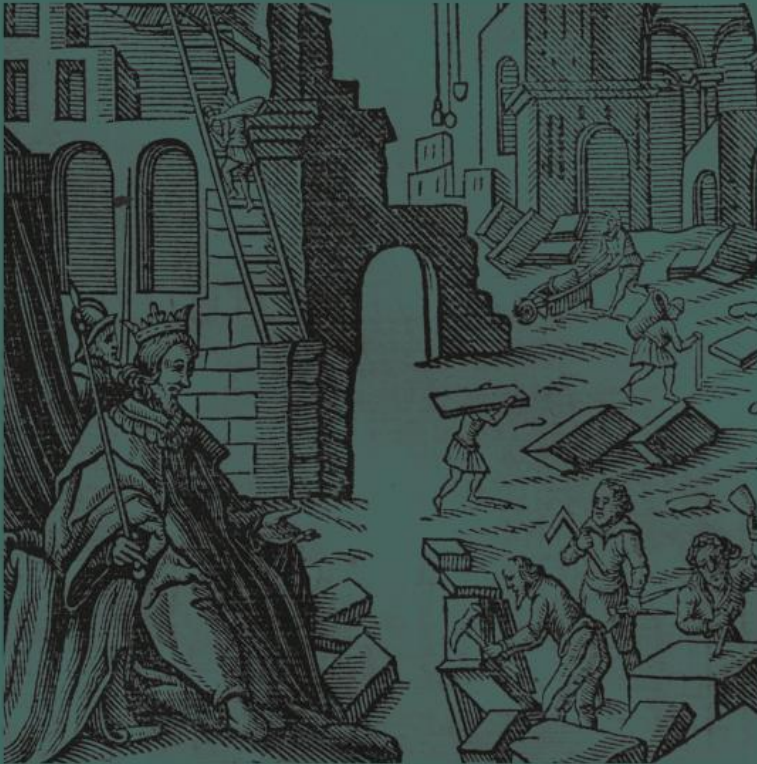


The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition

King, Sage and Architect

edited by Joseph Verheyden



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Christian and Islamic Tradition

Themes in
Biblical Narrative
Jewish and Christian Traditions

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SOLOMON IN ETHIOPIAN TRADITION

Witold Witakowski and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska

The figure of Solomon (Eth. *Sälomon*) plays an important role in the tradition of the Abyssinians, that is, those inhabitants of Ethiopia who have been bearers of the traditional political, cultural, as well as religious identity of the Ethiopian politeia. This means that the named tradition can be traced among the Christian Ethiopians, the speakers of Ethio-Semitic languages of what is today northwestern Ethiopia, mainly the Amharas and the Tigreans (the latter living today in both Ethiopia and Eritrea). The traditional literature of these peoples was written in Ge'ez, known as the Classical Ethiopic language, the "Latin of Ethiopia," a language that ceased to be spoken some time between the 7th and the 10th century C.E., but which was used as the literary language through to the 19th century, and serves as the liturgical language of the Ethiopian (and Eritrean) Orthodox Church(es), to this day.

Ethiopia always maintained contact with the Mediterranean world in the pre-Christian as well as Christian epochs, notwithstanding its political isolation from that world following the Muslim conquests of Egypt and Nubia. Particularly important were the contacts with Christian Egypt, with which Ethiopia, for most of its history as a Christian country, had ecclesiastical bonds being a province of the Coptic (Miaphysite) Patriarchate of Alexandria.

Other bonds in the pre-Christian epoch—still not sufficiently researched—were with Ancient Israel, as the Judaic elements in the official and non-official religious life of Ethiopia testify. These elements stem from the Judaic substrate that was established in the country when, before the arrival of Christianity, Jews, not very numerous, migrated from Palestine via South Arabia. Some scholars are unconvinced about the provenance of these elements, and believe that they are due rather to the internal religious-cultural development of Ethiopian Christianity leading to the patterning of the religious life of both church and people on the *Old Testament* and traditions emanating from it.¹ The authors of the present text

¹ The positions in this controversy were most clearly formulated by two scholars: Ullendorff 1973, chapter 5, and Rodinson 1964.

accept the first hypothesis,² based on our improved understanding of the early history of the Jewish presence and influence on the eastern side of the Red Sea, roughly in what is today Yemen, where Jews lived from the early centuries A.D., if not earlier, until the 1950s.

In fact, the role of Solomon in the imagination of Ethiopians can be regarded as an indicator of the traces that Jewish influences left in the country, notwithstanding the subsequent acceptance of Christianity.

The most important appearance Solomon makes in Ethiopic literature is in the work that has acquired a role of the Ethiopian national epos, *The Glory of the Kings* (*Kəbrä nägäst*, ክብረ ነገሥት).³ Here Solomon emerges as the protoplast of the dynasty that for seven centuries reigned in Ethiopia, through his being the father of Menelik (*Mənalik*), the legendary founder of the dynasty. *The Glory* has a complicated literary structure and consists of several parts, but the most central of them is the narrative that has its starting point in 1 Kgs 10:1–13 (paralleled by 2 Chr 9:1–12), where the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon's court in Jerusalem is narrated. In the epos, she is first called the *Queen of the South*, but later her proper name, Makeda (*Makədda*), is introduced. Having heard from Tamrin, a merchant, about King Solomon's wisdom, she decided to meet him and set out on a trip to Jerusalem. Once in the city, she had a series of conversations with Solomon and eventually was invited by him to share a meal and to stay overnight. She agreed only if Solomon would promise not to touch her, to which he agreed, on condition that she would not take anything that belonged to him. The king cunningly ordered a spicy dinner and when Makeda got up in the night to drink water he seized her, and, as a result, she fell pregnant. She returned to her country where she gave birth to Solomon's son, Menelik. When he grew up, she sent him to Jerusalem to his father, who recognized him because of his resemblance to his father, with additional proof provided by the ring he had with him that his mother had received from Solomon. After some time, the king sent his son back to Ethiopia, having given orders that the firstborn sons of Judaeen aristocracy (Menelik was Solomon's first born, too) would join him on his return trip to his country and stay there. Menelik and his retinue, however, in an understanding reached with Azariah, the son of Archpriest Zadok, stole the Ark of the Covenant from the Jerusalem Temple and in this way it reached Ethiopia. It is believed to be preserved to this day in the Cathedral of Zion in the city of Aksum.

² For the opposite view, see Gamst 2007.

³ The edition was provided by Bezold 1905.

The *Glory of the Kings* was composed in the 13th century, but its sources are certainly older. It is the work of one Isaac (*Yəshaq*), archpriest (*naburä ʾəd*—“the one on whom the hand was imposed,” a religious and civil chief of Aksum), and was written between 1314 and 1322, during the reign of Amdä Seyon (*Amdä Şəyon*, 1313–1344). As if it were ordered by the king, it was used for the glorification of his dynasty,⁴ and thus gave rise to a political myth that the dynasty had ruled Ethiopia in ancient times, that is, allegedly from the reign of Solomon’s son, Menelik, including the Aksum epoch, but that “usurpers” had subsequently seized power. The “usurpers,” the Zagwes, were of Agäw (that is, Cushitic) origin and ruled Ethiopia for some 250 years. However, with the accession of Yekunno Amlak (*Yəkunno Amlak*) in 1270, the grandfather of Amdä Seyon, the old “legitimate” dynasty regained the throne. Thereafter, the dynasty ruled the country until the revolution of 1974, when its last scion, Emperor Haile Sellassie (*Ḥaylä Şəllase*) was deposed and the monarchy abolished. However, over the 700 years or so of the dynasty’s rule, the legend noted above became part of the national tradition of Ethiopia, rooted deeply in the Ethiopians’ consciousness. Indeed, it practically became official doctrine of the state, to the extent that the Constitution of Ethiopia of 1955, art. 2, proclaimed that: “Imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of Haile Sellassie I, descendant of King Sahle Sellassie (*Şahlä Şəllase*), whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of Queen of Ethiopia, the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Jerusalem.”⁵

The *Queen of Sheba’s* becoming the *Queen of Ethiopia* is the result of the erroneous identification of the “Queen of the South,” under which name the Queen of Sheba appears in the *New Testament* (Mt 12:42, Lk 11:31), with “Candace, queen of the Ethiopians” (Acts 8:27). “Candace” or *kandake* was the title of the queens of Meroe, but was taken in the *New Testament* as a proper name. The Greek term *Aithiopia* had a different meaning in Antiquity from what it has today: it was indiscriminately applied to a vast area south of Egypt, that included Nubia, what is today Ethiopia, and sometimes even South Arabia and southwestern India. Nevertheless, the Ethiopians came to understand the name found in Acts 8:27 as referring specifically to their country.

⁴ The possibility that it was initially composed for the benefit of the ruling local dynasty of Enderata, a region in northern Ethiopia, south-eastern Tegray, and only subsequently taken over by Amdä Seyon (Marrassini 2007, 366), does not change the national function of the epos.

⁵ Ullendorff 1974, 105.

The literary motif of the Queen of Sheba in the *Glory* was relatively well known all over the Near East and the north-east African area.⁶ Several legends connected with her, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, circulated, of which at least the version provided by the *Targum Sheni to Esther*⁷ should be named. Many details present in the *Glory* can be found in that version (including the motif of seduction) but also in other texts, Jewish (*Alphabet of Ben Sira*), and Muslim, including the *Koran* (*sura 27, 15–45*).⁸ But the main story in *The Glory of the Kings*, that Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were the parents of Menelik, the first king of Ethiopia, is the invention of the Ethiopian author. Also, instead of presenting the Queen as trying to hide the handicap (in the *Targum* her feet were reported to be hairy) that Solomon tricked her into revealing, thus putting her in an awkward position, here she is “promoted” to a person more equal to Solomon. This move may have been prompted by the Ethiopic translation of the *Old Testament*: in 1 Kgs 10:1, she is said to approach Solomon “with wisdom,” instead of “with riddles,” as in the *Septuagint*, from which the Ethiopic Bible translation was made. Consequently, it appears that she was treated almost as equal in wisdom to Solomon who was widely known as the wise king *par excellence*. Even Menelik’s other name used in the *Glory*, *Ibn al-Hakim*⁹—“the son of the Wise” (in Arabic), testifies to that.

But the sheer fact that the legend such as the *Glory of the Kings* was composed shows also the apparently unprecedented¹⁰ ambition by at least some Ethiopians to draw the pedigree of the ruling dynasty back to ancient Israel. In this way, *nəburä ʾəd Yəšəhaq* proved that “Ethiopia was the lawful successor and heir of Israel as the chosen people of God.”¹¹ This was more than a propaganda pamphlet written to bring greater splendour upon the new dynasty: drawing Ethiopia’s pedigree back to ancient Israel reveals a wish to show the Ethiopians as a *verus Israel* (notwithstanding the Christian connotation of the term), who were, moreover, the custodians of the true Ark.

The visit of the Queen of the South to Solomon also had religious consequences: having learnt about Solomon’s god she abandoned her pagan

⁶ Ullendorff 1968, 131–145.

⁷ Of uncertain date, estimated to be written between the 4th and 11th century.

⁸ The sources of the *Glory of the King* were analysed by David Hubbard in his doctoral thesis presented to St. Andrews University in 1956. The work remains unpublished.

⁹ Garbled in Ethiopic to: *Bayna-Ləhkəm* (በይነ፡ ልክክም፡), but at least one ms. has preserved the form which is closer to the Arabic: *ʾIbna ʾalḥakəm* (أبنی: الحاکم).

¹⁰ Gamst 2007, 305, writes that this was not unusual “among the Christians elsewhere.” He does not, however, provide any other example.

¹¹ Ullendorff 1974, 108.

beliefs (in the sun, trees, idols, etc.) and converted to the faith of the God of Israel (chapter 28). Furthermore, Menelik, when in Jerusalem, learned the tenets of Israel's religion before returning to Ethiopia. He was also anointed the king of his country by Zadok, the Israelite priest (ch. 39). Eventually, the people of Ethiopia also converted to the religion of Israel. This can be seen as a fulfillment of Solomon's dream in which he saw the sun leaving Israel, but shining instead over Ethiopia (ch. 30).

There is yet another aspect of the relationship between Solomon and the "Queen of Ethiopia," which Edward Ullendorff drew attention to. In some modern popular paintings (see below), copied in Ethiopia even today, which depict the story of Solomon and Makeda, Solomon is represented in profile, the pose used to portray evil people, whereas the Queen is always *en face*, that is, in the position reserved for positive figures.¹² This reversal of the ethical attributes of the two main figures of the story is the more surprising as Solomon is otherwise treated as the wise man, and, in the context of magic, the protector against demons.

Over time the *Glory* has become a repository of national and religious feelings, and is not only a literary work. In addition to providing an impressive pedigree for the "Solomonid" dynasty, the royal manuscript copy of the epos seems to have become a national palladium or a talisman, without which it was not possible to rule the country. This can be seen in the famous letter that Emperor John IV (*Yohannäs*) sent to Queen Victoria. During the British invasion of Ethiopia in 1867–68, and the siege of Mäqdäla, Emperor Tewodros's fortress that was eventually captured, the emperor committed suicide, whereas his library was confiscated. Most of the collection was brought to Britain and deposited in the British Museum. The new Ethiopian emperor John IV (1872–89), Tewodros's successor, found himself in a delicate position, since he was deprived of one of the Ethiopian imperial attributes, the palladium of both the Solomonid dynasty as well as of the state. Apparently its physical presence at the court as an attribute of imperial power was so important that John wrote a letter to Queen Victoria and the Earl of Granville, the British Foreign Secretary, asking them to return the manuscript of Tewodros¹³ (already entered into the British Museum acquisition list as Ms. Oriental 819).¹⁴ The Trustees of the museum complied and the manuscript was sent back to Ethiopia in 1872.

¹² Ullendorff 1974, 111; Staude 1954.

¹³ Ullendorff 1968, 74–75.

¹⁴ Wright 1877, 297, footnote.

However, the *Glory of the Kings* is not the only Ethiopic composition in which Solomon appears. In the other texts, his character depends very much on his fame as a wise man or philosopher.

At the beginning of the 16th century (between 1510 and 1522) a collection of aphorisms found its way into Ethiopic literature after being translated from Arabic, but with roots, most probably, in Hellenistic gnomology. It is entitled *The Book of the Wise Philosophers* (*Mäṣṣafä fälasfa täbiban; መጽሐፈ ፈላስፋ፡ ጠቢባን፡*).¹⁵ The collection contains sayings or aphorisms of mostly Greek philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle (the original part), but also of Biblical figures (including King David), Persian figures (Chosroes), as well as the Church Fathers (the latter seem to be later additions, from the 19th/20th centuries).¹⁶ Consequently, it is no surprise that sayings also attributed to Solomon can be found in the collection.¹⁷

The fame of Solomon as the wise man or wise philosopher, seems also to be the source of the role he plays in Ethiopian magic. This is not an Ethiopian invention but is yet another cultural phenomenon attesting to the contacts with the eastern Mediterranean world. This role developed on the basis of the biblical passage in 1 Kgs 4:30, according to which his wisdom “was greater than all the wisdom of Egypt.” In the Hellenistic epoch, Solomon’s fame as a major magician was established first among the Jews, but over time also among other peoples. One account can be found in the *Jewish Antiquities* by Josephus Flavius, in which he writes that Solomon received from God the power of defeating demons in order to heal people.¹⁸ He also composed charms that people could make use of to expel the demons for good (*JA* 8.2; 5.44–49).

We cannot trace here the ways by which Hellenistic magic reached Ethiopia and, along with it, magical prayers attributed to or connected with Solomon. An important role was certainly played by the Greek composition entitled the *Testament of Solomon*, although a thorough analysis of the influences of the named text has not been provided so far. One thing is, however, certain: Solomon has become an important figure in Ethiopic magic.

Already in the *Glory of the Kings*, it is said that Solomon “made the demons serve him by his wisdom.”¹⁹ It is, however, difficult to say how

¹⁵ Cornill (ed. 1875); Sumner 1974.

¹⁶ Pietruschka 2002 and 2005.

¹⁷ Guidi 1932, 82.

¹⁸ Rodinson 1992, 133.

¹⁹ Ed. Bezold 1905, 18a, 9. Budge’s translation “and he forced the devils to obey him by his wisdom.”

old other magical texts that involve Solomon are, but there is no questions about their popularity in Ethiopia.

Stefan Strelcyn in his study of Ethiopic magic²⁰ provides a classification of the magical texts and in his first group, which contains magico-religious texts, there are several items attributed to Solomon.²¹ These may be further divided into two groups, the so-called “names” (*’asmāt*, አስማት፡) and the prayers (*ṣālotat*, ጸሎታት፡). Within the first group Strelcyn lists the following examples:

1. *The names that God gave Solomon (to be placed) on the rings of his fingers and of his hands, thanks to which the demons obey him* (አስማት፡ ዘወሀቦ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ለሰሎሞን፡ በሕልቀተ፡ አጻብኢሁ፡ ወእዳዊሁ፡ በዘይትአዘዙ፡ ሎቱ፡ አጋንንት፡);

2. *By these names, Solomon saved himself from the hands of the smiths* (በዝንቱ፡ አስማት፡ ድኅነ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ እምእደሆሙ፡ ለነሀብት፡);

3. *The names by which Solomon summoned the magicians, all the evil demons and healers, made them take an oath and anathematized them* (አስማት፡ በእንተ፡ ዘጸውዖሙ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ ለመሠርዖን፡ ወለኩሎሙ፡ አጋንንት፡ ርኩሳን፡ ወለዓቃብያን፡ ሥራይ፡ በዘአምሐሎሙ፡ ወአውጋዘሙ፡);

The *’asmāt* were usually written on scrolls and worn either around the neck or waist. They contain names of maladies and/or the demons causing them, but also the names of divine figures based on words of Hebrew, Greek and Arabic origin, or created in Ethiopia with elements borrowed from these languages.²²

An example of a magical prayer is:

4. *The prayer against all the (evil) eyes and the eyes of all the evil people that Solomon uttered* (ጸሎት፡ በእንት፡ ኩሎን፡ ዓይነት፡ ወዓይነ፡ ኩሎን፡ እኩያት፡ ዘይቤ፡ ሰሎሞን፡).²³

In addition to the magical “names” and prayers, there are also two larger texts connected specifically with Solomon. These are *The Net of Solomon* and *The Mirror of Solomon*.

The Net of Solomon (መርበብተ፡ ሰሎሞን፡),²⁴ is the short title of a text whose title in full is: *The Prayer concerning the net of Solomon that God gave him*,

²⁰ Strelcyn 1960.

²¹ Ibid., 150; cf. too Kaplan 2010.

²² Chernetsov 2003, 381.

²³ Strelcyn 1960, 150.

²⁴ Euringer 1928 and 1929.

(and) that he stretched (to catch) demons as a net for the fish of the sea (ጸሎት፡ በእንተ፡ መርብብተ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ ዘወሀቦ፡ እግዚአብሔር፡ ዘረበሰሙ፡ ለአጋንንት፡ ከመ፡ መርብብተ፡ ዓሣ፡ ዘባሕር፡). As was the case with the magical texts mentioned above, it is also usually written on a scroll²⁵ to be hung on a string and worn about one's neck or waist. *The Net* consists of eight (in the version published by Euringer) incantation units (lit. *prayers*) in which the magical words uttered by Solomon break the power of demons and cure the illnesses caused by them. The spells are framed by a story in which Solomon is told to be captured by demons and brought to their king. The king tells him of many evil actions by demons against various persons, including priests, monks, widows and virgins, whereupon Solomon utters the magical words and thus annihilates the power of the demons and their king. However, according to Sevir Chernetsov, the framing story is longer, but no single manuscript (scroll) contains the whole story.²⁶ This is because the set of charms is always adapted to the needs of the person who orders them. Moreover, the magical texts are generally written not to be read by the owners (who are very often illiterate), but only to be worn by them.

A version of the other magical Solomonian text, *The Mirror of Solomon* (መጽሔተ፡ ሰሎሞን፡) was published by Sebastian Euringer,²⁷ but a further version was published (in facsimile), translated and studied by Oscar Löfgren.²⁸ The results of the latter's research show that the *Mirror* is made up of several (variable ?) sections, each built according to the same pattern. The sections most often begin with the formula: "Solomon said to the demon, whose name was ..." (ይቤ፡ ሰሎሞን፡ ለጋኔን፡ ለዘሰሙ፡ ...), whereupon names of the various demons follow with a short characterization of each of them. In the subsequent sections of the charm units Solomon asks them how they harm, injure, make sick or kill men. The demons answer the question, whereafter a therapeutic part is provided that is uttered by Saint Victor (Eth. *Fiqtor*, ፊቅቶር፡). He names various substances, mineral or botanical (often unidentifiable), as well as special actions by the patient (including sexual abstinence for a period) that are supposed to help against the harm that the demon questioned by Solomon has just

²⁵ This is by far the most often met carrier of the text. On the other hand the so-called *däbtära*, who function as educated copyists, have their own books (codexes), in which various magical texts are put down, and from which they copy the text ordered by their customers for their specific needs.

²⁶ Chernetsov 1974, 18.

²⁷ Euringer 1937.

²⁸ Löfgren 1972.

described. Then follows the final part which is supposed to drive the demon away from the patient. The words of expulsion in this part are pronounced by yet another figure, Archangel Michael.

The *Mirror* can be written or copied as an ordinary text in manuscripts (codexes), and can include several sections: the example published by Löfgren has 25 sections. But, of course, there are items, such as the one published by Euringer,²⁹ that are single, having been copied on specific instructions for a given patient, in accordance with his personal needs. Euringer's item (from Jerusalem, early 20th century) is written in circles in concentric lines, starting from the centre and developed by copying each successive line around the preceding line.

The text of the *Mirror* may be furnished with magical drawings.

There is yet another magical prayer connected with Solomon, that which has its power "by the virtue of King Solomon's seal" (በማኅተመ፡ ንጉሠ፡ ሰሎሞን፡).³⁰

Another magical device connected with Solomon is his ring. It is referred to in a prayer against the evil eye of the demons *barya* and *legewon*, who can be deprived of their power by the virtue of the secret 'asmāt/ words contained in Solomon's ring; "... the prayer concerning the (evil) eye of Barya and Legewon; and the ring of Solomon was between his fingers... and its inscription reads Čača'el (7 times)..." (ጸሎት፡ በእንተ፡ አይነ፡ ባርያ፡ ወሌጊዎን፡ ወሀለወት፡ ህልቀቱ፡ ለሰሎሞን፡ በማዕከለ፡ አፃቢሁ፡³¹ ... ወጽሕፈት፡ ከመዝ፡ ይብል፡ ጫጫኤል፡ ...).

This prayer is preserved, *inter alia*, in a 19th century scroll in the Wellcome Institute, London.

The *magical square* containing the name of Solomon should also be named. It consist of 16 (4 × 4) small squares containing the letters in the name of Solomon (ሰ፡ ሎ፡ ሞ፡ ን), which, together with other nonsensical words, make up a square of the Sator-Arepe type, the widely known Latin palindrome.³²

There is a living tradition in the country regarding the so-called *caractères à lunettes* (glasses characters). These are the small looped characters resembling glasses that are added to the end of each line. In fact, the custom comes from the ancient Hermetists, but it spread into the magic texts of all Near Eastern peoples and can be found in Hebrew,

²⁹ See above, n. 27.

³⁰ Strelcyn 1972, 40 (no. 31).

³¹ For AcbOh.

³² Löfgren 1962, 117.

Coptic, Byzantine and Arabic magic texts, as well as in Ethiopic. In the latter such letters are quite frequent, and are interpreted as the script for the language of the demons that Solomon knew,³³ or as their cries they utter when they are summoned by Solomon.

The name “Solomon” (Eth. *Sälomon*) itself serves as a magical word (*ʾasmat*), as in the case of a prayer against the evil eye to be repeated seven times,³⁴ or in a magical scroll translated by W.H. Worrell, which he dated to the 17th–18th century.³⁵

It has to be mentioned, however, that “Sälomon” is also the name of a malicious demon, a *zar*.³⁶

The oldest depictions of Solomon in Ethiopian art appear in the Psalters dating to the mid- and to second half of the 15th century. The full-page miniatures introduce the text of the *Song of Songs*, which in Ethiopian Psalter manuscripts customarily follows the psalms. Two types of representations were used for these frontispieces. On one, the king sitting on the throne is accompanied by a courtier carrying the royal insignia—a ceremonial whisk and an umbrella. Solomon either holds a sword (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, d’Abbadie 105, fol. 121v)³⁷ or is drawing it from its scabbard (Paris, private collection, fol. 129v)³⁸—an allusion to his famous judgement (1 Kgs 3:26). The other type illustrates this event. In the Psalter from the monastery of Däbrä Wärq in Goḡgam, the king holding a sceptre sits on the throne, his feet resting on a cushion. In front of him stand two women with a child between them, and below stand the people, who, according to an inscription, are praising his wisdom³⁹ (fig. 1). The miniature in the manuscript *Gəbrä Həmamət* (the *Ritual for Passion Week*) fol. 210v, in the monastery of Mārʾawi Krəstos, Šire, also from the end of the 15th century, connects both types. It shows Solomon pulling the sword from its scabbard and assisted by an insignia bearer, while below him stand two women holding a child and a soldier with an unsheathed sword

³³ Mercier 1997, 51.

³⁴ Griaule 1930, 13–14.

³⁵ Worrell 1910, 84.

³⁶ Strelcyn 1955, 427b.

³⁷ Balicka-Witakowska 1983, 23 fig. 29.

³⁸ Balicka-Witakowska 1984–86, 24, fig. 5.

³⁹ The manuscript, badly damaged by dump and fire was never published; for some of its miniatures cf. *Mäzɡäbä Seʿelat*—Treasury of Ethiopian Images, <http://ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca> username: student; password: student: EBW-0001.001.001-015 and EBW-001.002.001–014.



Fig. 1. Judgement of Solomon; Psalter, Däbrä Wärq monastery, folio unknown; 15th c. (courtesy of Paul Henze).

ready to cut it in two.⁴⁰ In most of these representations, the king has a halo, which emphasizes his special position as an equal of the saints.

At the end of the 15th century and through the 16th century, when the less popular narrative scenes gave way to long galleries of holy figures grouped according to a different principle, Solomon is coupled with his father David. They can be represented side by side, as for instance in the Gospel Book from the monastery of Gundä Gunde famous for its painting workshop. The kings who appear in the larger group of prophets are distinguished by their common attributes: David holds the stringed *bägäna* instrument and Solomon a sceptre (fig. 2).⁴¹

Another variant shows the kings facing each other—the iconographical scheme suggesting that the persons are engaged in a conversation. This mean of expression was used, for instance, on the painted liturgical fan kept in the church of Däbrä Sälam, Tigre. The kings who belong here to a mixed group of Old and New Testament figures are devoid of all royal attributes. Decorated with haloes, like all other saints and each holding a cross, they would not be distinguishable if it were not for their names inscribed on the books they present.⁴²

The “dialogue scheme” was also used for the 16th century wall painting in the church of Yädəbbä Maryam.⁴³ David and Solomon sit facing one another, this time not on thrones or chairs but on the decorative seats. David is playing the *kərar*, another Ethiopian stringed instrument, while Solomon holds a sword. The difference in generation between them is marked in their hair: white for David, black for Solomon. Two schematically rendered buildings in the background remind viewers of the involvement of the two kings in the construction of Jerusalem’s temple.

With the style of painting known as the First Gondarene School, which flourished some hundred years after the mid-17th century, the figure of Solomon was incorporated as part of the programme of wall paintings designed to decorate the external walls of church sanctuaries. He is included in a group of Israel’s kings depicted on the eastern wall. All his royal attributes—a crown, a sword in its scabbard, here covered by his coat, an umbrella and a ceremonial whisk carried by two attendants

⁴⁰ Grierson 1993, nr. 89.

⁴¹ Cf. similar representations also belonging to the same painting school in the Gospels kept in the churches Täklä Haymanot Guya, Tämben and Maryam Sawné, Asbidära, *Mäzgäbä Se’elat* (n. 39) MG-2002.051:011 and MG-2004.079:025.

⁴² Balicka-Witakowska 2004, 28; *Mäzgäbä Se’elat* (n. 39): MG-2000.082:019-020 and 086:012–013.

⁴³ Raunig 2005, 187f., fig. 152.



Fig. 2. Solomon and David among the prophets; Gospels, Gundä Gunde monastery, fol. 4r; 15/16th c. (courtesy of Michael Gervers).

flanking his throne—are the same as for the other kings. Again, he can be identified only by the name written above his depiction. Not many examples of these paintings are still preserved, but at least two can be mentioned: in the Däbrä Sina church near Gorgora (fig. 3) and in Qoma Fasilädäs church, South Gondär.⁴⁴ This type of representation was limited to the First Gondarene School and disappeared in the middle of the 18th century when the programme of church decoration changed.

In the late 19th century, some churches decorated with murals added some rarely depicted biblical stories to the standardized repertoire. In this context, we find two episodes from Solomon's life in the first ambulatory of the Däbrä Marqos church in Goğğam, both illustrating the event epitomizing the famous wisdom of the king. In the first (fig. 4A) Solomon is making a generous burnt offering in the sanctuary in Gibeon, after which God appears to him asking what he wants to be given. The young king asks for an understanding mind and ability to discern good and evil (1 Kgs 3:9). The second is a proof that Solomon's wish was fulfilled—the scene of his judgement (fig. 4B). Unlike the old, abbreviated and stylized pictures, this one is rendered with great realism and narrative skills. The king, with a sceptre in his hand, sits on an elevated throne placed at the top of a staircase, on each step of which a lion is lying. The king's servant holds a child with its head down and has raised the sword to cut it in two in front of the women who by their reactions reveal themselves. People gathered behind the throne marvel at the king's judiciousness.⁴⁵

Although the manuscripts of the *Glory of the Kings* were never illustrated, at the beginning of the 20th century the story was given artistic expression and immediately became one of the most popular subjects in Ethiopian folk painting. The composition, which included numerous episodes, arranged in a cartoon-like suite of scenes, was, customarily executed on canvas or tanned skin using very bright, commercially produced colours. This artefact was, and still is, manufactured in uncountable amount of copies, mostly destined for the tourist market.⁴⁶ It is possible that the idea of illustrating the story came from the French journalist and novelist Hugues Le Roux, who in about 1900 commissioned a series of five pictures for the book entitled *Magda Queen of Sheba* from the painter Mika'el Āngəda Wärq.

⁴⁴ *Mäzgäbä Se'elat* (n. 39), SC-012:009:001; Wion 2001, 294.

⁴⁵ Despite that the picture is perfectly clear, the accompanying inscriptions both describe the subject and almost verbatim quote the biblical passage with the women's speeches.

⁴⁶ Balicka-Witakowska 2007, 679–681.



Fig. 3. Solomon with two attendants; church of Däbrä Sina near Gorgora; wall painting, eastern wall; mid-17th c. (courtesy of Paul Henze).



Fig. 4A. Solomon offering in Gibeon; Däbrä Marqos, wall painting; 19th c. (courtesy of Michael Gervers).



Fig. 4B. Judgement of Solomon; Däbrä Marqos, wall painting, first ambulatory; 19th c. [idem.].

The early examples depict only the main events contained in the text of the *Glory of the Kings*: the circumstances of Makeda's visit to Solomon, their meeting and the queen's departure to her fatherland. The further development of the pictorial narrative went in two directions. First, the illustration of a Tigrean folk tale of the hero killing a snake and identified as Menelik's father was added at the beginning, creating a kind of introduction. Later, this prolonged account received an epilogue based again on the *Glory of the Kings* and depicting the story of Menelik, his birth, visit to his father and return to Ethiopia with the Ark of the Covenant. From this tripartite suite of pictures, the "classical" format of painting emerged, with 44 scenes displayed in four rows, each depicting 11 episodes. The scenes are separated from each other by the frames, which also provide a background for a text in Amharic describing each event depicted.⁴⁷

Besides the multipictorial representations of the legend, there are pictures having a single scene as their subject. For instance, a piece belonging to the American Museum of Natural History (acq. 19.1/6173) depicts Solomon and Makeda banqueting, while another one in the Basel Museum of Ethnology shows the arrival of Makeda before Solomon (nr. 12849), and a painting in London's Horniman's Museum (nr. 19.4.66/20x) depicts Makeda giving Solomon a golden chain.⁴⁸

The magical texts connected with Solomon and written on magic scrolls are often illustrated with the figure of the king and with the representations of the devices he was using for magical activities and for subduing demons. The most common are the ring bearing the seal of God, Solomon's Knot and, more rarely, a labyrinth and a mirror.

As in the the religious representations in most of the magic scrolls, the king appears clad in full royal attire and flanked by the attendants—the elements that emphasize his majesty⁴⁹—despite the fact that in this context it is his abilities as a magician that are in demand. Sometimes, his crown is ornamented with crosses in accordance with the conception that Solomon was the antitype of Christ. The idea, which in Ethiopia was initially transferred by the *Glory of the Kings*,⁵⁰ clearly emerges from a picture belonging to a scroll in the Littmann collection (Berlin, Deutsche Staats-

⁴⁷ Cf. some examples in colour in: Fisseha and Raunig 1985, figs 1,2,8,9; *Mäzgäbä Se'elat* (n. 39), MG-1995.003:016-026.

⁴⁸ *Mäzgäbä Se'elat* (n. 39), MG-1995.003:009.

⁴⁹ Cf. for instance the scrolls IES nr. 182, Mercier 1979, nr. 11; Mainz Universitätsbibliothek, aeth. 38 and aeth. 38, Wagner 1967, 725 and figs. 7,8; Berliner Museums, Ms. 4066, Jäger 1966, fig. 16.

⁵⁰ Chapter 66, cf. above n. 3.

bibliothek, Ms. Or. Oct. 4068). Solomon is represented twice, once as the king of Israel wearing a horned crown and flanked by the vessels of the Jerusalem temple, and the second time—in horizontal mirror inversion—wearing the crown topped by a cross and flanked by two other crosses. Two half-figures of the king are divided (or joined) by three faces, which have been interpreted as two angels and one evil spirit.⁵¹ Two cephalic snakes or dragons that enclose his bust are most probably a variant of a picture, common in Ethiopian magic books and scrolls, representing the Lamb of God bearing a cross and encircled by two serpents.⁵²

In Ethiopian scrolls, Solomon may be represented in a conceptual way. Strongly geometrical figures with “rayed” face and dominated by large eyes on the scroll in Addis Ababa, IES nr. 293,⁵³ are interpreted as representing the king sitting on his throne. Crosses flanked by heraldic birds are visible on his chest at the top of his head and in the upper part of the picture, perhaps an allusion to a legend of Solomon, known, for instance, from an Arabic version, which tells that the king mastered the language of the birds.⁵⁴ The similar picture in the scroll Paris, MAAO nr. 34 even includes a demon bearing the throne of the king.⁵⁵

Among Solomon’s legends that circulated in the East, one tells of the labyrinth which the demons built for the king where he kept his harem. An Ethiopian version of the story adds that Sirak the Wise entered it by an underground passage and seduced one of the king’s concubines.⁵⁶ The picture of the labyrinth appears in some Ethiopian scrolls understood as a protected place where the owner of the talisman cannot be charmed by evil spirits. Usually, at the top of these drawings, the king is represented in half figure flanked by the courtiers, while below there is his labyrinth, the entry to which is either guarded by lions or locked by a seal, as for instance, in the scroll Paris, MAAO nr. 4.⁵⁷

The magic texts containing *’asmat* and *ṣālotat* have as a background the story of Solomon when he was captured by the blacksmith kings, but was able to vanquish them by pronouncing the sacred names of God, the topic which entered the *Net of Solomon*.⁵⁸ In some magic pictures, the

⁵¹ The picture is labelled by the inscription: *Sālonon rə’ṣä tābin* [sic!]—‘Solomon wise head’; a reproduction in colour in: Mercier 1979, nr. 27.

⁵² On this motif cf. Rodinson 1992, 131, fig. 83; Mercier 1997, 54 fig.

⁵³ Mercier 1979, nr. 11.

⁵⁴ Decourdemanche 1880, 83–106; cf. also Wagner 1967, 725 and fig. 8.

⁵⁵ Rodinson 1992, 134, fig. 85.

⁵⁶ Mercier 1979, 29; Rodinson 1992, 135.

⁵⁷ Mercier 1997 (private collection); Mercier 1979, fig. 15 (Paris, MAAO nr. 4).

⁵⁸ Euringer 1928, 81f.

tale is only alluded to by representing the king flanked by demonic eyes (Paris, MAAO, nr. 12).⁵⁹ In others, the story is depicted in details, as in one bearing the inscription “How Solomon killed the kings of the smiths” (Paris, MAAO, nr. 44).⁶⁰ This shows the mounted king hurling spears at the demons armed with swords, with two of them already hit. They are rendered as human beings but with faces presented in profile.⁶¹

An oral tradition transmitted by Ethiopian clerics tells of how Solomon drew portraits of the summoned demons and collected them in a book. This was taken to Ethiopia by his son Menelik and used to depict demons in a protective scroll. These portraits are considered to be as effective as the spells because the bad spirits confronted by them felt exposed and fled.⁶² It is believed that many pictures of demons that illustrate the texts written in the scrolls originate from this source. The tradition has a counterpart in the text of the *Mirror of Solomon*, where the names of the demons uttered by Solomon function as the means to uncover their personalities and evil deeds.

The magic sign called the “Seal of Solomon” and mentioned in the *Testament of Solomon* was well known in the Roman East and the Orient. An Ethiopian legend tells that it was the seal of God engraved on a ring that Solomon received from the Archangel Michael. This was the most powerful device in the king’s possession for subduing demons and forcing them to carry his throne, to help him in trading gold and building the labyrinth. The picture of an eight-, six- or five-pointed star with a face in its centre that appears in several Ethiopian scrolls is often understood as the “Seal of Solomon.”⁶³ Its variant, extremely popular, is known as the “Knot of Solomon” and was also a device to catch demons. It was widely used as a decorative motif but also as an apotropaic sign. Some Ethiopian magical pictures show a demon already caught in a knot.⁶⁴

Judging from the frequency of Solomon’s depictions in sacral art and in the magic scrolls, it is clear that in Ethiopia the king was recognized first as a magician and then as a biblical and holy figure.

⁵⁹ Mercier 1997, 48, fig. 40; Rodinson 1992, pl. 11.

⁶⁰ Mercier 1979, 38f; Rodinson 1992, pl. 7f.

⁶¹ A common way to represent the negative persons and the bad spirits in order to diminish the power of their gaze.

⁶² Mercier 1997, 49f; 1979, 29; the depictions cf. nrs. 13, 14, 24–26, and Rodinson 1992, pls. 42, 45–50, 143–151.

⁶³ About this motif and its transformation cf. Wagner 1967, 725f; Mercier 1975, 143–146.

⁶⁴ Mercier, 1979 nr. 45 and nr. 35; Paris, MAAO nr. 5; Rodinson 1992, pl. 18.

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* Abbreviations:

IES: Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

MAAO: Paris, Musée National d'Art d'Afrique et d'Océanie.

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