

THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE



DECORATIVE ARTS

The Brignole mirror in Palazzo Rosso, Genoa

The monumental silk curtains of Ethiopia

A painted cabinet from Catalonia

Matthew Boulton James Cox Jacobite drinking glasses

Frederick II William Hamilton Købke Whitefriars glass

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17th August 1695: lire 4810: 'buone al detto Bozomo per prezzo di argento consignato lavorato per la lampada' (*ibid.*)
 17th August 1695: lire 165 'buone al detto Bozomo per prezzo di ottone e rame che hà servito per detta lampada' (*ibid.*)
 17th August 1695: lire 58 'buone al detto per spese al fusto di ferro che sostiene detta lampada' (*ibid.*)
 17th August 1695: lire 525 'buone al detto per prezzo di saldatura d'argento calcolata per saldare detti ottoni e rame' (*ibid.*)
 17th August 1695: lire 3200 'buone al detto Bozomo per sua manifattura compresa ogni altra pretesa spesa anche à titolo di modello giusta l'ordinato dall'Eccellentissimo Nicolò De Mari' (*ibid.*)
 17th August 1695: lire 264 'se le carricano [to Giovanni Battista Bozzomo] delle 380 pagate al Pittore Gregorio de Ferrari . . . per sua assistenza e opera contribuita per li modelli del lampadario' (Registro 66, cartulario fol.31)
 19th December 1696: lire 264 'de zecchini 23½ per la doratura de rami nel lampadario d'argento, lire 83 all'Orefice Borgo per sua mercede e spesa di detta doratura & altra fatica rifatta per la politura del dorato al burnitore'; lire 17 'al burnitore' (Registro 66, manuale)
 31st December 1696: lire 311 'à Giovanni Palmieri Romano da 6 agosto in appresso à conto di sue giornate per detto lampadario lasciato imperfetto e non agiustato da Bozomo havendo di più il detto Romano fatto il giglio che serve per pomo al medesimo lampadario e pesa oncie 66

(Registro 66, manuale)
 31st December 1696: lire 36 'al ferraro Pizzorno per diversi accomodamenti per il lampadario d'argento' (*ibid.*)
 17th May 1697: lire 112 'per zecchini 10 consignati . . . a Giovanni Palmieri romano argentiere che hanno servito per doratura del fiocco in fondo al detto lampadario e diversi fili d'ottone intorti nel medesimo' (Registro 66, cartulario fol.123)
 31st December 1697: lire 29 'in conto del lavoro al piede del specchio e giornate al lampadario' (*ibid.*)
 31st December 1697: lire 38 'al Romano Intagliatore per modello del letto da ricevere, & altro modello del fiocco del lampadario' (Registro 66, manuale)
 28th March 1698: receipt 'del Romano' for lire 232 for 'bisse per il lampadario, compresa forma in gesso e cera, e di foglie grandi e piccole' and for works on the mirror (see under the payments for the mirror, above; Filza XXIII)
 5th September 1698: lire 31 'pagate al Romano argentiere per oro e fattura di foglie nel groppo sotto l'anello del lampadario' (Registro 66, cartulario fol. 123)
 31st December 1698: lire 125 'pagati al Romano per resto per il lampadario e piede del specchio' (Registro 66, cartulario fol.40)
 5th July 1700: lire 12 'à Giovanni Palmieri Argentiere Romano per giornate 5 consumate nell'aggiustamento del lampadario grande trasportato in sala' (Registro 81, manuale)

EWA BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA and MICHAEL GERVERS

Monumental Ethiopian tablet-woven silk curtains: a case for royal patronage*

IN 1864 King Tewodros of Ethiopia, frustrated by a lack of response to his appeals, took desperate action. He imprisoned the British consul in Ethiopia and over the next three years seized several other Europeans and their families. Queen Victoria did not take this indignity lightly and in the autumn of 1867 dispatched from India an expeditionary force of more than twelve thousand men, led by Sir Robert Napier, to liberate them. After traversing nearly four hundred miles of difficult terrain, the army laid siege to Tewodros in his highland fortress of Mäqdäla. Following a brief encounter, the king committed suicide on 13th April 1868 and the fortress fell into British hands.¹

Tewodros had for years been collecting manuscripts and church paraphernalia from his conquered territories to donate to the church of the Saviour of the World built in his new capital at Däbrä Tabor. The most valuable objects came from the churches of the old Ethiopian capital at Gondar, sacked by the king in 1854. In keeping with the antiquarian interests of the day, the British government sent out to accompany the expedition, with an allowance of £1,000, Richard

R. Holmes, assistant in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Museum who subsequently became Royal Librarian at Windsor. 'It was hoped that Mr. Holmes would be able to visit sites of importance, to collect antiquities, and to procure valuable manuscripts'.² This he did, selecting from Tewodros's Treasury, with the assistance of the prominent Swiss scholar and governor of Massawa, Werner Münzinger, some 350 Ethiopian manuscripts, making the British Library's collection thereof the best in Europe.³ Other religious items, such as crosses, censers, wooden altar-tablets (*tabot*), chalices, priests' prayer sticks and a panel from a large tablet-woven⁴ curtain made of thick spun silk (Fig. 15) were also sent to the British Museum.⁵

The remainder of the Mäqdäla treasure was either sold for the benefit of non-commissioned officers and soldiers at an auction which took place on the Dälanta plain on 20th April 1868, or was looted by individual members of the expedition. Some articles were later purchased by various museums from the officers' families, but numerous objects and manuscripts still remain in private hands and it is only when they occa-

* The authors are indebted to Anthony North of the Metalwork Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum for his generous assistance in identifying the probable origin and date of the guns appearing on BM1. Thanks are also due to Gillian Long of the DEEDS Project in Toronto for assisting in the research process.

¹T.J. HOLLAND and H.M. HOZIER: *Record of the expedition to Abyssinia*, London [1870], I, pp.12–13, 15, 56, 229–31, and II, pp.22, 56–58, 72; s. RUBENSON: *King of Kings, Tewodros of Ethiopia*, Oxford [1966], pp.67–89.

²W. WRIGHT, ed.: *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Library Acquired since the Year 1847*, London [1877], pp.iii–iv.

³R. PANKHURST: 'The Library of Emperor Tewodros II at Mäqdäla (Magdala)', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, XXXVI [1973], pp.15–42.

⁴Card or tablet weaving is done without a loom. The weaver uses a series of square

cards with a hole in each corner through which a warp thread is passed. Patterns are created by turning the cards, individually or in groups, forwards or backwards. The wider the pattern, the more cards are needed.

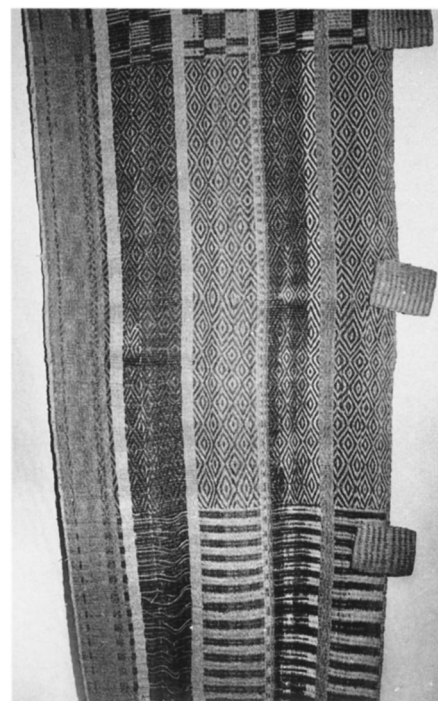
⁵O.M. DALTON: *Catalogue of Early Christian Antiquities and Objects from the Christian East in the Department of British and Mediaeval Antiquities and Ethnography of the British Museum*, London [1901], pp.181–82. There, the hanging is erroneously identified as an altar-cloth, a mistake deriving from the Museum's hand-written Register of Acquisitions for 1868 where, among the objects 'obtained in Abyssinia by R.R. Holmes Esq.', it is described as an 'altar cloth of woven silk in various colours with fringe at each end [and] six sets of figures (chiefly three) down the centre: borders on each side with six single frames. L. 16ft 2, W. 2ft.' Holmes apparently had the authority to purchase on behalf of the Realm whatever objects he deemed worthy of the Museum's collections.

sionally reappear in exhibitions and at auction sales that the public is made aware of their existence. The present exhibitions of Africana in the Museum of Mankind, London, are especially felicitous in this regard, for they include not only objects acquired by Holmes and accessioned by the Museum in 1868, but also subsequent donations of such things as the precious clothes of Ethiopian nobles, textiles, jewellery and arms, some of which certainly derive from Mäqdäla.⁶

The remarkable tablet-woven panel of a silk curtain mentioned above is particularly interesting both in itself and because other pieces of the same type were brought to England in 1868 by officers who had purchased them on the Dälanta plain. One such section, also presently on display in the Museum of Mankind (Fig. 15), was acquired by the British Museum in 1973 from the late Miss Gwynedd F. Martin, a descendant of Major-General Charles M. Griffiths of the Bombay Staff Corps.⁷ A third hanging, an entire curtain consisting of three panels, is in the Textile Department of the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (hereafter referred to as ROM; Fig. 16). It was loaned to the museum before 1914 by another of Napier's officers, Colonel George Augustus Sweny, and entered the permanent collections in 1922. The monumental dimensions of the panels, measuring between 520 cms and 535 cm. in length and 60 to 70 cm. in width, make these hangings the largest known tablet-woven fabrics in the world.⁸ The panel collected by Holmes (hereafter BM1) and the central panel of the ROM curtain are decorated with geometrical patterns and a series of registers depicting figural scenes. The Griffiths panel (hereafter BM2) is embellished only with geometrical patterns.⁹

All that is known about the ROM and BM1 hangings comes from two sources: a letter written in 1914 by Colonel Sweny at the request of the Royal Ontario Museum's director, Charles Trick Currelly, and a brief account published by Currelly himself in 1956.¹⁰ As a lieutenant in the 4th King's Own Regiment, Sweny had participated in the siege of Mäqdäla. He reported in his letter that he had been instructed by Napier to prevent the looting of the site and 'to see that all things which were of any intrinsic value should be handed over' for the auction. Sweny undoubtedly purchased the ROM hanging on the Dälanta plain.

It was Sweny's understanding that the curtain had served as a screen separating the sanctuary in 'the ancient cathedral at Gondar' from the body of the church, and that Tewodros had carried it off.¹¹ He goes on to report that this hanging 'formed only one half of the whole fabric; the other half had been divided into two equal parts before it was found by us, presumably for the king's use; these were sold at the auction



14. Detail of the BM2 hanging, showing patterning.

to two different people, but one portion has since found its way to the South Kensington Museum and the other was I think owned by General [Charles Crauford] Fraser, since dead.¹² To this information may be added Currelly's comments that Sweny, having bought what is now the ROM piece, 'had to buy a mule to transport it to the coast, as it takes two men to lift it'.

To date only the ROM piece has undergone a thorough physical analysis.¹³ The results show that over 350 tablets incorporating more than 1,400 twisted silk threads were used in the production of a single panel.¹⁴ The colours, which vary from panel to panel, are predominantly red, yellow and indigo blue, with blue-green and yellow-brown (probably faded indigo and red respectively) prominent in the left-hand panel. A largely deteriorated strip of bleached white warp threads provides a background for the middle third of the central panel. In terms of colour arrangement and, as will be shown below, of iconography, that part is the most significant section of the entire curtain. The dominant fabric structure is a double-faced weave with three-span floats in alternate alignment.

Like the central panel of the ROM hanging, BM1 is divided into three vertical sections. Designs are for the most part rendered in red against a yellow background, while narrow blue stripes separate the middle section from the other two and define the weft edges. Also like the ROM example, the

⁶The exhibition including the hangings discussed here continues until 4th August. For the catalogue/book, see note 9 below. The donors of the Ethiopian objects include, among others: T. Bent, H. Clapperton, L. Clarke, D. Denham, H. Littler, H. Perrin and Mrs. Charles Speedy, and their families.

⁷British Museum, Register of acquisitions.

⁸ROM (reg. no. 926.26.1): 535 cm. long, 212 cm. wide (consists of three 70 cm. wide panels sewn together); BM1 (reg. no. 1868.10-1.22): 520 cm. long, 60 cm wide (central section of a textile originally similar in format to that of the ROM); BM2 (reg. no. 1973 Af 38.1): 536 cm. long, 60 cm. wide.

⁹C. SPRING and J. HUDSON: *North African Textiles*, London [1995], pp.125-28.

¹⁰C.T. CURRELLY: *I Brought the Ages Home*, Toronto [1956], reprint [1976], p.288. Sweny's letter is in the Registration Department of the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

¹¹Sweny goes on to relate that his information 'was obtained from both Abyssinians and Europeans'. Of the former, he cites only Beru Goshee (Berru Gošhu), *däjjadj* of Godjam and father-in-law of Tewodros, whom the king had taken prisoner during his campaign against Gondar in 1854. Of the latter, he mentions the traveller and missionary DR JOHANN LUDWIG KRAPP, author of *Travels, researches and missionary labours*

during an eighteen years residence in Eastern Africa, London [1860], reprint [1968]; for Gondar, see pt. III, chs. II and III.

¹²Sweny's reference to a piece having reached the South Kensington (now the Victoria and Albert) Museum is an error, which undoubtedly arises from the fact that some of the royal artefacts brought to England from Ethiopia were displayed there shortly after the return of the expedition; see *The Times* [Thursday, 2nd July 1868]. As to the part which Sweny thought had been purchased by General Fraser, considerable effort has been made to trace it but as yet to no avail. There is, in fact, no certainty that Fraser did buy a piece, although he and R.R. Holmes were major purchasers at the auction (F. MYATT: *The March to Magdala*, London [1970], pp.168-69).

¹³This analysis was commissioned by the Canadian Conservation Institute in Ottawa, prior to the much-needed conservation of the item; see the report of M. FRAME: *The Gondar Hanging: Structure and Construction*, The Canadian Conservation Institute, Ottawa [1993].

¹⁴Other wide examples of tablet weaving to have survived derive from northern Europe and belong to the first millennium A.D., though all use fewer than 200 tablets (see P. COLLINGWOOD: *The Techniques of Tablet Weaving*, London [1982], pp.12-18).



15. Sections of two Ethiopian silk hangings (left panel = BM1; right panel = BM2), here dated c.1721–30. Silk, tablet-woven, 520 by 60 cm. (BM1); 536 by 60 cm. (BM2) (British Museum [Museum of Mankind], London).

middle section, which represents fully half the width of the panel, uses bleached white thread for the background warp. This white, probably the result of a milder bleaching agent, remains intact, leaving the woven pattern well preserved and distinct. Three silk cords are attached to the piece horizontally and one vertically. They still bear the occasional metal rings from which bells almost certainly once hung. The assumption that the panel originally served as the central section of a tripartite hanging is confirmed by the short, broken

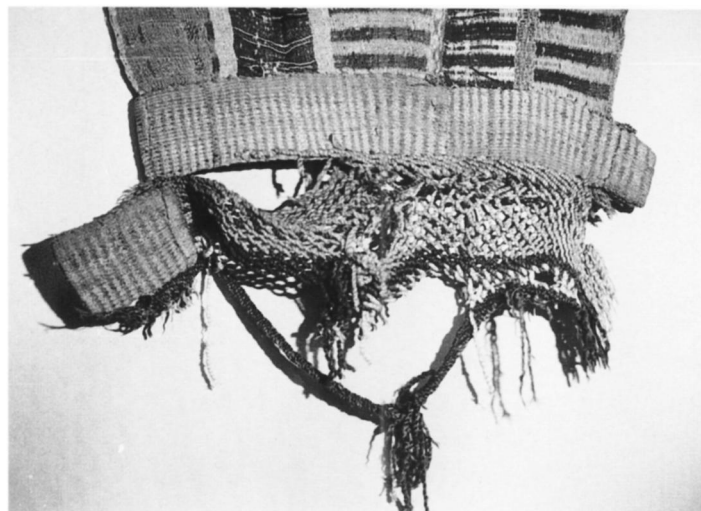
threads discernible at the weft edges by which side panels were formerly attached.

The composition of BM2 is divided into five distinct vertical strips by four narrow turquoise bands. The vertical is further divided into nine unequal sections bearing woven ornamental motifs which can effectively be compared with those appearing in the ROM hanging, notably the vertical stripes, the small diamond network, the checker-board, zigzags and, in its centre, two bands with double rhombuses



16. Ethiopian hanging consisting of three panels, here dated c.1730–38 and referred to as ROM. Silk, tablet-woven, 535 by 212 cm. (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto).

(Fig. 14). The first four strips are composed of alternating red and yellow and red and white threads, while the last is made up of blue-green and yellow threads with some red. The over-bleached white threads have suffered the same fate as those in ROM's central panel. Ten tablet-woven blue-green and yellow striped loops, each 8 cm. wide, are sewn at intervals along the length of one of the weft edges of the textile, indicating that at some point in its history it was hung horizontally. A longer strip of the same material hems the end of the panel and to this a macramé fringe has been applied (Fig. 17).



17. Detail of the BM2 hanging, showing the warp hem and macramé fringe.

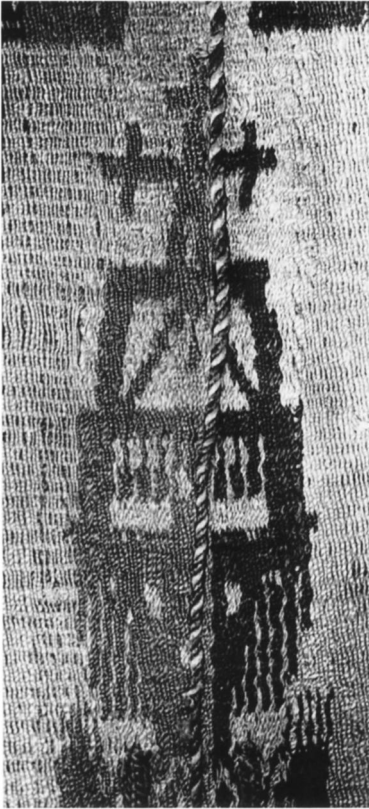
BM1 and the ROM 'trptych' are decorated with figural scenes woven between a variety of ornamental patterns. A red and yellow checker-board introduces BM1. The frontally arranged figural composition which follows from it is divided into six superimposed registers. In the centre of the uppermost register is an enthroned king enveloped in a rich vestment and wearing a turban-like headdress embellished with a cross and delineated by an applied blue silk cord (Fig. 22). The absence of hands and feet suggest that he is seated cross-legged with his hands under the garment. The throne stands on a raised platform under a canopy and is covered with a fringed textile which extends between its legs to the floor. On either side of the king stands an angel with stylised wings wearing a long robe ornamented with crosses. In contrast to this triumvirate, all the figures in the remaining five registers raise their hands wherever possible in praise.

A queen is positioned in an architectural frame directly beneath the king. She is clothed in a long, diamond-patterned, fringed tunic and court-style shoes with upturned toes. Around her neck hangs an applied blue cord, or *mätäb*.¹⁵ Her ornamental cylindrical crown, the *zäwd*, surmounted by a cross and decorated with filigrees and pendants in the form of small bells (Fig. 18), is of a type worn by Ethiopian rulers during the 17th and early 18th centuries (Fig. 20).¹⁶ The queen is accompanied by four female attendants holding whisks and purses. Below her, a prince stands under a canopy or an architectural frame (Fig. 23). He wears a long decorated robe, a *mätäb*, court slippers and a diadem. Three of the four flanking guards or courtiers wear three-quarter length trousers and Ethiopian warriors' lion-skin head-dresses, and hold staff-crosses. The fourth, smaller in size than the rest, bears neither staff nor head-dress.

Three subsequent registers contain groups of warriors wearing the same type of trousers, but differing in their attributes (Fig. 24). Those in the first rank are armed with curved swords, called the *šotel*, and present staff-crosses. The next four hold shields on their left arms and a pair of spears with blades topped by a protective leather cover in their right hands. The clothing of these warriors is supplemented by a *lamd*, the dress with characteristic long pendants which represents the lion-skin cape. The last five figures are fusiliers

¹⁵In Ethiopia, the *mätäb* is worn only by Christians; T. TAMRAT: 'The Matab', *Bulletin of the Ethnological Society*, University College of Addis Ababa, IX [1959], pp.38–43.

¹⁶R. BRUS: 'Ethiopian Crowns', *African Arts*, VIII, 4 [1974], pp.8–13, 84.



18.



19. Ethiopian cap-crown of King Tewodros. 1855–68. 23 cm. diam. (Whereabouts unknown).

18. Detail of the BM1 hanging, showing the crowned head of the queen.

20. Ethiopian crown, *zäwd*. 17th/early 18th-century. 28 cm. high, 22 cm. diam. (Monastery of Asua Maryam, Godjam).

21. Ethiopian deacon's crown, *aklil*. 18th or 19th century. Brass. 33 cm. high, 22 cm. diam. (Peabody Museum, Salem MA).



20.



21.



22. Detail of registers 1 and 2 in Fig. 15 (BM1), showing the enthroned king with angels and the standing queen with attendants.

armed with swords, cartridge-belts and matchlock guns. The remarkable precision with which these weapons are rendered enables one to recognise the reinforced, moulded muzzle of the smooth bore barrel, the decorative capuchin bands which bound the barrel securely to the combed stock, the large jaws and the pull trigger. These features suggest the weapons are of seventeenth-century Indian origin (Fig. 25). The section terminates in a long chevron pattern interrupted periodically by a row of diamonds.

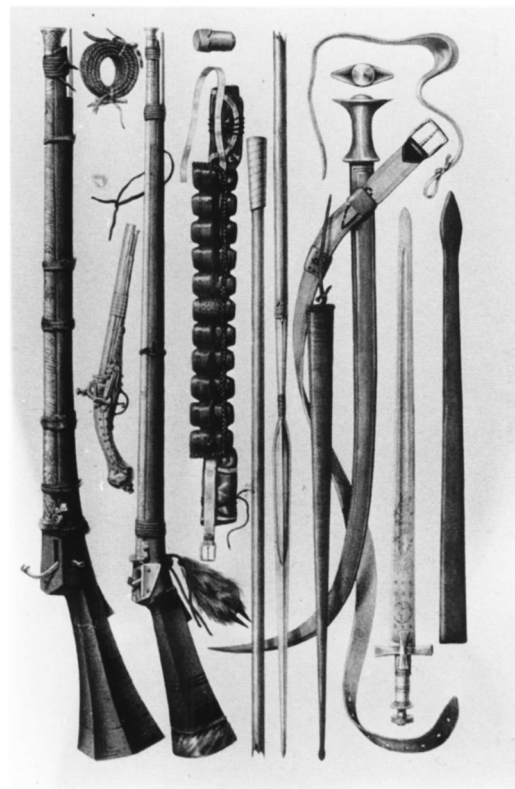
Although technically and artistically somewhat less accomplished, the central panel of the ROM curtain is generally similar in arrangement to BM1 and may be influenced by it. Four figural registers, each with three human figures, are introduced by a long section decorated with horizontal stripes (Figs 27 and 28). In the top register stand three bearded ecclesiastics. They wear cone-shaped crowns, called *aklil* (Fig. 21), and hold hand-crosses displaying a pierced diamond-shaped design. They also wear what seem to be pectoral crosses. In the centre of the second register is an orant queen whose



23. Detail of register 3 in Fig. 15 (BM1), showing the prince with attendants.



24. Detail of Fig.15 (BM1), showing registers 4–6 with sword-bearers, shield-bearers and fusiliers.



25. Ethiopian weaponry of the eighteenth century, from T. LEFEBVRE: *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris [1845–48].

stance, character and attributes are strikingly similar to those appearing in register two of BM1. She is flanked by two female orant attendants clothed in long garments. Below them, in the third register, an enthroned king sits, presumably cross-legged, under a canopy with his hands raised in praise. If crowned at all, he wears a diadem, thus recalling the princely figure holding a similar hierarchical position below the queen in BM1. Less successfully rendered than the throne in BM1, this one is also seen to be covered with a textile whose long fringes hang between its legs. The king is flanked by two guards holding staff-crosses. In the fourth and lowest figural register are three sword-bearers closely resembling those in BM1. Each has his right hand raised and wears a head-dress combed upward in strands. A staff-cross stands before each warrior. The left and central figures are also associated with whisks, attributes of Ethiopian high-ranking officials. The rest of the panel is decorated with four patterned fields depicting triple rhombuses, checker-boards, double rhombuses, vertical and, finally, horizontal stripes.

It seems that this central panel is an abridged attempt to

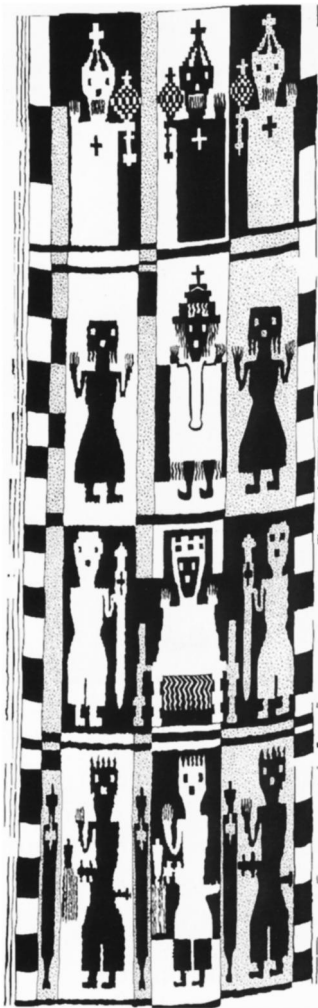
reproduce the figural registers of BM1 and also reflects a change in patronage and perhaps political succession. The king and angels of BM1 have been replaced by ecclesiastics. The queen retains an identical position in both panels, but the prince of BM1 has here been replaced by an enthroned king. It would be unusual for a queen to appear hierarchically above her king, unless she were acting as a regent for a minor. As will be seen below, there is a historical case in the Gondarene period which corresponds to this situation.

A number of technical discrepancies between the ROM central panel and BM1 point in the former to a decline in the designer's craft and to the product of a different and probably later workshop. The number of registers has been reduced from six to four. The narrow blue and red vertical stripes dividing BM1 into three distinct sections have become two broader blue bands in ROM running in broken rectangles down the outer edges of the left-hand column. Both bands are interrupted at irregular intervals, the right-hand one notably to make room for one of the throne's legs. There is no divider separating the central from the right-hand column of figures. The bleached white silk of this column, which originally served as in BM1 to emphasize the royal personages, is largely decayed. The queen's *mätäb*, applied in BM1, is here woven into the structure of the piece.

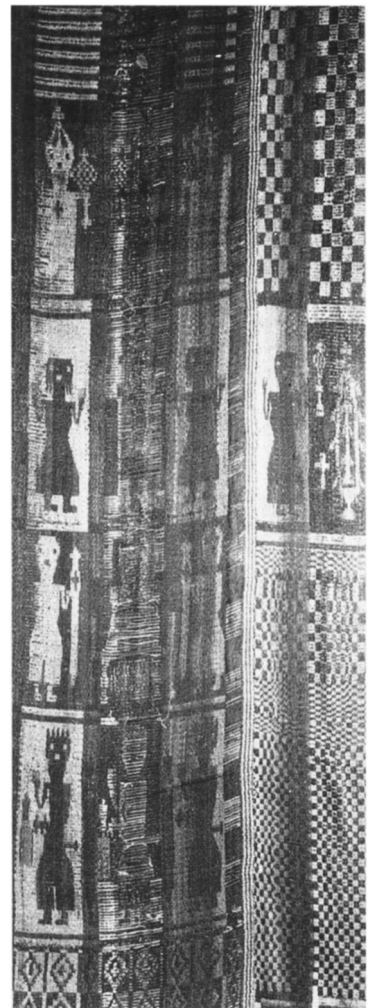
The upper of two figural scenes in the left-hand panel shows a person riding or standing beside a lion or lioness, flanked by a pair of confronting open-bill storks (Fig.26). The lower scene represents processional crosses, hand-crosses and censers rendered in considerable detail (Fig.34). The composition is centred around a large diamond-shaped processional cross notable for its pattern of interwoven squares and the elaborate supporting arm at its base. The small, square cross attached to its top is flanked by two others. Immediately below and to the left and right of these are a green and a red square which find their counterparts in the Crucifixion scene in the right-hand panel, described below. Under the squares are two pairs of decorative hand-crosses and, below them,



26. Detail of the upper left-hand panel in Fig.16 (ROM), showing a saint and a lion.



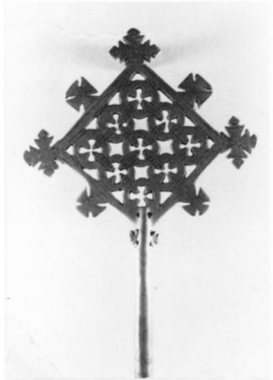
27. Reconstruction of the central panel in Fig.16 (ROM).



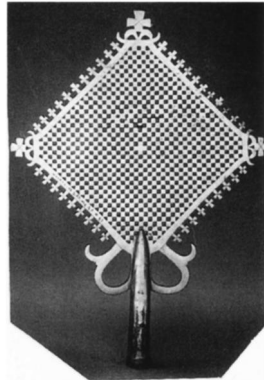
28. Detail of the central panel in Fig.16 (ROM).

27.

28.

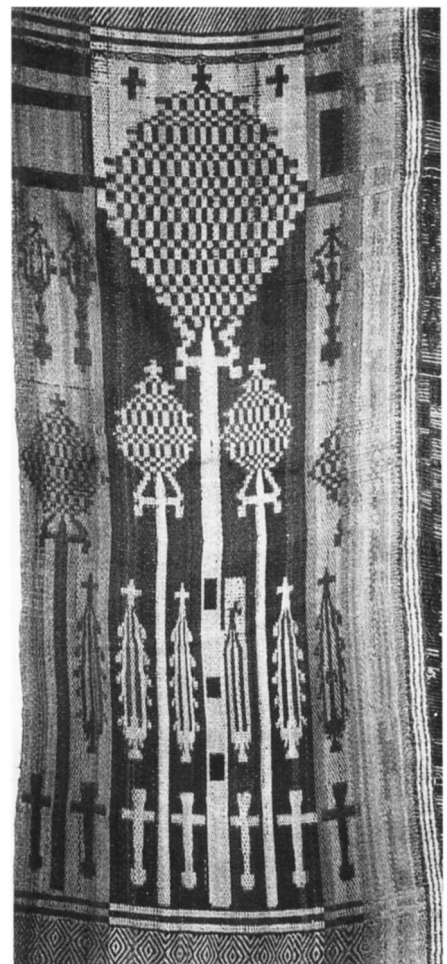


29. Ethiopian hand-cross. from Adigrat. Bronze. 20 by 11.5 cm. (National Museum, Warsaw).



30. Ethiopian processional cross. ?15th century. Gilded bronze, 50 by 36.5 cm. (St Gabriel, Wuqen, Tigre).

34. Detail of lower left-hand panel in Fig.16 (ROM), showing crosses and censers.



34.



31. Ethiopian hand-cross. ?16th century. Iron, 27.3 by 11.4 cm. (Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA).



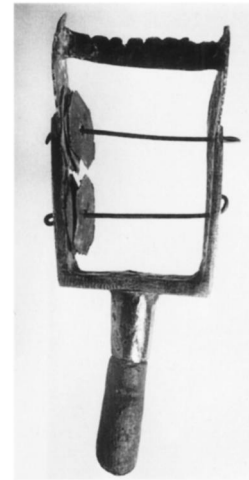
32. Ethiopian staff-cross. Wood, 30 by 5.8 cm. (National Museum, Warsaw).



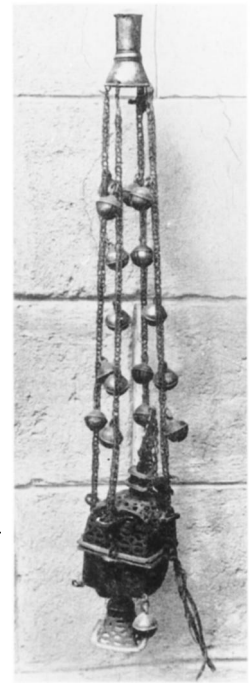
33. Ethiopian hand-cross. Metal, 25 by 8.1 cm. (Ethiopian Tourist Organisation, Addis Ababa)



35. Detail of the upper right-hand panel in Fig.16 (ROM), showing three ecclesiastics performing a religious ceremony.



36. Ethiopian sistrum.
?18th century. 19.5 by 6.5 cm.
(Private collection, Uppsala).



37. Ethiopian censer.
?18th century. 86.5 cm.
high. (Dābrā Berhan,
Gondar).

37.

four processional crosses similar in form to the central cross, but smaller. These are followed by a row of seven censers, all but one of which are shown with bells attached along the supporting chains of the vessel. At the bottom are eight small crosses with slender handles and cube-shaped bases. Close parallels can be found for all these types among old Ethiopian crosses and censers (Figs. 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33).¹⁷ The width of this panel is separated into three parts by changes in the warp colour scheme. Like BM1, the central part (yellow on red) is allotted half the width and the sides (red, sometimes faded, and green) a quarter each.

The figural scene in the upper part of the right-hand panel represents a religious ceremony (Fig.35). In the centre, a celebrant holds above his head a Gospel book marked with a cross. He wears typical liturgical vestments: a flat cap and a large cape, called the *lanqa*, with elongated flaps hanging down his sides. Two assistants accompany him; one, wearing a crown and a *lanqa*, holds a musical rattle known as the *sistrum* (cf. Fig.36). The figures are separated from each other by two groups of censers and hand-crosses. The precisely rendered censers, each supported by three chains to which bells are attached (cf. Fig.37), appear with their covers raised. Flanking hand-crosses inserted at the top are of the developed diamond-shaped type (like those held by the ecclesiastics in the top register of the central panel), while those at the bottom are of simple Latin form.

The lower scene on this panel represents the crucified Christ wearing a tunic which extends below his knees (Fig.38). Although the cross itself is absent, streamlets of blood can be seen flowing from his feet. The three crosses over him are a device for marking Golgotha, while the irregular red outlines on either side could be identified as the hills Gareb and Agra. Christ is flanked by two soldiers wearing short tunics and pointed helmets, and carrying small, trian-

gular shields. Conceived as evil persons, they are represented in profile according to Ethiopian pictorial tradition.¹⁸ The blue rectangle above each of their heads may be interpreted as a symbol of the darkness which, according to the Gospel, immediately preceded Christ's death. Behind the soldiers stand two orant figures who wear long tunics and have hair hanging halfway down their necks. They bear some resemblance to the flanking female figures in the second register of the central panel, but may represent the two thieves between whom Christ was crucified. Above them can be seen a green and a red rectangle representing the sun, which according to an apocryphal text became dark at the moment of Jesus's death, and the moon, which turned into blood.¹⁹

For the iconography of the hangings, primary consideration may be given to BM1 and the middle panel of the ROM piece. Their central position and the successive registers peopled with Ethiopian royalty, ecclesiastics and courtiers indicate that they are the principal representations in the hangings. The registers of BM1 include an enthroned king, and a standing queen and prince arranged hierarchically; the ROM counterpart contains a standing queen above an enthroned king. Dressed in ceremonial vestments, they are accompanied by their hand-servants and courtiers. Judging from their apparel, attributes and accoutrements, the military and ecclesiastical figures appearing in the remaining registers are high-ranking dignitaries.

The first representations of local rulers in Ethiopian art date from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Gondar, which was then the political and cultural capital of the country.²⁰ They are usually shown prostrate before the Virgin Mary, the crucified Christ or prominent saints, but from the mid-seventeenth century they also appear in historical contexts (Fig.41). Large scenes of kings and high-ranking dignitaries with their families and courts were commonly

¹⁷For further examples, see especially E. MOORE: *Ethiopian Processional Crosses*, Addis Ababa [1971], IES nos. 4754, 3978, 4197, 4486, figs. 18, 26, 25, 28; and W. KORABIEWICZ: *The Ethiopian Crosses*, Addis Ababa [1973], nos.126–27.

¹⁸W. STAUDE, 'Profilregel in der christlichen Malerei Äthiopiens und die Furcht vor dem "Bösen Blick"', *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, 9 [1954], pp.116–61.

¹⁹On the *Anaphora Pilati*, see K. VON TISCHENDORF: *Evangelia apocrypha*, Leipzig [1967], pp.248, 310.

²⁰J. LEROY: *Ethiopian Painting in the late Middle Ages and under the Gondar Dynasty*, London [1964], pp.57–58 and pls. XXXVII and XLIX.

represented in churches, with which they were often associated as patrons or donors. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the frontal position and square torso of the king in the top figural register of BM1 owe far more to representations of kings in magic scrolls (Fig.39) than in orthodox religious art where they are invariably represented in profile or semi-profile stance.

The religious ceremony shown in the upper register of the right-hand ROM panel (Fig.35) may be considered a direct complement of the main scene. The priest, surrounded by church paraphernalia, may be seen as celebrating a mass attended by the royal court. The manner in which the Gospel book is held points to the conclusion of the pre-anaphora in the eucharistic liturgy. Following the reading from the Gospel, the book is displayed to the faithful and is carried among them in procession so that they may kiss it. The two remaining figures are the assistants who, in addition to the celebrant, are required to carry out the liturgy. Thus, to the right the crowned deacon holds a *sistrum* while the sub-deacon on the left may function as a lector.²¹

The lower scene from the same panel, which portrays the crucifixion (Fig.38), confirms the religious programme of the textile and may allude to the second part of the mass. The archaic iconography of the picture is striking. Although, by depicting Christ with bleeding feet, the artist connects the image to the so-called realistic Crucifixions which appear in Ethiopia from the end of the fifteenth century, other details – the long tunic worn by Christ, the soldiers in classical garments, the sun and the moon illustrating an apocryphal text and, finally, the landscape of the Holy Places – point to inspiration from the earliest Ethiopian versions of the scene.²² This iconography suggests an identification of the two outer figures as the thieves shown as young men, rather than Mary and John.²³

In turn the elaborate representation of crosses and censers which appear at the bottom of the left-hand panel may be seen as a symbolic representation of the Crucifixion. The five processional crosses correspond to the five human figures present in this scene, the largest cross representing Christ himself. Noteworthy are the three small crosses which appear above the main cross in the left-hand panel and over the head of the crucified Christ in the right-hand panel. Equally important is the fact that in both scenes the sun and the moon are represented as green and red rectangles. This iconographical formula for the Crucifixion is known elsewhere in Ethiopian art, particularly in illustrations used to decorate magic scrolls (Fig.40).²⁴

The last scene on the side panels of the ROM hanging, representing a man with a lion between a pair of confronting storks (Fig.26), remains somewhat enigmatic. The obviously religious programme points to a saintly figure. The legends of the saints contain numerous references to hermits and



38. Detail of the lower right-hand panel in Fig.16 (ROM), showing the Crucifixion.

anchorites who kept tame lions which frequently assisted them in their arduous life in the desert. According to Ethiopian stories, lions accompanied abba Ensesa of Hazbo, abba Benjamin, Gābrä Mānfās Qeddus and abba Samuel of Wāldābba. The *Vita* of the fifteenth-century abba Samuel states that he cured animals, including lions, that came to his hermitage.²⁵ Grateful beasts allowed him to ride on their backs – a story which inspired his most popular representation (Fig.43).²⁶ Such is also the iconography of Mamas, the Cappadocian saint who died a martyr's death during the reign of the emperor Aurelian. According to legend, he preached to wild animals in the forest and once arrived in Caesarea riding a lion.²⁷ He is not infrequently depicted on Ethiopian miniatures, murals and paintings on wood (Fig.42).²⁸

The monumental dimensions of these hangings, the double-sided weaving technique used to produce them, and their obviously religious iconography, strongly suggest that they originally served as church furnishings, most probably curtains separating the sanctuary from the other parts of the interior. It may be noted in this regard that when the ROM hanging was washed during its conservation in 1994, a sweet smell emanated from it, 'similar to incense', which it undoubtedly absorbed in the course of repeated celebrations of the mass.²⁹

It is well known that the sanctuaries of most oriental churches were screened off from the earliest times. The fourth-century *Didascalia Apostolorum* contains an injunction that the place where the priest officiates during the anaphora should be screened.³⁰ In parallel with the development of the liturgy the number of divisions within churches increased, achieved by the use of screens and curtains frequently described in the sources as being made of silk.³¹

In Ethiopia, the traditional use of such screens remains

²¹F. HAYER: *Die Kirche Äthiopiens*, Berlin [1971], p.64; M. GRIAULE: 'Disposition de l'assistance à l'office abyssin', *Journal de la Société des Africanistes*, 4 [1934], pp.273–78.

²²M. MRASS: 'Kreuzigung Christi', in *Realenzyklopädie zur byzantinischen Kunst*, 5 [1991], cols.294–312.

²³E. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA: *La Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien. Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive*, Warsaw [1995], pp.72 ff.

²⁴See also J. MERCIER: 'Les peintures dans rouleaux protecteurs éthiopiens', *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, XIII, 2 [1975], nos. 2 and 53; E. JENKINS: 'Four Miniatures from 18th–19th Century Šawā' in *Aspects of Ethiopian Art from Ancient Axum to the 20th Century*, London [1993], p.107, fig.144.

²⁵B. TURAYEV, ed.: 'Vita Samuelis Valdebeni' in *Monumenta Aethiopiae Hagiologica*, Zapiski Istoriko-filologičeskogo Fakulteta Imp. S.-Peterburgskago Universiteta, LXV 2 [1902], pp.21–22.

²⁶Cf. also LEROY, *op.cit.* at note 20 above, p.33, fig.11; s. CHOJNACKI: *Major Themes in*

Ethiopian Painting, Wiesbaden [1983], fig.133; *Mensch und Geschichte in Äthiopiens Volksmalerei*, Innsbruck [1985], Fig.97.

²⁷H. DELEHAYE: 'Passio Sancti Mammets', *Analecta Bollandiana*, LVIII [1940], pp.124–41.

²⁸E. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA: 'Mamas: a Cappadocian saint in Ethiopian Tradition', in *ΛΕΙΜΩΝ: Studies presented to Lennart Rydén on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J.O. ROSENQUIST, Uppsala [1996], pp.1–32.

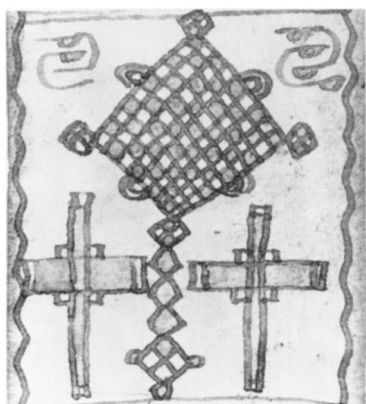
²⁹*Conservation Treatment of the Gondar hanging for the Royal Ontario Museum*, Ottawa, Canadian Conservation Institute, 1995, p.14.

³⁰F.X. FUNK: *Didascalia et Constitutiones apostolorum*, Paderborn [1905], pp.2, 125, 511.

³¹V. GERVERS: 'An Early Christian Curtain in the Royal Ontario Museum', in v. GERVERS, ed.: *Studies in Textile History in Memory of Harold B. Burnham*, Toronto [1977], pp.70–73.



39. Crowned king enthroned, from an Ethiopian magic scroll. Tigre, c.1800. (Musée National des Arts d'Afrique et d'Océanie, Paris).



40. Symbolic Crucifixion from an Ethiopian magic scroll. (Universitätsbibliothek, Mainz).



41. Ras Hailu with courtiers and guards (detail), c.1830. Wood, 109 by 21.8 cm. (whole panel) (British Museum [Museum of Mankind], London).

unbroken to the present day. Father Alvarez, a member of the Portuguese embassy to Ethiopia at the beginning of the sixteenth century wrote: 'Every church has two curtains, one on this side of the altar with little bells, and no one but priests goes inside this curtain; and another curtain in the middle of the church.' He mentions also that the curtains were made of silk and that they sometimes bore figural decoration.³² A century later, the Jesuit Almeida reported that sixteen curtains hung around the *mäqdäs* of the famous royal church at Mäkanä Sällase.³³

The treasury of Ethiopian rulers included masses of silk which they either bought or received as gifts or tribute. These valuable materials, mainly from India, Arabia and China, were kept in baskets and stored in caves administered by the governor of Shoa province, who held the title 'keeper of the silk caves'.³⁴ Ethiopian rulers made gifts of silk to monasteries and churches and in 1516 King Lebnä Dengel sent enough of it to Jerusalem to cover the walls of the church of the Holy Sepulchre.³⁵

Even though there can be no doubt that silk hangings were the preferred textile for the decoration of church interiors, it is not known where and by whom the ROM and BM exam-

ples were produced. Their iconographical programme and the precise identification of the utilitarian and ceremonial objects appearing on them indicate that they may well have been manufactured during the so-called Gondarene epoch of Ethiopian history, i.e. between 1630 and 1730.³⁶ The use of expensive, heavy silk to make them further suggests royal patronage, most probably by the very individuals who are represented on BM1 and the ROM central panel. Although their identification is not certain, there is good reason to believe that the royal trio are King Bäkaffa, his wife Menteuab and their son Iyyassu II. Bäkaffa, son of the famous King Iyyassu the Great, reigned between 1721 and 1730. Notwithstanding serious political problems and intrigues at the court, he continued the policy of his father in supporting the economical and cultural development of the country. He married Wälättä Giyorgis (Menteuab), herself a great patron of literature and the arts. Her political influence came to the fore only after Bäkaffa's death when she began to exercise the regency during the minority of their son Iyyassu.³⁷ We know that Bäkaffa built the magnificent church of the Archangel Raphael in Gondar, while Menteuab founded a convent and church at Qusquam near Gondar. It is quite conceivable that the hangings were commissioned for one or the other of them.

Further evidence for the association of the hangings with the reigns of Bäkaffa and Iyyassu II lies in the historical record. To date, five tablet-woven silk panels are known to have been brought to England by members of Napier's punitive expedition to Ethiopia in 1868: the ROM triptych, BM1 and BM2. The origin of all of them has been independently assigned to Gondar. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the most likely place of provenance would have been in or near Gondar, which was the imperial seat, the principal market for the imported goods required to make the hangings, the centre for the country's finest craftsmen and a place renowned for the high quality of its textiles. The differences between the figural scenes represented on BM1 and those on the central panel of ROM, together with the superiority of

³²F. ALVARES: *The Prester John of the Indies, a true relation of the lands of the Prester, being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, written by Father Francisco Alvares*, vol. 2, Hakluyt Society, Works, ser. 2, no. 114, Cambridge [1961], pp.87, 340, 510.

³³C.F. BECKINGHAM and G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD, eds.: *Some Records of Ethiopia 1593–1646*, Hakluyt Society, Works, ser. 2, no. 107, London [1954], p.89.

³⁴ALVARES, *op.cit.* at note 33 above, pp.117, 203, 296, 429, 434, 448.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p.448. O. MEINARDUS: 'The Ethiopians in Jerusalem', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, LXXVI [1965], p.218.

³⁶J. DORESSE: *La vie quotidienne des Éthiopiens chrétiens aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles*, Paris [1972].

³⁷E.A.W. BUDGE: *A History of Ethiopia*, London [1928], pp.443–59.



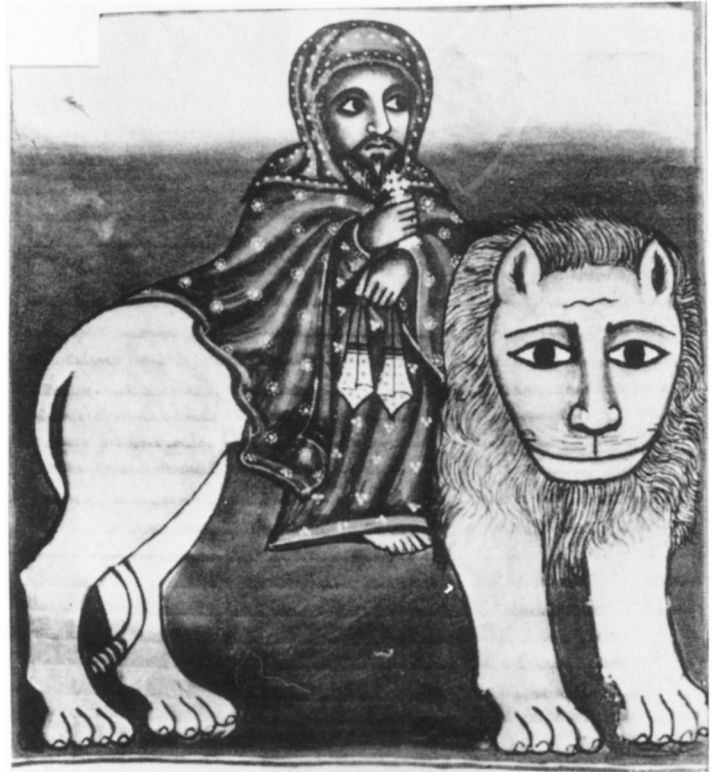
42. *St. Mamas*. Late 15th or early 16th century. Wood, 50.8 by 35 cm. (Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa).

execution and design exhibited by BM1 suggest that for a number of years there existed in Gondar a royal workshop producing such panels. Since there is no known tablet-weaving tradition in Ethiopia, there is good reason for suspecting that the weavers themselves must have been brought from elsewhere. Whatever the case, these examples may be part of a larger series witnessing royal devotion to the Church and designed to hang either around, or in front of, the *mäqdäs* of a royal foundation.

An indication that other such hangings were once current in Gondar is provided by Eduard Rüppell's description in the 1830s of the two-storey, circular oratory built a century earlier by Queen Menteuab beside her palace at Qusquam. He noted traces of the heavy silk door hangings and alcove curtains which once adorned its interior.³⁸ Among the many references to silk hangings in the historical sources, this is the only one which describes the material as being 'heavy' – a quality which is one of the striking characteristics of the BM and ROM panels. If the remnants cited by Rüppell were a product of the same workshop, there is reason to think that Menteuab at least, not to mention Bäkaffa and Iyyassu II, ordered similar materials to hang in other churches in Gondar.

³⁸ 'Hier und da gibt noch eine Spur von schweren seidnen Thürvorhängen und Alkoven-Gardinen' (E. RÜPPELL: *Reise in Abyssinien*, Frankfurt-am-Main [1840], II, p.116).

³⁹ I. GUIDI, ed.: *Annales regum Iyyasu II et Iyo'as*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum



43. *St. Samuel of Wäldäbba*. 18th century. Parchment, dimensions unknown. (Monastery of Abräntant, Bägemder).

There is further evidence linking the production of these silk hangings to a workshop active at the time of this royal family. British Library MS OR 590, containing the lavishly illustrated *Täbibä Täbiban*, was probably made either for King Bäkaffa, for his queen or for his son and heir. To help the reader turn to each miniature, a piece of silk yarn has been passed through a small hole in each folio and knotted, to serve as a tab and protect the manuscript itself. That silk yarn, in blue, green, red and yellow, is of precisely the same quality and colours as the silk used in the hangings.

Such temporal and material associations would suggest that the royal figures appearing on BM1 may be identified in hierarchical order as King Bäkaffa, Queen Menteuab and their son Iyyassu, and those in the second and third registers of the central ROM panel as the queen and her son. Following Bäkaffa's death in 1730, Menteuab acted as regent during Iyyassu's long minority. According to the chronicle of his reign, it was Iyyassu who not only acknowledged her as the real ruler of the country, but who also declared that she should wear his crown: 'Make my mother reign, crown her with my crown because without her my reign cannot go on . . .'.³⁹ Seen in this light, it may be postulated that BM1 was produced under King Bäkaffa's patronage somewhere between 1721 and 1730, and that the central panel of the ROM hanging was ordered by Queen Menteuab sometime before Iyyassu II reached his majority in about 1738. The evidence reflects the posture of the chronicle, which makes it quite clear that although Iyyassu was the legitimate successor to the throne, the reins of government were held by his mother, who wore the crown.

Uppsala University and University of Toronto

Orientalium, Scriptorum aethiopicum, series altera, VI, Versia Rome [1912], reprint, Louvain [1955], p.41.