jembere told us he had painted the portrait; there is no doubt that he did.

Jembere and His Son Marcos

\textsuperscript{15} Jembere and His Son Marcos

\textsuperscript{16} Jembere and His Son Marcos
no reason he would have lied to us and we believe he could have very
easily produced the portrait.

Like Father Like Son?

Only one of Jember's children, Marcos, learned to paint. Born in 1958,
Marcos began painting when he was only four (fig. 8.6). He learned by
observing his father. Early in his training Marcos copied his father's work
very closely but then began to experiment with his own interpretations
of religious and historical subjects. Jember showed him how to stretch
the cloth on its frame, prepare the pigments, sketch the outline of com-
positions on the cloth (i.e., the painting surface), and then apply the
pigments in layers, one color at a time. Marcos learned to work on sev-
eral paintings at one time—while the paint dries on one, the artist turns
his attention to another. He also learned the importance of preparing
sketches of the basic compositions of his paintings. In addition, Jem-
ber taught his son about the subjects depicted in traditional paintings.
The important figures presented in his compositions are often labeled
and there usually is a rich narrative associated with the religious, his-
torical, and genre scenes that both father and son have painted.

Marcos has produced a set of cartoons that he is constantly updat-
ing. These sketches serve as basic patterns for his compositions (fig. 8.7).
But Marcos is quick to point out that he approaches each painting as a
new challenge and no two paintings are the same. One can observe this
in his two renderings of the Battle of Adwa, both painted in 1993 (figs.
8.8 and 8.9). 

Though the composition and iconography are basically the same, there is a good deal of difference in detail.

Unlike his father, Marcos did not receive a formal church education.
Instead he attended public schools in Addis Ababa, completing the twelfth
grade. Marco's artistic education was further enhanced by the art lessons
he obtained while in school. He indicated that he was always the best
painter in his class, and his teachers encouraged him to continue his
studies at a professional art school. Indeed, this has been his dream. Mar-
cos would like to attend the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa or a for-
eign art school. Regrettably, he has been unable to pursue this dream
and this caused a serious rift in his relationship with his father. Roughly
fifteen years ago he required his father's sponsorship to leave Ethiopia
to pursue an arts education abroad. According to Marcos, his father
refused to sign the forms and Marcos was not allowed to leave Ethiopia.
They ceased talking to one another and despite living close to one another,
father and son rarely saw each other. Instead of pursuing a career as an
artist, Marcos has been a civil servant for the last thirteen years. He is
currently a supervisor in a government motor pool. It is still his dream
to go to art school.

Marcos is a gifted painter. Comparing Jember's recent work with
Marcos's paintings, it is difficult to see much similarity. However, if one
looks at Jember's earlier paintings, an affinity is quite apparent. For
example, there is a good deal of similarity in composition and style
between Jember's rendering of the birth of Christ (pl. 14) and the same
subject painted by Marcos over twenty years later (fig. 8.10).
Marcos's paintings, like most traditional paintings, have a strong narrative element—they tell a story. Inscriptions identifying the key actors and action are integrated into his compositions. In addition, Marcos enjoys offering an oral commentary on the religious and historical scenes that he paints. His knowledge of these subjects comes from working with his father, his public school education, and his independent reading of history books. See, for example, his comments about his painting *The Judgment of Emperor EndaNegus and the Battle of Maqdala* (pl. 16) that we have reproduced in the appendix to this essay.

These brief biographical sketches of Jembere and Marcos admittedly are incomplete. Further interviews and detailed analyses of the paintings of father and son are required if we wish a fuller understanding of the lives and works of Jembere and Marcos.

**Traditional Art in the Twentieth Century**

The capital of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa, is not an old city. It was founded in 1887 by the king of Shewa, Menilek II, during a period when much of the rest of Africa was being partitioned and claimed as the colonial domains of various European nations. After the "Scramble for Africa," Ethiopia, or Abyssinia as it was then called, remained the only inde-
pended nation in Africa. Menilek's successful campaigns of aggrandizement brought much of what is included within the current boundaries of Ethiopia under his control, and in 1889 he was crowned emperor of the sovereign nation of Abyssinia. 

Addis Ababa was perceived by the people of the country as a place of opportunity. The large imperial court, the many government officials, and a growing foreign community of diplomats and merchants required support. People from all parts of the empire flocked to the capital and it soon became a bustling cosmopolitan city.

For the last hundred years, Addis Ababa has been the primary focus for international activity and the exchange of ideas in Ethiopia. Indeed, it has been the site for most of the major changes and innovations that have driven the evolution of Ethiopian society and culture over the last century. The art produced in Addis Ababa bears testimony to these changes for it represents the melding of long-standing Ethiopian tradition and the traditions of a twentieth-century global society. It is in this setting that the art and artists of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church met the world.

References in early European travel accounts suggest that until recently, the production of paintings was the exclusive domain of monks and priests who learned the art as part of their religious education. There is an ancient tradition in the highlands of central and northern Ethiopia, stretching back to the advent of Christianity in Ethiopia over 1,500 years ago, of wealthy individuals commissioning monks and priests to paint religious subjects on the interior walls of churches, or icons and manuscripts that they would then give to specific churches or monasteries. Their support of the church in this manner served both as an act of piety and as a means of affirming their elevated position in Ethiopian society. Ethiopia's aristocracy continued to be the primary patrons of painting until the present century.

Paintings apparently were also produced in the palaces of the ruling elite. The subject matter of these palace paintings from earlier periods is largely unknown. We may speculate, however, that they were in part religious but also included some scenes recalling the exploits of earlier rulers or recording the life of the reigning aristocracy. There is evidence that secular themes were being painted in palaces by the eighteenth century, perhaps even earlier, and that by the nineteenth century they were appearing in churches around the country. Among the most popular subjects were recent battles and the portraits of regional rulers.

Elisabeth Biasio (1994) has recently argued that this development is not surprising, for it reflects the close ties between the political and religious values of the peoples of highland Ethiopia. Indeed, this same observation was made almost a hundred years ago by Viscount du Bourg de Bozas, who visited the Im'ot'o Church of Saint Mary (Addis Ababa) and commented on the portraits of Emperor Menilek II and Ras Mekonnen:

"It was not without some intention to divinize or at least to sanctify the rulers of the country that the portrait of Menilek was next to that of Christ on the day of the Last Supper and that of Ras Mekonnen was placed next to that of the four evangelists" (my translation; 1906: 214). He concluded that the paintings reflected the contemporary political scene. Biasio suggests that the roots of the tradition may be found in the Zenone Mesafin (1769–1855), a period of political instability during which local rulers may have exploited such imagery to affirm their political stature.

New Patrons for the Arts

At the end of the nineteenth century, the members of the ruling class continued to be the primary patrons of painters in Addis Ababa. However, in addition to commissioning artists to produce paintings for churches and their royal residences, they also had them paint large-scale compositions on cloth that they gave to visiting dignitaries as gifts. Visitors to Ethiopia also sought to obtain their own paintings. One of the first Europeans to do so was the British emissary Henry Salt (1867: 394), who visited Ethiopia in 1809 and engaged the chief painter of Ras Welde Selassie, ruler of Tigray (r. 1788–1816), "to paint him one of his best pictures."

During the nineteenth and first third of the twentieth centuries, most paintings were acquired directly from artists. A number of foreign residents, like the Russian physician A. I. Kohanovski, who lived in Addis Ababa from 1907 to 1913, were able to collect paintings. C. Keller (1904: 33), in one of the first articles devoted to Ethiopian traditional painting, reports that many artists were reluctant to work outside the traditional patronage system and it therefore was
sometimes difficult to locate artists willing to paint for foreigners. Even more difficult was finding ready-made paintings—in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, paintings were not produced for an open market (see, e.g., Bent 1893: 39–40; Powell-Cotton 1902: 120; Norden 1930: 32; Coon 1935: 122). Powell-Cotton (1902: 118), a British sportsman who visited Ethiopia in 1899–1900, offers the first reference to a dealer of Ethiopian paintings in Addis Ababa, a Greek merchant named Balambas Giyorgis, but even he had difficulty maintaining a stock of good-quality paintings.

Workshops and Schools

The commercialization of traditional painting may be seen as a response to a growing foreign presence in Addis Ababa. Pankhurst (1966: 39) reports that the production of oil paintings for visitors to Ethiopia really took off after 1930 and the coronation of Haile Selassie. Adrien Zervos (1936: 242) lists eleven painters working in Addis Ababa in the 1920s and 1930s whose work could be purchased for anywhere from 2 to 10 thalers, the equivalent of 10–50 francs at the time.23 But paintings were still relatively scarce until the Italian Occupation (1936–41), when an increased foreign presence created an “almost insatiable demand for all kinds of tourist goods” (Pankhurst 1966: 39). The commercialization of Ethiopian painting at this time owes a great deal to the Georgian entrepreneur Djoujalgulavili, who called himself Prince Amaredji and established a hotel and a “factory” for the production of Ethiopian paintings of religious themes, scenes of traditional life, and battles (Pankhurst 1966: 39). He is said to have employed between ten and fifteen painters who lived in their own homes but spent the whole day in Amaredji’s workshop, where they received a wage of from 100 to 1,000 lire a month in addition to their food. Molesworth tells us that most of the “freelance” painters of the day were engaged by Amaredji. Most of them had received their initial training as artists as part of a traditional church education in Gojjam, Tigray, Wello, or Begemdir. They came to Addis Ababa in search of the opportunities available in the country’s new capital (Molesworth 1957: 362). Workshops have continued to be important loci for the production of traditional painting, especially that destined for the tourist trade.

Jembere worked independently, as does Marcos, but many traditional painters have been attached to a workshop or school. A number of these workshops have been private. M. E. W. Molly, a Swiss engineer who visited Addis Ababa in the 1920s and collected a number of paintings by Behailu Gebre Maryam from Tigray, reported that Behailu had founded a school in Addis Ababa and that two or three of his students had become painters, more or less accomplished, but that they continued to paint the subjects of their teacher (Pittard 1928: 88). Today, one of the more active private workshops is maintained by the art dealer Welga Mehretu.

The most important government-sponsored institution involved with traditional painting was the Empress Menen Handicrafts School, founded in 1930/31 to offer instruction in various crafts.24 One of its primary mandates was to preserve “the beautiful handicrafts which had flourished in former times” but were beginning to disappear “under the impact of factory-made wares from abroad” (Anonymous 1957: 80). A number of church-trained painters have been affiliated with the school in one way or another. The well-known painter Johannes Tesema, for instance, worked at the school as a painter and teacher for a number of years. Some of Addis Ababa’s painters, especially those who did not learn to paint as part of their religious education, received their training at the school. The products of the Empress Menen Handicrafts School and related institutions, like the Ethiopian Tourist Trading Corporation (ETTC), have been directed toward the tourist market.25 Since these institutions were production-oriented, paintings were produced quickly, and a division of labor had developed artists “drawing” the compositions and the less-skilled artists “painting” them (filling them in with color) (Biasio 1993: 17). Among the more popular products were small “traditional” paintings on goat skin that depict various religious and genre themes. The quality of “craftsmanship” of these “skin paintings” varies. Though “handmade,” paintings of the same theme, produced by the same team of workers, are virtually identical. The products of these workshops are not as good as the paintings of some of the better independent artists, like Qes Legesse Menigistu and Zeleque Usatu, who also produce goat-skin paintings for the tourist market.

Another venue for training outside the church has been the School of Fine Arts in Addis Ababa. Biasio reports that a number of church-
trained artists—for example, Qes Legesse Mengistu, Gebre Kristos Solomon, and Tedesse Welde Aregay—received additional training at this school, which specializes in the training of modern artists in Ethiopia (Bisio 1993: 14).

Traditional Artists Working in Traditional Contexts

Today’s traditional artists, especially those who live in Addis Ababa, work for a broad clientele. Indeed, the paintings of a single artist may be destined for any number of venues. Jember has produced paintings for churches, political leaders, tourists, expatriates, č'q'ets (drinking houses), and museums. Often there is nothing inherent in the painting itself that determines its destination. This is especially true of religious subjects. The largest market, at least since the turn of the century, has been foreign visitors to Ethiopia. But there is still a demand for paintings that are destined for churches and many of the artists who produce work for the foreign market also decorate churches and illustrate religious manuscripts. In 1986, for instance, Jember was commissioned to paint a Crucifixion in the church Qeramn Methane Aleem in Addis Ababa as a votive offering (Bisio 1993: 22) (fig. 8.3). Similar, some traditional artists are still engaged in illuminating and illustrating religious texts. With the advent of mechanized printing in Ethiopia, the scriptorium has become an outmoded institution. Nevertheless, there is still a need for artists to produce the decorative and pictorial images for printed editions of religious books. Qes Legesse Mengistu, for instance, showed us a copy of a “Qeddase” book published in 1967 by the Imperial Press for which he had designed the hang (the decorative designs that separate the sections of the text).

Themes in Traditional Painting

Today, a common set of themes is associated with traditional painting. Walter Rauing (1989: 69) offers the following categories: the story of the Queen of Sheba, religious activities, daily life, outbreaks of aggression; ruler, court, politics, and diplomacy; hunting; feasts (both secular and religious); animal societies; courts of justice. The most popular subject, especially among tourists, has been the Queen of Sheba’s visit to King Solomon. The standard artistic interpretation of this popular tradition is a fairly recent development dating from the end of the nineteenth century and presents a serial recounting of the founding of Ethiopia’s Solomonic dynasty. An interest in the “exotic” has certainly driven the development of the themes that portray aspects of “traditional” life in Ethiopia. A question that we can only briefly consider in the present context concerns whether these subjects represent Ethiopian values or the values of the foreigners who purchase the paintings.

The advent of a foreign visitors’ market and the commercialization of traditional painting certainly stimulated the evolution of specific themes. During the first few decades (ca. 1890–1920) of the modern tradition, virtually all of the painting produced for export represented religious subjects or scenes of battle. By the late 1920s scenes of festivals, everyday life, the hunt, and contemporary events were being produced, and in the 1930s an interesting allegorical genre known as “Society of the Animals” was introduced. Scènes of battle, hunting, and torture (e.g., the Judgment of Tewodros) have been particularly popular (pl. 16). Molesworth, commenting on the production of painting in Amardjib’s workshop, observed that the “hard representations of battles, Ethiopian punishments and coarser practices which he [Amardjib] sponsored and encouraged for foreign taste may not have had much to do with traditional iconography” (1957: 362). The development of this “genre of violence” concerned even Emperor Haile Selassie, who banned the export of such paintings because he felt “they make the people [Ethiopians] appear barbarous” (Coen 1935: 119). Their popularity may very well represent a point of convergence between Ethiopian and European culture—a penchant for violence and hegemony has long been prevalent in both highland Ethiopian and European society. It would be safe to guess that most of the previously mentioned themes represent a coalescing of the values of both producer and consumer. One may view them as the products of a dialogue between the Ethiopian artist and the foreign visitor. This is an important factor for understanding twentieth-century Ethiopian art and requires further study.

Portraiture

Another genre of twentieth-century traditional painting needs to be considered—portraiture. Portrait painting is not a recent phenomenon. The
tradition of including portraits of important historical figures in manuscripts has probably been practiced to a greater or lesser extent since the advent of religious painting in Christian Ethiopia. 44 It seems to have been particularly popular during the Gonderine period (mid-seventeenth to late eighteenth century). 45 The tradition continued into the nineteenth century. For instance, a number of manuscripts produced during the reign of Sahle Selassie, king of Shewa from 1813 to 1847, contain illustrations of the king and members of his court engaged in various activities. 46 The practice of including portraits in mural paintings in churches also has some antiquity, though they are only rarely mentioned in the chronicles, biographies, and travel accounts before the nineteenth century. 47 Nor are there many extant examples of such paintings dating before this time. However, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century European visitors often observed portraits of the ruling elite in the murals of churches located throughout Abyssinia, especially in the towns and cities that served as capitals of provinces, kingdoms, or the empire. 48 These portraits are rendered in a style consistent with the paintings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. They are not naturalistic—the individuals depicted are rendered as human "types" distinguished only by their accoutrements and inscriptions.

Jembere's portrait of Haile Selassie represents a new type of portraiture that attempts to offer a naturalistic rendering of the subject. This genre appeared in the 1920s or 1930s, inspired by the European tradition of formal portraiture, and can easily be differentiated from earlier "type-portraits" by its higher degree of verisimilitude. 49 The introduction of photography in Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century certainly served as a catalyst for the genre. 50 Photographic images of important personages offered artists a naturalistic model from which to work. Earlier, the identification of an individual was based on iconographic or stylistic conventions (i.e., social perspective) and inscriptions; now it was possible to identify a person based on likeness. A marvelous selection of portraits by Hailu Weideyesus of various contemporary (ca. 1935) world leaders is reproduced in Zevos's L'Empire d'Ethiopie: Le minir de l'Ethiopie moderne, 1906–1935. 51

In our discussion of Jembere's paintings we mentioned that some scholars find it difficult to accept that Jembere painted the portrait of

Emperor Haile Selassie (fig. 8.4). There actually is plenty of evidence that Ethiopian "traditional" artists, especially those working in Addis Ababa in the twentieth century, have worked in more than one idiom. To offer a single example, one might consider the work of Hailu Weideyesus, a painter from Wellega Province active in Addis Ababa in the 1920s and 1930s. Zevos reproduces on the same page in his book a naturalistic portrait of Ras Mekonnen and a more traditional composition depicting a historical subject, The Debut of Mohammed Grai by the Portuguese, both painted by Hailu (Zevos 1936: 244). 52

Conclusion: Changing Traditions

Finally, we return to the observations that were made at the beginning of the essay, especially those concerning the commonly held notion that the assimilation of foreign ideas associated with the modern era has brought about the demise of traditional painting. Traditional painting of the modern era has been relegated to the status of "folk" or "popular" art, Western categories for art that do not carry the same import as the fine church art of the past. As mentioned in our introduction, this is a curious view that reflects the strong bias held in the West for things that are old, things that are "authentic."

Some authors have cited the introduction of Catholic devotional paintings and prints and of modern Russian, Armenian, and Greek icons at the end of the nineteenth century as contributing to the degenerative process. These were distributed throughout the country—walking into most churches, even in rural towns, one can see these imports displayed side by side with local paintings; one can also see the prints pasted in religious manuscripts (Biaso 1989: 57). In addition, we know that there were a number of foreign artists residing in Addis Ababa at the beginning of the present century who must have had some influence on the traditional painters living in the capital. 53 But this is not the first time foreign imagery has been introduced in Ethiopia or that foreign artists have worked in the country-European artists, as well as reproductions of European paintings and prints, have been coming to Ethiopia since at least the fifteenth century. 54 In fact, it is interesting that most of the scholars who have written on the history of Ethiopian art have been preoccupied with tracing the influence that these external elements have

Jembere and His Son Marcos
had on the evolution of Ethiopian religious painting. These authors celebrate the ingenuity with which these foreign traditions were assimilated by Ethiopian artists. Yet they fail to appreciate the same processes of integration operating in a modern context. The paintings associated with the Ethiopian Church prior to the modern era are esteemed as fine art and are studied as such. But works of modern-day priests and others who paint in a "traditional" manner are viewed as "degenerate" vestiges of the past. Apparently we are dealing with a double standard that emerges from a set of Western criteria for evaluating the material culture of other (i.e., non-European) people.

If we could somehow transport today's students of Ethiopian art back to the sixteenth-century court of Emperor Heba Dendi (c. 1508–40), how would they deal with the presence of the Venetian painter Nicolò Brancacop and the impact he had on the religious painting of that era? Would the art historians suggest that the paintings produced by the priests and monks who had come under Brancacop's influence were degenerate or inauthentic? Perhaps so. But five hundred years later, given temporal distance and the opportunity to observe change in a broader historical context, the impact that Brancacop had on Ethiopian painting is not viewed in a negative light.

The double standard is in fact a product of a tension existing in modern Western society between "tradition" and "modernity," a reverence for both the old and the new. This manifests itself in different ways—for instance, in the necessity to differentiate between that which is traditional and that which is not. The situation is further complicated when dealing with other cultures, where the related issue of identifying that which is "authentic" and that which is not also comes into play. This is a fascinating phenomenon that we can only briefly touch upon in this essay. May it suffice to say that these processes of differentiation have required the development of schemes for classifying material traditions that are based on Western criteria for evaluating cultural experience. In short, our preoccupation with differentiating between these categories has influenced how we have approached the interpretation of Ethiopian art.

Several scholars recently confronted this issue and they have all concluded that Western criteria or categories for artistic expression in twentieth-century Ethiopia simply do not work (see, e.g., Ricci 1986, 1989, Bender 1982, 1989; Biaso 1993; Benzing 1994). Their frustration is reflected in a series of questions that Brigitte Benzing (1994) poses: What is "modern" in Ethiopian art? How "Ethiopian" is modern art in Ethiopia? What is traditional in modern Ethiopian art? The necessity of seeking an understanding of Ethiopian painting on its own terms has become apparent. The works of artists like Jembere and Marcos need to be interpreted as products of a unique cultural and historical setting. Talking to living artists, such as Jembere and Marcos, offers the student of Ethiopian art a marvelous opportunity to acquire fresh insights into the past as well as the present.
APPENDIX

Marcos Jembere's Narrative concerning His Painting
The Judgment of Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdelia
(pl. 16 and fig. 8.7)

This painting has two parts. One is the battle of Maqdelia, and the other is Tewodros punishing those who oppose him. The painting shows Tewodros and his advisors discussing how to deliver the right decision and judgment based on the law. The Bible signifies that they are under oath.

At the beginning, Emperor Tewodros was poor and a slave. His poor mother used to sell kaso [a local medicine used for tapeworm] and was therefore despised and looked down upon by some people.

Wendyerad, Empress Menen’s most trusted servant, promised his queen that he would go to the forest and bring back “the son of the kaso seller” alive. He went to the forest to catch Tewodros. When Tewodros heard the news, he instructed his soldiers to catch Wendyerad alive. If this was not possible, he alone would fight Wendyerad. Somehow, Wendyerad was wounded and captured by a soldier and then taken to Tewodros. Tewodros asked Wendyerad what words were used to insult him. Tewodros then told Wendyerad that his mother raised him by regularly feeding him kaso. He also said he was as poor as kaso and that Wendyerad should taste how sour kaso is. Consequently, Tewodros sentenced Wendyerad to drink kaso continuously until he died.

The other side of the painting shows criminals as they are flogged and their hands, legs, and tongues cut out. Some were hanged; others, stoned to death or thrown down cliffs.

At the bottom of the painting, there are British soldiers and camels. Emperor Tewodros kept fighting his enemy, and when he knew he could not win the war, he killed himself with a pistol. When the British soldiers approached him and found him dead, they saluted him. Before his death, Tewodros ordered the prisoners released. The prisoners continuously shouted: “It is without your wish and will that you are releasing us now!” Tewodros got mad and ordered his soldiers to throw them all into a deep gorge.

In the right corner we see Tewodros’s relatives, particularly his son, Alemayehu, standing by his bedside crying. We also see the British soldiers using a ladder to climb a cliff in Maqdelia, and controlling the area.
Silverwork in the Highlands
The Life and Work of Gezahegn Gebre Yohannes and Abib Sa’id
Raymond A. Silverman and Neal W. Sobania

Although a majority of Ethiopia’s population lives more than a day’s walk to the nearest road, people are seldom more than a few hours’ walk to a market. For centuries markets have provided a focal point for exchange—the exchange of news, goods, and ideas. In the summer of 1993, while conducting research for the exhibition “Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity,” this notion was reinforced when in different parts of Ethiopia we encountered artisans who work in precious metals. In particular we had the good fortune to spend considerable time with Gezahegn Gebre Yohannes, who maintains a thriving shop in Addis Ababa, and Abib Sa’id, a silversmith working in the historic market town of Aleyu Amba on the eastern edge of the highlands, and briefer periods with Gebre Mikael Tizazu in the ancient city Aksum in Tigray Province in northern Ethiopia, and al-Haji Ali Sherif and Abdul Wahid in the old Muslim city of Hazer in the eastern part of the country. During the time spent with each of these artisans, we asked a number of questions about their lives, studied examples of their work, and observed them as they fabricated various types of silver wares. Whether in an ancient capital or a modern one, in lowland or highland towns, or in rural villages, markets have provided an arena for artisans to live and work in while learning, refining, and mastering the specialized skills that make them valuable members of their communities.

We would like to thank Charles Schaefer for introducing us to Abib Sa’id and the market town of Aleyu Amba. Special gratitude is extended to the silversmiths who generously shared both their time and their expertise: Gebre Mikael Tizazu in Aksum, al-Haji Ali Sherif and Abdul Wahid in Hazer, and especially Abib Sa’id in Aleyu Amba and Gezahegn G. Yohannes in Addis Ababa.
The silversmiths introduced in this essay represent both the tremendous range of aesthetic expression found in modern-day Ethiopia and the varied tastes of some of its peoples. The objects they create reflect the historical and cultural roots of the traditions in which they labor—traditions whose histories include interaction with the peoples and cultures of the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean world. This essay, therefore, is intended both to consider the lives and work of these artisans, particularly Gezahgn and Abih, and to introduce the context from which at least some of this expression is derived.

The latter must of necessity be introductory since scholarship dealing with the social, historical, or technological aspects of metalworking in Ethiopia is very limited and that which has been undertaken is narrowly focused on the Christian peoples of the Ethiopian highlands. To illustrate this point, one cannot begin without first addressing the issue of nomenclature. We are dealing with a group of traditions for which there is no inclusive descriptive term. There is no word or expression that succinctly describes the production of objects that include those of personal adornment (i.e., jewelry), ecclesiastical paraphernalia, and luxury utilitarian wares in precious metals. Nor is there a single term for an individual who works with precious metals, primarily gold and silver but also various alloys of copper, to produce objects of status and adornment. We have chosen to refer to these specialists as silversmiths, and to the general body of objects that they produce as silverwork. We do so because silver is more commonly used than the other metals. It is important to keep in mind, however, that most of the objects that are produced in silver have also been, and can be, made from gold and copper (and its alloys) using the same techniques.

Similarly, the unqualified use of the term "smith" is problematic, since this would also include blacksmiths, and in Ethiopia those who work primarily with iron occupy a special occupational, social, and at times ethnic niche that may not apply to specialists we are identifying as silversmiths. Many observers of highland Ethiopian society have noted that, aside from mining, the principal labors of artisans and craftsmen are looked down upon by the majority population, who are farmers. These groups were (and in some cases still are) "considered inferior either because they deviated from the customs of the majority or on account of their practice of engaging in manual crafts, such as those of the blacksmith and other metalworkers, the weaver, the leatherworker or the potter, which, though necessary, were considered degrading" (Pankhurst 1961: 22). And although the implements they produce are vital to sustaining the lives of the farmers among whom they live, the blacksmiths and their families live as an endogamous group that is feared, despised, and denied many of the privileges (like owning land) enjoyed by most other people. One of the earliest references concerning the status of this group of artisans is found in Alvares's (1961: 1149) sixteenth-century account of his visit to Aksum, in which he refers to a village located near the ancient city that was completely occupied by blacksmiths—an allusion to their endogamous status. A century later Almeida (1954: 55 n. 1) related the popular tradition that the fifteenth-century emperor Zara Ya'qob had all of the goldsmiths and blacksmiths in his domain put to death as sorcerers—an allusion to their alleged supernatural powers (see also Levine 1965: 70).

There is a tendency in much of the writing about these occupational groups to treat them as a whole. Many authors, like Pankhurst, suggest that all smiths were treated in the same manner. But evidence found in traveler accounts, hagiographies, and ethnographies suggests that there is some variation and stratification among the various artisan groups. Conflicting observations suggest that precious-metal specialists, though historically of lesser status than farmers, may have been better off than blacksmiths. The reason for this may have been that the objects they made were accessible to people who controlled the wealth in Abyssinian society. The raw materials that they manipulated had considerable intrinsic economic value, some of which, as we will see, remained in their hands.

**Contemporary Silverwork in Ethiopia**

Numerous small shops crowd the main streets that radiate from the Piazza, the central shopping area below City Hall in Addis Ababa. Once known as Arada, this area has been the site of a major market since the founding of Addis Ababa at the end of the nineteenth century. Whether one walks east along Adwa Avenue, south down Churchill Road, or west from Abuna Petros Square to the Mercato, what stands out to the outside observer are the numerous jewelry shops. In a country with lim-
...consumer goods, but in which personal adornment is crucial to
self-identity and a sense of beauty, gold and silver jewelry sells well.
This is not, however, a recent phenomenon. Evidence of the silversmith's
art—the fabrication of jewelry, liturgical paraphernalia, various accou-
trements of leadership, and especially coinage struck by various rulers—
is found in the more than 2,000-year-old archaeological record at
Aksum and related northern Ethiopian sites. With the exception of neck
crosses, the designs of these early objects share few affinities with con-
temporary jewelry, although the various technologies that were used in
fabricating these early objects, namely, casting, hammering, engraving,
repoussé, gilding (of bronze, copper, and iron), drawing of wire, inlay,
and die stamping (for the coins), remain in use. Today Aksum is gener-
ally held to be the historical center for metalworking in highland
Ethiopia and is regarded as one of the major centers for the production
of objects in fine metals (see Simoons 1960: 177). Indeed, a number
of silversmiths, including Gebre Mikael Tizazu, maintain shops in the
center of Aksum where they still fabricate a variety of liturgical objects,
like silver hand crosses and the larger processional crosses using the
ancient lost-wax technique, as well as a variety of silver and gold jew-
elry. Even today, many, if not most, of the silversmiths in Addis Ababa
come from either Aksum or the neighboring community of Adwa.6

Gezahgen Gebre Yohannes, one of the finest jewelers in Addis Ababa
today, is a product of this tradition (fig. 9.1). Born in Aksum in 1953,
he came to the nation's capital when he was eleven years old after comple-
ting the sixth grade of public school. Unlike many silversmiths in
Ethiopia, his father, Gebre Yohannes Tossi, was not a jeweler but a farmer.7
As he describes it, after spending a long, cold night in the precincts of
the Church of Saint George, he met a well-known, Aksum-born silvers-
smith named Haile Abraham, who invited him to come and work in his
shop. Gezahgen spent nine years as an apprentice and worker learn-
ing his trade under Haile's tutelage. In 1972 he left to establish his own
business, at least in part because he wanted to continue his schooling.
He set out on his own because Haile required that his employees work
until 8 p.m. and eight classes began at 6. Today Gezahgen has completed
the twelfth grade, finished a two-year accounting course, and taken
English classes to improve his language skills.

Upon first entering Gezahgen's shop, one is immediately struck by
the tremendous variety of jewelry designs displayed in his glass show-
cases (fig. 9.3). These are not showcases that highlight a few individual
pieces but rather ones in which numerous earrings, rings, neck crosses,
nearcaces, and bracelets are set side by side nearly on top of each other.
In looking through his display cases, one can recognize traditional designs
associated with peoples from various parts of Ethiopia, some are remin-
scent of European motifs, and other designs are difficult to place—
some are in fact Gezahgen's own designs (pl. 17). The breadth of his
repertoire is wide and he utilizes many different processes in fabricat-
ing silver and gold objects, including lost-wax casting, cloisonné,
engraving, repoussé, filigree, granulation, hammering, soldering, inlay,
cut-out, chasing, and gilding. Gezahgen explained that every silversmith
specializes in certain designs but that a good one, who had mastered
the techniques associated with the working of precious metals, should
be able to copy any piece of jewelry. He went on to explain that designs
often change. "Designs change every day. If I come up with one, the
next day another goldsmith will pick it up, and copy it or modify it.
Soon it is copied by other goldsmiths and is found everywhere." Geza-
ghen's specialty is the finger ring, which he creates for both men and
women. That some of his creations are copied and show up in shops
off the Piazza does not anger this soft-spoken, even-tempered artist. He
accepts it as a compliment and recognizes that this is just a feature of
doing business, and one that has long been present in Ethiopia. Wyld,
who spent considerable time in Adwa in the 1880s with Negras Mared,
the jeweler of Emperor Yohannis IV, was impressed by the skills he saw
demonstrated in the silversmith's workshop and commented that "they
can also copy any pattern given them." (1888: 1289).

Addis Ababa is a cosmopolitan city and Gezahgen's customers come
quite literally from all corners of the world. Not only Ethiopians but
diplomats and employees from different embassies, particularly those
of Africa, Europe, and North America, frequent his shop. Each has his
or her own preferences. Gezahgen finds it interesting that Europeans
and North Americans prefer the more traditional jewelry, such as the
neck crosses of Lalibela, Aksum, and Gonder, while Africans, including
Ethiopians, buy both Ethiopian and European designs (pl. 17). The large

Silverwork in the Highlands
volume of business that these customers generate allows him to maintain a considerable inventory of jewelry for walk-in customers, but Gezahgen also works on commission. In addition to his jewelry, he receives orders for processionals crosses for churches, and priests occasionally ask him to make silver hand crosses. Typically the former are made at the request of a thankful donor who, grateful for a special blessing in his or her life, will present the cross as a gift to a particular church.

Prior to this century, however, solid-gold jewelry, for which Gezahgen is widely known, was seldom seen. Several observers have commented on the popularity of gilded objects but noted the rarity of solid-gold jewelry. Charles Johnston (1844: 233), a British naval surgeon who visited Ethiopia in 1842–43, observed that in Shewa gold objects were the prerogative of the royal family and that there was an effort forbidding commoners from using the yellow metal. Today objects of 24k, 22k, and 18k gold are readily available but, given their cost, not widely attainable. Few Ethiopians outside the ranks of the professional and merchant class, military officers, and upper-echelon government workers can afford gold. Silver, however, as it has so often been, is commonly worn by those of lesser means.

For Gezahgen, business is good. In 1993 he employed eight workers, including one receptionist, in a well-lit, spacious workshop. Some are apprentices and others are already highly skilled silversmiths (fig. 9.4). Each is trained to produce in part or in its entirety a wide range of necklaces, bracelets, pendants, finger rings, hairpins, and earrings, yet all the items are considered to be the work of Gezahgen.

The conditions under which Gezahgen's employees work are in stark contrast to those under which the employees of Abdul Wahid work in Harer. When visiting his workshop in 1993 we observed just one type of jewelry being mass-produced, the well-known necklace called wapi, by several men who worked in the basement of Abdul's house under the light of a single, bare light bulb (fig. 9.5). It is important to note that these popular necklaces were destined for the tourist market, and unlike the traditional silver wapi, these were made from a base metal (nickel?). These necklaces are often deliberately oxidized to look old and can be compared with the more carefully made wapi fabricated in the shop of al-Hajj Ali Sherif, a silversmith in Harer who produces jew-

Fig. 9.4 One of the workers in Gezahgen's shop.

Fig. 9.5 Abdul Wahid's workshop in Harer.

Fig. 9.6 Two wapi (necklaces), the one on the left produced for tourists in Abdul Wahid's workshop, the other produced for Harari customers in al-Hajj Ali Sherif's workshop.
elry for a local clientele (fig. 9.6). Ali’s shop is quite different; it is a cross between a “big-city” shop like Gezahgen’s and the rural workshop of a jeweler like Abb Sa’id.

As already noted, silversmiths are found throughout Ethiopia. Aleyu Amba, where Abb now lives and works, is a town of barely a few hundred souls that burgeons to several thousand on Sundays for the weekly market (fig. 9.7). Once the commercial center of Shewa Province, in which today’s capital, Addis Ababa, is located, Aleyu Amba was strategically situated along the major trade route that ran east to Harer and the sea. Ideally located at the top of a small mountain in the eastern highlands, the town is a couple of thousand feet below Ankober, the former political capital of Shewa, and a couple of thousand feet above the lowland floor. Each Sunday the Christian Amhara descend from the villages and towns on the escarpment above with the products of their highland farms, eager to trade with the Muslim Afar, who ascend from the arid plains below, their camels carrying the products of their herding economy. It is from among those arriving to trade, as well as the town’s permanent population of Amhara and Argobba merchants, that Abb receives new commissions and requests to repair old jewelry.

Abb, who is roughly the same age as Gezahgen, moved here a few years ago from Kemisa, where he was born. Abb informed us that in Kemisa, a large town located north of Aleyu Amba in southern Wello Province, there are more than a hundred competing silversmiths; in Aleyu Amba, Abb is the only one. Business is so good in Aleyu Amba that his younger brother, Ahmed, has started to work with him, and he has begun to train his eldest son, who, in 1993, was ten years old. In doing so Abb is passing on the specialized knowledge associated with silversmithing that came to him from his father, Sa’d Abdul, and from his grandfather before him, each of whom was a silversmith. It is only in Addis Ababa that young men can apprentice themselves, like Gezahgen did, to a nonrelative. Abb, who never attended school, used to watch his father and grandfather work. Later they began to teach him the various techniques used to make certain types of silver jewelry, and when he was about nine years old, he began to make objects from silver. The first item he made on his own was a type of earring consisting of three silver “bulbs” called a sah. As a young man he initially split his time between farming and working silver, but since turning thirty, he has devoted all his time to making jewelry.

The clientele that Abb Sa’id serves is not as diverse as Gezahgen’s. Their tastes are more traditional. Unlike Gezahgen, Abb does not maintain an inventory of jewelry but instead does virtually all of his work on order or commission. For both the townspeople, who as already noted are few in number, and those who come to trade at the Sunday market, he makes only silver objects. Even though by his reckoning half the town is Christian and Christian Amhara come on Sunday in large numbers to trade with the primarily Muslim Afar and neighboring Argobba, he does not make crosses for them. Instead Abb, who is Muslim, specializes in other common objects, such as anklets, necklaces, bracelets, and finger rings, all of which he fashions in an “Islamic” style (pl. 18). Attending the Sunday market in Aleyu Amba one encounters Argobba and Afar Silverwork in the Highlands
women wearing earrings, necklaces, anklets, and bracelets very similar to those produced by Abbé (fig. 9.8). Many of the designs are reminiscent of the jewelry produced in Harer. Indeed, some types of jewelry are found throughout the Red Sea region—the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Religious and ethnic differences have long been reflected in preferences for particular styles of personal adornment, and many traveler accounts note these distinctions. For example, Johnston commented on the different tastes in jewelry of the Christian Amhara and of the Muslim peoples living in Showa: "The silver bracelets of the Islam are also different in form from those worn by the Christians, consisting of two or three thick silver wires, twisted upon each other, and finished at each extremity by a beaten square head" (1844: 2.337). And from the same period, Major Harris, the British envoy to the Showan court at Ankober, on the escarpment above Aleyu Amba, noted the distinguishing ornaments worn by Gurage and Amhara women. For the former these included "bars and studs of solid silver" in their perforated ears and "ponderous pewter bangles" on their wrists and ankles, while on special occasions wealthy Amhara women wore massive earrings of silver or pewter "resembling a pile of hand grenades, or the teething rattle employed in nurseries" (Harris 1844: 141, 275; see also Johnston 1844: 2.337).

Abbé's workshop, where those who wish to commission or order a piece of jewelry come, is a covered open air space next to his house—a short walk from the market area. Here he and his brother—using very basic tools, a goat-skin bellows, and a charcoal fire—melt, mold, shape, and fabricate silver into highly coveted creations (figs. 9.2 and 9.11).

The silver that Abbé, Gezahgign, and virtually all other Ethiopian silversmiths use comes from imported silver coins. From at least the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the principal source of silver in Ethiopia has been Maria Theresa thalers (talers). Also known as Austrian dollars and German crowns, these coins were called at hit (woman silver) by Ethiopians. Named for the queen of Austria whose portrait is found on the coin, the Maria Theresa thaler was first minted in Austria in 1751 and struck many times thereafter, including well into the century, to satisfy the demand of peoples trading along the Red Sea and the Arabian Peninsula who recognized no other currency. When Maria Theresa died in 1780 all subsequent thalers carried this date, and it is this particular one that became the coin of choice in commerce. But not just any 1780 Maria Theresa thaler would do. Historically, to satisfy themselves that a coin was genuine, Ethiopians looked for three particular features: that the queen was wearing a tiara, that there was a decorative star of many points on her shoulder, and that the letters "S.F." were clearly delineated (Johnston 1844: 2.234; Harris 1844: 29, 172).

Today, Abbé finds a ready supply of thalers and other silver coins in the market. Some he uses as pendants in necklaces by soldering a small ring along the coin's edge (fig. 9.10). However, most of the coins used for silver jewelry are melted in the crucible and then formed into ingots or wire. Abbé first breaks the silver coins in half and melts them in a small crucible (fig. 9.2). The molten silver is then poured into a mold that produces a narrow rectangular ingot. This he either hammer into strips or ribbons, pulls through a drawplate to produce thin lengths of wire, or melts into small balls (grains). He then employs filigree, granulation, hammering, soldering, and chasing techniques to fabricate a variety of jewelry.

We had the opportunity to observe Abbé make some hollow beads. He begins by melting a couple of thalers and casting the metal into a narrow ingot about 8 inches in length. He then flattens the ingot, using a hammer and anvil, into a thin sheet, which he then cuts into narrow strips about an inch in width. Next, using a hammer, punch, and cow-horn die (a cow's horn in which hemispherical depressions roughly three-eighths inch in depth had been carried), Abbé forms small half-beads (fig. 9.9). These are cut from the ribbon and two soldered together to form a spherical bead. These beads, along with silver wire that Abbé makes using a drawplate, are combined to make a variety of jewelry (pl. 18, fig. 9).

It is not surprising that the tools of this rural silversmith contrast sharply with those of an urban silversmith. Where Abbé uses a drawplate to produce wire, Gezahgign has been able to purchase a hand-powered metal-rolling machine. Living and working in the capital and having traveled to Europe and the United States, Gezahgign has access to and has purchased modern metalworking tools and utilizes this wider array of facilities.
in his work. Gezahgen and all his workers sit at benches in a workshop with bottled-gas burners (fig. 9.4); Abib and his brother sit on the ground in a covered open-air space next to Abib’s house with an open fire and goat-skin bellows (fig. 9.11). Gezahgen has both a mechanical and an electronic scale and employs a wide range of commercially produced tools. Abib also uses factory-produced tools: pliers, scissors, file, wire brush, and a hand-held balance scale. The difference is that he does not use as many and they are used in tandem with locally produced tools, including hammers and punches (probably made by another metal specialist, a blacksmith) and cow-horn dies. The wider range of technologies that Gezahgen employs enables him to produce the wider range of design demanded by the market in which he works. For the market that Abib and other rural silversmiths must satisfy, the tools they have are both adequate and effective. Observations made in the nineteenth century about the production methods of silversmiths might very well be made by observers of rural smiths today. Wylde, commenting on what he observed in Adwa over a hundred years ago, wrote: “The tools employed by the gold and silversmiths are of the roughest, and consist of very bad shaped hammers, pickers, anvil, blow-pipe, and bellows, and it is astonishing what delicate work they turn out with such rude means” (1888: 1.288). Sir Charles Rey, a British merchant, noted some forty years later that “their outfit is simple—a hammer and anvil, a pair of pickers, a charcoal fire, and a goat-skin bellows seem to constitute the bulk of the necessary stock-in-trade: and with this primitive equipment they certainly produce some very attractive things” (1923: 225).

He was especially impressed with “a really artistic bracelet made by an Abyssinian” that was given to his wife, “it was composed of gold wire strands and elephant hair woven together in a very pretty design, and the workmanship left nothing to be desired” (Rey 1923: 225). The bracelet he describes is quite similar to one produced in Gezahgen’s shop in Addis Ababa (pl. 171). Other accounts include references to various technologies commonly used by the smiths, particularly filigree work. Rey described it as a process using “silver wire, very often gilt, worked in a filigree design and soldered on to silver plates which have been previously hammered out to the shape desired” (1923: 235; see also Wylde 1888: 1.288).

A particularly interesting aspect of silverworking is the manner in which the price of objects is determined. Observers of specialists working not only in Ethiopia but in other parts of Africa have noted that gold- and silversmiths often do not get paid or that customers pay for their products solely by weight. Customers often bring the gold or silver that they wish transformed into jewelry (or into crosses, crowns, and other items) to the smith. Hermann Norden (1930: 165–66), a German traveler who visited Ethiopia in 1928–29, in a description of his encounter with Tesseman Wereda Hel, a silversmith in Gonder, mentions having commissioned some silver bracelets and a christening cup for which he supplied the “thalers for the melting, it being the Abyssin-
ian custom to furnish one's own metal and make extra payment for the work itself." He indicates that the price he paid for the silverwork was equal to the value of the silver he had given to Tessema (see also Rey 1923: 124).

A number of the early travelers accounts record the "stretching" and thus "adulterating" of the gold and silver by the addition of base metals like zinc, tin, or copper. The customer received a product that weighed as much as the metal originally given to the silversmith, as occurred with Norden's commission, but its purity had been reduced. 33 The practice of "cutting" precious metals was common among silversmiths; this is how they "extracted" their payment during the fabrication process. Mansfield Parkyns, who spent three years in Ethiopia, primarily in Tigray, during the 1840s, reported that the silversmiths of Adwa "make a tolerably good thing of their business, but it is entirely by appropriating a large proportion of both gold and silver intrusted to them for work. The silver they receive is in Maria Theresa dollars: what they return is, I should think, scarcely so good as a Turkish piastre, and in fact contains scarcely one-third of silver, if so much." (1966: 233). He added that he had "known a man [a silversmith] to receive thirty Venetian sequins for a job, on which he employed only seven and a half" (1966: 234). Similarly, Nathaniel Pearce, who visited Gojam during the first decade of the nineteenth century, recorded the cutting of gold with silver. Pure gold arrived from the west in small pieces "from the size of a pin head to a pea" and was combined in the crucible with one-eighth part silver and cast into ingots (1820: 57–58).

Today, especially in the shops of urban silversmiths like Gezahgen, the silversmith procures the metal himself and sells his products by weight, but usually after having employed a similar process to reduce the purity and increase the hardness of the gold he uses in his work. In this context, a per-gram price is fixed that takes into account costs and profit. Gezahgen explained his formula for estimating the profit he makes in producing gold jewelry (the prices he cites were those current in June 1993). He begins with 30 grams of 24-karat gold, which costs him 76 birr per gram. Most of the jewelry he makes uses 18k gold; to produce this he adds 6 grams of copper and 2 grams of silver to the 30 grams of 24k gold. He ends up with 38 grams of 18k gold; 18k gold is worth 60 birr per gram. Taking into account the amount of gold that can be lost during the fabrication process (up to 10%), a gram of 18k is then worth 66.6 birr. On the average, he pays the worker who produces the piece 4 birr per gram of worked gold. The cost of the gold is now 70.6 birr per gram. The current market rate for finished 18k gold jewelry is 85 birr per gram. His gross profit is therefore 14.4 birr per gram, out of which he must still pay for rent, tools, supplies, and the wages of his receptionist. He employs a similar formula for his silver jewelry but of course the prices are much lower because the value of the metal is much less than gold.

Less clear is how Abib makes this calculation, although he explained that "adding the cost of raw materials to the cost of labor will determine the price of the object made." In May 1993 Abib paid about 30 birr for each thaler, although he noted that the price had been rising over the past five years (during the time of famine in 1984–85, he bought thalers for as little as 12–15 birr). He indicated that the pair of silver anklets he was making during our visit to Aleyu Amba would require six thalers of silver and when finished he would sell them for 300 birr—a margin of 120 birr more than the cost of the silver used.

Conclusion

The observations that we have offered here are simply an introduction to a complex and rich set of traditions. Obviously, there is much work to be done. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different types of silver and gold objects produced by silversmiths in the Highlands of Ethiopia. Developing typologies for the range of objects might be an initial step. Many cultural history museums and art museums in Europe, North America, and Ethiopia maintain significant collections of historic Abyssinian gold- and silverwork; objects dating from as early as the eighteenth century. A systematic survey of these, and private collections, would surely yield valuable insights into the variety of objects produced over the last two hundred years. 35

One of the most promising lines of inquiry for reconstructing the history of gold- and silverworking—the documentation and interpretation of contemporary traditions—has yet to be pursued. As stated earlier, very little work in this arena has been undertaken. Though many

Silverwork in the Highlands
of these traditions are still practiced throughout much of Ethiopia, some of them certainly are beginning to atrophy, and urbanization, as illustrated by Gezahegn and his workshop, is resulting in major changes in the tradition of working nonferrous metals. There is a pressing need for documentation—specifically, vocabularies of technical terms and the names of objects; oral histories concerning the fabrication and use of gold, silver, and cuprous objects; and biographies of individual silversmiths. Still another body of evidence is found in paintings associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. One of the distinctive characteristics of these paintings is the “Ethiopianization” of religious themes—the depiction of religious subjects in an Ethiopian setting. The figures portrayed in these paintings often wear the clothing and carry the accoutrements of the period. Studying these works may provide information about the silver- and goldwork that was made and used during specific eras. A complete interpretation of these metalworking traditions will require not only the study of technology, the formal analysis of objects, and the contexts of use but the detailed investigation of the social status and the role of silversmiths in Ethiopian societies.

Once we have a better understanding of these Ethiopian traditions, we may begin exploring a further set of questions that concern the meeting of cultures in Ethiopia. We can pursue comparative analyses of the precious metalworking traditions of the Arabian Peninsula and Mediterranean world, especially Armenia and Greece. Curious comparisons of the jewelry produced in these areas with specific types of Ethiopian jewelry reveal remarkable affinities. Jewelry like Abib’s and that made in Hazer is very similar to that produced to this day by Bedouin and Jewish silversmiths living on the Arabian Peninsula, and many of the designs, especially those involving filigree-work, of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia, share many affinities with Armenian and Greek gold- and silverwork. In fact, traveler accounts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are full of references to Armenian and Greek artisans living and working in Ethiopian commercial and political centers. Similarly, there is abundant historical evidence of the close commercial and cultural ties that have been maintained for thousands of years between eastern Ethiopia and the Arabian Peninsula.

Ethiopia has been a crossroads for African, Middle Eastern, and Mediterranean tradition for at least three thousand years. The contemporary products of jewelers like Gezahegn and Abib reflect the dynamics of integration and innovation, which continue to be vital elements of highland Ethiopian society. The study of their lives and work, as well as those of their predecessors, will certainly yield important insights into the social and cultural history of Ethiopia.
Sorghum Surprise

The Models of Tolera Tafa

Neal W. Sobania

Step outside your hotel and even the seasoned visitor to Ethiopia is quickly reminded that this is a land of young people and children. That kids seem to be everywhere will not come as a surprise if it is understood that nearly 70 percent of the country's population is below the age of twenty-five. Sit in a coffee shop and they are ready to shine your shoes. Walk along the street and they will follow trying to sell you cigarettes or chewing gum or hawk a paper or magazine. Park your car and they will direct you into a space, tell you they will watch it for you and even wash it. And persistent they are, but then getting you to part with some change is the way they make their living. Sometimes a firm yell (no) can impart your disinterest, but if you are already sitting and sipping your coffee, twenty-five cents for a shoeshine will not break the bank and fifty cents to have your car watched is a good investment. Travel the back streets of the city where the school-uniformed kids live, or in the countryside where families of five, six, and seven children are common, and your presence is likely to be announced by shouts of kemfi (foreigner) or "Father, give me money." Begging is another acceptable way to make a living, and indeed parting with a few coins is earnestly counseled by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. But then perhaps this shouldn't be a surprise in a country that has a per capita income of U.S. $123.1

However, go beyond appearances and statistics and it is Jimmy who wants to wash your car and remembers you between visits that may be two or more years apart, and it's Solomon who shines your shoes; each has a story. Pass by the "pith boys" in front of the Hilton Hotel, where they sell their sorghum-stalk models of churches, cars, and airplanes,
and you miss getting to know a unique group of young people who have shaped a distinctive niche for themselves. Fail to examine carefully their models and you miss discovering the breadth of their talent.

Among them is Tolera Tafa, pithe sculptor and model maker. Creative and precise, yet working only with a razor blade and the discarded stalks of the sorghum crop, this self-taught designer has perfected a skill that earns him the admiration, and money, of foreigners and Ethiopians alike. Recently his work has also begun to earn him commissions. Look closely at the models displayed curbside at the Hilton and a number immediately stand out for their meticulous detail; these are Tolera's (fig. 10.1). The other assorted pieces are the work of different young, and not-so-young, men who live in Necho, a small traditional roadside farming village of thatched-roof houses some seventy kilometers west of the capital.

Leaving the city on the Ambo Road one easily observes how far the outskirts of Addis Ababa have sprawled into the countryside. Everywhere are the corrugated-iron roofs of houses, the eucalyptus pole frameworks that demarcate new construction, and the whitewashed mud-and-daub storefronts from which fresh vegetables, recently butchered meat, newly baked bread, and assorted pens, plastic bags, and tin cups are sold. The same urban sprawl is also apparent on the road—in the middle of it and next to it. Here the space is actively contested by donkeys that jog heifer-skelter with loads of firewood, by precariously overloaded trucks that lurch along in the clouds of personalized black smoke they belch, by ubiquitous blue-and-white taxis and wojjiti (taxi-trucks) that dodge in and out of traffic to pick up and drop off their passengers. And as if this were not enough for the limited road space available, there are countryside buses whose loudspeakers blare cacophony of distorted music into the air. It is on these buses, the principal mode of transport for the rural peasant, that Tolera and his friends from the village find time to sell their models.

At twenty-two years of age (in 1993), Tolera is the fourth child of eight—four boys and four girls. His father is a farmer, his mother a housewife, although that title scarcely covers the many burdensome chores associated with a rural farm wife and mother. On the small farm they own, which is the same land that Tolera's grandfather and great-grand-
vious regime, which limited family landholdings. Their expectations in a good year are to harvest 5 quintals of te’d, retaining one for seed, 1.5 quintals of sorghum, 1 of maize, 1 of chickpeas, and 1 of rag. with 20 kilograms of each held back for seed. The non-seed grains are consumed either by the family or by their animals, except for some of the rag and all of the chickpeas, which are sold to townpeople or merchants for cash. With this cash Tolera’s family is able to purchase other needed foodstuffs, including onions, peppers, salt, and oil. Most of the cash, however, goes to pay the government land tax of 100 birr and the children’s school fees. The support of such an averaged-sized peasant family is no mean feat.

The ongoing economic and environmental pressures that the small-scale peasant family faces in Ethiopia are exacerbated by the tug on its youth from nearby cities. The attractiveness of the capital with its greater job opportunities is evident in the lives of Tolera’s two older brothers, who today live independently in Addis Ababa. The eldest, age thirty-three, is employed as a wavy-wl driver, while the other, who was wounded while serving in the Derg, is trying to adjust to being a student again at the age of thirty-one. Two of Tolera’s sisters, one of whom is younger than he is, are married; Tolera is the oldest child still at home.

In the ninth grade, where he enjoyed history, math and English, Tolera ranked third or fourth out of more than sixty students. Outside the classroom he played volleyball and on the defense side of the soccer ball. Given a choice, he would have gladly skipped classes in physics and Amharic. The more widely known name of his village, Yekutdegay, is the Amharicized name of this roadside community,3 but ethnically this is an Oromo area. Tolera’s family and the others who live here and nearby are all Oromo, speak afan Oromo, and call their village Necho.4

Tolera, however, is a school dropout, as are far too many other young men and women of his age, who often do not begin school until the age of seven or eight, and then delay high school until the family can afford to pay the necessary fees. In 1988, while in the sixth grade and frustrated with only a morning or afternoon of classes (a framework of double shifts that since its implementation under the previous

regime has effectively halved the education the children of Ethiopia now receive), Tolera began to use his free time to make sorghum stalk models. Then in 1992, when financial difficulties plagued his family, he opted, as the eldest child still at home, not to begin the tenth grade but instead to take up full-time model making.

Model making has for some time been associated with the Ambo Road, and in particular with the villages of Necho and Kimoy (also known as Hamushegay).5 Local tradition states that the making of models from sorghum stalks originated more than thirty-five years ago at an irrigation site near Kimoy. Here boys constructed tiny toy waterwheels that were made from sorghum stalks held together with twine and that turned in the flowing water of the irrigation channel. The use of the outer layer of the sorghum stalk to tack the pith, or soft inner portion, of the stalks together is an innovation attributed to two fifteen-year-old boys, Kumsa Tessema and the late Haile Laku. Kuma, who is now a merchant in Addis Ababa, is remembered for his special ability to construct models of houses with multiple floors, along with fine cars and trucks; Haile is recalled for the quality of his churches and Italian cars.

The process of learning to make objects was then, as it is now, one of observation. Among those who learned by observing these early innovators were Umo Demeka, Mulatu Demissie, Bekele Badala, and Negussie Mekuria. Negusse’s first sculpture, which he made at the age of nine, was a Dakota airplane that sold for $5 Ethiopian.6 Today Negusse still lives in the village of Kimoy but has stopped making pith sculptures, which he describes as “a simple thing to do”; he works as a guard for the Ministry of Agriculture. His comment suggests a range of questions that deserve further investigation, the most obvious of which is that of the local status attributed by the community to those who make the sculptures. No one in the villages keeps sorghum stalk models in their houses, and to Tolera and Negusse, the question of whether either had ever given one to his mother as a gift to display was particularly strange. Clearly, however, these women, as well as other mothers and fathers in these two villages, have been the recipients of money earned by their sons from the sale of the models. For example, the materials for the new house in which Tolera’s family now lives, which cost nearly 600 birr, were paid for entirely by Tolera from his earnings.

Sorghum Surprise
With the possibility of learning to construct pitb sculptures by observing others, the door of opportunity has been left open to many. Today a number of eight- to twelve-year-olds display their work for sale along the roadside at Kimoy. There are, however, certain families whose sons have definitely gravitated toward making the sculptures. Tolera fits such a pattern, having followed in the path of his two older brothers. So does another well-recognized producer, Sorri Tafa, who is not related to Tolera but is a nephew of Negussie Mekuria, one of the earliest modelers. Thirty-two years old in 1993, Sorri describes his present-day occupation as three-quarters farmer, one-quarter model maker. With a sixth-grade education, Sorri has been making and selling pitb sculptures along the Ambo Road for twenty-one years, absent only for the four years he spent as one of Mengistu Haile Mariam’s drafted militiamen fighting in the north. He recalls his first successful efforts were an Italian car and a heavy truck, which he sold for $4 Ethiopian. Today Tolera still admires the work produced by Sorri, and indeed a careful examination of the detail of Sorri’s models, from the front seat inside his cars (mekina) and the gearshift next to the steering wheel, to the seats that line his airplanes and the pilot’s cockpit controls, suggests that this praise is richly deserved (fig. 10.3). When the issue is probed of what is the most difficult feature of a model to construct, invariably the tires of cars and trucks and the vertical dividers in the windows of churches and houses are cited. And Tolera is quick to identify Sorri’s tires as the best.

Others, however, point to Tolera’s windows as the best (fig. 10.4). And the general consensus on the Ambo Road is that the leading position once held by Sorri as the best model maker has now been assumed by Tolera. Today’s other recognized master, who as it happens is also from Necho, is Bekele Bedada. But even Bekele, who has been making and selling pieces along the Ambo Road for over twenty-five years, considers Tolera “the best in the area.” Tolera, however, finds such praise embarrassing; he is an exceedingly modest young man. When questioned about what distinguishes good work from that of lesser quality, and in particular if his work is better than Bekele’s, he shrugged off the question, noting only, “You can see the difference; it’s better if people admire your work than you telling them [about it].”
models are as often square or rectangular as round or octagonal, and sometimes they lack the circular-cross finial, but he always emphasizes solid construction. Foreigners, some of whom are tourists and others diplomats and aid workers, are the major market for pith sculptures. From selling to them Tolera has concluded that the major deterrent to their buying models is their concern about getting them home in one piece. Therefore, to increase the durability of his work, even if it is more in appearance than in reality, Tolera has abandoned certain decorative features, for example, the circular cross and roof ornaments on his churches. Although these features add greatly to the distinctiveness of Bekele’s churches, they also add considerably to their fragility.

So far, Tolera, and the others take great pride in the models they make. Their sense is that tourists buy the sorghum-stalk sculptures for their beauty and detailed decoration, and they add that the tourists probably use them to introduce others to the things Ethiopians make. While probing this subject with Tolera the question was asked, “What do you think of tourists who buy these pieces from you; are they foolish?” His response was quite telling. “We like modern things—fabricated outside [imported]; we admire these things. For example, my sweater is from outside. And so you must admire our craft and what we make. It’s not foolish.”

Each sorghum-stalk sculptor creates his own designs and makes his own models. Piecwork is nonexistent. An inquiry into whether or not the modelers had ever attempted the mass production of their work, for example, by having one individual who is particularly adept at the construction of tires making them for those who are better skilled at axle, chassis, or basic car/truck frame construction, brought forth comments about competition. Just as individuals acquire the skills to make the models without the active teaching or instruction of others, so too do they sell them: “We compete for dollars.” And while admitting that the basic shapes of objects are in fact the same, they nevertheless recognize differences in quality; this is understood to be especially evident in the construction of tires, windows, and the other finishing details. It may be overstating the issue to talk in terms of competition, since no one prevents a young boy from sitting nearby and observing the process of construction, or frowns on someone making the same object.

Inevitably the comparison between Tolera’s work and that of Bekele is made, if only because they live in the same village. Tolera’s specialties include taxis, cars, ships, and a number of new church types, with whose creation he is credited. The first sorghum-stalk church, however, is said to have been made by Bekele more than ten years ago. Bekele modeled his church on Saint Gabriel’s Church in the nearby community of Olaakomi. His church is the yardstick by which others’ churches are measured. Complete with a circular Orthodox cross and fringed finial, elaborate windows, and outer porch, the circular plan of an Ethiopian Orthodox church is immediately recognizable.

Tolera makes at least four styles of Ethiopian churches, and with his model of the octagonal Qeddos Giyorgis (Saint George’s) Church of Addis Ababa, he comes close to Bekele’s deftness (fig. 10.5). Tolera’s church

![Fig 10.5 Models of various churches made by Tolera in 1993. The one on the far left is a model of the Church of Saint George in Addis Ababa.](image-url)
type. Nevertheless, the sense among the modelers that one must learn by observation is so strong that the question, put to Sorri, as to whether or not he had ever actively helped someone or demonstrated a particular technique to an aspiring modeler took him completely by surprise, and he responded, "It never even came into my mind."

The counterpoint to this underlying notion of competing for the money the limited market offers is equally apparent. For example, because Bekele Bedada is older and to some extent has a harder time getting around, a younger man, Kebede Mekuria, takes and sells Bekele's work in Addis Ababa. And when questioned about this arrangement, Kebede simply stated that he sells the pieces for his "brother" (they are not related). A similar cooperative element in the relationship of modelers is found in there being no sense that one individual has a particular proprietary right to a certain design. Kebede Mekuria also provides an example in this area with his recently introduced design innovation: the construction of ships, especially cargo freighters complete with smokestacks, cranes, and booms. And although most of the model makers are capable of working from pictures, Kebede is understood to have introduced the ships based on his personal experience. Having enlisted in the militia because there was no employment, and in part to avoid being "drafted" during one of the Mengistu regime's infamous sweeps through peasant villages, which scared many unsuspecting youth who provided the cannon fodder for the war in the north, Kebede found himself in Asab and later Massawa, the two Eritrean seaports that were once part of Ethiopia. Upon safe return from his militia years, Kebede combined his skill as a model maker with his recollection of the ships in the Massawa and Asab harbors to create a cargo ship, a design after which Bekele, Tolera, and others today model theirs (pl. 19).

In the actual construction process the model makers work with only a double-edged razor blade and discarded stalks of sorghum. The razor blades can be purchased for twenty cents a piece (U.S. $0.40) in the local shops; the sorghum (ehi in afan-Oromoo) usually comes from the family’s farm but can also be purchased from local farmers, who charge 1 birr (U.S. $.20) for a large bundle (he’a in afan-Oromoo).

Using teeth or razor blade, often in combination, the outer layer of the stalk is stripped or peeled away to reveal the softer inner cortex, or

pith. With amazing dexterity, and especially so for Bekele, who stores his razor blade in his mouth between cuts, the model maker cuts and trims the pith to the required lengths. These pith lengths with either squared or mitered cuts are then fastened together with thin toothpicks-width pieces of the outer layer that serve as "pins." The modeler pushes a 3- to 6-inch "pin" through one piece of pith and into another. Then with a quick, sharp flick of the wrist, he breaks off the excess even with the surface of the pith.

To make the curved or round pieces that are required for tires, bumpers, and the like, a thin strip of outer layer is left on the stalk. Then wedges are cut from the side of the pith opposite the outer layer strip. When a length of pith cut in this manner is bent, the outer strip lends integrity to the piece, which can be tucked in place. For the tires required on cars, trucks, and taxis, the same thin outer strips that are used as fasteners are cut to the desired lengths to become the spokes that connect a wheel hub to the inside rim of the wheel, which is a piece of inner stalk with cut-out wedges (fig. 10.6). The truly exceptional model makers will sometimes look for an inner piece of pith that is dark red or maroon to make a more "naturalistic" dark-colored tire.

Windows, most often rectangular or square in shape but on some churches triangular, are filled horizontally by evenly spaced, thin pieces of the outer stalk and completed with the positioning of a single vertical divider of the same material. This, as already noted, is considered, along with the making of wheels, to be the most difficult aspect of construction. Indeed, it is the windows, wheels, and other carefully crafted details that make the pith sculptures so exceptional.

For example, the Eritrean wiyiyt model (in real life most taxi-trucks are light Toyota pickup trucks that have a fabricated metal "cap" in which passengers sit on benches) comes with steering wheel, windshield wipers, radio antenna, headlights, license plate, the interior bench seating, spinning wheels, and a back door that opens, complete with jump seat (fig. 10.7). (The young boy who sits on this seat in a real taxi calls out the destination at taxi stops, collects the fares, and indicates to the driver when a passenger wants to disembark.) Similarly, helicopters and airplanes are constructed with cockpit seats, control sticks, and propellers and rotary blades that turn. And dump trucks are made with hydraulic

Fig. 10.6 Tolera constructing a car tire.

Fig. 10.7 Detail of the back of the wiyiyt shown in pl. 19, complete with an opening back door and jump seat.
structures that allow the backs to rise. The details that can be incorporated are numerous, and with each viewing of a model new ones become visible. For the model maker the details are most important to the overall effect and are not taken lightly (fig. 10.8).

If each model maker works daily from eight o'clock in the morning until late in the afternoon, up to sixteen models can be made in a week. Such a pattern, however, is not typical. For Tola and those in Necho and Kinney, seven or eight sculptures in a week is a more typical output. Not working to full capacity undoubtedly relates to issues of demand and supply, but then Tola in describing his day also mentions quite specifically, for he is a devout Christian, his need to set aside time to read the Bible. And of course some days are taken up with marketing.

Usually once a week, with a number of models in hand, Tola and his friend Kebede Melketsa flag down one of the many local buses that ply the Ambbo Road. Paying either 6 birr for a one-way ticket or 12 birr for a round trip, depending on their cash on hand, they set off for Addis Ababa to sell their week’s labor. Only if the bus is crowded will the driver charge them extra for carrying their sculptures. Once in the capital the challenge begins to sell the pieces as quickly as possible. Generally the modelers stay in the city until they sell all their pieces. Their time in Addis Ababa is not considered a production cost as such, but clearly the ideal is to sell one's works and return to the village to make more—especially with overnight accommodation at 6 birr and meals at 2 or 3 birr each.

In what Tola and Kebede describe as a good week they can sell seven models each and earn as much as 150 birr (US$30). But this is in Addis Ababa at the Hilton (fig. 10.1). There is a significant difference between the prices they can ask and get, in the capital and what can be earned on the Ambbo Road. Whereas 15–25 birr a model is considered a good price in Addis Ababa, 10 birr is more common on the Ambbo Road. The lack of transportation cost might be calculated in the lower sale price on the Ambbo Road, but the reality is based more simply on supply and demand. Further, the Ambbo Road has for the past twenty or more years lacked tourist traffic, both Ethiopian and foreign. In part this absence can be accounted for by the road, especially west beyond Necho, being less than safe; in 1993 this was due to real or imagined con-

frontations, including fighting, between the soldiers of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) and various forces said to be associated with the Oromo people. But for the modelers the size of the piece and the corresponding time required to make a model are the factors taken into account when pricing a piece.

For Tola his churches and ships are proven sellers at 50 and 30 birr respectively, although he considers cars, along with his churches, to be his best work. And for the recently commissioned models, he determined his price by calculating how many of the smaller standard pieces he could have made in the time it took to make the commission. For example, two recent commissions, a six-foot model of the Tower of Pisa and a five-foot rendering of the Palazzo Vecchio and Loggia della Signoria bell tower (in Florence), both for the Italian Cultural Center in Addis Ababa, were priced at 400 birr apiece (the equivalent of thirty-six smaller pieces, the number he could have made over the fifteen days it took to complete each commission). For the "Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity" exhibition, Tola constructed models of the White House and the Jefferson Memorial, which took two weeks and one week respectively (fig. 10.9). In each case these commissions were accomplished by working from magazine pictures and interpreting the two-dimensional images into three with tremendous success. Tola was so pleased with the results of his Tower of Pisa that he "invested" in making a second in the hope of earning another large sum of cash, which eventually he did a few weeks later.

For Tola 1993 was time well spent. He clearly raised his modeling skills to a new level. And with the realization that he can produce models from pictures of buildings he has never seen before have come commissions. Obviously related, but more important to him and his family, is that he has money in his pocket. With his earnings he has assured his parents in building a new house—a traditional one—with which his family is extremely pleased. With his savings he had money for new clothes and the school fees that allowed him to return to school to begin the tenth grade. The money also enabled him to procure a bed frame, mattress, and blanket, since to attend high school he must rent a room in the town of Addis Alem, ten kilometers east of Necho. Other funds have been invested. With his eldest brother in Addis Ababa he has become Sorghum Surprise
to support its poor, young, ever-growing population. The reality may be that twenty-five years from now Tlera will be like Bekele today—sitting beside the Ambo Road selling his sorghum stalk sculptures to those who take the time to stop and discover and experience the great ingenuity seen in his models. Returning to the modesty that this young man exhibits, it was pointed out to him that “unless you speak about the quality of your work, others may not know”. Tlera responded with a laugh and remarked, “Now you have seen—you can tell [others about it].”

Fig. 10.9 Tlera with his commissions of the White House and the Palazzo Vecchio (Florence, Italy).

a modest entrepreneur; together they have purchased a bicycle which they rent to others.

For the immediate present Tlera’s future would seem secured. But can his modeling skills be turned into a profession? Will he find work in the building trades? Will attending high school classes for three more years provide him with the knowledge and skills to make him competitive for university admission and allow him to follow his dream of becoming an engineer or architect? Tlera’s drive, ambition, and venturesome spirit can take him far but may not be enough without the sustained economic development that a country like Ethiopia requires.
Tabita Hatuti

Biography of a Woman Potter

Tsehai Berhane-Selassie

Introduction

Tabita Hatuti comes from the community of potters who live alongside farmers in rural Wolayta, located in the newly formed Southern Administrative Region and administered from Awasa (fig. 11.2). Tabita speaks Wolaytatuto, a language spoken by about two million people. The Wolayta classify their society along occupational lines: the dominant gap (farmers); the lowly chamsa (artisans), including potters, who are politely referred to as kilasse; and the yek (slaves), who existed historically. There are about ten thousand potters in Wolayta, and as elsewhere in Ethiopia, they are looked down upon by farmers, who treat them almost as if they belong to a despised "caste." They have a myth that associates potters either with "newcomers" or with a sibling who lost his seniority for violating a food taboo.

Tabita is one of the best potters in her community. This evaluation is based on the variety of durable household utensils that she knows how to "create," to use the terminology used by the potters. "Creating" pots in all sizes, identifying sources of good-quality clay, and organizing her time effectively to perform both her household chores and her pottery

My fieldwork in Wolayta owes a great deal to my friend and assistant Wengnesh Welamo and her husband, Bekiete Momme. They both did their best to teach me Wolaytatuto, to translate for me, and to smooth my relations with the Wolayta potters' community. I also wish to express deep appreciation to all the other Wolayta people who befriended me and who facilitated my research by answering my questions and volunteering information. Like Tabita and Busho, they have been very patient with my frequent visits and unending curiosity, and I would like to express my deeply felt gratitude.
production, which is considered part of it, give a potter a reputation for industriousness and accomplishment in her community. Like all good potters, Tabita has trained all six boys in the art of pottery production so that they can participate in it as much as men can; though they are all boys, her children also participate in running her household.

Tabita was born in 1963 in Shemo, which is on the plain to the west of the mountain called Damota, in the heart of Wolayta country. In 1982 she married Busko Anjao, who comes from the village of Qentola, in northern Wolayta. She and her husband are bringing up their six children on their income from the sale of the pottery that Tabita makes and the food that Busko grows on the land he cultivates.

Tabita’s biography highlights her work as an artist while placing her in the broader context of the lives of artisans in her part of Ethiopia; it also offers a glimpse of the art of pottery production and evaluation in Ethiopia.

**Family Background**

One of the most difficult aspects of documenting a potter’s life is reconstructing her family history, including the genealogies of her ancestors. Tabita could recall the names of only three paternal ancestors, Haruti, Godola, and Bombe, and two maternal ones, Anjulo and Chacha. Such short recollection was fairly common among the potters of her area: women simply say, “We do not know the dead ones.” This is ironic, given the stereotypical view that potters relate to “the dead ones” better than farmers do. Tabita considers herself a member of the Zeno clan, to which her father belonged.

Her parents had always lived in Shemo, where she was born. Her father was a part-time farmer with access to land which belonged to a local landlord. He used to farm both his own plot, which was on a semi-arid hillside, and that of the owner, which was further up the hill. For the privilege of using the farmland, Tabita’s family used to pay annual tributes of pottery to the landowner. The number of household utensils supplied varied from year to year, but it never exceeded four. Her family also provided other menial services and were generally treated as though they were servants.

Shemo, where Tabita grew up, is in a temperate zone although it is rather hot and uncomfortable for most parts of the year. When she was a child, the women of her family dug clay from land which belonged to a farmer about a kilometer from their house. Despite her father’s position as a subordinate to a farmer, her family was comparatively better off than other potters in the area.

Her mother was a co-wife, and Tabita had other siblings besides those born to her own mother. She has three sisters and one brother. One of her sisters is married to a blacksmith; another is an expert in female circumcision. Her brother sings, which in Wolayta is a specialty of the potters’ community. In addition to making pottery, therefore, members of her natal family are engaged in all areas of work that potters are known for. This has shaped Tabita’s experience and knowledge of her social environment. Unlike her mother, however, Tabita, who is a Protestant
Growing up, she had to learn more about the physical environment than farmers' daughters did. She knew where the best clay was and where to find water during both dry and rainy seasons. She also knew where to get wood for fuel, which the potters' community used more of than the farming community. "We went to collect fuelwood for firing pottery as well as for cooking purposes," she said. "We never cut trees down; men did that. Women collected twigs and undergrowth. My mother collected fuelwood only. Occasionally, my father and "brothers" acquired all the bigger pieces of fuelwood needed for her work."

Her statement reveals how environmental resources were used and the division of labor in the making of pottery. The period during which she grew up, before 1976, was a time when private property and the use of fuelwood were regulated by landlords in a customary fashion. At that time the potters' community had to make do with what was provided by the individual farmers with whom their families had historical associations. Although her father had access to some farmland, his use of it and his access to the forest were restricted. The women of the household had to be careful about the amount of fuel they collected. Such sensitivity to the environment, especially guarding against the overuse of necessary resources, was a large part of her upbringing. Particularly important in this context was an awareness of the cost of fuelwood, which could affect the amount and quality of the pottery produced and, ultimately, the income derived from it.

Tabita was taught by her mother to be aware of the market demand for pottery. Like all young girls in the potters' community, Tabita used to go to all the weekly markets, sometimes taking pottery she or her mother produced and sometimes only buying supplementary food items needed for the household. These expeditions were used for determining pottery prices and for gauging where their products were most needed. "I was taught by my mother to know these things," she said. By comparison to farmers' daughters of her own age, her knowledge of market layouts, natural resources, and the general environment was quite extensive. In this sense, the lives of girls from potters' families were more similar to those of boys than they were to those of girls from farmers' families. Nevertheless, Tabita's experiences were more restricted than those of her own "brothers," who, like other boys in their com...
community, traveled further afield, taking their mother’s pottery to markets in Kambata, located to the north of the area where Tabita grew up. Closer to home, they also went to the main local markets of Boditti and Sodo. The farthest main market Tabita traveled to before her marriage was Boditti, about 10 kilometers from where she grew up. Like household chores and pottery production, knowledge of the natural environment was, and still is, gender specific.

Her most formative years also coincided with the time when the Protestant Church was expanding in the southern regions of Ethiopia, especially in Wolya. Many youths were attracted to it because of its novelty and because of the perceived economic benefits it offered. Visiting prayer halls was thus also part of her experience. The new religion also provided her with the willpower to rebel against injustice: “I ran away to Quintola because landlords used to force people to produce [pots] with no compensation.” She went to Quintola with her parents. Through the prayer halls too she met her future husband, who was introduced to her by his friends.

Marriage and the Family

Despite the coming of a new religion and her involvement with it, Tabita’s married life was largely dominated by traditional practices. Pottery practice, occupational endogamy, intermarrying only with potters or weavers, either of their own locality and linguistic group or outside it.9 Girls in Wolya get married in one of two ways: kidnapping and arranged marriage (Amarech Gedew 1983: 2). Tabita’s was an arranged marriage, with the two families having negotiated the couple’s future wealth, the families’ compatibility, and so on.

Her husband, Busho Anjajo, comes from a potters’ family in Quintola. His father had his own plot of farmland, which he had inherited from his ancestors because one of them was a particularly brave warrior. The land was on the plateau and very fertile, and Busho had his own house next to his father’s. Busho is literate, having attended school up to the fifth grade.

The extent to which both Busho and Tabita were able to break with tradition was reflected in their wedding, during which, contrary to tradition, there was very little singing and dancing. However, Tabita was subjected to the ordeals of circumcision shortly before her wedding.10 The births of her children were marked by the rituals which made them part of their father’s clan. A month before she delivered her first child, Busho sent Tabita back to her mother with gifts of food and clothing. She stayed with her mother until she had her son, and when Busho came to visit, he completed the period of “avoidance relationship” with his in-laws. The birth of the first son obliged society to accept Busho and Tabita as full members of the community. Like all newlyweds in their society, they were considered immature people until the birth of their first child. The umbilical cords and the afterbirths of all six of their sons were buried on the land that Busho farmed. This made the children members of their father’s clan, called Darmota.

Pottery and Marriage

When I married Busho and went to live with him in Quintola, I found the women in his family were potters like me. I noted, however, that my skills far exceeded theirs in terms of the variety of pots I created. The local market, even that in Shente, was not large enough for my products. I began to sell my pottery for very little. I noticed that many traders from Kambata were traveling through Shente and Boditti. So I decided to sell my pottery to them. I decided to move our house to an area nearer that trade route. I persuaded my husband to change houses, and we moved to my birthplace, Shente.

According to the virilocal tradition of Wolya, it is considered bad luck for a married woman to set up house in her natal village. However, in the case of Tabita, sensitivity to market prices and trends, which was part of her upbringing, influenced the choice of her new residence. In this too Tabita was a woman of her community. Potters are expected to assess their environment for resources and market potential and make decisions accordingly.11 Tabita’s assessment of economic factors also provided her with an excuse to move away from her in-laws, with whom relations had become strained.

Tabita Hatuti
In her new house in her own village Tabita began again to use the "best clay" and realize her dream of selling her pottery to traders and clients coming from Kambaata. The place was also quite close to two other Important markets, Shonto and Bodini, both within walking distance of her house. Some of her larger pots, such as the storage and brewing pot (gan) that holds about 5 quintals of barley, could easily be transported by her husband, either hanging from sticks slung across his shoulders or on donkey back (fig. 11.4).

Tabita’s pots sold well and she joined a small credit association with her neighbors. The association was a small-scale and temporary enter-

prise that enabled Tabita and her neighbors to acquire small amounts of cash for pressing needs. The proceeds from her weekly pottery sales have made it possible for her to send her boys to the local elementary school. In time, she and her husband were also able to build a house with a galvanized iron roof (fig. 11.5).

Revolution and Change of Status
By the time they were married and set up house, the 1974 Revolution had already been under way for about four years. The revolution brought new ideas and policies that influenced Tabita’s life considerably. People in Shonto were required to organize peasants’, youths’, and women’s associations, as well as farmers’ service cooperatives. 13 Men and women were also involved in literacy classes, skills-training programs, and local administration. Tabita was obliged to be a member of the local Revolutionary Ethiopian Women’s Association (KEWA) and through it to attend its literacy program. About this she said: “I had difficulty with my eyes and although I was able to learn the alphabet, I did not learn enough to retain it to be able to read and write. Now I cannot do anything more than read and sign my own name.”

Another source of revolutionary influence on Tabita’s life came from its impact on the men, including her husband. Potters were given the right to own land, and individual households received their own plots of farmland. This was a major departure from tradition, as potters usually did not have this right except in special circumstances, like that mentioned above in the case of Busho’s family. Busho began farming as well, and when the farmers were obliged to form a peasants’ association, he was involved in it.

In this way, the potters also acquired free access to land with clay on it. Instead of having to pay money to the landlords, women could quarry clay for free. Land was also allocated for harvesting the necessary grass for firing their pottery. From a potter’s perspective, especially with regard to these issues, the revolutionary years should have been idyllic.

A development program in the form of villagization undermined these gains by upsetting property relationships and by reinforcing unbalanced gender relations. 14 Despite the revolutionary ideas of equality, the local authorities relocated the potters and the farmers in Shonto into sepa-
rate villages; almost one hundred potter families were organized in their own village. As in all other villages, the houses were lined up in straight lines, all facing the thoroughfare and all surrounded by their own gardens. Each household also had its own plot of farmland. In spite of the traditional expectation that men help the women in pottery making, the men of the potters' community were expected only to farm. They began to find it difficult to find the time to assist the women in the production of pottery. Like many other women, Tabita explained the situation in terms of her reluctance to participate in the activities of the local branch of the REWA, saying that it stemmed from Busho's inability to assist her with her work.

The worst and most profound effect came from the development program that tried to involve the potters in a cooperative. In 1984, Busho was recruited to learn how to use the potter's wheel, an appropriate technology that had been brought to Shento in 1976 by a Ministry of Agriculture development agent. It was part of the program aimed at organizing the potters into a producers' cooperative. The development agent had the misfortune of being misunderstood and was removed, and the potter's wheel was locked away. In 1984, the service cooperative was organized to provide a physical space for a pottery producers' cooperative, the potter's wheel was brought out and used to train Busho and other men in the service cooperative. They, rather than the women, were selected because they were literate, a requirement for joining the "modern" sector of the development process. At about the same time, the government decided that rural women should not be involved in local government, because their families were being neglected. Officially, the women were left out of the training scheme because "they were illiterate." Busho was the only participant from the village of Shento; the idea was for him to train the other potters, who, of course, were all women. In the eyes of the women, Busho was an anomaly, to say the least, because, except for making roof tops and occasionally drinking vessels, pottery making in Welayta was women's work. The women therefore resented his new role. Nonetheless, Tabita agreed with Busho that it was good for him because "it was good to have the training."

A problem arose, however, when the men had to convince the women to change their traditional ways of working to suit the rules of coop- erative production and marketing. A neighbor of Tabita and Busho, who had acquired sufficient education to be a primary-school teacher, was nominated to organize the women trained by Busho on the wheel into a producers' cooperative. This man's wife was a potter, but unlike Busho and Tabita, who were proud of their situation, it was difficult for him to acknowledge his wife's skills in public: "I am a schoolteacher and recognizing the fact that my wife is a potter would affect my reputation with my colleagues." He had reason for this fear because those involved in the "modern" sector still retain the traditional prejudice against potters and other artisans. He had to perform his organizing through a proxy who would not mind being seen as belonging to the "traditional and despised" sector and had nothing to lose from the "modern" sector. He therefore involved his friend and neighbor Busho in the local politics of organizing the cooperative. For a long time Busho abandoned both his farm and his role as a potter's husband. Thus, Tabita and her family found themselves caught in the midst of a local political process that was unrelated to the women.

Nevertheless, the potters' community in Shento, which was traditionally despised, greatly benefited from the social, economic, and political processes associated with the 1974 Revolution, if only for a brief period. In their eyes, one of the positive outcomes was that, like farmers, potters could choose their own peasants' association leader from among themselves. Taking advantage of the new reforms, the peasants' association leadership, which included Busho and his teacher friend, organized free access to the source of clay. It was on the land of a local landowner, and the villagers were given the mandate to manage it. The association leadership also built a store in which pottery could be sold cooperatively. Shento was the only village, as far as I know, where potters had full control over local politics and used this situation to their benefit.

Both Busho and the schoolteacher began to have discussions with the women about the importance of selling their wares in a cooperative store. Initially, a few of the women were elected to the local committees of the cooperatives and associations, and they were able to convince their friends to sell their pottery through the cooperatives. Subsequently, however, the regional administration at Awasa decided that
women were unsuitable for decision making and high-level administrative work and ordered the men of the potters’ community to take total control of organizing the potters into production and marketing groups. This was the beginning of the end for the new cooperative process. Although Tabita and her neighbor and friend, the schoolteacher’s wife, cooperated in the beginning, Tabita later decided to have nothing to do with the new initiatives beyond learning how to use the potter’s wheel. She did not see them as contributing anything of value and made strong statements to that effect:

There was only one wheel and it was kept locked in the cooperative store. Very few women used it at all. The men also said that women were not good at keeping the books of the cooperative and that the cooperative was losing out as a result of their involvement in running the cooperative. The men were meant to collect the pottery that women made.

Every month women were supposed to contribute a certain quota of what they produced, and the men would record it in the book and sell it. “The women did not know what they gained from that work. The cooperative took away our market. Traders came from Kambiata and bought directly from the cooperative, not from the women.” The proceeds went to the cooperative, which was supposed to provide basic goods for the villagers.

By all accounts, individual women potters like Tabita feared losing their markets. Eventually, therefore, many women refused to contribute their quotas. Tabita added:

The only good thing about the cooperative was that we did not pay for the clay. I did not want to be elected to the committee that ran the producers’ cooperative because I had a lot of work to do. Yes, Busho continued, but he was paid for his work, and he is now an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture. That takes up a lot of his time, and he does not get his pay regularly.

Given the consciousness-raising that the national REWA had undertaken at the beginning, it is possible that Tabita’s and the other women’s objections to the cooperative were provoked by the dismissal of the women from its leadership. More important, pottery making is one of a woman’s household chores, to be performed for the benefit of her household alone. The cooperative interfered with this routine, and the women saw few benefits from the organization. The cooperative was never easy to run, and it came to an end in 1990.29 On the eve of the demise of the government of the Derg, the local people divided the money among themselves and closed it down. Tabita recalls: “It was a relief when it closed down because the men were bothersome, expecting us to contribute our products every month and never giving us the money they made from it.”

The Effects of Democratic Changes
By 1992, almost all rural people had devillagized and returned to their original homes. The residents of the potters’ community also devillagized and resumed their work on the plots of land they owned. Tabita and Busho went back to their land, which was closer to the market at Shento, and once again their lives began to revolve around the marketplace. Not only was their home nearer the market, but it was also very close to the route taken by traders from Kambiata. To make ends meet, Tabita now concentrates on making large pots that her neighbors do not produce.

An unexpected major change that has affected Tabita and the other potters in the area is the return of land to its former owners. Even though the government has not made any clear statements on the issue, former landowners have asserted their rights and are now claiming rent from the potters. In Shento, Tabita and her neighbors pay one birr a week to the local landlord for the privilege of extracting clay from his land. He said:

I have stipulated this payment because the extraction of clay renders the land unsuitable for farming. It becomes full of holes and [is therefore] difficult to farm. Despite my request for payment, I have no way of enforcing it. They

Tabita Hatun
are supposed to pay every Friday, but the women avoid paying by not coming to the place to collect clay on Fridays.

Tabita explains the potters' behavior simply by saying that another farmer wants to sell his clay for half the price and she goes there instead: "The clay on the other farm is running out anyway; besides, we are too poor to afford any money at all." The return of landlordism does not obviously entail the traditional obligations that potters have toward owners; they can buy the clay from anybody who wants to sell it and not just from the landlord who owns the plot of land on which they live.

Another challenge stems from losing access to the free use of the grass needed for firing their pottery. Now the potters have to make do with what they can buy either when thatched houses are pulled down, which is happening a lot during the devillagization process, or when a landowner has grass to sell. For the same reason firewood has also become expensive. Tabita's and the other women's relationship to resources has come full circle: they are no longer in control of the environment. As in the old days, landlords try to extract what they can from it and from the potters.

The Art of Pottery Production

Two major points need to be made here. One of them is that Tabita sees herself as endowed with a special knowledge. In terms of the thinking in her society, this attitude is a mark of self-confidence and is characteristic of all potter women her age. In her community the knowledge required to produce fine pots is regarded as a major asset—it is something that becomes part of one's nature, so to speak. In her own words: "Once they learn pottery, very few women forget the art of production. Some farmer women marry men of the potters' community and they learn to make pottery as adults. All others learn pottery as children, and they always continue to produce."

The other point that needs to be made is that pottery is associated with the creation of human life. In other words, pottery is perceived by the potters as a divine gift made to the mythical ancestor and passed from generation to generation. "We have always made pottery. God taught human beings to make pottery. I learned my skills from my mother and she learned it from her mother." Statements like this were made by everyone we interviewed. When she went beyond this, Tabita reluctantly spoke of pottery in terms of her immediate social environment. It is impossible to reconstruct the history of pottery production from oral tradition.

The instruments required for making pottery are gathered by each potter. These include ropes for carrying things, baskets for transporting clay soil and products, pieces of gourd and sheep rib bones for scraping excess clay while producing work, pieces of sheep or cattle hides for smoothing the surface, and stones for burnishing the surface.21

For Tabita, describing the everyday activities around the creation of pottery is not only an expression of pride in her work but also a way of attributing an identity to the particular piece of art she creates.

First I bring the clay from the river. I then spread it to dry. Once it dries I take a stick and break it by beating it into a powder. I then sieve it to separate the fine dust from stones and other hard clay. Then I bring water and mix it with my legs. I gather it together and continue to knead it with the palms of my hands.

Bringing clay from the quarry near the river involves carrying about 10 kilos of moist earth on her back at least twice a week. Women socialize while they fetch clay, and those who have daughters leave the carrying to the young girls (fig. 11.6). Tabita carries all the clay she requires on her own because men are normally forbidden to help in that. In order to meet her weekly supply requirements, she collects clay twice a week.22

Tabita mixes four types of clay, which she distinguishes by color: brown, which makes the pottery strong; red, which gives it color; black, which is porous and brittle; and dark brown, which she uses in large quantities. She also adds finely ground and sifted pottery shreds (the remains of pots that broke during firing) and kneads the mixture thoroughly (fig. 11.7). Potters then leave the wet "dough" to mature, either covered with a broken pot or in a hole dug in the ground specifically prepared for storing the clay (Hakemulder 1980: 16–17). For this purpose Tabita always has at hand a qan that had cracked while she was try-
ing to fire it. Additional water must not be allowed to get into the clay; nor should it be allowed to dry out. The length of time needed for the clay to mature depends on the weather, how firm a piece of pottery the potter wants to make, and how soon she wants to make and sell it. In the rainy season, Tabita leaves the clay for ten days or even longer because the weather does not allow for quick production, drying, and selling; often potters make new pottery only after they sell what they have already made. The question of storage does not arise. In Wolayta customers prefer to buy pottery processed slowly over a longer time because it tends to be stronger than that produced faster during the dry season.

After a while I start to create. I finish shaping the piece by smoothing it with a piece of gourd. Then I use hide dipped in water for smoothing [the surface] further. Then

I take a rib bone and scrape off the excess clay and further reshape it using both my fingers and the palm of my hand.

Tabita shapes her pottery by bending over the portion of clay she has placed on a piece of hide, soft ground, or the broad leaves of the enset plant and moving around and around the pot and “pulling” the clay up to give it the shape she wants (fig. 11.1). She places the index, middle, and fourth fingers of her right hand inside the vessel while pressing and scooping from the outside with her left hand. The gap, a pot for brewing beer and for which she has achieved fame, is made in two halves, which are joined afterward (fig. 11.4). Handles, which are rarely made in Wolayta and the south, and necks and spouts are made separately by using coils and are added to the main body. “I then leave it [the finished product] for a while in the shade to dry out on its own.” Pottery making can be very tiring. Some potters rest by sitting down to smoke tobacco from pipes. Co-wives and neighbors join in the smoke break. The noon break is often accompanied by coffee and snacks of parched grain or boiled beans and maize. Because of her fundamentalist Christianity, Tabita does not smoke. “I am Christian,” she says, “The Orthodox [Christians] smoke tobacco.”

As in other parts of Africa, decorating pottery is part of the expertise potters acquire, and in Wolayta not all women can decorate (Pollet 1978: 13; Fagg and Picton 1978: 13–16). For those like Tabita who have the expertise, most decoration involves incised lines, raised ridges, and other raised motifs. Big pots have raised ridges near the neck, smaller pots, such as serving bowls, can have ridges and other raised motifs elsewhere on their surfaces. Drinking vessels are decorated by painting them with contrasting colors made from earth pigments after firing. Small serving bowls have holes by which they can be suspended with strings on the walls of Wolayta houses. The amphora-shaped chen, a common pot type used for collecting and storing water, is found among the Wolayta and related people; it has an elegant profile and is a beautiful object in its own right (pl. 20d, fig. 11.8). Pottery is left to dry in the shade for a few days before it is exposed to the sun. Exposure to the sun is done gradually, and the pot is initially
covered with leaves. Like the rest of the potters, Tabita makes a number of articles before she starts to fire her pottery. Having collected firewood and sunbelt (savanna grass) while the pottery dries, she always does her firing outside, never in a closed space. Because kilns are not used, meticulous care is needed to maintain a high temperature. Large pots are placed around smaller ones; mit'afl, large round baking pans, often serve as the outer layer and are themselves covered with a thick layer of grass and wood (fig. 11.9). The smaller pots are fired both inside and out at the same time. When firing the big brewing pot, Tabita first lights the fire inside it. "After it dries inside, I completely cover it with grass and firewood and fire it further." Unlike in other parts of the country, maintaining the fire is an art in which both men and women participate and achieve expertise. The fire must be maintained for roughly an hour and often this requires the attention of every member of the family.

Because it is performed in the open air, firing pottery is a precarious endeavor; if it fails, all of the pots may be ruined. When there is a light rain, Tabita covers the pots with banana or palm leaves and continues the process. Too much rain can extinguish the fire and destroy the work of several weeks. When people are careless, houses catch fire. Indeed, during the period when villagization was in effect, this possibility was the formal explanation used by the dominant group, the farmers, to segregate the potters into separate villages. Historically, this possibility has also been a source of insult to the potters (Tsehai Berhane-Slassie 1991b). Tabita, who takes great pride in the attention she gives to this phase of pottery production, has never allowed a house to catch fire as a result of negligence.

Removing the pottery from the fire is often men's work but women also become involved. The men use sticks to remove the pots, first the mit'afl on the outside, then the smaller pieces (fig. 11.10). Potters become very annoyed if they find cracks in the pots. Tabita told us that

Tabita Hatutti
this rarely occurs with her firing. If small cracks appear, the glue-like sap from the est plant is applied to fill the cracks. If a large crack occurs, the piece is discarded and its sherds later used as grog in future pots. It is always a bit nerve-wracking waiting to see the outcome of the firing of pots.

As soon as the firing is finished, the sap from the est plant is applied to the surface. In the old days, sap from acacia trees was also used for this purpose. The sap gives the pottery a shine without changing its color and, where cracks appear, helps to fix some dust on top of them. For drinking vessels, a contrasting-color decoration is added on this wet sap, often by old men. Unlike potters in the central highlands, Wolya potters, and indeed many in the south, do not smoke or squeeze their pottery for decoration (see Cassiers 1988: 161; Hecht 1969: 9).

Since the villagers returned to their old homes after the fall of the Derg, Tabita has been working in back of her house. Most women, including Tabita, prefer to "create" while others are not watching so that their skills remain their own. While the creation is in progress, co-wives may chat with one another, and neighbors from the farming community may come to visit. Such socializing is tolerated because observing a potter at work in this manner is thought to help very little in learning this competitive skill.

Tabita involves her whole family in her work. Her six boys have learned all aspects of pottery making except the mixing of clay with water and shaping it. The boys even cook and get their own meals if she asks them to, although this is not typical of any group of men in Ethiopia.

Potters are supposed to engage in production continuously, although they can take holidays occasionally. Generally, people refrain from work for a whole month during periods of mourning; however, potters were still supposed to produce a small amount of pottery because it was believed that otherwise they would die. Tabita takes regular breaks every Sunday, when she goes to church. When we asked her about other times when she does not work, she said flatly: "We stop work when somebody dies out of respect for our neighbors." As for the belief that potters work continuously because otherwise they would die, Tabita said, "That was in the days when people were silly!" Perhaps this reflects a new outlook that she has acquired as a Protestant; other potters women

still hold to that belief. The fact that Tabita does not maintain this view has not reduced her commitment to her creative lifestyle—she continues to be a prolific potter.

Normally (i.e., when she is free from debts), Tabita collects clay twice a week, fetches water twice a day, and has some pottery ready for firing at least once a week. Firing is done at about 2 p.m. on Thursdays, just before the market gets into full swing. In her village of Shentu everybody fires their pottery on Thursday afternoon, which is the market day. If the women have been particularly productive, they also fire pottery for the Saturday market in Sodo and for the Friday market in Bodiiti.

"I know exactly how much to produce for each market day," said Tabita. Leaving unfired pottery lying about in the house immediately exposes it to dampness and the need for firing or seasoning it immediately, which makes the product secondhand and less valuable. Storing until the next market day is not done at all in Wolayta.

After the Pot Leaves Its Maker's Hands

Both Tabita and Busho go to the market, but more often than not Busho carries Tabita's pots there because the pots she makes are the heavy brewing pots and other big pieces which she cannot carry on her own (Fig. 11.11)."His involvement in firing the pottery and marketing it forces Busho to abandon his functions for the Ministry of Agriculture, but he gets his compensation. "He brings back all the money he makes from selling it, and I give him some for his needs. I also spend whatever I want from that." This attitude is common among the potters in Wolayta and elsewhere."

Potters like Tabita make sure that their pottery sounds dry (i.e., produces a ringing tone when knocked with the knuckles). Such a level of dryness is achieved by the drying and firing processes, but this is only the initial consideration. Potters need to develop their reputation with customers, which is determined by the survival rate of their pots during the seasoning process performed by customers to make the pots leakproof (see also Hecht 1969: 9). Every piece, except water and grain containers, is seasoned by applying special ingredients that each potter recommends. The standard method is to heat the product and rub it with burning cakes of oil seeds such as castor, cotton, or cabbage. Most
pots are heated with these seeds inside and out. Cooking pots are easier to season because they are burned and rubbed with the hot oil seeds only on the inside. The coffee pot is even easier; all it requires is boiling coffee fast and letting it boil over. More difficult to season are the large pots, such as the gaz, because women have to bend inside them in order to reach the bottom with burning oil seeds, fat, and beeswax on a pad of rough cloth. The miz'el requires heating at a high temperature while being rubbed with the oil seeds. Water containers are smoked with large amounts of twigs and leaves of oily wood such as sycamore. All seasoning involves subjecting the pottery to another round of high heat—hence the emphasis on the initial ringing tone, which indicates that the pottery has been dried out completely and properly. The hot oil treatment from the melting seeds, fat, and beeswax or the fumigation with the leaves and twigs blocks the pores of the coarse-textured earthenware. It also makes the pottery shiny and durable. The best-made pots may last for many years, often breaking only when subjected to an excessive shock. 31

Potters recommend that their customers use specific oil seeds in seasoning their products. Some, like Tabita, take pride in informing customers that the utensil will "come out" all right when seasoned with any of the oil seeds in any fashion. Women always buy from potters whose work they know will survive the seasoning process—price is determined by such reputations. In some cases, such as with the brewing pot, the size of the pot and the rarity of the skill needed to make it are additional factors. In 1993 when Tabita was raising money to cover her debts, she was producing very good large pots that she sold for 50 birr apiece, equivalent to about U.S.$10.00. A miz'el costs about 15 birr; smaller items may sell for no more than 5 birr. Potters get very little return for their work, and nowadays they are having to compete with imported plastic goods, which many urbanites prefer.

Conclusion
Tabita, a strict follower of tradition with regard to her creativity, is nonetheless a woman of her time. She has been influenced by a new religion and has lived through the years of the revolution maintaining the self-sufficiency she acquired in her youth. She deals with the vicissitudes of life without assistance. Like other rural women, the government development schemes have hardly touched her lifestyle and quality of life. When these schemes did affect her, they invariably reinforced the gendered access to the "modern" sector, and in Tabita's particular case, her husband's involvement with them has been depriving her of his help to some degree.

Tabita loves to produce pottery, and when a piece cracks during firing she says: "This too has its uses. It strengthens my future creation!" The functionality of the pottery produced by Tabita and other potters does not stop customers from appreciating the utensils' artistry and beauty. Indeed, customers add to the beauty and functionality through the seasoning process. For Tabita, her ancestors, and her customers, pottery is a traditional craft that will continue, representing a whole lifestyle, with beauty and functionality emanating from it.
Ilto and Arba—Two Doko Weavers

Mary Ann Zelinsky-Cartledge and Daniel M. Cartledge

High in the Gamo highlands of south-central Ethiopia is a green, precipitous land of terraced mountain slopes and cold, tumbling streams (fig. 12.3). This is the land of Doko, a home to rugged highlanders and a province of gifted handweavers. It was here that we came to settle among the society of the Doko-Gamo and it was here that we came to meet several of the weavers whose products are well known throughout Ethiopia. In this essay, we will spotlight the lives and works of two weavers, Ilto Indalay and Arba Desta (figs. 12.1—12.2), both of whom live in Losha, a neighborhood of Doko.

Doko is situated in the central Gamo highlands, 2,600–3,300 meters above sea level. By road, it is 500 kilometers south-southwest of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia’s capital. Doko is surrounded on three sides by the steep and barren Sura Mountain Ridge. Marching from north to south are the peaks of Moota, Soola, Olay Obota, Sura, Mar, and Mazay. From the mountaintop above Arba’s and Ilto’s homes, one can get a good overview of the quilt-work pattern of farms, cropland, pastureland, small woodlots, bamboo groves, wetlands, and forest tracts that constitute the land of Doko.

Doko weavers such as Ilto and Arba do not work solely on their craft but are also full-time farmers. Their main crops are wheat, potatoes, barley, peas, onions, cabbage, and enet (Ensetum ventricosum). Enet is a banana-

Research for this essay was supported by a Fulbright Research Fellowship and a grant from the Florida Tropical Weavers Guild. We would like to thank Gezahegn Alemayehu, Arba Desta, and Ilto Indalay for helping us better understand the weaving traditions of Doko Losha.
Fig 12.1: The Doko Gamo countryside near Arba Desta’s home.

like crop found only in the southern highlands of Ethiopia. Unlike banana, however, it produces no edible fruit. Rather, a variety of foods are prepared from the starchy pulp of the plant. It also yields a high-quality fiber that has many diverse uses in Doko society. It is, for example, the primary material used for lashing together the component parts of the weaver’s loom.

Doko is one of approximately forty semiautonomous societies, locally known as deyes, in the greater Gamo culture area. It is a society with regularly elected leaders (elders or chiefs) and hereditary ritual specialists. These specialists are responsible for carrying out traditional religious ceremonies and maintaining or enforcing the local system of rules and taboos. Doko is divided into two districts: Doko Gambella and

Doko Mesho. Both of these districts have a central market site and are divided into seven neighborhoods. The former regional administrative center of Chencha adjoins Doko Gambella to the north. Doko Lusha, the home of Arba and Illo, is one of the seven neighborhoods of Doko Gambella.

Doko society is almost totally agrarian. Most crops are produced for local consumption only; and essentially all farms include cattle, sheep, and perhaps a horse or mule. Weavers form a distinct socioeconomic component within this society. They belong to the mela social class—the commoners, or average citizens, of Doko. As such, they are eligible to be selected as habakas (the elected leaders of Doko society). This quite clearly distinguishes weavers from other Doko artisans because other artisan groups (including blacksmiths, butcher-tanners, and potters) are relegated to distinct lower-caste status in Doko society.

Following an intricate set of traditional rules, members of these caste groups must live apart from the rest of Doko society and are ineligible to hold office as mela habakas. Weavers are quite clearly a special occupational group rather than a social caste. Being a weaver carries no stigma, unlike that suffered by other Doko artisans, who must follow certain distinct behavioral rules. For example, a blacksmith is not allowed to use the front entrance to a commoner’s (mela’s) house. Or, if a family of higher status serves food to a butcher-tanner, he is usually given a special plate or cup to use rather than being allowed to eat from a communal plate with the family. Products made by weavers are usually much more expensive than those of the artisan groups. This is true even though these other products (such as pottery) are just as necessary to Doko society as woven materials. Weavers such as Arba and Illo tend to do more trading at a variety of markets and have more family network ties in Addis Ababa than do the caste groups’ artisans.

Even though there are many differences between weavers and the lower-caste artisans, there are several similarities. For example, once a weave is known or established within his area, many people will go to the weaver to get an article made rather than buying it in the market. This is also true for blacksmiths. Neighbors will frequently visit a specific blacksmith to have their knives sharpened or to have new tool handles made.

Illo and Arba—Two Doko Weavers
society and have underlying connections with one another. The products of Doko's weavers are but the end result of a complex interplay of various sociocultural influences.

We began our search for a better understanding of these influences near our home base in Doko Lusha. Fortunately, we didn't have far to go. Only two kilometers from our house we came across Iito Infallay. At the time he was forty-five years old and had been weaving for twenty years. When we first approached him, he was busily weaving in his compound with the assistance of one of his sons. He wore a locally woven hat and near his loom he had a beehive and his trusty waterpipe (garg).

He lives in a typical Doko Gamo house (fig. 12.4). Woven of split bamboo covered with wheat straw, this steeply domed structure looks like a large haystack perched on the mountainside.

His house is located down a long, narrow path and one has to bend over to enter through the small doorway of the two-meter-high bamboo fence that surrounds his compound. Iito was friendly and did not seem to mind having some foreigners visit him while he was working. We briefly explained, through our field assistant, Gezahgen Alemayehu, that we were interested in learning more about the weavers in Doko and the various textiles that they produce.

Iito took pride in showing us his weaving techniques and in explaining the process of producing a finished piece of cloth. He also took pride in telling us about his family. Iito and his wife, Sinkay Seray, have six children, five boys and one girl. When we would visit Iito, we would frequently see one of his sons or a friend assisting him by winding the thread on a handmade bobbin winder (dawm mkine) (fig. 12.5). For most sons of weavers, the winding of the thread, which is later made into woven cloth, is usually the first step in learning to become a weaver, a tradition passed down from generation to generation. Just as Iito's sons have a part to play in the weaving process, so do Iito's wife and daughter. As we were told, and frequently witnessed, generally only men and boys actually weave. However, in complementary manner, female family members are responsible for the spinning of the cotton used for the weft (shabi) threads. These are the threads which run the width of the loom. This spun cotton (bita) is used in making a variety of Doko textiles.

Most of the cotton that the weavers use for the warp (lachen), the

Iito and Arba—Two Doko Weavers
threads running the length of the loom, is factory-made. However, the cotton that is used for the weft (dhab) is grown in the Rift Valley lowlands. Women make regular trips down into the valley and return via steep mountain footpaths. They carry huge loads of goods into the valley and return with bundles of freshly picked cotton on their backs. These same women often sell this cotton at the three Doko area markets and at those in neighboring tiny areas such as Donze and Zozo (fig. 12.6). They sell the cotton in various forms, including cotton with seed (fast ungh), cotton without the seed (keeto), and handspun cotton (keeto). Throughout our stay in Doko, it was a common sight to see females of all ages spinning cotton using a drop spindle (inert) (fig. 12.7).

Most weavers, like Arba and Ito, have their looms set up outside in their compound near their main house (figs. 12.1–12.2). The Doko pit-style loom is supported by four vertical posts (gala sfo munto). The posts are made from local timber, often eucalyptus or kion (lindhinia hout). Two horizontal pieces of wood (gala sfo munto) help connect the vertical posts of the loom. There are two harnesses (moxa). These are also made from local woods or bamboo. On each harness are many string heddles. Attached to the bottom of the harnesses is a long piece of rope, made from inert. This forms the treadles of the loom. In front of the harness is the reed. The reed rests inside the wooden frame of the beater (memba). The reed is composed of vertical bamboo pieces with a space between each. The reed can hold up to 600 threads. At the very front of the loom is a beam (moxun), around which the finished cloth is wound.

The loom frame is usually built into a hillside. The weaver uses the embankment of the hill as a natural bench. Below the bench is a small hole (dab kille). The weaver places his feet in this hole to operate the treadles. These raise and lower the harnesses. The frame of the loom stays permanently in the ground. The reed and harnesses, however, can be removed. Sometimes Ito removes these at the end of a day’s work and takes them into his house. Some weavers have separate buildings that they use as a weaving house. Most weavers build the frame of the loom themselves but purchase the front beam, reed, and harnesses at one of the local markets from men who specialize in making these items (fig. 12.8).
The first part of the weaving process, referred to as warping (dimu), generally takes two to three hours to complete and is done outside in a large grassy area. To begin the warping for an ņa'ala, a fine gauze-like cotton cloth, a weaver needs approximately 1.5 skeins (nuku) of amani (thin cotton thread). This factory-made thread is obtained in the local markets. A nuku is divided into ten separate loops of thread. Thus a weaver begins with fifteen long threads. These are carefully placed on a hand-held warping reel (waqomba mauwur). The free ends of these fifteen threads are tied together onto the first warping post. This is one of the eight wooden posts set in the ground in two parallel rows. The weaver then unrolls the threads around each warping post in a zigzag pattern. When the weaver comes to the last two posts, the thread is crossed and an X is formed. This is to prevent the threads from tangling and aids in the dressing of the loom. The weaver retraces his steps, repeating the zigzag pattern around all the posts at least twenty times.

The two rows of posts are set approximately six to seven meters apart. This will be the length of the finished ņa'ala cloth. A weaver may use between 300 and 500 threads to make one ņa'ala. If the ņa'ala is to be sold at the market, it is not uncommon for a weaver to use fewer threads than if his work is being commissioned. Frequently the weaver may have someone assist him throughout the warping process because the amani thread is so fine it frequently breaks. The assistant helps by twisting on additional pieces of thread to the broken section. Once the warping is completed, the threads are carefully removed from the posts.

Now the weaver is ready to put the warping threads on the loom (huru)—a process called dressing the loom. The weaver takes one end of the warp threads and ties this to a post (yechu mutes) located at the front of the loom near the weaver’s seat. The warp threads are then brought around a second post (sivo mutes), which is 2.5 meters beyond the back end of the loom. Next the weaver takes the warp threads and pulls them through the harnesses (zenwana). When this is finished, half of the warp threads will be on each of the two harnesses. Then each warp thread is pulled through a small space in the reed (achai). Finally the warp threads are tied onto the beam (wamfrahba) at the front of the loom.

After Illo dresses the loom, he puts the weft threads on a set of bobbins (small hollow pieces of bamboo). He winds the weft threads on the bobbin using a bobbin winder (dimu maiki) (as in fig. 12.5). This is a small wooden apparatus which enables the weft threads to be quickly wound. It has a rectangular base with a small wooden wheel that rests on top. A string or piece of leather goes around the wheel and attaches to the front of the machine, where the bobbin is held. Illo places an empty bobbin on the winder and attaches a small piece of weft thread. He then begins to turn the handle, which causes the wheel and bobbin to rotate simultaneously, rapidly winding the weft thread onto the bobbin.

Once enough bobbins have been wound with thread, one is placed in the shuttle. The bobbin is held in the shuttle by a thin stick (amane). The shuttle (naikay) is similar in shape to a small dugout canoe. It is usually made of eucalyptus wood. The shuttle is the tool that carries the weft threads across the warp.

To begin weaving, Illo presses down with his right foot on the treadle to open up the shed (the space between the threads). Next he takes the shuttle and, with a flip of the wrist, throws the shuttle through the shed with one hand. The shuttle glides across the warp threads. Illo catches it with his other hand. He beats the cloth with the beater by pulling it toward him and then pushing it back. Then he presses his left foot down to once again open the shed and throw the shuttle across the warp threads (this time left to right). These steps are continuously repeated. Illo frequently sings traditional Doko songs as he maintains a steady methodical rhythm on the loom. Here is one example:

Oh, never problems, never problems inside the bottomlands.
I solve the problems because I live in the land of Losha.
I am like good feva. I have free lands in End. I am the great grandson of Data Benela and people call me Illo, Illo.
I am a black king, black king. I look like cotton.
One day I can stop one big horse. People say I am powerful. I am called Illo, Illo; people call my name Illo, Illo.

Illo and Arba—Two Doko Weavers
Oh, I am a strong leopard, a strong leopard. I can overcome any hardship. I am clear and honest. A strong fighter for truth.

I was born in war and I am a participant in the Gamo war places. I want people to know about the war and the battle place.

I am the great-grandson of Weyzero Konayfay and my name is Illo. People call me Illo, Illo. I look like a running horse. My name is Illo, Illo.

Illo first learned to weave the netesh from his father. This cloth is worn by most women in the Gamo region. It is usually about 160 x 260 centimeters in size. The cloth is white with a colorful 3- to 6-centimeter border at each end. There are two types of borders: one is a plain-weave design called losmet using only one color, and the other, the t'ileh, is an inlay design using one or more colors and various patterns (pl. 21).

Illo knows how to weave other cloths as well but prefers to weave netesh because these are quickly made and easily sold in the markets (fig 12.9). The netesh is woven in one panel (osga) at a time. When Illo begins to make a netesh, he will first weave one panel, starting with the border. He then completes the main body of the cloth. To make the appropriate length of one panel Illo places a small piece of mud (osga) on the warp threads. He will then leave a gap and begin to weave the second panel. This is the common Doko method of making cloth sections. Illo can complete a netesh in one day, and so, he is frequently seen at the local markets, loaded down with an assortment of these delicate white cloths.

Joining Illo at the market are other Doko weavers, who sell a bright, multicolored, plaid cloth referred to as a fen (pl. 22). Through some local contacts we were able to meet a small active group of Illo weavers residing in a scenic meadow area of Doko Loshia. One was the eighty-year-old weaver Arba Desta. Arba's compound is somewhat larger than Illo's. It contains four woven bamboo houses and a large grassy lawn

on which Arba's six sheep graze. In one corner of his compound, built next to one another, are two pit-style looms. When we visited, the looms were dressed with very bright red and blue thread.

During our conversations with Arba we found out that he has been weaving nearly half of his lifetime. He and his first wife, Kastay Tasa, have eight children, six sons and two daughters. Arba also has a second wife, Wolestat Ika, who resides in Addis Ababa along with their five sons. In the Doko culture it is not uncommon for a man to have up to four

Illo and Arba—Two Doko Weavers
wives. But, as many farmers told us, it is difficult to support more than one wife. Arba's family is very active in weaving. Five of his sons are also weavers. Four reside in Addis Ababa, and two sons, Malako, still lives in Doko Losha and weaves on the loom alongside his father (fig. 12.2). Due to his family ties in Addis, Arba speaks both Amharic and the local Doko Gamo dialect. This is in contrast to Ilo, who speaks only Doko Gamo.

Originally, one of Arba's neighbors taught him how to weave. Like Ilo, he first began weaving the net'e. Now, however, he prefers weaving the fea (pl. 22). The thread used for the fea is stronger and does not break as easily as the thread commonly used for the net'e. The fea is a rather new type of cloth. It is said to have originated in the central Gamo highlands about twenty years ago, but it is now the most popular textile in Doko. The fea has similar dimensions to the net'e. It is approximately 146 x 266 centimeters, but the entire body of the cloth is woven with brightly colored thread. There are numerous plaid designs. The most common pattern is one with blue and red thread alternating in the warp and weft. By alternating the two threads, the pattern develops into a checkerboard of 13 x 13 centimeter squares throughout the cloth. The fea differs from the net'e in that it is much more colorful, it does not have a border, and it is a medium-weight textile, whereas the net'e is a lightweight, gauze-like cloth.

The fea and net'e not only differ in design but also in the ways they are worn. In Doko society, there are four basic ways to wear a net'e. For general wear, the net'e covers the body and shoulders but the border is folded over the right shoulder. For church activities, the two layers of the net'e are opened up all the way, and the border edge is placed over both shoulders. When the border is worn up around the face or shoulders, it is a sign of mourning or bereavement. For recreation or resting, the border edge of the net'e is worn over the left shoulder.

There are not as many variations in the way that a fea may be worn. Generally it is simply wrapped around the shoulders or over the head as a shawl. Some women wear it toga-style like a dress. It is also often seen being used as a baby carrier. A woman places her baby on her back and ties the fea securely around her waist to support the child. Unlike the net'e, the fea is also used as a sleeping blanket.

Arba's youngest son, Malako, who is fifteen years old, has recently been learning to weave the fea. He has been weaving since he was ten years old. In addition to the fea, he also knows how to weave the net'e and danch. Like most young boys in Doko society, Malako first began weaving by learning to make a cloth called a danch (pl. 22). This is a very long cotton sash with some edgework added for color. This sash is usually worn only by married women. There are two types of danch. One type is narrow and long (10.5 x 615 cm) and is usually worn by the mab (commoners). The cloth is tightly beaten and a hand-spun thread is used for the weft. The other type of danch is a lightweight cotton sash that is loosely beaten and is much wider and longer than the first type. It is generally about 33 x 800 centimeters. The wider danch is usually worn by the wives of halaka. Men sometimes also wear this kind of danch to hold the large Gamo dagger. The danch is worn by simply wrapping it around the abdominal area and tucking in the loose ends.

Malako usually finds time to weave between going to school and helping his father with the farm work. He would very much like to join his older brothers in Addis Ababa and become a full-time weaver. For the time being, Malako is helping his family by selling his finished woven products at the local markets.

Doko weavers attend the local open-air markets both to procure necessary supplies and to sell their finished products. Different markets are held on various days of the week. There are three market sites in Doko: Mesbo, Indota, and Chencha. The Mesbo market operates on Sundays (fig. 12.10). A small market is held every Friday at Indota. And on Tuesdays and Saturdays, a big market is held in the town of Chencha. Sometimes Doko weavers also go to the neighboring towns of Dorra, Eto, Zoco, and Deeta to transact business. There is no set time for a market to begin. People start arriving at the marketplace early in the morning but the busiest time is generally between 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Market days are the most colorful days of the week. One sees a wide variety of people wearing many different types of colorful clothing. Some people wear Western-style clothes but many also don a traditional cloth as well. Most Doko residents wear the brightly colored fea. It is used by women, for example, to cover bundles of goods carried on their backs. Both men and women use it as an outer garment on cool, cloudy days.

Ilo and Arba—Two Doko Weavers
Most goods are transported to market by the females of a household. According to Doko tradition, females should carry items on their backs. Men and boys, on the other hand, must carry things only on their heads or shoulders, never on their backs. Horses and mules provide another, less-common means of transporting goods to and from the local markets.

Each market site is customarily divided into specific sections where various items are bought and sold. There are designated areas for the sale of various foods, for livestock, for imported goods, and for textiles and weaving supplies. Weavers and/or their wives will often have specific spots where they regularly display their products for sale.

Since most weavers also produce much of the food needed to sustain their families, on market days they often purchase only a few special items such as salt or farm implements, in addition to needed wearing supplies. Local weavers, such as Ito and Arba, usually market their products themselves, though occasionally a wife or child may handle the sale of finished textiles. There are no set prices for various items; lively bargaining is the rule.

Ito can sell his lemnot-bordered nélčes for about 20 bIRR (US $4.00) each. This is the average market price. Arba’s blue and red feta (which he claims are better made than most) can fetch between 40 and 60 bIRR. When one purchases a nélč, the panels are usually not sewn together, so the buyer must go to a tailor and have the panels assembled. Most often, however, the fis is fully assembled before being sold. Weavers themselves admit that the quality of the handwoven cloth sold at most markets varies considerably. This is because some weavers are more production oriented than others. A well-made piece of cloth will consist of more warp threads, and in producing the cloth, the weaver will pull the reed or beater more forcefully to produce a tighter weave. Arba not only weaves to sell at the market but also produces commissioned work for friends and neighbors.

The marketplace is not just a place for buying and selling; it also provides a context for socializing. Much of the socializing takes place at the fir’i (honey-wine), t’ála (beer), or shay (tea) ben (houses) that surround every market site. The local fir’i is a popular drink among both Doko and Amhara people. It is served in a glass beaker that looks something like a chemist’s flask. T’ála is locally produced beer made from barley and/or wheat. It is usually drunk from decorated gourds. Tea, on the other hand, is served in a small glass with two to three teaspoons of sugar. The unique thing about the tea is that each tea house uses its own blend of different spices (including clove, fennel, and oregano).

Market day is also a time when rural residents such as Ito and Arba can eat some of the Amhara foods served in marketplace restaurants, primarily injé (w). Injé is a thin, flat, spongy bread that is served cold and is usually made from t’íd (a grain grown at elevations lower than Doko). Wet’ is a spicy meat or vegetable stew. A popular side dish is raw beef. After such a meal, men often smoke tobacco using the gums.
the local Gamo waterpipe. This is usually accompanied by lively singing and conversation that echo up and down Doko's deep valleys and mountain slopes.

Weavers constitute a distinct occupational group within Doko society. In contrast to the lower-case status of other artisans, weavers, by virtue of their special talents and lucrative business dealings, enjoy a relatively high status position in this still very traditional culture. The production of textiles often involves the participation of many members of the weaver's family. Sons often apprentice under their father's watchful eye, while wives and daughters assist in procuring weaving supplies and in spinning the thread that will eventually become useful and attractive cloth. In Doko society, weaving remains a family tradition; it is handed down from father to son, from generation to generation.

The unique Doko pit loom is often built by the weaver himself, and all its component parts are made from locally grown bamboo and the wood of various indigenous tree species. Common highland Ethiopian textiles such as the net-ke are produced in abundance by Doko weavers. Additionally, colorful handwoven items such as the fin and duka are found here also. The products of the Doko weaving tradition are in distinct contrast to those found in other parts of Ethiopia and sub-Saharan Africa in general. Uniquely adapted to the cold and wet climate of the Gamo highlands, they are both functional and pleasing to the eye. The proud mountain farmers striding energetically up and down Doko's rugged mountain tracks garbed in colorful, flowing traditional garments owe much to the industriousness and creativity of weavers such as Arha and Illo.

Notes

Chapter 1. Introduction

1. The various types of crosses (processional, hand, and neck) associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church also have received some attention, but to a lesser extent.

2. Sidney Kasfir (1992: 44) has recently considered this "condition" of anonymity. In her commentary she refers to the earlier work of other scholars who have examined this issue.

3. The collectors also often failed to document who owned the objects, how the objects were used, how they were made, etc. In short, there is very little information about these objects. In many instances, the only information that remains with the "anonymous" object is the name of the person who collected it.

4. Only since the 1950s have museums, commercial galleries, national cultural centers, and hotels in Ethiopia been exhibiting "art."

5. A good deal of scholarly writing has dealt with the challenge of interpreting art and aesthetics in other cultures. An excellent set of essays that consider various dimensions of this complex subject is found in Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics, a volume edited by Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (1992). A. Neal Sobania and I recently considered this situation in a published conference paper: "Ethiopian Traditions of Creativity: 'Art' or 'Handicraft'?'" (Silverman and Sobania n.d.-a).

7. An excellent consideration of various aspects of this subject may be found in Vogel 1988.

8. There are exceptions, a number of which are referred to in the essays presented in this volume.

9. The research undertaken for the exhibition involved collecting examples of the objects made by the artists with whom we worked. Most of the field-collected materials were commissioned by the researchers from the artists. However, a few noncommissioned pieces were also collected. The researchers were well aware of the cultural and personal importance of these older objects (such as Banja's stool, two baskets that Amina had made for herself prior to her marriage, and Jember's portrait of Haile Selassie I) and spoke to each of their makers/owners about this and the reasons why we were interested in collecting such objects. In every case, the object makers and/or owners willingly agreed to sell these objects because they understood the cultural and historical importance of preserving these objects and using them to teach people about the traditions with which they are associated.

10. The issue of authenticity has been one of the focal points of debate among scholars and collectors of African art for some time. Kasfir (1992) offers a thought-provoking critique of some of the key topics relating to the subject.

11. The magic scroll is a magico-religious device worn to ward off ill fortune and combat disease. It is made by covering one side of a narrow strip of parchment with written incantations and graphic imagery. The strip is then rolled up and inserted into a tube that is
attached to a cord so it can be worn by the suppliant. The tradition is an important manifestation of popular religion as practiced in the highlands of central and northern Ethiopia. Zerihun's "bamboo-strip" paintings utilize strips of parchment that are glued to a "bamboo" armature (actually the part of a weaver's loom known as the reed); this in turn serves as the painting surface. Many of the images that he incorporates in his compositions are derived from the graphic designs used in the magic scrolls.

Chapter 3. Harari Basketry through the Eyes of Amina Israel Sherif
1. My own research has revealed that Hecht may be overstating this quality of exclusivity; this issue is discussed at greater length below.
2. The symbolic value of this cone-shaped basket has been forgotten and its utilitarian purpose is unknown. We can suggest a couple of possibilities. It may represent a pre-Islamic phallic symbol, like the wooden kulebe (a symbol of authority) of the Oromo. Or perhaps, in an Islamic context, it could represent the minaret of a mosque.
3. Dire Dawa, a large city with close historical ties to Harer, is located 35 kilometers northwest of Harer.
4. Daughters, until marriage (i.e., until they acquire their own land), work on their mother's land.
5. In 1993 a heir was equivalent to U.S.$20.
6. Most girls used to attend Qur'anic schools until they reached the age of puberty. Today this traditional mode of education has been replaced by state-sponsored schools that include Islamic education through the eighth grade.
7. Hecht 1992 provides color illustrations of some of these patterns.
8. E.g., masha (praise to God), nishthun (we have opened you up to).
9. See the detailed diagram of a Harari gidin gar (that is reproduced in Hecht 1992: 21, fig. 3). I originally drew this diagram for Hecht. It accurately identifies the key features of the living room, with the exception of the various sitting areas. Information about these areas is given in the present essay.
10. For a discussion of this attitude see Bender 1989: 185–86.
11. Inv. no. 21003, Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.
13. The human remains were named Lucy after the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." In Amharic they are referred to as emmmEA, meaning "you are wonderful.
14. For example, images of cattle are found in rock art produced roughly four thousand years ago at sites near Dire Dawa (eastern Ethiopia).
15. The similarity of Zerihun's works with "wax and gold" has been pointed out by Chojnacki (1973c: 89).
17. See Vogel 1991: 17–20 for various examples of this attitude.
20. See the artist biographies in Tate Tadesse 1991.

Chapter 4. Every Woman an Artist
1. The Borana divide time into periods of eight years, each named after the edoin gaba (father of the gaba) who led the community during that eight-year period. Gaba is the term for a generation age grade as well as for a calendrical period of eight years.
2. In Borana culture and society a great value is attributed to sons, especially the firstborn.
3. She finally agreed to sell the cow she had made for her daughter to our research team but only after we agreed that delivery would occur in secret. Elemu told us she would make her daughter another one.
4. Male sterility is not considered a problem, because Borana married women are institutionally allowed to have lovers.
5. All scientific names presented in this essay are derived from Wilding 1985.
6. Elena Boru showed us one gaba that could stand by itself. It was very old and the bottom had been repaired with a flat base.
7. The 7 most common varieties of wood used for furniguration are bahulch (Acacia tortilis), babale-dake, qorq (Olea africana), and mushehn (Cordia quadra).

Chapter 5. Zerihun Yetmgeta and Ethiopian World Art
2. His first show is discussed in Murray 1970.
3. I am very grateful to Ms. Skokoff for allowing me to study and photograph Zerihun's work at her home.
4. For a discussion of this attitude see Bender 1989: 185–86.
5. Inv. no. 21003, Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich.
7. The human remains were named Lucy after the Beatles song "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds." In Amharic they are referred to as "emmmEA, meaning "you are wonderful.
8. For example, images of cattle are found in rock art produced roughly four thousand years ago at sites near Dire Dawa (eastern Ethiopia).
9. The similarity of Zerihun's works with "wax and gold" has been pointed out by Chojnacki (1973c: 89).
11. See Vogel 1991: 17–20 for various examples of this attitude.
14. See the artist biographies in Tate Tadesse 1991.

Chapter 6. Menjiye Täbeta—Artist and Actor
1. Shack notes in passing that the Gurge are "specifically distinguished artisans according to their craft activity; woodworkers are known as Fuga, blacksmiths as Nüjne, and tailors as Gehal" (1964: 50).
2. They hunt with dogs after the end of the rainy season when the rivers have subsided. Leslau (1950: 62) recorded an account in which Fuga are described going with their dogs in groups of ten or twenty with spears and bows to hunt gazelle and rhinoceros. Shack (1964: 50) notes that for the "Eastern" Gurge "hunting hippopotamus and gazelle is still economically important."
3. Shack suggests that "according to tenable theories the Fuga are "remnants of earlier inhabitants of the Horn" generally known as Watta (1964: 5). He suggests that the Fuga "were first subdued several centuries ago by the Sidamo peoples who once occupied present-day Gurageland; the coming of the Gurage merely replaced the Sidamo as conquerors" (Shack 1964: 50).
4. In a note Shack explains that the term "language" is incorrect, adding "most probably fanf is an argot composed partly of Gurage words inverted in meaning and perhaps partly of survivals of a Fuga dialect. The latter is admittedly purely conjecture since a study of Fuga language, if it exists at all, is yet to be carried out, and this is so for fanf as well" (1966: 133 n. 43; our emphasis).
5. This argot has been analyzed by Leslau, who suggests that it is "composed of partly Guragigna words inverted in meaning and perhaps partly of several of Fuga dialect" (1964: 42). It is spoken only by women and by Fuga ritual experts and is kept carefully guarded from Gurage men and strangers (Shack 1966: 9, 133).
6. These included words for "male gazelle," "female gazelle," "antelope," "wild pig," "leopard," and "lion." The Fuga also have a term for "let's go hunting" (attuwe) and collective terms for a big wild animal (anu) and hunting implements (hadane), which include bows and spears. There were also terms for "blood," "honey," and specific hunting implements.
7. There were a few basic verbs, such as "he comes," "goes," "eats," "drinks," and some commands, such as "give me food" and "give me drink."
8. Menjiye was emphatic that the Fuga "language" was different from the fanf ritual "language." Seven terms we collected coincided in meaning with words in Leslau's fanf list but were different words.
9. Leslau notes that among the Gurage it is believed that the Fuga are "pagans" and that they "have no special festivals of their own" (1930: 62). Gebra suggests that Fuga "celebrate the Gurage deities, but alone" (1973: 47).
10. In the past Fuga used to walk, but now they use public transport.
11. Menjuj explained: "We do not accuse one another of wrongdoing in the court, in police stations, or in the Yokas [Gurage council of elders]. We bring our problems with one another only to Walsu." Since this essay was written, Ambaye Dergea has shown that on the day of a festival arbitration takes place (1997: 39-40).
12. Today ordinary Zbera (noncaste) Gurage also perform circumcision, though it is unclear whether this was the case in the past.
13. The chief's mest or the initiated girls "throw" each girl on the roof (Leslau 1964: 53).
14. As Shack notes: "A woman may call upon the chief mest for special sacrifices when spiritual uplift is needed" (1966: 134).
15. The male leader of the Denna art cult in Chaha is called wenyam mest and is addressed as Abhena. According to Leslau's (1964: 52) informant, he is either a Fuga or a member of a special group that arrived in the region recently, and therefore he does not belong to an established descent group. However, we found no evidence to support the assertion that the leader was ever a Fuga. He is the hereditary leader chosen from the Yamagga clan by the fertility goddess Dennaarti. Under him are several assistants, called aminna or yegnna mest (i.e., "male mest"). Some of the latter are Fuga. The wenyam mest sets up several cult leaders in every region. However, recent evidence has shown that in an area that the Fuga migrated to near Waliso in Oroamnaland, the leader of the Denna art cult is a Fuga (Ambaye 1997: 38-39).
16. The exact relationship between these Fuga and the cult leaders remains a mystery. Shack (1964: 51) speaks of a Fuga "Chief" of the mest and a Fuga "Chiefness" who rank above their respective male and female Fuga assistants. These chiefs receive only part of the fees collected for ritual duties performed by their assistants, "the largest part of the fees passing to the Gurage religious dignitaries who represent the deities and guard the shrines" (Shack 1964: 52). We found no evidence of any Fuga "chief" or "chiefness" in Chaha. The Fuga involved in the cult are the male mest, who play an important but subsidiary role.
17. Shack notes that he was told that craft specialists cannot perform rituals, for these are organized and controlled by the Gurage dignitaries representing the deities. However, he adds that "a Fuga can fall into disfavour and be debarred from performing rituals, though it is unknown whether he is permitted to take up craft work" (1964: 51).
18. Shack notes: "In some cases a husband and wife team up as ritual experts, but this does not seem to be the rule for every married Fuga couple. Fuga women often do craft work" (1964: 52).
19. In fact, some of these women did not obtain hides from tanners.
20. In fact, there are exogamous clans among the Fuga.
21. The text on Gurage culture that Leslau recorded states: "The Fugas have no land for themselves, they live by doing the work of other people" (1950: 61).
22. Leslau's text notes: "A Fuga does not raise cows nor does he cultivate the land on which he lives. Some of them, however, ask for a loan of a cow, cultivate the land on which they live and plant the shift plant" (1950-61). However, Gehru's survey (1973) suggests that some Fuga did own livestock, although none owned land.
23. This was called prigo wele and consisted of the lower part of the back and the feet of the animal (Leslau 1950: 61-62), which they were supposed to eat alone and apart from the homesteads (Shack 1966: 10).
24. "The Gurage hold strongly to the belief that Fuga can destroy the fertility of the soil, injure the breeding abilities of the cattle, and change their milk into blood or urine. For these reasons Fuga are never permitted to assist in eunoe cultivation or to tend to cattle" (Shack 1966: 10).
25. Lewis (1965: 53) notes that the Fuga in Jimma were "handy men."
26. The text recorded by Leslie notes: "If a man has much land he brings in a Fuga into the back of his house, and the Fuga builds a house and lives there. Inasmuch as the Fuga lives on the land without paying for it, the proprietor of the land, when he needs something, can tell him: "Take care of this for me." The Fuga will then leave all the work he has to do, however important it is, and goes to do the work of his master" (1950: 61).
27. He recalled: "In the past the Fuga used to be rebellious. When a Fuga became hungry, he set fire to his master's house in the night so that he could eat the burnt animals."
28. This is reminiscent of Hallpike's (1968: 268) description of the caricature of Konso craftspeople as mean and stingy, a characteristic which he attributes to part in their need to drive a hard bargain and to the wish of the dominant group to assert their own moral rectitude in opposition to the behavior of the artisans.
29. Shack notes that the central pole "is the focus from which the social, ritual, and economic role of the homestead radiates" (1966: 10), and the occasion of its erection requires the slaughtering of an ox (1966: 42).
30. Shack noted: "At the annual festival to Waj, Fuga present as tribute a number of wooden constructions called waj, which resemble the Christian cross minus the vertical extension above the crossbar. On the waj the crossbar is attached to the long staff by diagonal members at each end. At the close of the festival, the waj are stationed at various places throughout Gurage-land, symbolically designating the site as a sacred area, similar to way (1974: 112).

Chapter 7. Qas Adamu Tesfaw—A Priest Who Paints

1. I had met the Wendersu during my first visit to Ethiopia. He is a dek (a cleric who functions as a scribe, cantor, healer, etc.) in the Orthodox Church, a competent painter, and a gregarious businessman, who has been selling his work to visitors to Addis Ababa for at least forty years. A photograph, preserved in the Frobenius Institute (Frankfurt), of Wendersu taken by the anthropologist Eike Haberland between 1950 and 1952 indicates that the artist has been interacting with foreigners for well over forty years. Unlike Adamu, who primarily paints religious themes, Wendersu interprets genre and historical subjects. Adamu is considerably younger than Wendersu, but both were born and grew up in Bichena, Gofjam Province, and moved to Addis Ababa as young men.
3. Haile Gabriel explains that a "Qubin teacher normally teaches only hymns which a deacon or a priest has to use in the liturgy of the Church. The rest, including teaching the traditions and service of the Church, is learned through daily experience in the parish itself. Usually a candidate for this training is attached to a priest or monk to whom he gives certain services, accompanying him on visits to families, festivals, and ceremonies in and outside the parish. Through observation or day-to-day practice and instruction by his priest-master, the boy learns the Church activities and functions of a deacon and of a priest. . . . activities of the priest, therefore, are limited to the rituals, which do not usually demand the understanding of the Scriptures. Thus relatively little education is expected from a young man to be ordained an altar priest" (1970: 88).
4. It is perhaps significant that many of the capital's twentieth-century "traditional" artists are from Bichena, including the well-known painters Johannes Tesserana (Pankhurst 1966: 45); Yitbarek Haile Maryam; the latter's younger brother, Alemu Haile Maryam (Girma Kidane 1989: 73, 75); and Belachew Tamer.
5. The Empress Menen Handicrafts School was

Notes
established to train artists and craftsmen and was supported by the Ethiopian government.

6. A number of his paintings have been published in various magazines and books; for instance, a set of agricultural scenes was published in the Ethiop Observer in 1964. It is interesting that these and other published works by Yohannes show little stylistic affinity with Adamu’s recent paintings.

7. For an introduction to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church see Wondmagegnehu Aynro and Joachim Motowu 1970: Ephraim 1968.

8. Even today, religious paintings serve this important function. At a church school in the town of Gonder, for instance, Hayer (1971: 56) observed a priest-teacher, Mambr Kefle Yiam, using a mural depicting various religious subjects to teach his students.

9. Lepage asserts that based on existing evidence it appears that early painting in Ethiopia was “exclusive-ment religieuse et christienne” (1977: 60). He adds that there is no evidence for “profane” paintings, for instance in the interior of palaces, during the early periods.

10. Examining these schemes is outside the purview of this essay; Seyoum Wolde (1989) has critiqued some of them, as has Chojnacki (1983a: 22–28). There are problems with all of them. As Chojnacki (1983a: 27) points out, scholars have been preoccupied with assigning newly discovered paintings to specific periods; he questions whether there is enough data to do this. Leney (1967, 1970) presents the standard schema that most scholars continue to use. He delineates two major periods: a medieval period and the Gonderine period (beginning ca. 1635). The Gonderine period is often divided into two eras: the First Gonderine and the Second Gonderine (starting at the end of the seventeenth century). Heldman (1993) has presented periodization that delineates three periods: Zagwe (1137–1270), Early Solomonick (1270–1527), and Late Solomonick (1540–1679).

11. The term “Habesh” describes the Christian peoples, specifically the Amhara and Tigrean, living in the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. The term “Abyssinia” is derived from “Habesh.”

One could cite many sources that reveal the tendency to ascribe all change in Ethiopian church painting to outside influences. A good example is Claude Lepage’s (1977) essay “L’Équipe d’une histoire de l’ancienne peinture éthiopienne du X au X VI. siècle,” in which he delineates five phases for the church painting of the tenth through fifteenth centuries. All of the significant events that drove the evolution of painting during this 500-year period he sees as coming from outside Ethiopia.

12. The town of Aksum, located in northern Ethiopia, is still a very important religious center. It is traditionally held that in the year 333 King Ezana converted to Christianty.

13. Heldman, for instance, writes that it was during the sixth century that a “specifically Christian style and iconography was introduced to Ethiopia” (1993: 118).

14. Lithaba was a Zagwe king whose tomb, located at Boka, became an important pilgrimage site. The most accessible study of the churches in this area and their painting is Gerster 1970.

15. For reproductions of some of the paintings found in Beta Mariam see Gerster 1970: 95–98, pls. 66–75. Heldman (1993: 134) suggests that some of the Beta Mariam paintings, such as the frieze of animals, follow the Late Antique iconography introduced to Ethiopia during the Aksumite period (i.e., second to seventh centuries). But this in itself is not evidence that the paintings were produced during the Zagwe period, for, as Heldman (1993: 119) herself points out, many of the iconographic and stylistic features associated with Late Antiquity continued to be used until the sixteenth century.


17. Later, however, the convention was established of depicting wicked or evil people in profile.

18. Heldman (1993: 119) observes that the evidence offered in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Ethiopian Gospel manuscripts suggests that, until the sixteenth century, the formal and iconographic characteristics of Ethiopian manuscript illumination conformed closely to the Byzantine book traditions of Late Antiquity.

19. See Heldman 1993: 144–45, 176–77, for examples of the illuminations and for information about the manuscript, which is maintained today in the National Library, Addis Ababa.

20. Heldman points out that “much remains to be learned of artisans, patrons, and centers of artistic training and production. The distinctive styles of manuscript illumination await localization, and information concerning workshop practices and the training of artisans is virtually nonexistent” (1993: 141).

21. Heldman relates that “monasteries served as centers of training in chant, singing, and painting, and it seems that most artisans were monks, although it was possible to enter a monastery without taking monastic vows in order to obtain training as a scribe or painter” (1993: 143).


23. Other painters for whom we have scant information are Iyazu Mo’a and Abuna Maha’s S’eyon. Alex Mérab (1979: 3.303) mentions the names of three early painters: Meval, who lived in the time of Amda S’eyon I (r. 1314–44); Sige Dengel, during the reign of Yishak I (r. 1414–29); and Aleqa Halli, who was active in the time of Iyasu I (r. 1682–1706). Mérab describes Aleqa Halli as the “Raphael of Ethiopia.” It is not clear where he obtained these names. Mérab also offers the names of a few painters who lived during the second half of the nineteenth century.

24. Examples of Fre S’eyon’s or his workshop’s icons (and paintings that were influenced by this work) are reproduced and discussed in Heldman 1993: 77–81, 94, 160–62, 182–83, 1994: 13–69.


27. For information on the Evangelium elmysum see Heldman 1993: 241; for a reproduction of a single page see Heldman 1993: cat. 98.

28. For information on the Kewatu Be’ru see Pankhurst 1979; Chojnacki 1983a: 405–7; Heldman 1993: 248. For a reproduction of the painting see Chojnacki 1983a: fig. 190.

29. The best-known example is the Four Gospels of Emperor Yohannis, which contains illuminations influenced by the aforementioned Evangelium elmysum. See Heldman 1993: cat. 97 for reproductions and a discussion of the manuscript.

30. See, for example, the page from Collection de Prayers to Our Lady Mary depicting the Assumption of Mary that is reproduced in Heldman 1993 (cat. 117). It was painted sometime after 1730 and displays distinct Dercani features. See Heldman 1993: 251 for a discussion of the multiple sources for this image. The Portuguese served as a conduit between India and Ethiopia. The Portuguese were actively engaged at the court of various Ethiopian emperors and they maintained diplomatic and commercial ties with India. In addition to painting, there is evidence in royal architecture suggesting that Goan architects or artists may have come to Gonder to assist in building palaces and churches during the seventeenth century. 31. Objects that are covered (i.e., “overlapped”) may be read as residing farther back in space than objects in...
front. Using vertical positioning, more distant objects are placed higher in the picture plane.


33. Adamu signs his work "Painters-Priest Adamu Tesfaw."

34. It has been suggested that church paintings are generally anonymous because of the deep religious significance attached to producing holy images in Ethiopia (Chojnacki 1983a: 21). Elisabeth Biajo (1989: 63), in a conversation with Kasala Marcus, a contemporary artist who works as a restorer of paintings at the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, learned that in a religious context, the inclusion of one's signature in a painting would be considered an act of immodesty, for it is God's recognition that is most important.

35. Heldman (1993: 143) suggests that it may have been European craftsmen employed by the ruling elite in the fifteenth century who introduced the idea of signing works of art.

36. See Heldman 1993: 142 for a brief discussion of this topic.

37. This tradition is recorded in the Arta de Iyasu Moa, abbe du couvent de St. Damien de Hovey, translated and edited by S. Kehr (CSO 259/260, script. art. 49/50; Louvala, 1965) and cited in Heldman 1994: 80–81. Other evidence of the elevated status afforded artists in the church may be seen in traditions associated with Abbe Maha S'eyon and Fre S'eyon. It seems that monks could learn to work certain metals. The greatest stigma is attached to working iron. The only reference to monks engaged in ironworking that I have been able to find is in the nineteenth-century account of Charles Johnston (1844: 232–22), in which he describes seeing monks at Myolones in Shewa who worked as blacksmiths.

38. The variable status of different types of metal specialists is discussed to a limited extent in chapter 9.


40. Before the advent of schools, like the School of Fine Arts or the Empress Menen Handicrafts School in Addis Ababa, learning to paint was part of one's church education.

41. See Girma Fiseha and Silverman 1994: 372 and chapter 8 in this volume for a description of how Jembere Hallu was supported by the provincial ruler of Begemdir.

42. There is a third painting depicting this theme that Adamu painted at roughly the same time. It is also hung in Mutt Qoldos Geyorgis, on a wall opposite the painting illustrated here. Though the composition is basically the same, there is a good deal of variation in detail.

43. When used for painting, the melat is saturated with a gesso-like sizing that creates a viable surface for applying pigments. For information on the weaving of melat see chapter 12.

44. Adamu and Belayneh's introduction to their discussion of painting in the Ethiopian Church is a good example of this orientation: "The hall-mark of a sophisticated artistic expression of any country can be tested by its capacity to assimilate many elements from foreign sources and indigenise these foreign influences. Ethiopian representational art is no exception to this rule. In fact, Ethiopian art has synthesized both Oriental and Byzantine artistic traits" (1970: 79).

45. Over thirty years ago Chojnacki made the same observation: "the paintings of the Ethiopians were an extraordinary blend of imported models, transformed according to the psychology and artistic canons of the people. Of the paramount questions, which were the models and how were the models transformed, only the first has been dealt with fairly extensively... the second is awaiting sensible art historians who can be art critics at the same time." (1964: 1).

46. There are a few notable exceptions. Marilyn Heldman (1993: 92–94, 142–43, 182–85, 1994: 23–69), writing about the fifteenth-century monk-painter Fre S'eyon suggests that he (and members of his monastic circle) was responsible for creating a new iconographic and stylistic program for devotional images used in the veneration of Saint Mary and, in doing so, gave material form to the new religious doctrines formulated by the then emperor, Zara Ya'qob. Elisabeth Biajo (1994) has begun to consider the changes that occurred in the paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a reflection of the political and social climate of highland Ethiopia at that time.

47. The issue of creativity is an important one that, in the present context, we may only briefly touch upon. Donald Levine (1965: 238–86) offers a fascinating discussion of "individualism" in Ambula society. Chojnacki suggests that artists "in general did not make direct transpositions from a text into the image they were painting, but frequently followed a stereotyped version common in Christian art, though with the occasional addition of their own interpretation of details of the subject depicted" (1973b: 81). This view is echoed by Biajo (1989: 63), who asserts that the traditional painter did not consider himself an artist—least not in the modern sense of the word—who had to create a unique work; he was more concerned with reproducing a specific subject "correctly"—that is, in accordance with the iconographic and stylistic rules of the period in which he lived and worked. In such an environment there was not much room for creativity.

48. Molesworth offers a nice comment on the issue of originality in Ethiopian painting: "there seems to be a real nervousness of, even distaste for, 'original' work. Where the image of the illustration is firmly fixed in his mind, the artist goes ahead happily though he may introduce slight variation of size and very minor details in different paintings of the same subject. Far from finding the iconographic traditions irksome, the artist seems to find that their solid foundation brings a security, and enables him to concentrate on the aesthetic qualities of the picture in hand according to his feelings at the moment" (1957: 164).

49. Walter Rausign, writing about twentieth-century "folk art painting" in Ethiopia, is of the same opinion: "Ethiopian folk art painting is a young variant of the older Ethiopian tradition of painting—emerging from it and remaining in close connection with it. Folk art, on the basis of its origin, choice of theme and intention, must be considered to form a special branch within the long and distinguished tradition of Ethiopian painting" (1989: 71).

50. Biajo (1994) offers a brief, but important, foray into this document-rich arena.

51. This is especially true in the rural areas, where the majority of Ethiopia's people live.

52. Girma Kidane (1988) has offered brief biographies of four church-trained artists: Wendemendo Wende, Yengesta Jembere Hallu, Alemu Halle Maryam, and Berhane Yemien. More extensive documentation of their lives is required. Of course, the lives of many other painters living in Addis Ababa as well as in other parts of Ethiopia need to be documented. One in particular, Aleqa Yohannis Teklu, was the most prominent painter in Aksum. A number of his paintings can be seen in the Church of Mary of Zion in Aksum. He recently passed away but his life could easily be documented through...
discussions with his family and other members of the Aksum community. Another is Aleqa Gebre Selassie, who lived and worked in Mekele (Tigray). Little has been written about him, but a number of scholars (namely, Dan Bauer, Marilyn Heldman, and Neal Sobania) met with him and collected some of his paintings in the 1970s. The only example of the sort of study I am proposing is Jacques Mercier’s (1988) biography of the dechen (healer) Asres.

53. Chojnacki tells us that in “virtually all Church decoration from the 12th century onwards St. George occupies a prominent position; his portrayal is often found on the left side of the western wall of the Holy of Holies, a place of special distinction” (1973a: 57). He also indicates that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Saint George was often depicted in icons, usually placed on the lower half of the left wing of a triptych or on the left panel of a diptych (Chojnacki 1973b: 74).

54. In the stratified society of highland Christian Ethiopia, where only the nobility learned the arts of horsemanship and war, the victorious equestrian saint has had a special appeal. In a broader context, the equestrian saint has been a popular taliasonic image, having its roots in the world of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium, where the holy rider was used as an aporoponic image (Heldman 1993: 244).

55. For a description of these attributes see Chojnacki 1973b: 82–92.

56. For more information about the Ethiopian attire of the equestrian saints see Chojnacki 1983b.

57. The identification of the maiden in Ethiopian paintings as Birurawit (i.e., the maiden born in Beirut)—in Adam’s painting she is identified in an inscription located to the right of the maiden’s head—suggests that Ethiopians were familiar with the medieval tradition of a small town close to Beirut claiming to be the spot where Saint George fought the dragon and saved the maiden, said to be a daughter of the king of Beirut (Chojnacki 1973b: 57). Chojnacki (1973b: 58) suggests that it may have been Nicolò Brancaleon who introduced these two innovations.

58. Chojnacki (1973b: 54, 87) cites a number of specific examples in mural paintings found in churches in or near Bich’era (Gojjam).

59. These servants, according to the Encyclopaedia of Saint George and the Description of His Twelve Miracles, assisted Saxatil in burying the saint and later transported the body back to Saint George’s native city, Lydda.

60. For the dating of the church and its murals see Gerster 1970: 116. There is also an image of Saint Mercurius in the chapel of Aba Dan’el located on Mount Qorqor, which, according to Chojnacki (1975: 43) may date to as early as the turn of the fourteenth century. However, Heldman (1994: 173) has recently dated the murals in the chapel to the second half of the fifteenth century.

61. For additional information on Mercerus see Eskroeco 1991.


63. See Budge 1928: 3.757–76 for one of the saint’s biographies. For an overview of his life, especially how it is depicted in Ethiopian paintings, see Chojnacki 1971: 85–87; 1978b: no. 10.

64. Such practices were popular in Ethiopian monasticism.


66. Body objects are carried by members of the Ethiopian clergy. The sitarum is a rattle-like musical instrument used in Ethiopian Orthodox churches to maintain the cadence of liturgical chant.

67. This particular version of the tradition is published in Budge 1928: 3.876.


Chapter 8. Jembere and His Son Marcos

1. His works can be found in the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (Addis Ababa University), Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München, Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Nationalmuseum München, Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie (Paris), and Michigan State University Museum (East Lansing, Michigan). Jembere’s paintings have been collected by expatriates for some time. His painting The Birth of Christ (pl. 14), which dates from around 1960 and is today maintained in the Bayetiches Nationalmuseum in Munich, was reproduced as a UNICEF Christmas card in the 1980s. Rolf Italiano aand Jembere’s Story of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghali, which dates from around the same period, in an issue of Art International (1965). Jembere’s paintings have appeared in a number of recent exhibitions. For example, see Girma Fisseha and Raunig 1985: 67, 80, 102, 106–7, 109, 119; Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie 1992; 97; Girma Fisseha and Silverman 1994.

2. Much of the biographical information presented here is drawn from the authors’ earlier essay “Two Generations of Traditional Painters: A Biographical Sketch of Wasseila and Marcos Jembere” (1994), which was based on data collected in interviews with Jembere and Marcos in April and May of 1993. Additional material was gleaned from the short biography of Jembere published by Girma Kidane in 1989 and from a brief autobiographical statement prepared by Jembere for Girma Fisseha in 1986. See Girma Fisseha and Silverman 1994: 369 for information about the autobiography and a discussion of the problem of dealing with the discrepancies that occur among the three accounts.

3. This is traditionally the date on which a boy begins his formal church education. For an overview of a traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church education see Alaka Ermukem Kaledew 1970 and Tesfaye Wegg 1979: 10–21.

4. Calligraphy is learned because, in addition to producing the painting itself, the traditionally trained church painter must also be able to “label” the various figures depicted in the painting. This is the last reference made to any formal aspects of Jembere’s church education. It seems that he did not “finish his formal course of study” since it takes thirty years or more to receive a complete church education.

5. A thorough study of these tenets or canons has yet to be undertaken.

6. Artists attached to the imperial court were often well rewarded for their work. An oft-cited example is Nicolò Brancaleon, a Venetian artist who worked at the court of Emperor Lebna Dengel in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century (Chojnacki 1983a: 379). See also Haile Gabriel Dagze 1988: 215.

7. A dawil is equivalent to 100 kilograms, and one ge’neb is equal to 20 kilograms.

8. This account is presented in his autobiographical statement, see n. 2 above.

9. Jembere did not explain why he became involved in the independence movement.

10. According to Girma Kidane (1989: 75), he was given 6,000 birr.

11. For a brief biography of Balachew Tamer’s life see Taye Tadesse 1991: 6. Hailu Weldeyesus’s work is discussed below.

12. There is evidence that Jembere was painting in the 1980s. Both Elisabeth Bisio and Jacques Mercier collected paintings by the artist in the mid-1980s.

13. Eight paintings produced between 1991 and 1993 were purchased for the collection of Michigan State University Museum.


15. See Silverman’s essay on Qes-Adamu Tesfay in this volume for a brief discussion of individuality and an overview of the evolution of Ethiopian traditional painting. Interestingly, in the eyes of many students of
Ethiopian traditional art, it is this receptivity to change and interest in innovation, creativity, and individuality that have brought about the demise of Ethiopian traditional painting.


17. Though very few sketchbooks have been documented, it appears there is a tradition of maintaining a collection of basic patterns or templates. Ruth Planta (1973), for instance, documented a pattern book produced by an artist in Meqele (Tigray) at the beginning of the century. Silverman also had the opportunity to examine the sketchbook of the contemporary traditional painter Qes Legesse Mengistu in 1993.

18. One wonders how common this attitude is among traditional painters in Ethiopia. Silverman, during his work with the priest Adamu Tesfaw, encountered this same creative approach. See Silverman’s essay on Qes Adamsa in this volume.

19. We commissioned a number of paintings from Marcos that deal with a range of themes. These include Meqel Celebration; Market—Real Life Scenes; Hunting, Fishing, Marketing, Church; The Countryside; Saint Mercurius; The Judgment of Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Mekasha; The Battle of Adwa; Ethiopian Saints and Historical Figures; Humus; T’ignat Civilization; Tewodros and the Birth of Kings; The Birth of Jesus; Yohannes IV’s March to Matemata and the Medebit Invasion of Gonder; Last Judgment; Ahmed Gagne’s Invasion.

20. The nation became known as Ethiopia only after World War II.


22. An exception to this rule are the artists (e.g., the fifteenth-to-sixteenth century Venetian artist Niccolò Brancaleoni) who came to Ethiopia and worked for various rulers.

23. Arab Faqih, who chronicled the life of Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazzi, reported that the palace of Emperor Lebna Dengel (r. 1508–40) located at Andot-nob in Shewa, was decorated with “pictures, of lions, men and birds painted in red, yellow, green and other colours” (R. Basset, Histoire de la conquête de l’Abyssinie du XVe siècle) par Chahal d’Ad Dire Ahd al-Qadr intitulé Amad-Faqih [Paris, 1879], p. 215; cited in Pankhurst 1966: 9). The chronicler of the life of Emperor Bekassa, who ruled in Gonder from 1721 to 1730, indicates that the emperor’s palace was adorned with pictures (J. Guidi, Amide Johanni 1 Ysua I kalefik [Paris, 1955], p. 316; cited in Pankhurst 1966: 9). Henry Salt, who visited northern Ethiopia in the early nineteenth century, observed, “All classes of people in Abyssinia ... are fond of pictures; the inner walls of their churches being filled with them, and every chief considering himself fortunate, if he can get one painted on the wall of his principal room” (1967: 394). A French scientific mission that visited Ethiopia in the 1840s, for instance, reported that paintings “were never intended other than for the churches” but adds that “one nevertheless finds some in the palace of the king” (T. Lefébure et al., Voyage en Abyssie oriental pendant les années 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842, 1843 par une Commission Scientifique comprenant de Théophile Lebrun, A. Petit, Quartinet-Dillon, Vignaud, 9 vols. [Paris, 1845–48], vol. 1, p. lxxi; cited in Pankhurst 1971: 94).

24. Chojnacki points out that “lay subjects occasionally appeared. For example, the decoration of the royal palace with paintings was recorded by the chronicler of Emperor Bekassa, 1721–1730; this, however, was quite unusual” (1978: 73).

25. E.g., see Wyld’s (1888: 300–101) and Powell-Cotton’s (1902: 393–94) descriptions of the paintings in the Church of the Holy Trinity in Adwa; Wyld’s (1901: 171) description of the paintings in the Church of the Savior of the World, also in Adwa; and Bent’s (1893: 42) comments on the paintings in the old stone church at Asmara.

26. The Zemen Mesafah, or Era of the Princes, was a particularly unstable period during which local rulers were constantly engaged in conflicts as they maneuvered for control of the central and northern highlands of Ethiopia. See Bisso 1994: 551.

27. Bisso (1993: 9) cites two examples, one involving a painting given by Emperor Yohannes IV (r. 1872–89) to the German diplomat Gerhard Rolfs, and the other a painting given to a Swiss mission in the 1930s by Emperor Haile Selassie. There also is evidence that painters used to give their work to noblemen and dignitaries as New-Year’s gifts and that rulers exchanged paintings as gifts (Bisso 1993: 8–9).

28. A line-drawing of the painting is reproduced by Salt (1967: following p. 394). It depicts two “Abyssinian horsemen engaged in battle with the Gall.” Salt indicates that it took the painter six days to complete the painting and offers the following description of the process: “He first suspended the paper against the wall; then, made an exact outline of his design with charcoal; and afterwards went carefully over it again with a coarse sort of Indian ink; subsequently to which he introduced the colours” (1967: 394).

29. Though it is not explicitly stated, we may assume that he commissioned the paintings. His collection is now maintained in the Institute of Ethnology of the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg (Pankhurst 1966: 32–36). Pankhurst (1966: 29) also mentions a series of paintings by the artist Mikael Ingida Work that were collected by the French traveler Hugh Le Roux. Another important collection of paintings, by Belhaul Gebre Maryam, an artist from Tigray, was made by the Swiss engineer M. E. W. Molly in the 1920s. These were then included in the Musée d’Ethnographie in Geneva (Pittard 1928).

30. Zervos (1936: 467) offers a brief biography of this well-known merchant. Also see Natsoulas 1977: 130–32.

31. The artists originally came from various provinces: Shewa, Tigray, Begemdir (Gonder), Gojam, Wello, and Wellega. Pankhurst (1966: 18–19), drawing primarily from the writings of Mérab and Zervos, lists and offers a limited amount of information on twenty-one artists who lived and worked in Addis Ababa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

32. Djougashvili was known as the Alqawrash, or “Prince.”


34. All of these “pioneers” have passed away. Limited biographical information about some of them has been collected but for the most part we know very little about their lives and work. The most useful compilation of information is Richard Pankhurst’s 1966 article “Some Notes for a History of Ethiopian Secular Art.” In this article he presents data gleaned from primary documentation and his own interviews with various artists. Other scholars offer additional information on artists. See, e.g., Grima Kidane 1989; Taye Tadesse 1991; Girma Fisseha and Raunig 1985.

35. The school was closed during the Italian Occupation, and in 1978 it changed its name to the Handicrafts and Small-Scale Industries Development Agency (HASIDA) of the government of Ethiopia. It was finally closed in 1991 (Bisso 1993: 16). Molesworth (1957: 366) offers a brief discussion of the support of government schools and workshops in Addis Ababa.

36. The ITTC was founded in the early 1970s. Its name was changed in December 1993 to Ethiopian Tourist Trading Enterprises (ETTE).

37. Ricci (1989: 120–52) reproduces a representative collection of skin paintings that may have been produced about fifty years ago. Since the paintings bear no signatures, it is impossible to know whether they were made in a workshop or by independent artists.

38. Bisso (1993: 22) also recorded that the well-known traditional painter Berhaney Yemenu painted the Church of Peter and Paul in the Kolfe district of Addis Ababa.

Notes
39. There are, of course, various idiosyncratic themes that do not fit in any of these previous groups. Benzing (1988b: 116) offers a similar set of nine categories: biography; legend of the Queen of Sheba; nobility; politics; and diplomacy, court festivities, fights and battles; tribunal and legal sanctions; hunting; games and sports; everyday life, including festivities; animal society.

40. For more information on this popular theme see Perzelt 1978 and Pankhurst and Pankhurst 1957.

41. These compositions are pictorial representations of Abyssinian folk stories that function in a manner very similar to Aesop's fables. To the best of our knowledge this particular genre has no precedent in earlier eras. It would be interesting to discover the creator of the genre, which is firmly rooted in oral tradition. An analysis of one of these paintings can be found in Scholler and Girna Fisseha 1985: 164–66.

42. Donald Crumpey (1994: 6–10) recently considered the "place of violence in historic Ethiopian political culture" in his analysis of the life and times of Emperor Tewodros.

43. To date, no one has attempted a critical analysis of the range and frequency of subjects in Ethiopian painting. No doubt such a study would yield significant insights into the cultural dialogue between these paintings and visitors to Ethiopia reflected in these paintings. A number of studies explore this phenomenon; perhaps the most relevant to the Ethiopian situation is Benetta Jules-Rosette's "Mesage of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective" (1984).

44. One of the earliest extant manuscripts, the Four Gospels of Abbot Yiasu Mo'a, dating from 1280–81, includes a portrait of the monk who commissioned the manuscript, Yiasu Mo'a. See Heldman 1993: 176 for a discussion of the manuscript and its illustrations.

45. Portraits of historical figures like the legendary fourth-century kings of Aksum (Abreha and Atsbeha), Emperor Yekuno Amlaq (c. 1270–85), Emperor Susneyos (c. 1607–32), Emperor Theodore I (c. 1667–82), Emperor Yiasu I (c. 1682–1706), and Emperor Bekaffa (c. 1712–30) appear in manuscripts dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A number of these are illustrated in Jäger 1960.

46. Earnestine Jenkins (1995) has recently examined one of these manuscripts, maintained in the Church of Tekle Haymanot at Ambaiblot. It dates from 1817 and its illustrations include scenes of Sahle Selassie overseeing a banquet, playing chess, having his hair braided, killing "heathens," hunting an elephant, etc.

47. The Church of Debre Tseha in Gonder is said to have had a portrait of Emperor Iyasu II (c. 1730–55) beneath a representation of the Crucifixion and a portrait of the emperor's mother, Meneneweb, beneath an image of the Holy Virgin (E. Guild, Amhara-Iyasse it Iyasse [Paris, 1910], p. 106; cited in Pankhurst 1966: 9). It is likely that these portraits indicated that the emperor and his mother had commissioned the religious paintings for the church; such sponsorship was quite common during the Gonderine period.

48. Pankhurst (1966: 16–18) cites numerous examples of portraits of Emperor Menelik II, as well as other members of the Abyssinian aristocracy, in churches throughout the empire.

49. The genre of portraiture has not yet been studied. Pankhurst's "Some Notes for a History of Ethiopian Secular Art" (1966) offers a compilation of references to portraiture as one of the themes of Ethiopian "secular" painting and is still the most complete treatment of the subject. Girna Fisseha and Raunig (1985: 26–27) briefly consider the topic, drawing on Pankhurst's earlier work and the descriptions of Zeros and Merah Ricci (1989: 11) includes a painting of a "Moslem noblewoman" who, from the inscription on the top right of the painting, is named Ahmad Abdul ('A). Ricci attributes the painting to Etrebe (Amsara) at the turn of the present century. The man is rendered as a "type," following the Second Gonderine style of Ethiopian traditional painting. But because it is undoubtedly a portrait, Ricci suggests that it may be one of the earliest examples of this genre.

50. Pankhurst (1968: 19–20) offers a brief discussion of the influence of photography. Adrien Zeros, who lived in Ethiopia from 1905 to 1935, was one of the first to produce the documentation of portraits. He was particularly impressed with the work of Ibarak Halli Maryam, who produced a particularly fine portrait of Emperor Haile Selassie. He relates that other favorite subjects of portrait painters were Ras Mekonnen, Lij Iyasu, Emperor Menelik II, Empress Menen, and the imperial children (Zeros 1936: 244).

51. One will find portraits of Chancellor Adolf Hitler, King Leopold III, King Fouad I of Egypt, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, President Albert Lebrun, King Victor Emmanuel III, Emperor Hirohito, King Gustave V, President Gazi Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, and King Imam Yehya.

52. Other traditional-style paintings by Halli are reproduced on the facing page, and more portraits of Ethiopian and European dignitaries are scattered throughout Zeros's book. One can observe the close affinity between photography and painting by comparing Halli's portrait of Ras Mekonnen and the photograph (reproduced on p. 62 in Zeros 1936) from which it is derived.

53. Zeros (1936: 246) lists some of the foreign artists who worked in Ethiopia during the first three decades of the twentieth century.

54. For a discussion of the influence of painters who came to Ethiopia in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see Choqznaki 1983a: 375–432.

Chapter 9. Silversmithing in the Highlands

1. One of the richest sources of information for beginning to reconstruct the history of this tradition are the travel accounts of European visitors to Ethiopia. A thorough survey of the travel literature, however, is well beyond the scope of this essay, but examples of the sort of information these accounts contain are used throughout to illustrate the long history of gold- and silversmithing in Ethiopia and to begin the process of placing these traditions in a broader context. For a detailed discussion of the light that these sources shed on the tradition, see Silverman and Sobania n.d.-b.

2. Even studies of ironworking and the role of blacksmiths in society are limited, though there are a few good sources, e.g., Amborn 1990 and Todd 1985.

3. For a discussion of this stratification see Hoben 1970.

4. A variety of terms are found in the scholarly literature to refer to these special groups found in many Ethiopian societies: "submerged classes," "outcast groups," "pariah groups," "occupationaries," "depressed groups," and "caste groups." The literature is full of debate addressing the validity of using any and all of these terms.

5. For descriptions of some of these finds see Munro-Hay 1989: 210–21, 228–33; 1991: 180–95; 1993. There has been a limited amount of work reconstructing the history of gold- and silversmithing in Ethiopia. The best-studied objects made from gold and silver (as well as copper and its alloys) are associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and include items such as processionals, crosses, neck crosses, sistreums (z'malī), the finials of prayer sticks (nqumqum), chalices, and crowns. See Moore 1973, 1989; Pankhurst 1981; Brus 1975.


7. Tossi is not an Ethiopian name. Gezaehgen told us that his father's father was in fact Italian but that his father had never met him and knew nothing about the man. Apparently, Tossi left Aksum before Gezaehgen's father was born.

8. The design of the ring is very similar to pendant necklaces produced by Bedouin smiths in Arabia and by the jewellers of Yemen and Oman.
9. Artificial aging is a response to market demands. The tourists from Europe and America who visit Ethiopia prefer things that are old, and a variety of aging processes are employed by the artists and artisans who fabricate goods for the tourist trade.

10. Though not as abundant as the Maria Theresa thalers, other silver coins, from Saudi Arabia and Italy, for instance, as well as coins minted during the reigns of Emperors Menilik II (r. 1889–1913) and Haile Selassie I (r. 1930–74), are in circulation. Though they are not accepted as legal tender, they still are valued for their silver content.

11. For these practices in West Africa see Garrard 1989.

12. At times the finished product does not weigh as much as the metal originally given to the silversmith; in such situations the silversmith will return the difference to his customer with the finished product.


Chapter 10. Sorghum Surprise

1. Ethiopia has one of the fastest-growing populations in Africa. At the current fertility rate of 7.0 children per woman, this country of 58 million will double its population in twenty-three years (13 percent of the population is urban and 87 percent rural) (Menzel 1995: 31; Aeda Hallermariam and Klaas 1993: 58).

2. One quintal is equal to a hundredweight, or 100 kilograms (220.46 pounds).

3. The name Yehudgebaya simply translates "Sunday market." The village apparently is or was the site of a weekly market held on Sundays.

4. By some estimates the speakers of afan-Oromo make up more than 40 percent of Ethiopia’s population. They live throughout much of the west, south, and east of the country as peasant agriculturalists and pastoralists and may be Christians, Muslims, or traditionists.

5. Like Yehudgebaya, the name Hamenfugeba is a reference to the town serving as the site of a weekly market, this one meeting on Thursdays.

6. During the later years of the reign of Haile Selassie I, the monetary unit was a dollar of one hundred cents, with one Ethiopian dollar equal to twenty U.S. cents.

7. In June 1993, the official rate of exchange was 5 birr to U.S. $1.

8. Tutors planned to return to school and the tenth grade in the fall of 1993 and hoped to finish the twelfth grade in 1996.

Chapter 11. Tabita Hatuti

1. Wolaytatsi is classified by linguists as belonging to the Omotic group of the Sidama cluster.

2. This classification is discussed in Tsehai Berhane Selassie 1991a: 15–18.

3. This figure is derived from unpublished notes from fieldwork carried out from September 1989 to July 1993. The estimate is based on an intensive house-to-house baseline survey among the potters' community.

4. The issue of potters as a "caste" group in Ethiopia has been discussed by David Todd (1978), among others. Donald Levine, in his Great Ethiopia (1974: 170, 195–97), seems to use the term "caste" synchronously with "ethnic groups." Since "caste" is loaded with religious meaning, it is best avoided in the case of Ethiopia. My objection to the term is also based on the fact that most artisans in Ethiopia can move in and out of their occupations. See Halkemaler 1989: 9–10. For more on my argument, see Tsehai Berhane Selassie 1991b: 21–22; 1994c: 350–52. Although they do not make the point explicit, Steven Kaplan (1992) and Jon Abbink (1987) provide further evidence on the difficulties of using the term "caste" with regard to Ethiopia. In many linguistic groups in Ethiopia, "immigration" rather than "caste" is the concept applied to distance the potter. See also Casier 1988: 162–63.

5. This is a widespread system of symbolic hierarchy and classification in Ethiopia. See Lange 1982: 70, 75–78, 98 b 7, 103 passim.

6. The men of the potters' community in Wolayta are the ritual experts for the dominant group, the farmers. They perform rites and sing and dance at funerals and weddings. See Tsehai Berhane Selassie 1991a: 21, 1994c.

7. Occasionally, children in Wolayta also make clay figures, depicting pregnant women, new hairstyles, male and female bodies, etc. These are strictly toys, and adults discourage their production.

8. Landlords owned and controlled access to forests (and therefore fuelwood), grazing grounds, and certain sources of water such as springs. Such control over the use of the physical environment was particularly limiting to potters. See Tsehai Berhane Selassie 1994a.

9. Occupational endogamy is practiced in different ways. In many areas, only weavers and potters intermarry, excluding blacksmiths, tailors, and slaves (Casier 1988: 166, 169, 189).


11. Although I have interviewed many potters, no one has ever explained their move away from a rural residence using this reasoning; nevertheless, it appears to be an acceptable reason for asserting one’s independence, and many practice it.

12. These grassroots political structures created to support the Marxist-Leninist Party. The peasants’ associations formed the local level of government, and the farmers’ service cooperatives functioned as the base for the circulation of basic goods and services to the rural community. See Clapham 1988: 171–79.

13. Many other women that I interviewed in Welalya said the same thing. It was their way of rejecting a program that was forced on them.

14. Villagization was a controversial program, supposedly designed to aggregate scattered hamlets to provide better delivery of basic services such as schools, water, and health care. In reality, it is said, it was for easier control of the rural people by the Marxist-Leninist Party, which ruled the country until 1991. See Clapham 1988: 174–79.

15. The separation in Shento was partly due to the historical accident that a large number of potters lived in that particular area. Elsewhere in Wolayta potters were deliberately segregated as a result of the traditional prejudice against them. See Tsehai Berhane Selassie 1991a: 239–40, 268.

16. This program was based on a study made by the Handicrafts and Small-Scale Industries Unit (HSIU), a joint International Labour Office/Economic Commission for Africa project sponsored by the African Training and Research Center for Women (ATRCW). See the Introduction in Halkemaler 1980.

17. Development agents and home agents argue in a matter-of-fact manner that women should be left out of technology-training schemes because they are illiterate. “Literacy” included having mathematics skills, and by 1984 no potter woman was deemed literate enough. Even if they could read and write, they lacked the power and didn’t feel the need to enforce gender equality and reverse the local government’s decision to exclude them.

18. Gender plays a role in pottery production in much of Africa. Asante women potters, for instance, are forbidden to make anthropomorphic and zoomorphic decoration, which is supposed to threaten their fertility (Fagg and Picton 1970: 10). In Ethiopia it is generally a man’s job to construct houses and provide drinks, and thus in the south men are generally restricted to...
making only roof tops and to helping women in the firing and selling processes.


20. Hakemulder (1980: 26, 63) reports on similar failures, albeit with surprise, elsewhere in Ethiopia. See also Tsehai Berhane-Selassie 1991a for a report on Band Aid–sponsored research to evaluate its own impact on rural women.

21. Hakemulder (1980: 17–18) describes a motley collection of more or less similar items for other areas in central Ethiopia.

22. Men dig clay in Wolayta only when women are threatened, or are actually trapped by the holes saving in. Elsewhere, men can dig clay. See Hakemulder 1980: 51. Pottery always follow a set pattern in their work, until age requires modifications. See Hakemulder 1980: 13.

23. See Hakemulder 1980: 18–21 for comparison. The type of modeling described by Hakemulder (1980: 20, 56) does not seem to be practiced by potters in Wolayta, although she reports that the potters she saw in Menagesha, near Addis Ababa, had come from Wolayta.

24. For decorating practices elsewhere in Ethiopia and further detailed descriptions of pottery decoration in Wolayta, see Hecht 1969: 9, 93–99.

25. No bellows are used for firing pottery in Wolayta. Hakemulder (1980: 21) describes how firing was done indoors in the kitchen in Addis Ababa. In another village, where there has been no government intervention, the potters fire their wares outside (Hakemulder 1980: 44).

26. Elsewhere in the country women are actually forbidden to fire the pottery they make; firing is a man’s task. See Hakemulder 1980: 46.

27. The amount of smoke generated by open-air firing has been cited as a reason for placing potters on the outskirts of populated areas in Latin America (Rice 1987: 156).


29. Hakemulder (1980: 60) reports that in Menagesha the men take care of the marketing as a rule.

30. Hakemulder (1980: 48) also reports that couples in pottery families share their income.

31. Despite Cassiers’s (1988: 166 n. 18) amazement, I am personally aware of at least one man that has been in use for the last four decades.

Chapter 12. Ito and Arba—Two Doko Weavers

1. Formerly, these structures were thatched with katu, the stem sheath of the bamboo plant. But today most houses are thatched using wheat straw.

GLOSSARY

Edited by Grover Hudson

This glossary includes all the words of Ethiopian languages that appear in the book, except for names of persons and places. The words are listed here alphabetically according to their English-alphabet spellings as used in the book, followed by their pronunciations and meanings. Oromo words are presented in the current established Oromo orthography.

The English-alphabet spellings, without the use of special characters, are a simplification which is helpful for most readers, who are uninterested in the phonetic details of the languages that special characters would express, for example, the high-tone vowels of Me’en shown with accents [ä, ö, ü, ć], the voiced glottalized implosive stops of Me’en and Oromo [b] and [d], and the central vowels of Amharic and Gurage-Chaha [a] and [i]. For those who are interested in such details, however, this glossary includes pronunciations as International Phonetic Alphabet representations. Consonants followed by apostrophes are voiceless glottalized ejectives.

The pronunciation of some words in this glossary, especially those of the little-studied languages Gamo (Gamu), Me’en, and Wolayta, has been based entirely on information provided by the authors of the essays. The pronunciation of most words of the better-known languages Amharic, Gurage-Chaha, Harari, and Oromo, however, has been verified in the available dictionaries: Thomas Kaiser, Amharic-English Dictionary, 2 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1980); Wolf Leslau, Ethnological Dictionary of Gamo, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1979); Wolf Leslau, Ethnological Dictionary of Harari (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); Gene Gragg, Oromo Dictionary (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1981); and Hamid Muhumed, Oromo Dictionary, vol. 1, English-Oromo (Atlanta: Sigalee Oromoo Publishing Co., 1995).

A = Amharic
G = Gurage-Chaha
Ga = Gamo
H = Harari
M = Me’en
O = Oromo
W = Wolayta
gobu (G) [goboe] large wood bowl used for serving food, especially on ceremonial occasions
gobu merk (H) [gobra marfi] basket pattern: "slave-needle"
goblu nabo (H) [gobtbar nadoba] seat in the goblu gur, where "ordinary" people sit
goblu sota mtana (G) [gido sota mita] two horizontal pieces of wood attached to the vertical posts of a loom
goli (H) [goli] society of young women of similar age who live in the same neighborhood
gomi (H) [gerengi] term describing the colors used in traditional Harari baskets (as opposed to those used for tourist baskets)
gogo (G, A) [gepo] hops-like plant used in fermentation of traditional beer (Rhamnus prinoides)
gidir gur (H) [gdir gair] traditional living room in a Harari home; lit. "big room"
gidir nabo (H) [gdir nadoba] seat in the gidir gur reserved for the elderly
gihi (G) [giha] a caste group of tailors; a tailor
goldoni (O) [golondi] leather and wood container for liquids
gombwa (W) [gombowa] pot used for transporting 
(y or tafu)
gunj (M) [gojigur] wooden bowl
pyi (W) [gojik] farmer
[gur] (G) [ggorara] deity of the Fuga
geki (O) [gojka] type of basketry milk container
gubbe (O) [gubbe] name-giving ceremony for firstborn male
[gufta mudali (H) [gufta mudali] hairnet container
[gufta] (A) [gwaanda] unit of measure, ca. 10 kg
[gufta] (G) [gwaanda] wooden headrest
hebe (A) [habba] Semitic Christian peoples, specifically the Amhara and Tigrai, living in the central and northern Ethiopian highlands
hala mel (H) [hala mola] important lessons associated with social etiquette
hilika (Ga) [balika] elected leader (A. [alakka])
human moat (H) [hammat moat] basket that a new bride makes for her mother-in-law
hara (A) [hara] a vine or tendril of a climbing plant; the decorative designs used to frame the pages of manuscripts
harta (Ga) [harta] pit-style loom
ilaha (W) [ilaha] polite term for a potter or artisan; lit. "people who make things"
ilaha (G) [holotk] fiber derived from roots of a small tree and used to weave containers
hurud (H) [hurud] yellow
hurud ini (H) [hurud inii] type of yellow spice; lit. "yellow wood"
injaa (A) [njitra] thin, flat, spongy, fermented bread made from tef, a millet-like cereal grown in the highlands of Ethiopia
injaa ilaha (O) [intila farasfa] marriage; lit. "the girl away"
injaa ga (Ga) [intara] narrow stick that holds the bobbin in the shuttle
injaa (Ga) [injatu] drop spindle used for spinning cotton (A. [nirajj])
jub (G) [jub] rotating credit association (A. [kukib])
jub (O) [juba] stick for mixing curdled milk
jub magh (H) [jub magha] incense container
jub magh (A) [juby] empress
jub magh (O) [jubata] curdled milk
jubka (W) [jubak] coffee pot (A. [jubaka])
jabak (M) [jakak] type of tree (Maytenus senegalensis (Lam.) Exell.)
jub (M) [jiba] large clay cooking or storage pot
jubka (Ga) [kacina] threads running the length of the loom, referred to as the warp
jubka (W) [kakera] pot for serving food
kabere (W) [kabere] oreous, (burned) black, brittle
kita (Ga) [kita] stem sheath of the bamboo plant; formerly used to thatch Doko houses
ker (G) [kan] skilled person, master house builder
ker (W) [kere] pottery saucepan
kitch (G, A) [kiti] minced meat, a Gurage specialty
kide (G) [kibei] wooden-soled shoes
kidi (O) [kidze] small water and milk container with a lid
kimori (M) [komori] hereditary ritual leader
kia (A) [kia] eucalyptus
kia (O) [kere] type of tree used in making wood objects and also as a tapework purgative (Hamig abishin)
kusa (Ga) [kote] spun cotton
kusa (W) [kusa] horizontal band on the guri milk container
kusa quinbana (O) [kusa kudzana] horizontal band on lid of the guri milk container
kusa quinbana (O) [kasa baidzani] part of the guri below the kusa band (kia “down,” “under”)
kusa (M) [kak] leather bracelets
kusa (M) [laga] royal friendship bond
kua moja (H) [kua moja] basketry plate used as cover for another basket
kua (A) [kia] tie-fis
kuma (H) [kuma] large flat basket
komori (G) [kum] plain-weave border design on the arisi
kuma (O) [kuma] word used to designate the guri milk container when used during ceremonies, always full of milk or curdled milk
kuma (O) [kuma] aromatic wood
kulakura (W) [kulakura] pitch-shaped ceramic vessel
kuma (G) [kuma] commoners
kuma (M) [kuma] servant who takes care of the children or the milk in the container
kuma (M) [kuma] bamboo sieve
kuwu (A) [kamu] prayer stick carried by priests
kuwu (O) [kamu] giraffe tail hair, decoration made with same

Glossary

mashul (H) [malala] “Praise to God,” an example of an inscription that may be woven into a basket
messu (Ga) [mistra] loom harness
mepat (A) [mepat] automobile
mepat (Ga) [mepat] the heater of a loom
mepat (G) [makat] mortar (of mortar and pestle, for grinding)
mepat (A) [mape] basket pattern: “belt”
mepat (A) [mape] church title for the leader of the Geme
mepat (G) [mepat] table-basket
mepat (O) [mepat] feast of the finding of the “True Cross” celebrated on 27 September
mepat (G) [mepat] tradition of “receiving coins” from visitors to the mepat (G) mepat (O) [mepat] hymns sung at funerals and memorial services
mepat (G) [mepat] basketry weaving technique; lit. “winding”
mepat (A) [mepat] comb
mepat (H) [mepat] type of sturdy grass used for the core of the coil of a basket
mepat (W) [mepat] round baking pan made from pottery (A. [mepat])
mepat (O) [mepat] word used to designate the cow milk container when used during ceremonies, always full of milk or curdled milk
mepat (Ga) [mepat] shuttle, the tool that carries the weft threads across the warp
mepat (G) [mepat] group of young women who regularly come together to weave baskets (mepat “passing the day”; gur “house”; Ahmed’s gloss of the term is “house of work”)
mepat (O) [mepat] upper section of the guri milk container; lit. “neck”
mepat (G) [mepat] type of small container for aromatic butter
mepat (M) [mepat] small iron pick
mepat (G) [mepat] bamboo (A. [mekat] “reed”) and objects made from bamboo
References


Alaka Imbakan Kallewold 1970 Traditional Ethiopian Church Education. Translated by Menghestu Lemma. New York: Teachers College Press.


Amborn, H. 1990 Differenzierung und Integration: Volkselemente Unter-

Anonymous

Anselmi, Ines

Asea Hailemariam and Helmut Kloos

Asmarom Legesse

Bahrey

Bahruru Zewde

Barbour, J. and Wandibba Simiyu, eds.

Beaux Arts Magazine

Belayneh Michael, S. Chojecká, and Richard Pinkhurst, eds.

Bender, Wolfgang

Benjamin, Brigitte


Berhanu Ababa

Bisie, Elisabeth


Bouss de Boza, P. M. du

Brous, René

Buchholzer, J.

Budge, E. A. Wallis

Bureau, Jacques

Caputo, Robert

1983b “A Note on the Costumes in 15th- and Early 16th-Century Paintings: Portraits of the Nobles and Their Relation to the Images of Saints on Horseback.” In Ethiopian Studies—

References


Chauss, Laurence

Chojecká, Stanislav


1983b “A Note on the Costumes in 15th- and Early 16th-Century Paintings: Portraits of the Nobles and Their Relation to the Images of Saints on Horseback.” In Ethiopian Studies—


1983b “A Note on the Costumes in 15th- and Early 16th-Century Paintings: Portraits of the Nobles and Their Relation to the Images of Saints on Horseback.” In Ethiopian Studies—

284
Wienbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.

Clapham, C.
1988
“Temperature and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia.”
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coen, Carlston S.
1935
“Measuring Ethiopia and Flight into Arabia.”
Boston: Little, Brown, and Co.

Coote, Jeremy, and Anthony Shelton, eds.
1992
Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics.
Oxford: Claredon Press.

Crummey, Donald
1994
“Personality and Political Culture in Ethiopian History: The Case of Emperor Tewodros.”

Dahl, Gudrun
1990
“Mas and Milk Pots: The Domain of Borana Women.”
Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis.

DeCarbo, E. A.
1977
Indiana University, Bloomington.

Diop, Cheikh Anta
1974
The African Origin of Civilization—Myth or Reality.
Translated by Mercer Cook.
New York: L. Hill.

Duri Mohammed
1955

Ephrem Isaac
1968
The Ethiopian Church.
Boston: Henry N. Sawyer.

Esbroock, Michel van
1991
New York: Macmillan.

Essaye Gebe Medhin
1991
Habana: Centro Wilfredo Lam.

Fagg, William Buller, and Picton, John
1970
The Potters in Africa.
London: British Museum Publications.

Gachuru, Margareta
1993
“Work of Two Worlds Wins the Top Spot.”
Daily Nation (Nairobi), 26 Nov., p. 10.

Garrard, Timothy
1989
Munich: Prestel-Verlag.

Gebru Woldu
1973
“A Study of the Attitude of the Gorge towards Fega (Low Caste Occupational Groups).”
Senior essay, School of Social Work, Addis Ababa University.

Gell, A.
1992
“The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology.”
In Coote and Sheldon, 1992: 40–63.

Gerster, Georg
1970
Churches in Back: Early Christian Art in Ethiopia.
London: Phaidon.

Getachew Haile
1991
New York: Macmillan.

Girma Fisseha and Walter Ramig
1985
Mench and Geschichten in Ethiojismus Villermelci.
Innsbruck: Pinguin-Verlag; Frankfurt am Main: Umschau-Verlag.

Girma Kidane
1989
“Four Traditional Ethiopian Painters and Their Life Histories.”

Gonzales Mora, Magda J.
1992
“Afrikan Kunst lebt: Nicht nur im Museum.”
Parnischen (Schweizer Gesellschaft für Entwicklung und Zusammenarbeit) 129 (Sept.): 6–8.

Graburn, Nelson H. H.
1976
“Introduction: Arts of the Fourth World.”

Haile Gabriel Dagne
1970
“The Ethiopian Orthodox Church School System.”
In The Church of Ethiopia: A Panorama of History and Spiritual Life, edited by Georg Hable Selassie, pp. 81–97.
Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

1988
“The Scriptorium at the Imperial Palace and the Manuscripts of Addis Ababa Churches.”

References

Hakemmulder, Roel
1980
Potten: A Study of Two Villages in Ethiopia.
Addis Ababa: ECA/ILO/SIDA Handicrafts and Small-Scale Industries Unit, African Training and Research Centre for Women, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa.

Hallpike, Christopher
1968
“The Status of Craftsmen among the Konso of Southwest Ethiopia.”

Harris, W. Cornwallis
1844
Highlands of Ethiopia.
New York: J. Winchester New World Press.

Head, Sidney W.
1969
“A Conversation with Gebre Kristos Desa.”

Hecht, Elisabeth-Dorothea
1969
The Pottery Collection.
Addis Ababa: Haile Selassie I University, Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum.

1992
“Basketwerk von Haraz.”

Heldman, Marilyn
1989
“An Eswatiniyan Style and the Gunda Gunde Style in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Manuscript Illumination.”

1994
The Marion Ions of the Painter Fe Seym: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality.
Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

Heldman, Marilyn, with Stuart C. Munro-Hay
1993
African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia.
New Haven: Yale University Press.

Heyer, Friedrich
1971

Hoben, Allan
1970
“Social Stratification in Traditional Ambiara Society.”
In Social Stratification in Africa, edited...

Italiander, Rolf

Jiger, Otto

Jenkins, Earnestine

Johnston, Charles

Jules-Rosette, Bennett

Kaplan, Steven

Kasfir, Sidney

Keller, C.

Kennedy, Jean

Kifte Beseat

Lange, Werner I.

Lepage, Claude
1967 "Épuisée d’une histoire de l’ancienne peinture ethiopienne du Xe au XVe siècle." Afrob, no. 8: 59–94.

Leroy, Jules
1967 Ethiopian Painting in the Late Middle Ages and during the Gonder Dynasty. New York: Praeger.


Leslau, Wolf


Lett, T.

Levine, Donald N.


Lewis, Herbert R.

Masquet, Jacques

Marcus, Harold

Menzel, Peter

Méralh, Docteur [Etienne]

Mercier, Jacques


Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs et al.


Molesworth, H. D.

Moore, Eine


Munro-Hay, Stuart C.


Murray, Edmund F.

Musée National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie

Natsoulas, Theodore

Nordlen, Hermann

Pankhurst, Richard


1993

1994

Pankhurst, Richard, and Rita J. Pankhurst
1979
“Ethiopian Ear-Picks.” Arab. no. 10: 101–10.

Pankhurst, Sylvia, and Richard K. P. Pankhurst
1957
Ethiopia Observer 1 (6). (Special issue on the Queen of Sheba.)

Parkyns, Sibella
1966

Pearce, Nathaniel
1820

Perceval, Cilla Fabo
1978

1981

Pittard, Eugène
1928

Plant, Ruth
1973

Podlief, Leo
1978
Traditional Zorrian Pottery. Munich: Galerie F. Jahn.

Powell–Cotton, P. H. G.
1902

Prussin, Labelle
1987

Raumig, Walter
1989

Ravenni, P. L.
1991

Rey, Charles R.
1923
Unexplored Abyssinia As It Is To-Day. London: Seely, Service & Co.

Ricci, Lanfranco
1986
“In margine a una mostra di dipinti etiopici tradizionali.” Atti dell’istituto Universitario Orientale (Napoli) 46 (2): 227–90.

1989

Rice, Prudence
1987

Salles, Berit
1990

Salt, Henry
1967

Scholler, Heinrich, and Girma Fisseha
1985

Sebhat G. Eigziabher
1983

Serge Sable Selassie
1972

1992

Seyoum Wolde
1989

Shack, William
1964
“Notes on Occupational Castes among the Gurage of South–West Ethiopia.” Man 64 (5): 50–53.

1966

1974

Silverman, Raymond, and Neil Sobania
n.d.-a

n.d.-b

Simoons, Frederick J.
1960
Northwest Ethiopian Peopls and Economy. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

1994
Theay Tadesse
1991

Tesfome G. Wagaw
1979

Todd, David
1978

1985

Tsehai Berhanne-Selassie
1991


Early Marriage in Ethiopia. Geneva and Addis Ababa: Inter-Africa Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children. “The Wolayta Conception of Inequality, or

Vogel, Susan


Von Gugum, A., et al.

Wilding, R.

Wondmagegnehu Aynro and Joachim Motowu
1970 The Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Orthodox Mission.

Wylde, A. B.


Yohannes Tezema

Zervos, Adrien

CONTRIBUTORS

Jon Abbink
Abbink studied anthropology and history at the Universities of Nijmegen and Leiden (the Netherlands). His dissertation research was on the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. In 1988–92, he was a postdoctoral research fellow of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Science and engaged in an extensive field study of southern Ethiopian ethnic groups in the Kefa region. His interests are, apart from Ethiopian studies, in the history and theory of anthropology, interpretive approaches, and applied anthropology. He has taught at the University of Amsterdam and at the University of Nijmegen and is now senior researcher at the African Studies Centre in Leiden.

Ahmed Zekaria
Ahmed received his bachelor's degree in history at Addis Ababa University (1979) and his master's degree in ethnology and museum ethnography at Oxford University (1989). He has curated a number of exhibitions and written several articles dealing with various aspects of Ethiopian culture and history. He is particularly interested in the history and historical preservation of the ancient city of Harer. Ahmed was a lecturer in history before he transferred to the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University, and is currently acting head of the museum at the Institute.
Marco Bassi

Marco Bassi is a social anthropologist specializing in African studies and pastoralism. He carried out field research among the Borana of Kenya in 1983 and 1986 and among the Borana of Ethiopia in 1989 and 1990. In 1992 he received his Ph.D. from the Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples. He has been working as an applied anthropologist in Ethiopia and is currently teaching in the master's program in social anthropology at Addis Ababa University.

Elisabeth Biasio

Biasio studied ethnology, psychology, and history of religion at the University of Zurich from 1970 to 1978. From 1974 to 1979 she served as assistant curator and since 1979 as curator for Northeast and North Africa and the Near East at the Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich. She is particularly interested in Ethiopian art, especially paintings of the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Biasio has been conducting research in Ethiopia since 1982 and has curated a number of exhibitions in Zurich and written articles, essays, and catalogs dealing with various aspects of Ethiopian art.

Daniel M. Carledge

Carledge, a sociocultural anthropologist and human ecologist, completed his doctorate at the University of Florida in 1995. In 1992 and 1993, he conducted field research to examine issues of land use and agricultural sustainability in the Gamo highlands of Ethiopia with funding from the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Fulbright Program. Currently, Carledge is a visiting professor of anthropology at Universidade Federal de Sergipe, Brazil. He conducts research on rural development and traditional artisans in the northeast region of Brazil.

Girma Fisseha

Girma Fisseha, born in Ethiopia but living in Munich, Germany, since 1974, Girma has been very interested in the art and material cultural of Ethiopia. During the 1960s and early 1970s, he served as a research assistant to Stanislaw Chojnacki, as the latter built the collection of the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University. Since 1974 he has been the curator for Ethiopia at the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde in Munich, where he has organized and prepared catalogs for a number of exhibitions dealing with Ethiopian art and culture.

Alula Pankhurst

Pankhurst received his B.A. in oriental languages (Arabic and Ge’ez) at Oxford University (1984) and his M.A. (1986) and Ph.D. (1989) in social anthropology at Manchester University. His research and writing have focused on issues of famine and resettlement in Ethiopia. Pankhurst has been teaching in the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Administration at Addis Ababa University since 1990, where he also served as chair of the department from 1992 to 1994. He is editor of the Sociology Ethnology Bulletin (Addis Ababa University).

Raymond A. Silverman

Silverman is an art historian specializing in the arts of Africa. He received his B.A. in art history at the University of California, Los Angeles (1975), and his M.A. (1977) and Ph.D. (1983) in art history from the University of Washington. He has conducted research and written on the arts of the Akan peoples of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire. In 1989 he began organizing the exhibition “Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity,” of which this volume is a product. Silverman is currently engaged in an ethnohistorical study of metalworking in the Tigray region of northern Ethiopia. He is an associate professor of art history and adjunct curator of African visual culture at Michigan State University.
Neal W. Sobania
Sobania is professor of history and director of International Education at Hope College in Holland, Michigan. His involvement with Ethiopia extends over more than twenty-five years and includes research, writing, and teaching. He teaches courses in African history and culture and has published widely on the history, ecology, and socioeconomic relations of pastoral production systems in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Tsehai Berhane-Selassie
Tsehai received her B.A. in history at Haile Selassie I University (1969) and M.A. (1976) and Ph.D. (1981) in social anthropology at Oxford University. Her primary research and writing interests lie in the areas of women's studies and development, and she has spent many years working with the women of Wolayta (south-central Ethiopia). Tsehai was on the faculty of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Administration at Addis Ababa University and is currently a research fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies at Princeton University.

Mary Ann Zelnisky-Cartledge
Zelnisky-Cartledge (B.A., Lake Erie College, 1982) conducted research on hand weaving and other traditional crafts in the Doko Gamo area of southwest Ethiopia in 1993. An experienced weaver herself, she has studied textiles and hand weaving at the University of Florida, University of Tennessee, and Cape Breton School of Crafts, Nova Scotia. She currently resides in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

Worku Nida
Worku received his B.A. in history (1984) and his M.A. in social anthropology (1995) from Addis Ababa University. He has conducted research in the Gurage region of Ethiopia and is particularly interested in the impact of urban migration on village life. He has published articles concerning Gurage religion and culture, as well as a book on Gurage history. Worku is currently leading a policy-making team at the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Information that deals with the study and conservation of Ethiopian cultural heritage.

Neal Sobania
Neal Sobania talking with Toleza as he works on one of his songham-stalk models.

Tsehai Berhane-Selassie (right) and her assistant, Wengoes Selamo, interviewing Tabita (left).

Mary Ann Zelnisky-Cartledge interviewing Itcho as he sits at his loom and weaves.

Photo Credits and Museum Accession Numbers

(musm = Michigan State University Museum)
Figs. 2.1–2.4 Photos by J. Abbinck, 1993.
Fig. 2.5 Photo by J. Abbinck, 1993.
Fig. 2.6 (Left to right) musm 7557.180, musm 7557.164. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.
Fig. 2.7 (Left to right) musm 7557.170, musm 7557.160. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.
Fig. 2.8 (Left to right) musm 7557.167, musm 7557.175, musm 7557.166. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.
Figs. 2.9–2.12 Photos by N. Sobania, 1993.
Fig. 3.1 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 3.2 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 3.3 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 3.4–3.7 Photos by R. Silverman, 1993.
Figs. 4.1–4.2 Photos by N. Sobania, 1993.
Fig. 4.3 (Left to right) musm 7557.307, musm 7557.283, musm 7557.306. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1995.
Fig. 4.4 Photo by N. Sobania, 1993.
Fig. 4.5 (Left to right) musm 7557.299, musm 7557.300. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1995.
Fig. 4.6 (Left to right) musm 7557.304, musm 7557.348, musm 7557.286, musm 7557.303. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1995.
Fig. 4.7 musm 7557.282. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1995.
Figs. 4.8–4.12 Photos by N. Sobania, 1993.
Fig. 5.1 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 5.2 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 5.3 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 5.4 Photo by R. Silverman, 1991.
Fig. 5.5 Collecion of the artist (Zerihun Yetmgeta). Photo by R. Silverman, 1994.
Fig. 5.6 Church of Qeddus Giyorgis, Addis Ababa. Photo by Ania Basso, 1989.
Fig. 5.7 Private collection, deposited in the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, Munich.
Fig. 5.8 Collection of the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institution, no. 91-18-2. Photo by Franko Khouri.
Fig. 5.9 Collection of the Völkerkunde-
(a) msum 7557.113, (b) msum 7557.112, (c) msum 7557.111, (d) msum 7557.114, (e) msum 7557.110, (f) msum 7557.107, (g) msum 7557.108, (h) msum 7557.109, (i) msum 7557.105, (j) msum 7557.96, (k) msum 7557.95, (l) msum 7557.97, (m) msum 7557.99, (n) msum 7557.101, (o) msum 7557.100, (p) msum 7557.102, (q) msum 7557.103, (r) msum 7557.106, (s) msum 7557.104, (t) msum 7557.98. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.

(a) msum 7557.130, (b) msum 7557.126, (c) msum 7557.125, (d) msum 7557.123, (e) msum 7557.129, (f) msum 7557.128, (g) msum 7557.124. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.

(a) msum 7557.204.1, (b) msum 7557.205, (c) msum 7557.205, (d) msum 7557.199, (e) msum 7557.196, (f) msum 7557.189.3, (g) msum 7557.203.1, (h) msum 7557.202.1, (i) msum 7557.200.1, (j) msum 7557.194.1, (k) msum 7557.195.1, (l) msum 7557.188.2. Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.

Photo by R. Silverman, 1993.

Photo by K. Kaufman, 1996.

Abdnin, Jm, 7, 10, 16, 17, 21, 27–45, 273
Abdelrahman M. Sherif, 896, 102
Abdulgheimo Marwan, 47
Abel Halabi, 183, 188, 189 (fig. 9.5)
Abebe Zeldelew, 896, 104, 107
Abul-Sa‘id, 15, 21, 182 (fig. 9.2), 183, 186, 190–95, 194 (fig. 9.11), pl. 18
Adamu Ababa, 264
Adamu Tesfaw, Qes, 18, 19, 20, 24, 132 (fig. 7.3), 132–36, 140, 143, 144–47, 145 (fig. 7.5), 146 (fig. 7.6), 148, 151, 152–53, 156, 261–66, 267
Addis Ababa University, 100, 107
Adwa, 186, 187, 195, 196, 268
Battle of, 162, 167, 168 (fig. 8.8–8.9), 267
aesthetics, 5, 257
criteria, 4, 44, 85–87
Haxari, 51
Mers, 28, 30, 34, 42
Alger, 191
Alewok Tekele, 99, 100 (fig. 5.6)
African Training and Research Center for Women (ATRCW), 273
agriculture, 36, 124, 126, 203–4, 218, 219, 221, 225, 226, 243
Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazali, 268
Ahmed Zakaria, 17, 46–63, 258
Alemu Haile Maryam, 261, 265, 269
Alemu, Aqef, 159, 160, 160–61
Aleya Amba, 2, 22, 183, 190, 190 (fig. 9.7), 192
Ali Sherif, al-Hajj, 183, 188–89
Alliance Ethio-Francaise, 90, 96, 101, 106–7, 110
Almeida, Marcelo de, 185
Alvares, Francisco, 185
Amarga Oqubot, Kenyazmach, 113
Amrullah Ibrahim, 47
Amhara Dogefia, 260
Ambror, Hermann, 29–30
Asaha S'eyou, L'Emperor, 263
Amhara, 35, 39, 90, 93, 190, 191, 192, 262
Amhara Sayen, 159
Amina Ismail Sherif, 10, 11, 17, 46–63, 66, 69 (fig. 8.4), 69 (fig. 37), 258
Anchen, Battle of, 160
Anchot, 113, 114, 127 (fig. 6.6)
Anderle, Lazaro de, 263
Anikho, 190, 192, 270
Anonymity, of artist, 4, 257, 264
Arab Fasi, 268
Arab Peninsula, 192–93, 198, 271
Arba Desta, 13, 18, 23, 240 (fig. 12.3), 241, 243, 350, 351, 352, 255, 256, pl. 22
Aref, 79
Argobba, 47, 191, 192 (fig. 9.8)
Aguatschew Teferra, 27
Armenia, 198
art
abstract, 101, 106
academic, 88–111, 258–59
collections, 92
Cubism, 102, 108
exhibitions, 92, 96, 100–101, 103, 106–7, 110–11
Harrisi, 10
international, 108–9
modernism, 101
social realism, 103, 104
Surrealism, 102
vs. artifact. See artifacts
artifacts
ascended value of, 29–30, 34, 42–44, 74
form vs. function of, 42
life history of, 9–10, 34
utilitarian vs. aesthetic, 34
vs. art, 5, 28, 29–30, 51, 257
Aruma, 268, 270
Asmarrom Legesse, 66
Ateas, 266
Association of Young Artists, 106
authenticity, 10, 30, 92, 158, 177, 178, 257
symbolism (omitted)
Hazar barken, 5:2, 52-58, 62, 258
Wodan pottery, 230
Tabeta Tamayu, 113
Tabita Harari, 10, 12, 13-14, 15, 17, 18, 22, 216-39, 216 (fg. 11.1), 224 (fg. 11.4), 231 (fg. 11.5), 232 (fg. 11.6-11.7)
tables, 125, pl. 108 d
Taddese Welde Aregay, 174
Taddese Yaye, 279
Taddese Belanyew, 89 n
Taddese Mesfin, 89 n
Tana, Lake, 142, 163 (fg. 8.2)
tanneries, 116, 185, 243, 244, 239, 240, 273
Tasso Napte Welde, 269
Ta'ay Tadesse, 89 n
technology See process
T'egest Welde, 90
él de 31, 203, 255
Tesfari Mekonnen, Ras, 99, 160. See also
Haile Selassie I
Tsegabe Mariam, 159
T'ayra Zewdu, 90
Tshombe Bekele, 89 n, 104, 105 (fg. 5.10), 106, 107
Tesemama Wereda Hei, 195-96
Tewodros, Emperor, 106, 106 (fg. 8.7), 169, 180-81, 266, 270, pl. 16
Tewodros, Saint, 152
textiles See cloth
Thaler (Maria Theresa), 182 (fg. 9.2),
192-93, 195-96, 197, 272
Tibebe Erhete, 133 n
Tibebe Tarita, 89 n, 104, 105 (fg. 5.9), 106, 107
Tigray, 171, 172, 173, 183, 196, 262, 266, 269
Todd, David, 272
Tolera Tafisa, 20, 21, 24, 200 (fg. 10.1),
200-215, 201 (fg. 10.2), 207 (fg. 10.4), 288 (fg. 10.5), 210 (fg. 10.6),
211 (fg. 10.7), 212 (fg. 10.8), 214
(fg. 10.9), 272, pl. 19
tools, metalworking, 193-95
tourists, 51, 57, 58, 61, 136, 145,
150, 157, 158, 162, 165, 172,
175, 178, 202, 203
traditional, 68, 70
sharing of, 20-22, 23-24, 125,
138, 140-43, 147, 177-78,
198, 271
training of artist/artisan, 16-18, 36,
52-54, 76-77, 135, 143, 144,
159-60, 166-67, 186, 187,
209-10, 220, 220 (fg. 11.3), 245,
252
trays, 125, pl. 10 c
Tshaiti Berhane Selassie, 12, 17, 22,
216-39, 272-74
villageization, 225, 229, 230, 233, 273
Wagene Wodebo, 234 (fg. 11.9)
Waldvogel, Herman H., 92
Wollo, 118
waterpipe (tobacco), 245, 255
Watta, 259
weaving, 13, 15, 18, 96, 131, 181,
260-56
Wolde Libanos, Merigeta, 159
Wolde Selassie Bereka, General, 113
Welga Mehretu, 173
Wellega, 177, 269
Welilo, 159, 161, 172, 191, 269
Wendem Aggegenaw, 269
Wendem Wende, 133, 136, 261,
265
Wendwossen Kassa, Dejazmach, 160
Werquesh Weliamo, 217 n
Weynibet Adamis, 24
Wodan, 10, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 22,
216-39, 218 (fg. 11.2), 272-74
Woleayy Ihab, 214
Woldien Adam, 27 n
women
academic art by, 24, 104-5
economic independence of, 54
wood, used for carving, 125
woodwork, 8-9, 11, 12, 16, 18, 21,
23-24, 36, 113-14, 120, 123,
126, 131, 259-61
Worku Goshu, 89 n, 94, 108
Worku Nida, 9, 14, 11, 112-31,
259-61
Woydai Dorichi, 44, 45
Wylde, A. B., 187, 195, 268
Yadawege, 113
Yaleqal, Fiawran, 161
Yared, Saint, 155, 155 (fg. 7.9), 266
Yasael, 79
Yehudgeyaya, 204, 272
Yekuno Amlak, Emperor, 270
Yemen, 271
Yeshaa I, Emperor, 263
Yitabirrek Haile Maryam, 261
Yohannes Tsenema, 136, 149, 151,
173, 261, 262, 269
Yohannis I, Emperor, 142, 270
Yohannis IV, Emperor, 187, 268, 269
Yohannis Tako, Aleqa, 263-66
Zagwe dynasty, 139, 262
Zakwot Muhammad, 159 (fg. 6.8)
Zara Ya'qob, Emperor, 140-41, 144,
185, 265
Zewdru, Emperor, 159
Zezebo Useto, 173
Zelden's Cartridge, Mary Am, 15,
240-56, 274
Zemene Mesfin, 171, 268-69
Zegwa, Mount, 154
Zeriam Yemguta, 16, 18, 19-20, 23,
88-98, 103, 104, 106, 107, 108,
109, 110-11, 237, 258-59
masks by, 96
paintings by, 88 (fg. 5.1), 91 (fg.
5.3), 98 (fg. 5.5), pl. 6-8
studio of, 91, 91 (fg. 5.2-5.4)
Zervos, Adrienne, 172, 176, 177, 269,
270, 271
Zheza, See Garga
Zomo, 246, 253

308