



Aethiopica 6 (2003)

International Journal of Ethiopian and Eri-
treat Studies

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Conference report

November 5–8, 2002 in Addis Ababa:

Sixth International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art

Aethiopica 6 (2003), 282–285

ISSN: 1430–1938

Published by

Universität Hamburg

Asien Afrika Institut, Abteilung Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

Hiob Ludolf Zentrum für Äthiopistik

Eine Führung mit wissenschaftlichen Erläuterungen im Phonogramm-Archiv im Ethnologischen Museum mit besonderer Berücksichtigung von Tonbeispielen aus Äthiopien auf Wachswalzen beschloss die Tagung.

Veronika Six

November 5–8, 2002 in Addis Ababa: Sixth International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art

The Sixth International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art took place on November 5–8, 2002 at Addis Ababa, organized by Professor Baye Yimam, Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Professor Richard Pankhurst, Chair of the Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Ato Bekele Makonnen, Director of the School of Design and Fine Art. It brought together over 30 speakers from half-a-dozen countries. Since there was no strict theme to the conference, the topics examined by the speakers covered a wide range of subjects including architecture, ancient and modern painting, sculpture, anthropology, ethnology, sociology of art, numismatics, and problems concerning the preservation and restoration of Ethiopian artefacts.

Papers read on the first day dealt with general topics. Stanislaw Chojnacki, who spoke about “*Attempts at the Periodization of Ethiopian Painting: a Summary from 1960 to the Present*”, revisited the problem which he discussed in his book *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting* – namely, that the chronology of Ethiopian art and its periodization must be continuously updated as new artefacts are discovered; this is a lasting subject since only a small part of the Ethiopian artistic heritage is presently known to scholars.

Ian Campbell, in “*An Introduction to Form and Spatial Construction in Ethiopian Iconography*”, analysed the structure and form of some early Ethiopian paintings in order to prove that the geometrical rules governing compositional conceptions and pictorial schemata were introduced to Ethiopia from Byzantium and the Christian Orient.

Paul Henze reported on the preservation of the church of Wäynamä Kidanä Məhrät near Biččäna (southern Goğgam) and its early 19th C. wall-paintings, an important matter already raised in 1972 by Walter Krafft (*Ethiopia Observer* 15, 1972).

As the first part of the title suggests, the following paper, by Worku Sharrow, “*A Meditation on Three Archetypes of Ethiopian Sacred Art*” had very little to do with a scholarly approach to the problem.

The papers presented the second day focused on Ethiopian painting. Alessandro Bausi gave an overview of the arrangement and decoration of the

Canon Tables in a group of ancient Ethiopian Gospel Books, upon which he elaborated with valuable remarks on the etymology of the terms and words appearing in those compositions.

The liturgical fans which in Ethiopia were made of parchment and decorated with paintings were the topic discussed by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska; these objects disappeared from the Ethiopian liturgy a long time ago and only a very few examples have survived.

Three illuminated manuscripts containing the Apocalypse of St. John (from Q^wəsq^wam Səllase in Gondär, *Däräsqe Maryam* in Səmen, and London, British Library, Or. 533) and their connection to Queen Məntəwwab were explored by Robin McEwan.

Richard Pankhurst presented electronically the material concerning four miniature painters active in the 18th century who unconventionally signed their works.

Abebew Aleyew read *“Some Notes on the 18th and 19th century Paintings and Painters in East Godjjam”*. The author suggested that in the period investigated, the political independence of the province enabled painters to develop a local variation of the so-called second Gondarine style.

The reception of Ethiopian iconography by foreign contemporary painters was demonstrated by Kirsten Stoffgren Pedersen, who took as examples the works of Lars Göran Willner (1931–98), Joachim Persson, Laure Cadoux Jubran and herself. The long discussion which followed the paper provided the speaker with the opportunity to clarify the meaning of the word "icon", which obviously was misunderstood by some debaters.

Edwin Johnson discussed that part of his Ph.D. thesis which considered the educational development of a group of contemporary painters (Debre Krestos, Salomon Balatchew, Kesella Marqos, Getatchew Berhanu, Adina Tumye, and Aseffa Gebre) and the question of patronage as it pertained to their artistic activities.

Folklore painting was the subject of the two papers which followed: “The Antica-Genre of the Traditional Styles in Addis Ababa of 1930’s: Continuum, Contamination and Cultural Contact” read by Jörg Weinerth and “Täjbət Paintings” by Girma Fisseha.

The session was closed by a discussion of the life and art of a contemporary self-taught sculptor, Desso Hordofa, presented by Denis Gérard and Rita Pankhurst.

The papers read during the morning session of the third day were for the most part devoted to modern Ethiopian painting and the problems concerning the younger generation of Ethiopian artists.

Rebecca Martin Nagy and Achamyelleh Debela presented an exhibition of Ethiopian modern art travelling in Florida, which included among others the

works of such prominent artists as Skunder Bogossian, Krestos Dästa and Afewerk Tekle. Konjit Seyoum reflected on the artistic identity of Ethiopian artists, while Geta Mekonnen gave an account of how the political life of the 1900's affected their artistic activities. Elisabeth Wolde-Giorgis presented the situation of Ethiopian and other African artists living in the United States. Leah Niederstadt, in the paper "Framing Images: The Evolution of a Narrative Format in Ethiopian Popular Painting", talked about the popularity of paintings illustrating the Ethiopian national epos, *Kebrä Nägest*.

In the afternoon session Anne Person and John Mellors gave a report on their field research concerning the production of manuscripts which included interviews with 25 active scribes. The results of their studies have been published in the form of two booklets: *Ethiopian Bookmaking and Scribes of South Gondar* (London, 2002), both were available for purchase during the conference.

Precious metals, their import to Ethiopia and use throughout the centuries in Christian and Muslim religious spheres, was the subject of the review "Gold and Silver at the Crossroads of Highland Ethiopia", presented by Neal Sobania and Ray Silverman.

The papers assembled on the last day dealt mainly with architecture. Michael Gervers presented new photographic documents on the Golgotha churches in Lalibäla (Mikä'el, Golgotha, Sälläse) and gave a novel interpretation of the origin of the complex and its dating. LaVerle Berry spoke about his recent research on Gondarine architecture, particularly on the castle known as Ras Gemb. The construction of Gurage houses was discussed by Fekadu Gedamu.

Alula Pankhurst provided an analysis of the Oromo tombs in the Rift valley, while Enrico Castelli presented an anthropological approach to Conso architecture which, in addition to the construction of houses, included the planning of a village and landscape architecture.

The latter problem, with specific reference to Ethiopian church architecture, was the subject of the paper read by Christopher Fellerhoff. Finally, Zelalem Teferra presented a Russian collection of Aksumite gold coins kept in the Hermitage, and Bantalem Tadessa described some crosses from the collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

The conference was closed by Richard Pankhurst and Stanisław Chojnacki, who gave a retrospective review of the conferences from their inception in 1982.

The electronic equipment used during many sessions, and an opening reception, was provided by the Swiss Embassy, while the German Embassy also sponsored a generous reception for the participants and guests.

Three exhibitions accompanied the conference in the museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies. One was a presentation of sculptures by Desso

Hordofa, another, which centred on the production of a manuscript book, was illustrated by a collection of photographs and included the portraits of prominent scribes. Beside one of them, *mulugeta* Araya Gebeyehu demonstrated the art of calligraphy, copying before the eyes of the visitors the pages of a Psalter. Simultaneously, the Italian Cultural Institute hosted an exhibition of photographs by Enrico Castelli entitled "Images for a museum".

It was decided at the business session that all papers given at the conference will be considered for publication in the conference proceedings.

The next conference will be held in München, organized by the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde.

Ewa Balicka-Witakowska

**"The Horn of Africa between History, Law and Politics",
Rome, 13–14 December 2002**

On 13 and 14 December 2002, an International Conference *The Horn of Africa between History, Law and Politics* was held in Rome, organized by the University of Bologna (Irma Taddia and Massimo Papa) and the University of Dalarna, Sweden (Tekeste Negash).

With a view to understanding the root causes of the long-standing grievances and underlying tensions between the countries of the Horn of Africa, this conference has addressed the overall aim of critically assessing the legacy of colonialism, as Irma Taddia signals in her introductory presentation.

The rich programme of the conference has brought together researchers involved in new and ongoing works and NGO staff to discuss both comprehensive evaluations and particular case studies that focus attention on these fundamental, contemporary issues, considering interdisciplinary approaches to the history of the Horn of Africa. There has been considerable scope for historical and political analysis meant to go further than the traditional paradigms, and the conference itself reflects how scholars are sensitive to the recent epistemological trends and ready to cut across old boundaries of disciplines.

The first Session was divided in two panels, respectively entitled "*Italy and the Horn of Africa*" and "*Politics and History in the Horn*". In the first panel, Bereket Habte Selasse seeks to historicize the Italian colonial legacies and to assess the post-colonial challenges of peace and democracy, while Tecléhanot Gebreselassie and Mohamed Abbas Sufi examine the impact of the Italian colonial policy in the identity-reformulation process among ethnic groups.