

Christian Metalwork in Early Solomonic Ethiopia: Production, Function, and Symbolism

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The cross has been at the heart of the religious and spiritual life of Christian Ethiopians since the introduction of Christianity in Late Antiquity. Ethiopic literature is rich in accounts of its miraculous properties. Believers wear it as a pendant around their necks for protection and may have it tattooed on their foreheads to assert their faith. Clergymen mount large processional crosses with hollow shafts on poles swathed with colourful fabrics, carrying them in procession or using them in liturgical settings. They also hold small crosses with handles that fit in the palm to bestow blessings upon the faithful and indicate their ecclesiastical status. Even the landscape of Ethiopia is marked by the sign of the cross which appears atop many of the country's churches, from the roots of the rugged peaks of the Simien mountains to the tranquil lush shore of Lake Tana and from the parched plains with sandstone outcrops of the Gär'alta regions to the gentler eucalyptus-dotted slopes which surround the capital.

Throughout the centuries Ethiopian crosses have been made of different materials including wood, leather, and fabric. But it is especially in the intricate geometrical patterns and elegant lines of metal crosses produced from at least the twelfth century onwards that the skill and inventiveness of Ethiopian artists is fully revealed. Yet, we still know very little of the history of the making of these works. In this respect, much of the earliest surviving evidence comes from the early Solomonic period (1270-1527). So, it is on this time frame that this essay focuses to start filling some of the gaps in our knowledge.

Metalwork had important and yet, to date, little-researched and little-understood functions within the ever-shifting boundaries of early Solomonic Ethiopia (1270-1527).¹ Metal objects were used to express religious or secular authority and in liturgical and healing practices.² Secular objects from this period have not survived the ravages of time, so that knowledge of them is based primarily on secondary evidence, including coeval sources and depictions of Old Testament rulers and historical figures in Ethiopic manuscripts, as shown by a miniature from a 15th-century Ethiopic Psalter in which Solomon is portrayed with items of regalia of Ethiopian kings including a sword (Fig. 1).³ In contrast, the treasuries of Ethiopian churches still preserve a variety of items, including crosses, censers, ewers, patens, spoons, and other liturgical paraphernalia (Fig. 2).⁴ The reasons for this discrepancy remain to be explored, but it seems likely that an aversion towards the destruction of the sacred, a desire to preserve objects connected with the memory of holy men, and the sanctuary offered by church treasuries were among the factors that prevented an equally great loss of religious art.⁵ If to this one adds that the writing of books was monopolized by the clergy,⁶ it becomes clear that a focus on the religious rather than on the secular domain provides firmer grounds for an enquiry into the aesthetical, functional, and symbolic properties of metalwork in Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, in a theocratic state such as Ethiopia, where Christianity pervaded most aspects of life, the division between the religious and secular spheres was never too sharp. Indeed, metal objects with Christian significance were often donated to churches and monasteries by powerful secular figures, including the Emperor. Donations of paraphernalia, but also of land, were essential to the formation and strengthening of ties between ecclesiastic institutions, on the one hand, and the emperor and local elites, on the other.⁷ Evidence of this is found in colophons and inventories preserved in Ethiopic manuscripts, but also on the artworks themselves, especially on crosses of bronze and brass.

The earliest cross with such an inscription is the one donated by Emperor Ṭāntāwädəm and kept in the church of 'Ura Mäsqäl (Fig. 3).⁸ Longer inscriptions found on crosses⁹ and other types of objects indicate that such donations were also made in the hopes of obtaining spiritual benefit, as shown by a series of portable altars donated by Emperor Lalibäla who ruled Ethiopia between the late 12th and early 13th centuries.¹⁰ Moreover, donation notes in manuscripts show that the gifts given to monasteries included metal objects, such as patens, ewers, but also textiles and manuscripts.¹¹ By having his name recorded on his

gift, a donor ensured that, after his death, the clergy would pray to intercede for his soul during a religious service called *täzkar* (commemoration).¹² Therefore, Christian metal items were part of a broader population of objects – each with its own function and symbolic meaning – that could be donated for political or religious reasons to ecclesiastical institutions.

Ethiopian crosses are especially rich in symbolic meaning, as shown by an examination of the morphological features of the *Ṭäntäwädäm* cross. The ram horns on its shaft, for instance, are an evident allusion to the Binding of Isaac and to its connection with the Crucifixion of Jesus.¹³ Allusions to the continuity between the Old and New Testaments such as this, and to the former's foreshadowing of the latter, are a typical feature of the arts and literature of the Ethiopian Church.¹⁴ Equally evident is the trinitarian significance of the three small crosses placed within the concentric circle, which also evoke Ethiopian depictions of the Crucifixion in other artistic media.¹⁵ Finally, the outer circle in the *Ṭäntäwädäm* cross functions as a mandorla of glory. The iconography of the circular mandorla is frequently attested in Ethiopian crosses, but also in early Solomonic miniatures of the Ascension.¹⁶ Therefore, many of the multivalent motifs which appear in Christian Ethiopian metalwork belong to a broader artistic vernacular which Ethiopian artists shaped and adapted to help visualize their own understanding of the divine.

The circular mandorla type is not the only form used in Ethiopian art. The so-called *Lalibäla* crosses, for instance, feature a pear-shaped band that derives from the globe-mandorla type attested in local examples of wall-painting and manuscript illustration and, more generally, in other Christian traditions.¹⁷ On the one hand, this shows that some of iconographic elements which appear in Ethiopian art stem from a common artistic tradition that has its roots in the Late Antiquity.¹⁸ On the other hand, the endless and subtle geometric variations introduced in each Ethiopian cross – which, coupled with the use of the lost-wax technique,¹⁹ make each piece unique – challenge the assumption that Ethiopian artists of the early Solomonic period were lacking in creativity.²⁰ A bronze cross in the collection of the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art (Fig. 4),²¹ which represents a variant of the *Lalibäla* type, illustrates their capacity to give new form to the meaning of object through subtle morphological adaptations. In fact, in this cross, which can be tentatively dated on stylistic grounds to the fourteenth or fifteenth century,²² the outer band of the mandorla is replaced by an

arch, thus creating a motif that evokes an iconography used since the Aksumite period to allude to the *loca sancta* of Jerusalem.²³

Inscriptions such as the one found on the cross of Emperor Țäñtäwädäm are also attested in works from the early Solomonic period. The best-known example is a processional cross donated by Emperor Zär'a Ya'äqob (r. 1434-68) and now in the church of Däbrä Tä'amina.²⁴ One face of the cross features a representation of the Virgin and Child flanked by the Archangels Michael and Gabriel,²⁵ while the other is decorated with the Transfiguration.²⁶ If this latter motif is uncommon, representations of the Virgin and Child appear in the majority of incised processional crosses dating from the second half of the fifteenth to early sixteenth centuries, as illustrated by another processional cross in the Harn Museum, which features the Trinity²⁷ on one side and the Virgin and Child on the other (Fig. 5).

The Harn cross offers one of the earliest representations of the motif of the Trinity in Ethiopian art. The diffusion of this iconography has been rightly associated with the trinitarian writings of Zär'a Ya'äqob by Heldman.²⁸ In fact, the iconography of this cross is in accordance with the theological views of the Emperor, who preferred the metaphor of three suns to describe the mystery of the Trinity, rather than that of one sun with three properties.²⁹ Although uncommon as a motif, the Trinity is especially suitable in this context since the Ethiopians, like other Christians, make the sign of the cross in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The pattée cross finials and shaft of this cross seem to be later additions, suggesting that it may have initially been used as an unusually large pectoral cross.

The recurring presence of Marian imagery on Ethiopian crosses and icons belonging to the second half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries can be associated to Zär'a Ya'äqob's efforts to promote devotion towards the Cross and the Virgin across his kingdom. In fact, this influential Ethiopian emperor, as Kaplan has convincingly shown, took advantage of the visual power of these two elements to promote his religious and political policies and unify his divided territories under their pan-Christian symbolism.³⁰ The Emperor additionally required his subjects to prostrate themselves before an image of the Virgin placed under a canopy in church.³¹ This kind of homage was no doubt rendered not just to icons, but also to crosses such as the one in the Harn's collection.³² In an effort to root out pagan and syncretistic beliefs from his kingdom, Zär'a Ya'äqob also encouraged his subjects to wear small images of the Virgin for protection.³³ A

small number of fifteenth-century portable icons, but also an exceptional pectoral cross in the Harn Museum (fig. 6),³⁴ were probably produced in compliance with his instructions.

Pectoral crosses with imagery from the fifteenth-century are extremely rare. The Harn pectoral cross is decorated with images of the Virgin of Tenderness on one side and of Christ in Majesty on the other. The former scene shows the infant Jesus tenderly embracing his mother. Used sporadically in the fourteenth-century, images emphasizing Mary's motherly love became popular in Ethiopia between the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.³⁵ The *Maiestas Domini* on the other side of the Cross shows God seated in a mandorla surrounded by the four living creatures. In Ethiopia, as in Coptic art, this image is often combined with representations of the Ascension to allude to the Second Coming.³⁶

Unfortunately, despite the existence of numerous crosses with depictions of the Virgin and Child, we know almost nothing about the artists or workshops who produced them. Fifteenth-century icons are occasionally signed by artists who have been identified as ecclesiastics,³⁷ but to date no signed cross bearing the name of its maker has been published. Sporadically, passages in hagiographic texts (*gädl*) written during the early Solomonic period, provide a glimpse into the organization of monastic life. However, if the studying, teaching, and copying of manuscripts are occasionally listed among the activities of monks,³⁸ there are typically no references to metalworking.

A possible exception is offered by the *gädl* of Iyäsus Mo'a (1241–93), abbot of Däbrä Ḥayq Ḥestifanos, who is said to have made twenty-four lamps "with his own hands."³⁹ According to Heldman, "because such church lamps are typically made of metal, one may conclude that Iyäsus Mo'a had received training as a metalworker."⁴⁰ This may be true, but, on the whole, the silence of the sources strongly suggests a negative attitude towards, or disinterest in, the sort of manual labour required to produce objects in metal.⁴¹ At the same time, the presence of Islamic metalwork in the treasuries of many Ethiopian churches disproves Heldman's opinion that it would have been "most inappropriate to place the production of [...] sacred liturgical objects into the hands of non-Christian metalworkers." The questions of where and by whom crosses like the one in the Harn Museum were produced must therefore remain open, though their close stylistic and iconographic affinities point, if not towards a single workshop, then at least towards a concerted effort to use them as agents of a centralized aesthetic authority.

Finally, to conclude this brief survey of the role of metal in early Solomonic Ethiopia, it is worth noting that a study of the sources also reveals an ambiguous attitude towards the materiality of art and the use of precious metals such as gold (*wäraq*). This can be illustrated by taking in consideration some of the historical documents concerning the reigns of Zär'a Ya'əqob and his father Emperor Dawit II (r. ca. 1379/80–1413) preserved in the *Mäšḥafä ʾəfüt* from the church of Däbrä ʾƏgzi'abəḥer Ab on Amba Gäšän. The manuscript records that Dawit II refused a large sum of gold dinars asserting that “gold and silver are of no use for the salvation of the soul and the body.”⁴² Yet, in the same manuscript, Zär'a Ya'əqob is commended for having decorated a church with “gold and precious stones”⁴³ and for having placed a relic of the True Cross in a “gold chest.”⁴⁴ If to this one adds that the church inventories specify when and what objects in their possession are made of precious metals,⁴⁵ as well as the evidence afforded by hagiographic works, such as that of the fourteenth-century Saint 'Abiyä ʾƏgzi' who is said to have been pure as gold “purified seven times,”⁴⁶ it becomes evident that the Ethiopian clergy condemned the coveting of riches but approved of the making of Christian items in precious metals. In a certain sense, one could even say that they regarded metal objects, and works of art in other media, with the same mindset with which they regarded their body. Just as Ethiopian holy men sought to cleanse themselves from sin through an asceticism which mortified their flesh, thus valuing the spiritual over the physical, they did not concern themselves with the materiality of metal items,⁴⁷ or with the processes which led to their creation, but with their symbolic and spiritual properties.

¹ The key studies for this period are, Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972); Marie-Laure Derat, *Le domaine des rois éthiopiens, 1270-1527: Espace, pouvoir et monachisme* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003).

² On the use of the cross in healing rituals, for instance, see Éric Godet, “La croix dans l'Église éthiopienne: De la guérison de l'âme à celle du corps,” in *Le roi Salomon et les maîtres du regard: Art et médecine en Éthiopie*, ed. Jacques Mercier and Henri Marchal (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1992), 63–66.

³ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, éth. d'Abbadie 105, f. 121v; on this manuscript, see Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Le psautier illustré de Belēn Sägäd," in *Imagines Medieuales. Studier i medeltida ikonografi, arkitektur, skulptur, måleri och konstverk*, ed. Rudolf Zeitler and Jan O. Karlsson, *Ars Suetica* 7 (Uppsala: Uppsala University Press, 1983), 1–46. The iconographic boundaries between historical and biblical figures, secular as well as religious, in Ethiopian art of this period are almost invisible. Thus, if contemporary secular figures are depicted like biblical kings, portraits of biblical rulers feature the clothing and regalia of Ethiopian kings and noblemen. For some examples, and a more detailed discussion, see Stanislaw Chojnacki, "A Note on the Costumes in 15th and Early 16th-Century Paintings: Portraits of the Nobles and Their Relation to the Images of Saints on Horseback," in *Ethiopian Studies: Dedicated to Wolf Leslau on the Occasion of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, November 14th, 1981 by Friends and Colleagues*, ed. Stanislav Segert and Andrés J. E. Bodrogligeti (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1983), 521–53; Marilyn E. Heldman and Getachew Haile, "Who Is Who in Ethiopia's Past, Part III: Founders of Ethiopia's Solomonic Dynasty," *Northeast African Studies* 9, no. 1 (1987): 1–11; Bent Juel-Jensen, "An Aksumite Survival in Late Mediaeval Ethiopian Miniatures," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art: Held at the Warburg Institute of the University of London, October 21 and 22, 1986* (London: Pindar Press, 1989), 41–43; Alessandro Bausi, "Su alcuni manoscritti presso comunità monastiche dell'Eritrea," *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 38 (1994 [1996]): 57–61; Jacopo Gnisci and Rafał Zarzeczny, "They Came with Their Troops Following a Star from the East: A Codicological and Iconographic Study of an Illuminated Ethiopic Gospel Book," *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 83, no. 1 (2017): 138–52. Evidently, due to the nature of the sources, one must bear in mind that even the evidence for secular metalwork in Ethiopia has been filtered through the lens of ecclesiastical culture and values.

⁴ Among the numerous metal object used by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, only the crosses have been the object of systematic research, and the bulk of this work focuses on their morphology rather than on their symbolical value, see Eine Moore, *Ethiopian Processional Crosses* (Addis Ababa: The Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1971); Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Crosses: A Cultural History and Chronology* (Skira, 2006). Their agency has received even less attention as noted by Steven Kaplan, "Seeing Is Believing: The Power of Visual Culture in the Religious World of Aṣe Zär'a Ya'eqob of Ethiopia (1434–1468)," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 4 (2002): 405. Thus, it is necessary to examine metalwork in Christian Ethiopia in the light of local sources in order to bring in the necessary "artistic competence" to decipher their significance and reconstruct the value-system in which they were used, as argued in Pierre Bourdieu, "Outline of a Sociological Theory of Art Perception," *International Social Science Journal* 20, no. 4 (1968): 589–612.

⁵ Occasionally, crosses, such as that now in the Bargello discussed in “Una storica croce processionale etiopica conservata in Italia,” *Africa: Rivista trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell’Istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* 46, no. 2 (1991): 163–83, feature an inscription with a prohibition to remove them from the church to which they were donated accompanied by an anathema for those who violate this ban. Similar inscriptions are also found in other church objects, especially in manuscripts.

⁶ For a general introduction to the manuscript culture of Ethiopia, with further bibliography, the best overview is in Alessandro Bausi, “Writing, Copying, Translating: Ethiopia as a Manuscript Culture,” in *Manuscript Cultures: Mapping the Field*, ed. Jörg Quenzer, Dmitry Bondarev, and Jan-Ulrich Sobisch, *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* 1 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2014), 37–77.

⁷ On land donations, see Donald Crummey, *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia: From the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

⁸ “Who has served this sign of the cross, is me, King Salomon, son of Murara, and my name is Ṭäntäwädäm,” quotation taken from Alessandro Bausi, “Kings and Saints: Founders of Dynasties, Monasteries and Churches in Christian Ethiopia,” in *Stifter Und Mäzene Und Ihre Rolle in Der Religion: Von Königen, Mönchen, Vordenkern Und Laien in Indien, China Und Anderen Kulturen*, ed. Barbara Schuler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2013), 33. On this important cross, and on the dates of reign of this ruler, see also Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Crosses*, 36–39; Marie-Laure Derat, “The Zāgʷē Dynasty (11–13th Centuries) and King Yemreḥanna Krestos,” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 25 (2010): 162–66.

⁹ For instance, see Tedeschi, *Croce processionale etiopica*, 172.

¹⁰ Claire Bosc-Tiessé, “Catalogue des autels et meubles d’autel en bois (tābot et manbara tābot) des églises de Lālibalā: jalons pour une histoire des objets et des motifs,” *Annales d’Éthiopie* 25 (2010): 55–101.

¹¹ Especially interesting, for the general period covered by this study, are the fifteenth-century inventories published in Bausi, *Alcuni manoscritti*, from which we discover that the metal items in the property of the church included crosses, trays, bells, boxes used for keeping different items, censers, lampstands, chalices, incense holders, and eucharistic spoons.

¹² Bausi, *Kings and Saints*, 180–81.

¹³ The horns of the ram also appear on other Ethiopian crosses, for their symbolism and some examples, see Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, “Is nāwā bāg’u an Ethiopian cross?,” in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa, 1984*, ed. Taddese Beyene, vol. 1 (Addis Ababa and Frankfurt am Main: Institute of Ethiopian Studies and Frobenius Institut, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, 1988), 105–24. For its connection in

relation to the Crucifixion in Ethiopian art of the early Solomonic period, see Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, *La crucifixion sans crucifié dans l'art éthiopien: Recherches sur la survie de l'iconographie chrétienne de l'Antiquité tardive*, Bibliotheca nubica et aethiopica 4 (Warsaw: Zaś Pan, 1997), 48–55; Jacopo Gnisci, "The Dead Christ on the Cross in Ethiopian Art: Notes on the Iconography of the Crucifixion in Twelfth- to Fifteenth-Century Ethiopia," *Studies in Iconography* 35 (2014): 197. For a general overview of the motif of the Binding of Isaac in Christian art, see Alison Moore Smith, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Christian Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 26, no. 2 (1922): 159–73; and Isabel S. van Woerden, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Abraham," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15, no. 4 (1961): 214–55.

¹⁴ Jacopo Gnisci, "Picturing the Liturgy: Notes on the Iconography of the Holy Women at the Tomb in Fourteenth- and Early Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Manuscript Illumination," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 78, no. 3 (2015): 576; id. "The Liturgical Character of Ethiopian Gospel Illumination of the Early Solomonic Period: A Brief Note on the Iconography of the Washing of the Feet," in *Aethiopia Fortitudo Ejus: Studi in Onore di Monsignor Osvaldo Raineri in Occasione del Suo 80° Compleanno*, ed. Rafał Zarzeczny, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 298 (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2015), esp. 259–61.

¹⁵ For an introduction to trinitarian symbolism in Ethiopian art, see Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models, and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century*, *Äthiopistische Forschungen* 10 (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1983), 101–46. For the iconography of the Crucifixion, see Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion sans crucifié*; and Gnisci, *The Dead Christ on the Cross*, with further bibliography. For a similar interpretation of the iconography of the cross, see Jacques Mercier and Claude Lepage, *Lalibela, Wonder of Ethiopia: The Monolithic Churches and Their Treasures*, trans. Jennifer White-Thévenot and Jane Degeorges (London: Paul Holberton, 2012), 128.

¹⁶ For some examples, see Marilyn E. Heldman, "An Early Gospel Frontispiece in Ethiopia," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 48 (1979): figs. 6-7, 10. The circular form may also allude to the sun which, as discussed also below, was often employed as a metaphor for God by Ethiopian theologians, see Getatchew Haile, "Religious Controversies and the Growth of Ethiopic Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Oriens Christianus* 65 (1981): 108–9.

¹⁷ As noted also in Mercier and Lepage, *Lalibela*, 135.

¹⁸ As discussed in Heldman, *Early Gospel Frontispiece*; Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Prototipi miniati dell'Ottateuco etiopico," *Bollettino del Museo Bodoniano di Parma* 8 (1994): 69–102; id., "Πρόσοψις, Non Πρόοψις: Efeso, Gerusalemme, Aquileia (Nota a IEph 495, 1 S.)," *La Parola Del Passato* 58 (2003): 182–249, with further bibliography on the subject.

¹⁹ Jacques Mercier, "L'art Des Croix," in *Le roi Salomon et les maîtres du regard*, 68–70.

²⁰ For instance, see Lanfranco Ricci, *Review of La pittura etiopica, durante il medioevo e sotto la dinastia di Gondar*, by Jules Leroy, *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 39, no. 4 (1964): esp. 326–27.

²¹ Collection no. 2003.10.2. For an overview of the African collection at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, see Susan Cooksey, "The African Art Collection at the Samuel P. Harn Museum of Art, University of Florida," *African Arts* 49, no. 3 (2016): esp. 73–77.

²² The dating put forward, presumably on stylistic grounds, in Jacques Mercier, *Art That Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia* (New York: Prestel, 1997), cat. 32, fig. 64., is convincing.

²³ On the motif of the cross under an arch in Ethiopian art, see *Fiaccadori, Πρόσοψις, non πρόοψις*; and Gnisci, *The Dead Christ on the Cross*, with further bibliography. For pilgrim art, see André Grabar, *Les Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza - Bobbio)* (Paris: Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1958); Jean-Pierre Sodini, "La terre des semelles: images pieuses ramenées par les pèlerins des Lieux saints (Terre sainte, Martyria d'Orient)," *Journal des Savants* 1, no. 1 (2011): 77–140; Jaś Elsner, "Relic, Icon and Architecture: The Material Articulation of the Holy in East Christian Art," in *Saints and Sacred Matter: The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*, ed. Cynthia Hahn and Holger A. Klein, *Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2015), 13–40. For further remarks on the motif, see Per Jonas Nordhagen, "The 'Cross under Arch' Motif in Early Medieval Art and Its Origin," *Acta Ad Archaeologiam et Artium Historiam Pertinentia. Series Altera* 3 (1982): 1–9.

²⁴ For a discussion and reproduction, see Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Crosses*, 135, fig. 82. As is often the case, the inscription mentions the donor but provides no information on the recipient, thus leaving open the question of its original destination.

²⁵ For a general overview of the motif of the Virgin and Child in Ethiopian art during this period, see Marilyn E. Heldman, *The Marian Icons of the Painter Frē Şeyon: A Study in Fifteenth-Century Ethiopian Art, Patronage, and Spirituality*, *Orientalia Biblica et Christiana* 6 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994); Stanislaw Chojnacki, "Notes on a Lesser-Known Marian Iconography in 13th and 14th Century Ethiopian Painting," *Aethiopica* 5 (2013): 42–66.

²⁶ For some remarks on this motif in the Ethiopian tradition, see Athanasios Semoglou, "La Transfiguration du Christ, une vision éminente: Représenter Philippe à la place de Jacques à l'église Betä Maryam à Lalibäla en Ethiopie," *Eastern Christian Art* 6 (2009): 119–26; Gnisci and Zarzeczny, *They Came with their Troops*, 160–61.

²⁷ Collection no. 2003.10.9. The cross was published and discussed in Mary Nooter-Roberts and Allen F. Roberts, *A Sense of Wonder: African Art from the Faletti Family Collection* (Phoenix, AZ: Phoenix Art Museum, 1997), 132–33.

²⁸ Marilyn E. Heldman, "Trinity in Art," eds. Siegbert Uhlig and Alessandro Bausi, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 97–99.

²⁹ Getatchew Haile, *Religious Controversies*, esp. 108–9.

³⁰ Kaplan, *Seeing Is Believing*.

³¹ Text and translation respectively in Carlo Conti Rossini and Lanfranco Ricci, eds. and trans., *Il Libro Della Luce Del Negus Zar'a Yā'qob (Maṣḥafa Berhān), II*, 2 vols., Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 261–262 [Scriptores Aethiopici, 51–52] (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1965), 4 [text], 2 [trans.].

³² In all likelihood, when, in the aforementioned decree, Zār'a Ya'əqob orders the clergy to use a cross when no image of the Virgin was available, he had in mind engraved crosses such as this one.

³³ See Kaplan, *Seeing Is Believing*, with further bibliography.

³⁴ Collection no. 2003.10.1. This cross is reproduced and discussed in Marilyn E. Heldman, "Maryam Seyon: Mary of Zion," in *African Zion: The Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), cat. 1, figs. 3–4. For a collection of related pectoral crosses, see Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Crosses*, figs. 61–63.

³⁵ On this motif in the Ethiopian tradition, see Heldman, *Marian Icons*; Gnisci, *The Dead Christ on the Cross*, 211–212; and Gnisci and Zarzeczny, *They Came with their Troops*, 148–152.

³⁶ For the Ethiopian tradition, see Lanfranco Ricci, "Qualche Osservazione Sull'iconografia Della «Maiestas Domini»," *Rassegna Di Studi Etiopici* 15 (1959): 106–11; and Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Maiestas Domini," eds. Siegbert Uhlig and Alessandro Bausi, *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, vol. 3 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 665–667; for the Coptic, see Frederik Van der Meer. *Maiestas Domini: Théophanies de l'Apocalypse dans l'art chrétien: étude sur les origines d'une iconographie spéciale du Christ* (Rome and Paris: Pontificio istituto di archeologia cristiana and Société d'édition "les belles-lettres, 1938).

³⁷ For an overview, see Heldman, *Marian Icons*; Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies from the Addis Ababa University* (Milan: Skira, 2000), 22–29.

³⁸ For instance, see Lanfranco Ricci, "Le vite di Ĕnbāqom e di Yoḥannēs abbati di Dabra Libānos di Scioa," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 14 (1955): 104. For an interesting case in which one of the scribes of a manuscript is also identified as its illustrator, see Gianfranco Fiaccadori, "Bisanzio e il regno di 'Aksum: Sul manoscritto Martini etiop. 5 della Biblioteca Forteguerriana di Pistoia," *Bollettino Del Museo Bodoniano Di Parma* 7 (1993): 161–199.

³⁹ Text and translation respectively in Stanislas Kur, ed. and tr., *Actes de Iyasus Mo'a, abbé du Convent de St-Etienne de Hayq*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 259–260, Scriptorum Aethiopicum, 49–50 (Louvain: Secrétariat Du CorpusSCO, 1965), 40 [text], 32 [trans.].

⁴⁰ Marilyn E. Heldman, “Creating Religious Art: The Status of Artisans in Highland Christian Ethiopia,” *Aethiopica* 1 (1998): 134.

⁴¹ An idea that we find expressed, for instance, in the life of 'Ēnbaqom (ca. 1470–1560), which reports that blacksmiths, like other individuals who earn a living with the art of their hands, live a “transient life” which ends in a “miserable condition” Ricci, *Le Vite Di Ēnbāqom e Di Yoḥannēs*, 80. See also the interesting remarks of Francisco Alvares on this matter, Charles F. Beckingham and George W.B. Huntingford, eds. and trans., *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John, Being the Narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, Written by Father Francisco Alvares*, trans. George W.B. Huntingford (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), I, 170.

⁴² André Caquot, “Aperçu préliminaire sur le Maṣḥafa Ṭēfut de Gechen Amba,” *Annales d'Éthiopie* 1 (1955): 100.

⁴³ Caquot, *Maṣḥafa Ṭēfut*, 102.

⁴⁴ Caquot, *Maṣḥafa Ṭēfut*, 104.

⁴⁵ For a number of examples, see Bausi, *Alcuni manoscritti*.

⁴⁶ Personal translation from the Italian in Carlo Conti Rossini, “Note di agiografia etiopica ('Abiya Egzi', 'Arkalēdes e Gabra-Iyasus),” *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 17 (1938): 413. For another example, in which a Father named Fiḳṭor, is said to have been as clear as gold and as worn as silver, see Bausi, *Alcuni manoscritti*, 51.

⁴⁷ The context of Ethiopia, where art is not valued for the technical processes it embodies, but for its symbolism, meaning, and capacity to mediate with the divine, exposes some of the limits of the theory of art expounded in Alfred Gell, “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology,” in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40–63.