



University of Gondar

College of Social Science and Humanities

Department of History and Heritage Management

Introduction to Ethiopian Art and Visual Culture

Course code: HiHm3059

Target: Year III, Semester II major History and Heritage Management
students

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Course Descriptions: The course is designed to discuss the History of Ethiopian Visual and Performing Arts; that is very fundamental to enable students to familiar themselves with the basic production areas of tangible and intangible cultural heritages of the country. As a preemptive idea for the major discussion, the course begins dealing with theories of arts in general, mediums of art, interrelationship of arts, and arts through the study of humanities and the like. Basically, however, students will be able to internalize the visual and performing arts of Ethiopia periodically from Pre-Aksumite to the end of the second millennium, and thematically it comprises from the intangible performing arts to the traditional house architecture of the various ethnic groups of the country. As such mural and rock paintings; architectural values of historic cities; church and mosque architectures; traditional house architecture; monuments and sculpture; handicraft products and practitioners; survey of Ethiopian performing arts; and more. In general this course, equip students to internalize art History in general and the Visual cultures of Ethiopia in particular.

Course Objectives:

At the end of this course, students will be able to:-

- define basic terms and concepts of Arts
- describe the various components and types of Arts
- distinguish and explain the different art mediums
- explain how the art of painting evolve in Ethiopia from pre-history to the emergence of the so called modern painting.
- Identify Ethiopian architectural heritages under components of : modern architecture, vernacular architecture and religious architecture
- Evaluate the various components of Ethiopian architectures based on the functional requirements of scientific architecture.
- Typifying craft or visual heritages of Ethiopia and their historical evolution
- Examine the type and artistic features of Ethiopian megalithic monuments and other sculptures
- Acquire a social oriented skill of interpreting different artistic products

Unit One

1. Fundamentals of Arts

1.1 Conceptual Meanings of Arts

Understanding the meaning and concepts of art is a prelude to easily perceive what art history is. Art can mean many things; it refers to: the use of painting, drawing, sculpture, etc. It represent things or express ideas; objects that are produced by art, such as paintings, drawings etc.; the skill of drawing or painting; music, theater, movies, literature etc.; the ability or skill involved in doing or making something; the use of skill or imagination in the creation of aesthetic objects, environments, or experiences that can be shared with others. Art is an expression of ideas created by human imagination, skill and invention. There is a saying “Music is what feelings sound like”. Similarly this applies to other art forms. Movement manifests emotion, voice modulation gives way to the inner self, drawing reveals the inner layers of the mind, Sculpture mirrors the inner self -this is Art.

Art is uniquely human and tied directly to culture. It takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. It asks questions about who we are, what we value, the meaning of beauty and the human condition. As an expressive medium it allows us to experience sublime joy, deep sorrow, confusion and clarity. It tests our strengths, vulnerabilities and resolve. It gives voice to ideas and feelings, connects us to the past, reflects the present and anticipates the future. Along these lines, art history, combined with anthropology and literature, are three main sources in observing, recording and interpreting our human past.

Art is a timeless, the ‘beauty’ of its appearance having meaning, significance, and appeal to humankind across the ages. At least this usually applies to our ideas about ‘high’, or fine, art, in other words painting and sculpture. This kind of visual material can have an autonomous existence for its own sake, independent of any knowledge of its context, although of course viewers from different time periods or cultures may see the same object in contrasting ways.

When we look at a painting or sculpture or any other art, we often ask the following questions: who made it?; what is the subject?; when was it completed? These are quite valid questions that are often anticipated and answered. In this way, art appreciation requires no knowledge of the context of art; the ‘I know what I like and I like what I see’ approach to gallery going is sufficient. And this is absolutely fine.

We have Art all around us: in paintings, architecture, pottery, sculpture etc. Our architecture, inside our houses, in the way we dress up, the way we display our food, the way we stand, sit or even talk...a personal style statement. Each occasion and festivities in our lives involve the aesthetic expression.

Art appreciation can also involve the more demanding process of criticizing the art object on the basis of its aesthetic merits. Usually aspects such as **style, composition, and color** are referred to, and more broadly reference is made to the artist's other work, if known, or to other artists working at the same time or within the same movement or style. Thus, the word art encompasses many meanings including ability, process, and product. Ability is the human capacity to make things of beauty and things that stir us; skill, mastery, and creativity. Process refers to the different classifications of art such as drawing, painting, sculpting, architecture, music, and photography; methods and process. Product refers the completed work; painting, sculpture or any other art works.

1.2 Types of Arts

Art works can be classified in a diverse ways. Broadly speaking, all arts categorized under performing and visual (tangible) art.

1.2.1 Performing Arts

It is a form of arts practice that involves a person or persons undertaking an action or actions within a particular **timeframe** in a particular space or location for an **audience**. Central to the process and execution of Performance Art **is the live presence of the artist and the real actions** of his/her body, to create and present an ephemeral art experience to an audience. A defining characteristic of performance art is the body, considered the primary medium and conceptual material on which performance art is based.

This type of art is the intangible aspects of art such as traditional songs and dances, ecclesiastic chants, mourning, motivational chants, theatre, child and youth festive chants. Artists who participate in performing arts in front of an audience are called Performers. The artist uses their own body, face and presence as a medium. They include actors, comedians, dancers, magicians, musicians, singers, puppeteers etc. The important aspect that a teacher has to understand is that performance need not always be through very formal learning of artist uses their own body, face and presence as a medium.

1.2.2 Visual Arts

Visual art has been defined as a language of visual (tangible) signs which conveys ideas, feelings, or moods. Visual artists make many choices. Some might include: What should be shown? Should it look realistic or not? Should it be real or imagined? What colors, shapes and textures should be used? Though these questions are from different artists from different cultures and eras, they seem to show the same thing: a person deep in thought. Visual arts classified in to Handicraft and fine arts.

1. **Handicrafts**; the focus in handicraft is on the production of useful than beautiful matters; under this category we have; basketry, tannery, pottery, metallurgy etc.

2. **Fine arts**- the focus in this category is on beautiful than useful things such as architecture, painting, sculpture and the like. Fine arts categorized under drawing, painting, sculpture, statue and architecture.

a. Drawing: It refers to a picture that you make using a pencil, pen and the like. Drawing is the most immediate form of artistic expression. Before the Renaissance it was rarely valued as an art form in itself, but was seen as the preparatory design for a work in another medium. The first artists who really exploited drawings as an independent expressive medium were Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

b. Painting: It is a skill or process of making a picture using paint. All paints require a binding medium that can hold pigments in suspension and permits successful application to prepared supports walls, wood panels, vellum, paper, or stretched fabric (canvas). Early forms of paint consisted of pigment bound by water based glue called size, made from animal skins. Alternatives were gums and resins extracted from trees, the white and yolk of eggs, and beeswax.

c. Sculpture: a work of art that is a solid figure or object made by carving or shaping wood, stone, clay, metal, etc. It was the first and most ubiquitous form of artistic expression. The earliest sculptures appear to have been created by modifying found objects that suggested either animal or human forms. As tools and technologies developed, artists progressed from carving bone, wood, and stone to manipulating and firing clay, then to casting in bronze. While we are familiar with the bleached remnants of Greek and Roman sculpture, Classical statues were, in fact, rarely left uncolored, as artists applied pigments and precious stones to decorate or enhance the realism of their work.

d. Statue: It is an image of a person or an animal that is made in solid materials such as stone or material with the same size as in real life or larger.

e. Architecture: Architecture is the style and design of buildings. A History of architecture is a record of man's efforts to build beautifully. The erection of structures devoid of beauty is mere building, a trade and not an art. Edifices in which strength and stability alone are sought, and in designing which only utilitarian considerations have been followed, are properly works of engineering. Only when the idea of beauty is added to that of use does a structure take its place among works of architecture.

We may then, define architecture as the art which seeks to harmonize in a building the requirements of utility and of beauty. It is the most useful of the fine arts and the noblest of the useful arts. It touches the life of man at every point. It is concerned not only in sheltering and ministering to comfort, but also in providing with places for worship, amusement, and business; with tombs, memorials, embellishments for cities, and other structures for the varied needs of a complex civilization. It engages the services of a larger portion of the community and involves greater outlays of money than any other occupation except agriculture. Everyone at some point comes in contact with the work of the architect, and from this universal contact architecture derives its significance as an index of the civilization of an age, a race, or a people.

It is the function of the historian of architecture to trace the origin, growth, and decline of the architectural styles which have prevailed in different lands and ages, and to show how they have reflected the great movements of civilization. The migrations, the conquests, the commercial, social, and religious changes among different peoples have all manifested themselves in the changes of their architecture, and it is the historian's function to show this.

To study architectural styles is therefore to study a branch of the history of civilization. Technically, architectural styles are identified by the means they employ to cover enclosed spaces, by the characteristic forms of the supports and other members (piers, columns, arches, moldings, traceries, etc.), and by their decoration. The plan should receive special attention, since it shows the arrangement of the points of support, and hence the nature of the structural design.

2.3 Purposes of Art

Communicating information: this can be seen in two ways; In a Non-literate world it was used to exchange and transmit ideas. In this respect; the prehistoric rock and cave arts are best examples. Even in a literate society to this day different art works including photography, drawings and films are being used for disseminating cultural thought. Spiritual sustenance-all of the world's

major religions have used art to inspire and instruct the faith. We can see the role and place of art in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church as an example; the dominant aspects of art specifically fine arts such as painting in the manuscripts, mural painting and icons are common. Similarly, art works have greater role to play in the major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism which are popular in India and other south and eastern Asian countries. The dominant aspects of art in the aforementioned religions are sculpture of different materials including plastic.

Socio-Cultural expressions; both tangible and intangible art works can also be used to reflect and represent the way of life of a particular group. It is possible to even portray the difference in the environmental settings of a variety of peoples such as the highlanders from the lowlanders, the pastoralists and the agrarians, urban dwellers and those in rural areas and so on.

Political purposes: artists have the capacity to criticize or influence values or public opinions, often in clear and direct manner and less obviously some other time. For example: - different symbols used by different political parties throughout history are parts of symbolism. For instance, the symbols of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy can be mentioned. In Ethiopia too, paintings and statues associated with different political ideologies of various regimes were used like the hammer and sickle of the Derg regime used to represent the proletariat and peasants.

Personal expression:- artists can express or portray their feeling and imagination in different ways. Best example for this is Monalisa of Leonardo da Vinci.

1.4 Art Mediums

Medium refers to a particular material used as a platform for the production of art works. It is applicable mainly for fine arts. In this regard different types of fine arts use diverse materials. For instance, Paint media: canvas, cloth, glass, metal, paper, wood and the like Sculpture materials: beads, clay, jewels, marble, metals, stone, textile, wood and so on.

Style in Art works Style refers to the consistent and characteristic handling of media, elements of form, and principles of design that make a work identifiable as the particular; culture, period, region, group, or person i.e. style = form + composition. Style may originate and vary because of the following factors.

Culture: Societies develop their own beliefs and style of material forms like clothing, building, etc. i.e artists are the product of their style culture.

Period: styles change over time. Art changes because of economic and political changes, new technology, religious insight with the above dynamics, a desire for something new comes along.

Regional Style: Geography also leads to diverse styles which may be a conscious decision or caused by a mere lack of communication over distance. For example; variations in the style of dwellings construction in the highland and lowland Ethiopia, Hindu sculptures of north and south India can be mentioned.

Group Style: Sometimes artists for alliances exhibit together and publicize their aims as a group to promote a distinct style. One of the best known group styles is impressionism (a style of painting used especially in France in the 19th century, which uses color instead of details of form to produce effects of light or feeling).

Personal Style: Individual artists often have characteristic modes of expression.

Generally there are two basic forms of style; i.e, representational and abstract. Representational style seeks to create recognizable subject matter while abstract style is intended to capture the essence of a form, not literal representation.

Unit Two

2. Origin and Development of Art History

2.1 Genesis of Art History in Ethiopia

The origin of religion or beginning of traditional beliefs through human evolution is believed to be one of the important factors for the development of visual art. There are arguments that early humans have had ritualistic relationship with their surrounding rocks such that they used to draw and engrave spiritual images other than using them for shelter. It is also believed that early humans might have begun to domesticate fauna and flora sanctify for their religion before they domesticated them for personal consumption. Thus, the beginning of religion is regarded as one of the roots of the evolution of visual art and architecture and sedentary way of life as well.

Ethiopia enjoys well developed historic arts. Historic art consists of traditional music and dance, icons manuscript illumination, calligraphy, book arts, weaving, metal work, wood carving, basketry, amongst these religious paintings, icons and Christian iconography are very dominant.

Since the 16th century travellers, missionaries and explorers from different parts of Europe mainly Portugal, were coming to Ethiopia and visit different places particularly churches. These early explorations were mentioning the different art works including rock-hewn churches and paintings. Travellers and missionaries like Francisco Alvarez, Almeida and in 1905/06 the German archaeological mission known by the name Deutsch Aksum Expedition (DAE) has played a determinant role. This continued to the 20th century when scientific investigation to art and archaeology of Ethiopia was started. Apparently, special attention was given to the study of paintings of the ancient churches of Ethiopia than the other aspects of art.

The study of Ethiopian church painting began more or less a century ago. Studies on Ethiopian painting began with the publications of Alfred Wallis Budge, keeper at the British Museum at the end of the 19th century and during the third quarter of the 20th century. He published in facsimile some manuscripts, kept in the British Museum. As a matter of fact, the British collections are first of all rich in illuminated Ethiopian manuscripts from the 17th and 18th centuries. These manuscripts were taken by the British troops from Meqdela to London after 1868. Most of the manuscripts of Meqdela originated in Gondar, from where they had been taken away by King Tewodros II (1855-68). In other words, the first study on Ethiopian painting focused on the 17th and 18th centuries' paintings produced in the capital of the Ethiopian kingdom at that time.

Ethiopian art is far from being fully explored for two reasons. First a very limited number of scholars have dealt with this matter, and the study was started very recently. Secondly, only a small part of the material is known and has been studied.

2.2. Technical Aspects of Painting

Painting is one source of uniqueness for Ethiopian arts as compared to other African countries which are more known in their sculpture and statue production. Ancient and medieval Ethiopian paintings are characterized by Biblical themes and figures. Angels, evangelists, saints, martyrs and other biblical personalities are the subjects of painting in Ethiopia. Of all these biblical personalities the Virgin Mary occupies a very prominent place in Ethiopian painting. The extreme veneration attributed to St. Mary finds its expression in many ways.

The paintings and pictures found in various manuscripts and on the walls in churches, afford the viewer a moral lesson and religious instruction. As they communicate their message clearly they are a way of acquainting the faithful with the teachings of Christ, the history and teachings of the Church, the lives and Acts of the Apostles. All this of course is in addition to the purely aesthetic role they fulfill as objects of beauty and decoration. Regardless of its materials, painting production is composed of two essential elements: **A prepared foundation**, followed by **an application of paint**.

I. Parchment Foundation: In Ethiopia, parchment is generally produced from the skin of goats, although bovine parchment may be used for large manuscripts, such as Gospel books. Parchment leaves for a manuscript are cut to a given uniform size, scored with lined columns for texts or simple frame outlines for full-page miniatures. The text is copied by a scribe and the illuminations are executed by a painter directly upon the parchment. When the work of the scribe and painter is complete, the leaves are gathered into quires and bound, i.e. sewed together within wooden end-boards.

II. Mural Foundation: The preparation of wall surfaces in churches excavated from living-rock consists of smoothing and then coating the walls with a layer of chalk or gypsum. Round churches are constructed either of stone or wattle-and-daub; the interior walls, finished with plaster or clay, are prepared for Painting by the application of a sized fabric, sized with chalk or with a slick, sticky substance prepared from grain. The fabric is then glued to the wall with a mixture of casein and ox blood. The point at which the primed fabric was painted varies; the painter may choose to execute the Painting on the sized fabric before gluing the fabric to the wall. Since the mid-20th century, undecorated walls of Ethiopian Orthodox churches may be

hung with framed icons and other religious Painting, painted upon prepared canvas mounted upon wooden stretchers.

III. Wooden Panel Foundation: Portable Painting on wood panels (known as icons). Various kinds of wood icons were used, primarily made from *wanza* (*Cordia abyssinica*). An icon is a painted image of a religious figures or event believed to aid in contacting the represented figure while iconography is a form of symbolic representation with conventional meanings being attached to the image or its elements. Iconography is particularly important in the study of religious and allegorical painting, where many of the objects that are used; crosses, books or candles are often obscure or symbolic. The study of understanding of Ethiopian Christian iconography has always been a challenge due to the poor condition in which most of the paintings are found. Ethiopian Christian iconographic art began during the Aksumite period and developed throughout the medieval period reaching its peak during the Gondarine period and survives as a very important form in the Ethiopian Orthodox church to date.

The panel may be absolutely flat, but more often is carved with an engaged frame. In the case of older icons, panels to be prepared for a diptych or triptych were cut from a single board. (Recent icons may be composed of different pieces of available wood, even salvaged shelves and ledges.)

The panels may have been painted before they were joined together. (From the 17th c. onward, metal hinges have also been used.) The exterior sides of small late 17th and early 18th centuries pendant icons of wild olive wood are carved with intricate cruciform designs. Priming the foundation Mural surfaces of churches are primed with a thin layer of chalk or gypsum, or sized fabric, depending upon the construction material. Wood icon panels are first covered with a thin cloth that serves as a stabilizing element, to which gesso (a mixture of glue and gypsum or chalk) is applied. Icons are often primed and painted on the external sides. 19th- centuries icons are sometimes primed with thicker cloth, which may prevent the glue from adhering effectively to the wood panels.

2.3 Main Subjects of Ethiopian Painting

Whilst Ethiopian imagery is not different from what was current in the other Oriental Christian communities, there are certain particularities as to which subjects were preferred. The wide spectrum of the most popular representations is evident from the universally applied patterns established for monumental painting in the second half of the 17th century and finalized during the 18th century. The pictorial repertory spread mostly through those illuminated manuscripts that were frequently used either during the liturgy or in private devotion. Church manuscripts were

never illustrated with narrative scenes. The customary decoration system of Church books with its selection of single or grouped figures inserted into the relevant parts of text, often as full-page, frontispiece miniatures promoted their popularity. The variant with groups of figures is typical of the manuscripts produced in the *Stephanite* scriptoria, primarily in *Gunda Gunde*.

The longstanding popularity of exclusively religious subjects was changed in the 18th century, when murals started to include a very large scene depicting a royal or aristocratic procession, iconographical standardized but always enriched with individual historical details (including representations of the donors).

Studying the Gondarine paintings especially those of Gonder and Lake T'ana, it appears that one should focus first on the dating of paintings in order to ensure sound iconographical analyses in the proper context and understand better the full meanings of images. This implies that one needs to look into different studies in order to have a better understanding of each kind of painting and of the object it is linked to, that is, the manuscript or the building it is associated with.

In both manuscripts and murals, one needs to consider the religious, financial, political context and the patronage that led to the creation of an image. This kind of study could lead to questions of models, which had been essentially treated as a graphic problem as pointed out before. One can now go further and demonstrate how the choice of using foreign engravings by rulers helped distinguish between influences. The choice could be based on politics and/or aesthetics. Either way, one can decipher the background of creating specific images, their meanings and purposes.

In the 13th and 14th centuries churches (e.g., Genete Maryam, Emakina Madhane Alem, Qorqor Maryam), the focus is on the episodes that transmit the idea of divine deliverance (the Sacrifice of Abraham, the Three youths in the furnace, Daniel in the lion's, etc.). Less popular during the following two centuries, these scenes reappear at the end of the 17th century. The standardized illustration of early Gospels was also transferred to Ethiopia. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the popular sets contained, beside the Canon tables and the portraits of the Evangelists, one of the two types of Christological cycles: the short (three miniatures of the Passion) and the developed (a dozen episodes covering the whole life of Christ). Miniatures representing Moses, David and Solomon regularly illustrated 15th and 16th century paintings. Enthroned Christian kings first appeared in the wall-paintings of the 17th century churches (e.g., Debra Sina, Qoma Fasiladas). Narrative Church scenes also appear in monumental Paintings. At the end of the 17th century, a large group of Gospels was produced and illustrated with miniatures copying Western European models. Each Gospel was supplied with an extensive Christological cycle which included a large

selection of the miracles of Jesus, previously omitted, and various episodes drawn from the Passion.

From the late 18th century, this cycle enters the programme of monumental painting alongside the large composition of the Last Judgment conceived as the Second Coming. On wood (panels, diptychs and triptychs), the most frequent images were the Christological scenes transmitting pivotal theological messages: the Nativity, Crucifixion and Anastasias often combining the elements of the Resurrection.

The beheading of John the Baptist depicted in some old manuscripts was chosen to join the standard series of the martyrdoms of the saints, set up in the second half of the 17th century, within the programmes for monumental painting. In the 18th century, this was extended by scenes depicting the death of each apostle based on the apocryphal Acts. The most popular depictions of the apocryphal stories concern St. Mary. The Negere Maryam was extensively illustrated at the end of the 18th century.

The collection of Teamire Maryam, illustrated in the second part of the 17th c with a set of 32 narrative scenes, gained particular popularity due to wide distribution of the manuscripts. Two of the miracles, the story of the “cannibal and the Apparition of Mary at Debre Metmaq, entered the programmes of monumental painting in spectacular form: the former was displayed on the southern sanctuary door, the latter was placed above, on the tambour. Similarly favored was the pictorial story of the Archangel Michael composed in the second half of the 18th century, as an illustration to the Dirsana Mikael. One of the stories (Crossing the Red Sea) was equally selected to join the 18th cent. Wall- painting programmes and reappears in almost every church on the main, western entrance to the sanctuary.

Among ecumenical saints, the martyrs enjoyed particular veneration and were frequently represented. Heading the list in popularity were always the Equestrian saints, especially the representation of St. George killing the dragon. When, in the 18th century, the text on his martyrdom and the collection of his miracles received an extensive pictorial version, the abbreviated variants were almost immediately introduced into monumental painting and painting on wood.

Five Ethiopian saints regularly reappear in almost any kind of painting: Tekle Haymanot, Gebre Menfes Qiddus, Samuel of Waldibba and Ewostatewos. When, in the second half of the 17th

century, their representations became a part of mural programmes, abba Zemikael Aregawi was added to the group.

Since the Nine Saints were usually also depicted as a group in the same programme, Zemikael appeared twice. The extended programme of the second half of the 18th century introduced St. Yared to the group, where he is shown singing in front of king Gebre Mesqel. The special place of Angels in Ethiopian spirituality is reflected in the popularity of their representations. Besides Michael, closely followed by Gabriel, other angels, single and in groups, were always present in any kind of Ethiopian painting.

The popularity of representations of the Kidanä mihret was reinforced by the cult of Mary. The same factor is true for the ubiquitous production of iconic pictures of St. Mary with Child, appearing in many iconographical variants and in innumerable copies (Mary in art).

2.4. Types of Ethiopian Church Painting

There is no doubt that pictorial in Ethiopia is very old and originated as far back as the introduction of Christianity. Unfortunately, nothing was preserved prior to the 13th/14th C. The little that was saved was a result of development throughout the centuries and gives us some clue to the earlier trends

2.4.1. Miniature Painting

Christianity was introduced in Aksum in the first half of the 4th C., but it was evidently not until the 6th century and the translation of the Gospels and the Septuagint into Geez that the tradition of illustrating manuscripts with painted miniatures was introduced to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The historical record of highland Christian Ethiopia is discontinuous because of periods of external and internal destruction. Few extant Ethiopic manuscripts are earlier than the 14th century. Nevertheless, a small family of Gospel manuscripts produced in northern Ethiopia in the 14th century, which includes the Debre Maryam Gospels, provides insights into Ethiopic decorated Gospels of the 6th century. These manuscripts are decorated with a frontispiece of three full-page miniatures,

Gospels is introduced by a full-page portrait of the Evangelist. Miniatures are not inserted within the Gospel texts. This pattern of frontispiece decoration may represent a tradition inherited from 6th century Aksum (abune Gerima monastery). Most Ethiopic Gospel manuscripts of this period have no decoration; others have Canon tables with simple arcade frames and full-page author portraits that introduce each respective Gospel text. This frontispiece pattern of manuscript

illumination is typical of all Ethiopic illustrated manuscripts produced during the Early Solomonic period (1270–1529). Full-page miniatures in a beautifully copied manuscript of the *Dirsane Maryam* from the church of Bethlehem function as a frontispiece for each of the different homilies. The manuscript probably dates to ca. 1400.

The decorative headpiece in the form of a *hareg* marks the text incipit. This pattern of introductory frontispiece appears in a manuscript of the *Gedle semaitat*; a full “Assumption”, frontispiece miniature of the Homily for the Feast of the Assumption, the iconography of which reflects the Early Byzantine cult of holy places in Jerusalem. Their prototypes were introduced to Ethiopia during the 6th century.

The pattern of illumination is typical of Ethiopic Gospel manuscripts produced during the 13/14th, 15th and early 16th centuries. The text is preceded by decorated Canon tables and an extensive Christological frontispiece; each of the four page portrait introduces each martyr’s and saint’s. Monasteries were important centers of training for painters and scribes during the early Solomonic period, although identifying the site of a specific style or workshop monastery or royal court is rarely possible. The illuminated manuscripts of the *Dirsane Maryam* of Bethlehem and the *Teamire Maryam* of *Amba Gishen* were created at the court of King Dawit II.

Two monastic houses located in Northern Ethiopia developed distinctive styles of manuscript illumination in the late 15th century.

1. The *Stephanites* (at Gunda Gunde) and 2. The *Ewostateans* (at Debre Maryam).

The Gunda Gunde style is best illustrated by Gospel books with tendril (*hareg*) decorated Canon tables and a distinctive frontispiece with portraits of St. Mary and the Christ accompanied by the Twelve Apostles.

In keeping with its importance as the “metropolis” of the *Stephanite* congregation, the monastery of Gunda Gunde enjoyed renowned for its scriptorium and library. A collection of manuscripts remarkable for both the age of the books and the variety of texts they transmit. Besides transmitting texts extant nowhere else, which were locally to inspire a rather controversial theological literature the works gathered or produced at Gunda Gunde allow a detailed reconstruction of the history of this extremely conservative milieu and of the *Stephanite* movement centered in it. The main church of Gunda Gunde is especially interesting, for it represents a typical sacred building of the late 15th/early 16th C that underwent since very minor changes.

Many of the manuscripts preserved in the library are richly illustrated in a particular style referred to as the Gunda Gunde style, which flourished about 100 years from the end of the 15th C. It introduced **squat figures** with extremely simplified bodies hidden under stylised garments in **bright colors** covered by geometrical, patchwork pattern. Their pear-formed heads with **concave faces** have characteristic **elongated eyes**, upward **triangular eyebrows** and **small mouths**. They appear in full-size illuminations often inserted as frontispieces to the texts, which are also divided and decorated by particularly elaborated *hareg* ornament. The writings more often illustrated are: Gospels, Vitas of the Stephanites saints, the Gebre Himamat. The miniatures usually depict groups of saints and biblical figures displayed in rows, but seldom include narrative scenes.

The favorite subject is St. Mary with the Child flanked by Gabriel and Michael. Besides a number of illuminated manuscripts which are still preserved in the monastery, examples of the Gunda Gunde style can be found in the following places: Aksum Tseyon; Debre Maryam Sawne;; Mikael Dera (Tigray); Gennete Maryam in Lasta; Iyasus Gwénagwéna. The Gunda Gunde style applied also to crosses, decorated with figural carvings and chiseling, as well as to folded parchment strips (Sénsul) and some of the most refined liturgical fans (Merewéh). Alongside with manuscripts, the treasury of the church hosts a collection of liturgical vessels and devices, paintings on canvas from the 17th-19th C., and a number of hand and shaft crosses carved in wood and decorated with metal inlay, all attributed to the Stephanite artisan and craftsman abune Ézra

The Ewostatean “workshop” decorated a variety of manuscripts. Full-page miniatures in a manuscript of *Gibre himamat* serve as frontispieces to each homily or major sections of Biblical texts. A full-page miniature of Mary with the Christ Child introduces the *Anqetse Birhan*. The impact of the style of Fire Tsiyon, a painter at the court of ase Zera Yaeqob, is seen in an illuminated *Gibre himamat* copied for abune Merha Kiristos, abbot of Debre Libanos of Shawa, probably produced at his monastery.

Gonderine Styles

There appears to have been a hiatus in the production of illuminated manuscripts from ca. 1530 until the early 17th century, when production was revived at the new capital of Gonder. Miniatures in the manuscripts commissioned by Gonderine rulers (Gonderine kingdom): Display new styles and new iconography. Patterns of illumination also changed, and Canon tables are no longer added to Gospel books. Narrative images are placed beside and within text pages of

17th century religious manuscripts, not only in manuscripts of the Gospels, but also in a variety of popular religious texts, such as the *Teamire Maryam* and the *Dirsane Mikael*, as well as small prayer books for private devotions, the latter were very popular in the 18th century.

Two styles dominate manuscript illumination, icon, and monumental painting during the Gonderine period the so-called: First Gonderine style developed there in the 17th century and the Second Gonderine style which appeared in the early 18th century. These periods are known as the golden period of Ethiopian art extends from 17th century to the early 19th C. the different centuries are known for representing serious of painting eras.

The 15thC represents the transitional period (pre-Gonderine) while the late 16th and part of the 17th centuries encompasses the first Gondarine style and part of the late 17th -19thC accommodates the second Gondarine style.

In the first Gondarine style the most common features are a. figures were usually elongated with **small heads** in proportion with the rest of the body. b. the faces of the subject were elongated with large almond shape eyes mostly outlined by heavy eyelids painted with double lines. c. St. Mary is emphatically the most popular subject of the period; she was usually represented sharing the main wall with St. George. Another form shows her hands folded in prayer as she is surrounded by angels. d. Tekle Haymanot and Gebre Menfes Qiddus, two local saints were also popular during this period as they appear constantly in manuscript icons and church mural paintings. e. paintings depict objects taken from the life of the country. Local baskets, pottery or weapons appear in scores of painting. f. it is known for the decorative quality inherent in the paintings. g. soft and schematic, the background is flat and usually divided horizontally in to two or three bands of red, yellow and green.

The latter (the second Gondarine style) came to be recognized as the “royal style”, and as such it continued to be predominant during the period of the *Zemene mesafint*. In northern Ethiopia, it continued to be the preferred style for religious art until the late 20th century. In this style more realistic imagery was produced due to the introduction of light and shade perspective. The robes at times multicolored were drawn with patterns covering them and falling into carefully studied folds. The colors of the 18thC paintings are more somber, richer and deeper. Several shades of red, green were the special character of the time.

Some dramatic changes in manuscript illumination were inspired by the introduction of Western European prints by the Jesuits in the early 17th century. The woodcut illustrations in the

Evangelium arabicum inspired the illumination of the large Gospel books, with illustrations placed above or below the text which they illustrate. The vivid narrative illustrations by Jerome Nadal provided inspiration as well as visual models for painted murals as well as manuscripts. Texts that had not previously received painted miniatures were decorated with numerous narrative images. This is true of the manuscripts of the Teamire Maryam produced during the 17th and early 18th centuries at Gonder for the private devotions of the ruling elite. Manuscripts of the Teamire Maryam with miniatures painted in the Second Gonderine style display a greater variety of narrative images.

2.5 Monumental Painting

Monumental painting is one of the lesser known branches of Ethiopian art due to its limited accessibility, poor condition and unprofessional restorations. Its origins must be connected with the introduction of Christianity into Ethiopia, although known works do not date from before the 12th–13th centuries. Until the beginning of the 17th cent., murals had been designed for basilica or hall churches, constructed or cut into the rock, mainly in Tigray and Lasta. They were painted with organic and mineral pigments, probably locally produced, in the fresco technique.

The pictorial programmes were similar to those applied elsewhere in the Christian Orient. The distribution of scenes had a clear liturgical connotation: in the sanctuary (*Meqdes*) and its vicinity (or on the northern wall), scenes and figures, expressing the idea of God in majesty or connected to the Eucharist (the Sacrifice of Abraham, Melchizedek) were displayed; Christological scenes were placed along the central nave; the saints and angels covered the walls of the aisles, some of them as guardians of the sanctuary or the church (Equestrian saints). Murals may be supplied with inscriptions, identifying the depicted figures and scenes, and also containing invocations or prayers. Dedications from before the 17th century are rare (e.g., Gennete Maryam). Written sources rarely mention the origin of murals, and the majority can only be dated with approximation on the basis of iconographic and stylistic comparison with dated manuscript illuminations.

Paintings from late 13th to 15th centuries represent an artistic approach typical for old Ethiopian Paintings (conceptualism, lack of feeling for organic forms, rigidity of the figures, and limited variation of poses). These features intensify between the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 17th century, when narrative scenes were almost completely replaced by sequences of stereotyped Biblical figures and saints (Abba Yohanni in Temben). This thematic monotony was

compensated by skillful use of colors, ornaments and, in the 16th century, by realistic rendering of garments and everyday objects.

In the first quarter of the 17th century, the circular church with a square sanctuary in the middle became the dominant form of church building. Large canvas Paintings were glued to the exterior surfaces of the sanctuary, the plinth and the tambour, and, in some richly decorated churches, also to the walls of the *kine mahlet*. For this vast space, an extensive iconographic programme was designed a genuine Ethiopian creation, displaying originally composed thematic units distributed according to strictly defined rules.

Most commonly, on the western upper wall of the sanctuary, in front of which part of the holy liturgy is performed, the History of Salvation was depicted (Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion and Anastasis), extended in the 18th century by the Passion cycle, with the Kidanemihret above; on the tambour, the *Maiestas Domini* (as the Ancient of Days) featured, replaced in the 18th century by the Trinity; the main intercessors, St. Mary with the Child and St. George killing the dragon framed the door. On the southern wall, facing the women's entrance, scenes of the Nativity, Jesus's infancy and public life appeared, with the apparition of St. Mary at Mitmaq on the tambour. In the 18th century, the Christological scenes were extended by the apocryphal miracles of the Child, scenes from the life of St. Mary (*Lideta, Irefta, Filseta*) as well as the Last Judgment rendered as the Second Coming.

The programme of the eastern wall intended to demonstrate the unity of sacred history. It showed the Old Testament prophets and kings alongside with scenes of deliverance (Three youths in the furnace, Sacrifice of Abraham, etc.), and the Ascension on the tambour. The northern side, facing the "male" entrance, showed the Transfiguration on the tambour and scenes of martyrdom on the wall (Beheading of John the Baptist, Death of the Apostles, Stoning of St. Stephen, and Burning of St. Qirqos); the Equestrian martyrs occupied the upper part of the wall. The double doors of the sanctuary, four or eight in number, were each guarded by a pair of armed archangels (Angels).

In the 18th century, the southern door was framed by one of St. Mary's miracles, and a large dedicatory scene appeared on the south side of the plinth: the king associated with the church approaching the building in a procession, welcomed by the clergy. The figures of Gebre Menfes Qidus, Tekle Haymanot, Ewostatewos and Samuel of Waldiba were painted on the western plinth, other saints appeared around the frames of the entrances or anywhere an empty space remained. With some small changes and additions, this arrangement is still observed in the

decoration of contemporary round churches. Some basilica and hall churches (hewn and constructed) adopted the new iconographical programme, but with few exceptions (e.g., Debre Berhan Sellase) the effect was inadequate. Whether strict iconographical rules were also imposed on the decoration of Qine Mahlet is not clear, usually it is covered with scenes depicting the history of biblical figures, hunting scenes with Ethiopian kings and nobles and, in some churches, the Revelation.

Wall Paintings in the First Gonderine style appeared from the first quarter of the 17th to the beginning of the 18th century. Some of the pigments were imported. The portraits of donors and church benefactors are rare, sometimes their names are known from the accompanying inscriptions or church documents.

From the beginning of the 18th century, the murals follow the Second Gonderine style. Donors identified by the inscriptions are frequently depicted; in addition to the narrative scene on the southern plinth they appear as supplicants in several pictures of St. Mary, in the Crucifixion and in the representations of the most venerated saints and archangels. At that time the social status of painters rose, and their names and sometimes even portraits also appear on canvas can easily become damaged: the ground layer of gypsum is too thin leading to poor adhesion of pigments; the glue is uneven and sometimes unsuitable and the canvas may detach from the wall.

Complete and relatively well preserved Painting from the 17th century are very few. Even 18th and early 19th centuries Paintings are rare. Original painted decoration in most churches has been replaced by sets of very recent date. These usually follow the 18th century iconographic programme but are executed with acrylic paints.

2.6 Painting on Wood

Painting on wooden panels within the context of the Eastern Churches, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Church are devotional images. The term “icon” may also be used for such devotional images or portable panel Painting.

The primary subject matter is portraits of: the Trinity, Jesus, St. Mary, and Saints, either as a single portrait or in combination with others, painted often in smaller scale. These portraits are the focus of the prayers of the faithful. In addition, formal rituals of devotion were performed in church before the Marian icon displayed upon an icon stand, including the burning of candles and incense, the recitation of prayers and the singing of praises. In Ethiopia, the practice of painting the portraits of saints on portable wooden panels dates to the first half of the 15th

century. However, indirect evidence suggests that at least a few imported Byzantine icons of the Virgin had been available as models for Ethiopian painters a century earlier.

Furthermore, pre-15th century saints' portraits with prayers of supplication are found in the murals of churches; and miniatures of saints in Ethiopic manuscripts also functioned as devotional images. The introduction of devotional images in the form of portable wooden panels is directly related to the development of the cult of St. Mary in the Ethiopian church. Ase Dawit II had a Marian icon in his palace before which he prayed each day. His son, Atse Zera Yaeqob, mandated the display of an icon of Mary upon an icon stand accompanied by a ritual of veneration in each church of the realm during the Sunday service and on Marian feast days. Painter(s) of Marian icons working under the sponsorship of Zera Yaeqob combined borrowed elements from Byzantine and Italian painting, thereby creating a new Marian iconography as well as a new Ethiopian style of Painting.

The early 16th century saw the development in Ethiopia of a new sensibility toward the icon, focused towards the imported post-Byzantine Cretan icons in the type of the **Madre della Consolazione** which had been acquired for Atse Libne Dingil. Several of these icons received an attribution to the hand of St. Luke the Evangelist, thus endowing them with a reputation of inherent sanctity and the power to work miracles. These and other Cretan icons of St. Mary are the treasured property of the monastery of Tedbabe Maryam, and Zemeddo Maryam. Post-Byzantine icons continued to be of interest to royal patrons at Gonder.

By the 17th century, iconographic schemes of Ethiopian icons had become quite complex, inviting the contemplation of the theologically sophisticated worshippers upon the meaning of the scheme; other supplicant could limit their focus to St. George of Lydda, St. Mary with her Son, diptych, early 16th century; from the collection of the dressing prayers to Jesus Christ or Mary or the saints.

An Ethiopian 18th century triptych takes the form of certain Post-Byzantine Cretan triptychs made for personal devotions. The distinctive central panel is shaped with a semicircular arch and its base allows the icon to be free-standing, following the form of certain Post-Byzantine Cretan triptychs made for personal devotions.

In order to accommodate a large portrait of Our Lady Mary with Her Son or Jesus Christ, accompanying portraits of numerous saints and abbreviated images of the Crucifixion and Resurrection were rendered in a reduced scale; and also the triptych became the most popular

form of icon. Less common are the 17th and 18th centuries diptychs and triptych icons dedicated to narrative themes the Passion and Resurrection of or the Negere Maryam. This innovation is related to the development of narrative schemes of Ethiopian illuminated manuscripts and to the narrative iconographies of murals painted upon the sanctuary (meqdes) walls of the churches.

This period also witnessed the introduction of small double-sided pendant diptychs worn suspended by a cord around the neck. The most popular include portraits of Mary with her Son paired with St. George, and the Crucifixion paired with Ethiopian saints. The exquisitely carved cross designs upon the exterior surfaces of these pendant diptychs undoubtedly had an apotropaic function. Examples of these double-sided pendant diptyches and other icons discussed in this essay may be seen in the museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University.

2.7 Modern and Contemporary Art

With the exception of a few internationally renowned artists, such as Alexander Boghossian, Gebre Krestos Desta, Afeworq Tekle and Wesene Werqe, the broader Art world has paid relatively little attention to modern and contemporary Ethiopian artists, even though Addis Ababa has twice been home to active fine Art communities, once in the 1960s and again in the post-Derg (Provisional Military Administrative Council) environment starting from the 1990s.

Today, Ethiopian artists produce work that references their cultural heritage while utilizing new materials and technology. Many now focus on mixed media, photography, or site specific installations. Innovation is not a new phenomenon among Ethiopian artists. Near the end of the 19th century, foreign visitors began purchasing objects, particularly paintings, as mementos of their time in Ethiopia and church painters responded to this demand, giving rise to a genre known as “contemporary painting in traditional style”.

2.7 Contemporary painting in traditional style

With the founding of Addis Ababa in 1886, and the arrival of foreigners and legations, demand for Ethiopian “souvenirs” increased. Church painters started to produce artwork for this new clientele, and paintings became available to patrons outside of the church and nobility. This new category of painting is known as “secular painting”, “folk painting”, “traditional painting”, “popular painting” or “contemporary painting in traditional style”.

The traditional themes of church paintings religious subjects, portraits of rulers, or hunting and battle scenes were still reproduced, but new themes emerged, such as daily life, church rituals, and legends, above all the story of the Queen of Sheba (Makdda). These innovations were driven

by the requests of foreign patrons and by the creativity of painters, who experimented with and then included successful new themes in their repertoire. Through the early 20th century, paintings were still somewhat difficult to acquire commercially. As demand increased, especially during the tourist boom (Tourism) of the 1950s and 1960s, paintings began to be mass-produced in artists' workshops and in government established schools. Autodidacts also began producing for the commercial market, which led to a loss in quality when compared to works produced by church-trained painters. During the *Derg* regime, the market for paintings and other souvenirs fell as tourism decreased.

Today, church-trained painters' still produce large, high quality canvases and a few, especially in and near Aksum, educate their children, including their daughters, to follow in their footsteps. Some academically trained painters also create work in the traditional style, as do some younger artists, who produce such paintings to help support their work as full-time studio artists. Contemporary tourists prefer small paintings on parchment or canvas which are easy to transport. Foreign and Ethiopian collectors usually purchase large works on canvas. Although the number of church-trained artists has declined, painters continue to create for the church and for commercial clients; Aksum and its surrounds are particularly active in this regard.

2.5.2. Magic Scrolls as a Motif in Contemporary Art

Magic scrolls have been a popular theme of modern painting since they were introduced by Alexander Boghossian after he returned from Paris to Addis Ababa in the late 1960s. He was keenly interested in symbolism and religion and gained inspiration from the paintings found in Ethiopian Orthodox churches and illuminated manuscripts. By the 1970s, the influence of magic scrolls became widespread in contemporary Ethiopian Art. Throughout his career, the Ethiopic script and magic scrolls have played a dominant role, especially in his last series. Wesene feels that he is a kind of a 20th century *debtera*, and believes that his paintings have a healing influence on the beholder.

Magic scrolls also figure prominently in the paintings of Zerihun Yetimgeta who was impressed by Boghossian's work, although he never ventured abroad for further studies. In 1968 he began to create canvas paintings featuring strip compositions inspired by magic scrolls. In ca. 1979, he started a series of bamboo-strip paintings formally modeled on magic scrolls. Today, he is arguably best known for these works, which he continues to create. Magic scroll motifs also appear in other media and techniques used by Zerihun. As a teacher at what is now the School of Fine Arts and Design, he has influenced many of his students. While the expatriate artists

transform the magic scroll motifs into ornamental designs, the artists in Addis Ababa express the motifs realistically, often using Jacques Mercier's book *Ethiopian Magic Scrolls* (1979) as a source of inspiration.

Chapter Three

3. Vernacular architecture and its value

Architecture has been used as one of the means to evaluate the socio-economic, political as well as religious status of a particular society. Accordingly, this part of the unit examines the major secular architecture in Ethiopia throughout history.

3.1. Secular Architecture

Secular architecture can be classified in to dwellings and royal courts/palaces. The Architecture, as well as skills and methods of constructing residential houses, developed according to the environmental conditions, and variability of materials and economic needs.

Accordingly, in the northern and southern parts of the country different materials have been used to construct a variety of styles of dwellings. Major aspects of secular dwelling architectural production in the northern and southern halves of the country are presented as follows.

a. Traditional houses in Northern Ethiopia

Tigray:- Architectural remains of residential and cult buildings (palaces and churches) are the most impressive archaeological evidence in the Aksum area. In the course of the excavation, a large number of dressed stone blocks were uncovered in fill deposits: none were found in intact walls. Fragments of fired clay bricks were also numerous in the fill deposits. No large dressed stone blocks, such as those used in the construction of Dungur and other Aksumite site residential structures, have yet been found in wall construction at Ona Negesit. The evidence of rural Houses dating to Aksumite times is very scarce. Some remains near Aksum, consist of a rectangular building, about 9 m long, with two rooms on a small platform about 50 cm high and a step at the entry to the south. One room was slightly projecting.

A similar building was also recorded in **Qohayto**. Two clay models of huts from **Hawelti**, to the east of Aksum, represent a rectangular building with a flat top sustained by projecting wood beams, and a cylindrical hut with a conical top. These models are tentatively dated to the late 1st millennium B.C., and suggest that the same basic types of rural houses we can see today in Tigray already existed over 2,000 years ago.

People known Remains of an Aksumite residential building at Dungur near Aksum to have special competence will be called on for thatching and for preparing the *cheqa*/mud mixture which is used for plastering. There is no advanced carpentry work involved, since the wooden

parts are tied together with strips of bark, but specialists in construction of the walls and roof are still needed.

Hidmo are the traditional house of Tigray peasants of the highlands of Akkale Guzay and Hamasen. The house, sometimes also called *nasi*, are rectangular and have a flat roof. Similar house also exist in Tigray. Trunks of big trees are used as pillars for the main construction and the ceiling enforcement. The side walls can be filled with layers of stones and mud or with branches, straw and mud. The trunks on the roof are covered with soil on which grass may grow. The inside walls and the floor are covered with a mixture of animal dung and soil and painted white. Their sizes and aesthetic differ from each other within one village and also within the region. There are several regional types of hidmo which vary as to floor plan, size and functional areas.

In the areas on the fringe of the Eritrean highlands, such as Senafe and Matara, *hidmo* take modified forms under the influence of the neighboring peoples. The Eritrean *hidmo* interior usually consists of three separate sections: ‘entrance’, *médír bet*, ‘antechamber’ and ‘kitchen’. The *gebela* is a roofed but open fronted veranda, sometimes fitted with mud benches (*medeb*) and then used as the men’s bedroom, for storing farming tools, for meeting family members publicly, playing with children and as an animals’ rest area.

The semi-public middle section, *midir bet*, is the place where guests are received and entertained, where the family takes their meal and where a newly married couple sleeps for the first time. After the birth of children, the wife and children sleep here. This is the place where most of the house work is done and the new born animals as well as unthreshed grain are kept. The *midir bet* is furnished with stools and a table for eating meals, with *medab* as seating and sleeping facilities.

Further, a grinding stone and water container may be set on the ground. Round holes are left in the walls to fit in cylindrical beehives (*qefo*) with the bee entrance outside the wall. The bee colonies (usually several in each house) are maintained and the honey is collected by the wife.

The traditional beekeeping practice allows honey harvesting without destroying the colony. When a *hidmo* must be built or repaired, women cook, brew sorghum beer and invite neighbors, friends and relatives to collect the build in their midst. The Bilen, Kunama and Nara sedentary ethnic groups construct the walls of their house of mud bricks which have been plastered with mud and occasionally painted white. For the roof, branches, brush wood or palm leaves are put

in rows one over the other up to the top. In the interior the “furniture” is movable, like the bed, shelves, the fire place, the grinding stone, the granary. The fire-place was traditionally a three-stone-stove which is sometimes replaced by a mud stove. The *hidmo* are usually inherited by the youngest son, or, if the family has no male children, by the closest relative of the man.

The **agwdo** is a round structure with a conical roof formerly wide-spread in the rest of the Eritrean highlands; it also exists in Tigray, especially in the Aksum area and Abergalle (a similar type is also known as *seqala*). In the past decades, however, hidmo became the dominant house type almost everywhere. The walls are made of stone kept together by earth and mud. A trunk in the middle of the room supports the conical roof made out of branches covered by thatch (*sar*). Several agwdo houses are usually grouped together forming a large yard. The dik-compounds are characteristic for the Mini-fire Saho. They consist of a large oval hut for goats (*abur*) and a conical house made of branches for the shepherd (*dasa*).

Irob and Afar: The Saho inhabiting mountain slopes adjust grottoes for their house. A stone façade with a door closes up the hollow or cave within which the rooms have been divided up for living, sleeping and for the animals. The rectangular hut is common among the pastoralist Saho and the Afar who live along the Red Sea coast. It is also found in Massawa and other coastal and island settlements. It can be made of natural material like brush wood/ reeds, twigs or grass. The roof consists of dome palm leaves royal courts/palaces

Amhara: The traditional Amhara Houses is built of stone or wattle and daub; the term (*gojjo*) refers to less prestigious huts mainly associated with young couples’ or poor people’s dwellings. The round Houses with their conical grass roofs, topped with an earthenware dome (*gullilat*) provide maximum protection from wind and rain and integrate well with the landscapes of the Amhara highlands. Amhara households live on their land, or close to it, often in fenced compounds (*gibbi*) with at least one dwelling house which accommodates the household members and, occasionally, some of their animals. The result is a scattered settlement pattern, although in some regions (e.g., Wello) one may find larger clusters of households forming small hamlets. The compound commonly contains a number of houses in addition to the main one which belongs to the household head some used as dwellings for married sons or retired parents, others simple constructions for the house- hold’s animals.

In previous times the nobles would have a number of houses with different functions in their compounds, such as kitchen and guest houses. Such specialized houses are no longer common. The Amhara highlands vary in altitude and climate, which is reflected in the houses people live

in. The extreme highlands (*dega*), which are populated at altitudes up to 3,600 m above sea level, are often exposed to frost. Dwellings are consequently constructed to keep their inhabitants warm, typically with thick stone walls, often with two layers of stones with clay in between. At lower altitudes (*weyna dega*) the climate is milder and timber is more readily available. Here the walls of the houses are built with strong saplings or split trunks (mainly of eucalyptus) which stand up-right from the ground, each quite close to the next. They are bound together with horizontally placed wood or bamboo. The walls are then plastered on both sides with a mix of mud and straw.

In the lowlands (*qolla*), the climate is warm and dry and houses are even simpler constructions, with less use of plastering, which provides airy shelters. For the Amhara peasant the houses are one of his most valuable material possessions. Building houses is men's work, usually done in the dry season by communal work (*Debo*) in which neighbors and friends of the host participate.

A circular ditch is dug for the round wall which the roof rests on. Trunks and saplings (Eucalyptus) are cut for pillars and the beams used for the roof and walls (if not stone walls), and grass for thatching is collected grass also has a sanitary effect as it is thrown out after some days, together with the dirt and fleas which have accumulated in it. The house may be divided into several rooms by semi-permanent walls of bamboo or cloth, but the central room is the main one, where the hearth is placed at a good distance from the wall and the central pole. Damage by fire is rather common. About half of the room has clay benches along the walls, where household members and guests can sit on sheepskins. The benches also provide sleeping places for the children. There is little furniture; small straw trays (*mesob*) are used for serving meals, and most residential house have at least one master bed (*Alga*), consisting of a wooden frame with interlaced strips of hide. The smallest house, typically occupied by widows, newly married couples, or poor families, have only one room, where grain is stored, food is made, and family members sleep. Full-fledged households, with two or more generations, tend to occupy bigger house. These usually have a wall which runs inside the outer one and makes a section (*guwada*) with partitions for storage of grain and equipment, and a part used as a kitchen, where cooking utensils are stored and the heaviest cooking, particularly *enjera*-bread baking, is done. A part can also be used as the master bed-room. Cattle, if the household has any, are kept at night in separate sheds in the compound or in a part of the *guwada*. In some highland areas with a cold climate, two-story buildings (*foq bet*) exist. These are stone buildings where animals are kept on the ground floor and the living quarters are on the first floor, benefiting from the warmth of the animals downstairs. The house for the Amhara has great symbolic significance.

Depending on the local availability, grass and wood represent the highest costs. The standard grass for thatching is *senbelet*, while guwassa, the most valued grass, is only found in the highlands. The cheapest alternative, straw is more rarely used. The house has one entrance with a simple door made of rough wood boards; windows are not common in traditional grass-thatched house. Light comes in through the door opening and through non-plastered sections of the wall, where it meets the roof. Smoke from the hearth disperses through these openings and through the grass-thatched roof. The smoke from the fireplace can be dense and irritating, particularly in wood-deficit areas where dung is used as fuel.

The **outer walls** are protected from heavy rain and hail by the overhanging roof, but repairs may be needed after each rainy season. With good maintenance a house can last for 20 years. **Inside the building** the floor, walls and the clay benches that run along a part of the wall are smeared with a mixture of mud, dung, teff straw and ashes. This makes a smooth and hard surface which needs regular maintenance; cracks tend to develop over time and serve as refuge for insects and fleas. Daily brushing of the floor and occasional application of new layers of fresh dung/mud are consequently important household chores, done by women. Fresh grass or reeds can be spread on the floor at religious holidays or other festive occasions as a symbol of life. Besides being refreshing and decorative, the means to claim land. This made the house a symbol of connection to the land over generations, and the family is closely associated with the land and the house.

The round form of the traditional Amhara house has been compared with the tent of the king and with the church, seeing the circular room around the central pole as the “domestic inner sanctum”. The central pole holds symbolic meaning and represents the protective spirit of the household. Before a house is inhabited blood sacrifices may be presented to the *adbar*, by smearing blood from the sacrificial chicken or animal on the central pole and the door.

The **Addis Ababa–Djibouti** railway facilitated the importation of corrugated iron sheets and these gradually replaced thatched roofs, especially in Addis Ababa in the first decades of the 20th century. In rural areas this process was slower but today it is common to see house with corrugated iron sheets. While this may have signified relative wealth in earlier times, locally manufactured sheets are now available and iron sheet roofs have become common also in rural areas. A consequence of this shift in roofing materials is that, houses are built in a rectangular form.

Elite buildings: Most residential buildings discovered at Aksum are elite palaces or parts of elite palace complexes. These complexes were square or rectangular in plan, and consisted of a

central building, surrounded by open courtyards and enclosed by a range of rooms. Residential buildings were built on a stepped podium (i.e., a constructed platform usually about 3.5 m high) with an indented plan. The podium was approached by staircases, and sustained a building with two or more stories. The external walls of the central building and surrounding range of rooms were “indented”, i.e., they presented an alternately recessed and projecting surface with projecting corners. The podium consisted of a platform with an external stone wall strengthened with corner blocks, and internally divided by walls and filled with soil.

The stone walls of the upper building were strengthened with wooden beams which projected on the exterior (the so-called “**monkey’s head**” construction technique). The walls were built with a core of small, flat stones in a clay mortar, and were reinforced at regularly spaced intervals of ca. 50 cm with timbers let into the inside and outside of the wall and small cross poles projecting outside. Stone columns and wooden poles supported the upper stories inside the buildings. Pillars made with small stones embedded in the soil fill of the podium supported the columns at the ground floor. Evidence of frequent restoration, reinforcement and reconstruction at the residential “palace” of Ona Negaitt (Bete Giyorgis) suggests some structural instability of these buildings and a need for constant maintenance to prevent building deterioration.

Today, only the podiums and sometimes the lower part of the elevated walls are preserved. They are frail structures because; the construction stones were not well laid. Large concentrations of small stones from collapsed structures often indicate the occurrence of ancient buildings on the surface. The remains of the “palace” excavated at Ona Negesit serve as an example of the state of preservation of the ancient buildings. The walls range in width from about 0.5–1.25 m and are composed of a combination of flat, tabular, and polygonal rocks (some showing signs of rough hammering) laid uncoursed in a thin application of mud mortar. In many instances small pieces of rock were set in the mortar between larger rocks for added stability. Stepped walls are characterized by a series of recessed sections about 0.48 m high, each of which is set back about 5–6 cm, and is separated from other recessed sections by a thin course of finely worked slate or schist, which forms the “step”. Since the earliest phase of ancient Ethiopian civilization rulers in Ethiopia used to construct well-furnished and elaborated palaces as their main seats save the medieval period (1270-1st half of 17th century). Even kings of the Zagwe period were emphasizing on conversion of rocks in to churches than palace construction. For instance, king Lalibela is said to have stayed in tent. So, production of astonishing palaces with different degrees of artistic feature started with the dawn of the Gonderine period.

Domestic architecture of the 1520's is described by Francisco Alvares. He saw "good large houses of one storey, with flat roofs" in Debarwa, and houses with "*good walls and flat roofs*" at Yeha. These must have been square or rectangular. He mentions "very good" houses at Aksum, better than anywhere else in Ethiopia, but frequently mentions the houses elsewhere as "good" (perhaps judging these houses to have been as comfortable as the domestic architecture with which he was familiar in Europe). He writes that there were no houses of more than one storey.

Since the 15th century, the presence of foreign craftsmen (many of them Portuguese) trained in construction and masonry is attested. They facilitated and enriched the construction skills and methods used by Ethiopians. They definitively influenced the development of the unique Gonderine style. In Gonder in the 18th century Poncet noted houses built after the European fashion, apart from the round houses made of mud and branches covered with conical straw roofs. When Pedro Paez built a two-storey palace for atse Susinyos at Gorgora, the Ethiopians were apparently amazed and called it, 'a house above a house', but the Portuguese influence seems to be found in the structures built in Ethiopia long after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1634.

With the decline of the Gonderine kingdom, during *Zemene mesafint*, the most prominent kind of structure became the compound of a regional king, a distant descent of ketema, royal camp. Hence the type of *gibbi*, the royal palace including the household buildings, was gradually elaborated. This kind of structure is well-known from the places of residence of provincial rulers and Atse Menelik's palace at the mount of Entotto. In the next years until the Italian invasion of 1935, the main construction activities were concentrated in Addis Ababa.

a. Traditional houses in Southern Ethiopia

Corresponding to the multiplicity of peoples and cultures the southern parts of Ethiopia possess a considerable variation of architectural styles and types of house. Regarding their layout and technical details they are basically dependent on the environmental conditions, ranging from cool and wet highlands to dry and hot lowlands, and on the respective availability of construction materials. The functional principles differ according to economic orientations, intensive and extensive farming, agro pastoralism and nomadism. Since it is impossible in this context to present information concerning the house of approximately 50 ethnic groups, a limited number of models will be sketched which can be regarded as representative examples of larger regions or culture areas. These are the cases of the Oromo, Somali, Afar, Gurage, Welaytta, Sidaama, Dizi, Konso and Angwaa.

The architecture of the *ketema*, the (fortified) towns and market centers with *rectangular tin roofed houses*, has spread everywhere in southern Ethiopia after the imperial expansion of the late 19th century. For the most widespread types of circular house with conical roofs the general label *tukul* became common in Ethiopia.

The Oromo developed different types of settlement patterns and houses. The **Mecha** in the west usually live in circular houses with conical roofs the eaves of which are stretched and supported on poles thus forming a small veranda where firewood, household items etc. can be kept. The interior is mostly partitioned into two or more rooms. One contains the fireplace and a sleeping platform modeled out of mud and others are used as bedrooms for husband and wife and for storing kitchen utensils and foodstuffs. The main house is surrounded by grain stores (Granary), and a hedge of living euphorbia or of acacia boughs commonly fences the whole compound.

The **Arsi** formerly lived in beehive shaped house with three to four small pillars supporting the roof, which were constructed around enclosures of thorn fences. These have meanwhile been replaced by circular constructions with conical roofs over-hanging at some distance. Milk containers made of grass and wood are fixed to the central pillar supporting the roof. Livestock is kept outside in kraals surrounded by thorn fences or walls of cow dung. Other Oromo groups, such as the **Gujji and the Ba'arentuu** on the Harar plateau, mostly follow comparable patterns of house construction although considerable differences are visible in the details. Among the Arsi of the highlands near the spring of the Wabishebelle a huge type of house is found which looks like a horizontally halved barrel. It is mainly constructed of bamboo and consists of separate rooms for men, animals and equipment.

The **Borana** in the utmost southern parts of Ethiopia and adjacent Kenya are mostly cattle breeders leading a semi-nomadic way of life. The house they live in are made of a wooden framework of bent sticks, often with the lower walls reinforced with a screen of branches. The roof and parts of the walls are thatched with grass. Small calves, lambs and kids are kept inside the house whereas adult livestock stays in enclosures of thorn fences during the night.

When people move for their cycles of nomadic transhumance they carry along only the essential parts of the wooden frame; the materials for tying and thatching are usually collected in the new place. In this respect the Borana house differs from the true nomadic dwellings of their neighbors such as the Gabra and the Somali Peoples in the arid lowlands of the Ogaden and the Afar Triangle are largely camel nomads who need to be very mobile. Their dwellings have to be transportable and therefore constructed and dismantled quickly. They consist of a cupola shaped

frame of bent boughs on which mats of palm fiber or tarpaulins of plastic are fixed. Half a dozen of these tents belonging to related people usually encircle a space where the animals stay overnight. Walls of thorn twigs and/or stones mostly surround the whole compound. Within the tent a small platform is erected on wooden pillars which serve as a bed and for storing parts of the equipment. The tent is the property of the women who take full responsibility for its construction and transport. Some Afar nomads possess stone dwellings near the escarpment of the highlands which they temporarily inhabit during their seasonal migrations. House of most highland populations are solidly built dwellings of the tukul type. They have to provide protection against cold and abundant rainfall and shelter people as well as domestic animals.

The houses of the **Gurage** are circular with an average diameter of 8–10 m. A circular pillar with additional buttresses fixed at its upper part support the beautiful thatched steep roof. For these parts species of wood are preferred which are more or less resistant to termites. The walls constructed of poles (usually Eucalyptus) vertically dug in the ground are horizontally connected with wooden bars and split bamboo sheets. The specially ornamented piece of ceramic on the apex has largely been replaced by a broken clay or metal pot. The space right of the entrance is usually the domicile for humans, whereas the animals, cattle, sheep, goats, horses, mules, donkeys and chickens are stalled in the left part behind a wooden barrier. The kitchen is either at the back of the house or, less frequently, in a small extra hut. The grain is stored in huge baskets within the house. The Gurage type of dwelling was widely adopted by their southern neighbors, the **Hadiya and Kambata**. These peoples live in scattered hamlets, which is a characteristic pattern of settlement for all groups in the southern highlands relying on intensive agriculture with *Ensete ventricosum* (Enset) as basic foodstuff. It fits perfectly to the necessity of permanent care of the gardens and plantations surrounding the house. Such conditions basically relate to the Welaytta, and Sidama as well.

The **Wolayta** house equals the Gurage type of dwelling in size, but the roof is usually less steep and often extends to the ground as a kind of second wall. The composition of the interior is similar to the Gurage house but, is usually subdivided into more compartments by screens of bamboo. The furniture consists of wooden bedsteads covered with ox hides and stools. The custom of decorating the apex with ostrich eggs, which is principally widespread in Ethiopia, seemed to have been particularly frequent in Wolayta.

The traditional house of the **Sidama** is extraordinary by the fact that it is mainly constructed of bamboo. In its diameter and inner division it does not differ much from the Gurage and Wollayta

type, but it is flatter and its roof is supported by usually three oblique poles instead of one vertical pillar in the middle. The split bamboo sheets horizontally cover the roof as well as the walls down to the ground. The spaces in between are carefully filled with grass and enset leaves. Thus, the interior is well isolated and kept warm. Above the entrance there is an extended shelter (a “nose” of the roof). The compounds, gardens and enset plantations are commonly surrounded by bamboo fences.

Like the Sidama, peoples of the **Gamo** highlands use bamboo as a basic material for constructing their house. The shape, however, is remarkably different. The Gamo house is a beehive shaped building of sometimes more than 5m height. In this construction the roof and the walls are no longer distinguishable. It is furnished with two benches and provides a special place of reception for guests. In its shape, the **Dizi** house, on the utmost south-eastern promontory of the Ethiopian highlands, is similar to that of the **Dorze**, but being 5m in diameter, it is considerably smaller. The left part is paved with pebbles as a stall for the animals and roofed with a platform for storing utensils and provisions.

A higher platform in the middle above the hearth carries household equipment and at the right side people sit and sleep. The houses of the **Gimira** peoples on the escarpment of the south-western highlands are comparatively small and with low entrances. The eaves of the steep roofs are often stretched and form a narrow veranda. The walls painted with white color often carry a mural decoration of red geometric ornaments. (With regard to Christian motives this custom has recently been introduced to other parts of Ethiopia) house in the southern highlands may last for about 40 years, provided their dilapidated parts are regularly repaired. When they are finally dug up, some parts such as central pillars may be used again. At the escarpment of the southern highlands in the direction of the semiarid plains of eastern Africa the **Konso** have invented a peculiar type of settlement and house. Unlike the areas of enset cultivation these people live in compact villages practicing intensive agriculture (mainly of millet varieties) on terraced fields. The houses are built on basements made of stone including the walls of the relatively small house (diameter usually less than six meters). The roofs are thatched with reed and shelter a veranda surrounding the house. There are separate grain stores and stone walls with gates surrounding and securing the villages and grave-yards with wooden effigies showing the deeds of deceased persons. The ecology of lowlands west of the south-western escarpment of the Ethiopian highlands offers extremely different conditions with respect to architectural conventions.

The **Mien-Surma** peoples dwell in semi-permanent hamlets and villages and temporary herding settlements. The shape of their house is circular. Livestock is always kept outside the house. Suri houses often have a **defensive double wall** and a **fireplace** at the center. The **Agnnwaak** are sedentary along the rivers living on agriculture and fishing. Their circular houses have many-tiered reed roofs and the walls are often painted with geometric or figurative ornaments. Provisions and domestic animals such as chickens and sheep are mostly kept inside whereas fireplaces and grain stores are outside.

Among numerous peoples of southern Ethiopia the gathering of building materials and the construction of traditional house is a kind of social event in which many adult members of a local community participate. Several groups such as the Gurage, Hadiyya and Kambaata possess special associations of mutual aid for house building at the clan level.

In Harar, there are usually **several houses within one compound**, the kitchen being housed in a separate room and shared by all households. The dwellings are rectangular and windows face the courtyard. The building materials are stones found around the city and pounded stones, mixed with clay, serve as mortar and as plaster for the exterior and the interior of the walls.

Today, walls are whitewashed with lime, *nach afar*, while the floor and the visible parts of the platforms *nadaba* are painted red. The ceilings of older houses are made of thin tree trunks stripped of their bark and then whitewashed. One beam (the *hamil*) above the first and lowest platform is thicker. An ostrich egg used to be hung there to protect the house against lightning.

One enters through a large living-room, *gidir gar*, which is the centre of the house. Every room in the house has a *nadaba*; the living-room has several of them on all sides serving as seats or beds.

These are covered with Somali mats or oriental rugs brought from the pilgrimage to Mecha. Shoes are permitted to be worn only in the space between the entrance door and the first and lowest platform, the *tit nadaba*. Next to the highest platform, the *amir nadaba*, which is only for the master of the house and for honoured guests, there is the “pillar of the house”, with a spearholder. Above the entrance door there is a shelf for Somali mats. In the far corners of the living-room there are one or two built-in cupboards or wardrobes.

The walls have several niches for trinkets and books. The walls of the living-room are decorated in a prescribed manner with Harari basket-work; wooden porringers and Chinese enamel plates. From the living-room a doorway leads into a small side-room, the “women’s room”. Adjoining, there is a small store room.

Attached to the house at the front there is often a small room with an entrance of its own, for the youngsters of the house. A latrine surrounded by a wooden structure is separate from the dwellings. Once filled up it is covered with earth and left to dry, while a second latrine is built. After a while the first latrine is opened and its contents are used as manure for fields.

In south Ethiopia the common type of the round (thatched) buildings with conical roof diversified into a large variety of construction types, ranging from small dwellings with straw roofs up to large “royal palaces”, such as the residence of the kings of Keffa at Andaracca.

Some peoples in the South are reported to have a tradition of building fortified stone settlements.

Chapter Four

4. Religious Architecture in Ethiopia

Religious architecture here is to mean the major aspects of architectural history mainly the two oldest monotheistic religions i.e. Christianity and Islam.

4.1 Christian Architecture

After the Empire of Aksum had declined, the political center of its descendant, a new feudal monarchy, moved southwards. Before and at the time of the Zagwe dynasty (12th–13th century), the monumental stone construction at least of secular buildings seems to have ceased while the Lalibela and other rock-hewn churches still imitate the style of big built structures.

In this process some elements of the Aksumite architecture and building techniques were preserved in traditional buildings of Tigray and the highlands of Eritrea, and to a lesser extent in central Ethiopia. In the central and southern parts of Ethiopia the most common type of houses was round, constructed of wattle and daub and covered with conical straw roofs. Few examples of secular architecture are known from the period prior to the 17th century.

The Jesuits report about forts built by Turks in Debarwa and Hergigo in the time of Atse Sertse Dingil (1563–97), who also is said to have a “tower of admirable construction” at his residence in Gubae. The typical examples of Ethiopian architecture of the post-Aksumite period are church buildings. Square or oblong churches remain common, especially in Tigray and Lasta, both built and rock-cut. Big churches were constructed in other places as well, e.g., a quadrangular church Mertula Maryam (Gojjam), for which queen Éleni is said to have invited Egyptian craftsmen. The famous churches Aksum Tsiyon of Aksum and the rebuilt church of Debre Berhan Sellase of Gonder are examples of Gonderine rectilinear plans.

The round churches are not attested at all before Solomonic dynasty times, and none certainly until the 15th century. A round church in Amhara was built like a normal dwelling house, sometimes of bigger size, with mud walls supported by woven branches, conical roof, supporting wooden poles inside and a fence outside the building (Ethiopian tradition attaches symbolical meaning to every detail of the church structure). It contains a square sanctuary, topped by a round drum supporting the roof beams at the center, with two further concentric areas delineated by pillars or walls. Classical examples are Debre Sina at Gorgora, the Zege churches and others on the islands in Lake Tana. Most churches have some paintings on the walls, and some are very elaborately decorated in this way. Easy to destroy or burn down, like ordinary houses, the

churches were equally easy to restore. Two storey round or square stone houses are till now common in Tigray and other places, both for domestic purposes or as church gate-houses. They were often built within enclosures, with gates and usually have an external staircase.

The architecture of the rock-hewn churches of both Tigray and Lalibela are always rectilinear, and solidly based on Aksumite style with some extra features not so far confirmed at the old capital peripheral colonnades, domes, arches (though horseshoe-shaped ones in brick are already known from Aksum 4th century A.D.). The so-called palace of Yimrahanne Kristos beside the church dedicated to him near Lalibela is a simple low rectangular structure.

It seems to be a rare case of survival of domestic Zagwe architecture Oriented basilica-plan churches of stone and wood in Ethiopia, such as Debre Damo, Gammadu Maryam, Yimrahanne Kristos, Betlihem in Gayint, Debra Libanos of Ham, Qirqos Agobo, Giyorgis Zarema; for carbon-14 dating of wood samples taken at some of the churches offer evidence of a very rich tradition based on Aksumite origins. It employed such features as corner blocks, “monkey heads”, transverse wall beans, Aksumite-style doors, window frames, but also some other features unknown in Aksum. The type of truss roof surviving in some of these churches is an exceptional feature, and domes of different types are also employed. From the reign of Atse Naod (1494–1508), at least, who built at Amba Gishen, we have records of round churches in Ethiopia.

4.1.1 Designs and Styles of Churches

Externally, Ethiopian church architecture does not bear any relation to the familiar styles evident in the western world. Ethiopia was isolated from these architectural concepts. The architectural forms that we see copied in some in the *stelae* fields of Aksum reflect the traditions of Ethiopian built-up structures. They represent a style and technique unique to Ethiopia, which has prevailed in most of the built-up churches of today. These features have also been reproduced in many rock-hewn churches.

Ethiopian church plans fall into two main categories:

1. **The rectangular plan** which follows three main forms • Single aisle • Basilica with a tripartite apse; • Hypostyle This layout was almost popular until the 17th century.
2. **The round plan** resembling the indigenous tucul house, which became the preferred style from the 17th century onwards.

1. Rectangular Churches

The most common church at the beginning of Christianity was of the basilica or single nave plan. This plan was of western origin and was certainly used in Syria and the Nile valley from where it spread to Ethiopia by such people as Frumentius and the nine saints of the 4th and 5th centuries respectively.

Most rectangular churches, whether built-up or rock-hewn, are of the basilica-type divided lengthways by columns or piers into three or five aisles and into several bays in depth, starting from the narthex at the entrance all the way to the apse at the eastern end. They all face east west and have at least two doors, one for men and one for women.

Ethiopian rectangular plan churches often involve the Aksumite style of construction, the origins of which are to be found in the buildings of the country's first known capital at Aksum, and which date before and after the arrival of Christianity in Ethiopia. This has been dramatically recorded on the great monolithic *stelae* to be found at Aksum, many of which are carved with simulations of the architectural style of the capital's palaces. The Aksumite style of construction is unique to Ethiopia. It was used in many of the built-up churches dating before the 16th century and has been employed in a purely decorative manner in many rock-hewn churches. Unfortunately most of the original Aksumite built-up churches have disintegrated or have been destroyed in wars. One of the few extant examples in Debre Damo, reputedly Ethiopia's oldest built-up church dating back to the 6th century which is clearly of Aksumite construction but, which has been substantially restored.

Rock-Hewn Churches

Considering their manner of construction, rock-hewn churches in Ethiopia are classified into:

1. rock-hewn cave churches and
2. rock-hewn monolithic churches.

The rock-hewn cave churches are of two types. Some of them are semi-monolithic, partially separated from the main rock with various degrees of attachment to the rock, e.g. Bete Aba Libanos. Some others are excavated inwards from a vertical cliff face like Bete goligotha, lalibela.

Rock-hewn monolithic churches are separated from the surrounding rock and hewn on all sides including the roof. They are isolated within a deep courtyards excavated around them. Therefore,

they are strictly monolithic in structure and completely free standing, attached to the rock at the base only. The architecture of the rock-hewn churches and their decorative motives are directly derived from Aksumite building techniques. these churches were built of local materials.

2. Round Churches

The stone built circular church with a conical thatched roof, which has now been substituted by corrugated iron has become the most common style of construction since the late 15th or early 16th century. The church is set on a platform, usually slightly raised, sometimes to a height of three or four steps. It resembles the tucul, the traditional indigenous house seen in the country side

The round church is designed to fit the **hierarchical order of the liturgical service**. In the center there is a *Maqdas* or sanctuary, topped either by a cylindrical drum or by a pole originating from the center of the sanctuary, both of which extend up to the roof which they help support. Rafters extend laterally from the top of the sanctuary to the outer wall of the church and are often decorated with colorful designs. These rafters usually carry a crown of trusses on which the roof rests.

Surrounding the *Maqdas* is a circular enclosing wall which defines the *Qeddest* in the form of an inner ambulatory, pierced by wooden doors and windows with wooden shutters. Occasionally the windows are filled with an intricate fretwork screen. The circular enclosing wall is itself surrounded by columns supporting the roof. Between the columns extends a low wall which creates an outer ambulatory. The *Qine Mahlet* protected by the wide, overhanging roof. Ethiopian church yards are usually surrounded by a high stone wall with an entrance which is sometimes in the form of an elaborate gatehouse.

4.2 Islamic Architecture and Calligraphy

Islam does not permit representational art. Hence, paintings and similar arts are unknown in Islamic religion. On the other hand, the inherent human artistic urge found expression in the refinement of calligraphy (the art of writing). The region had also some fine representative of Islamic architecture in the Somali coastal towns of Moqadishu, the walled city of Harar, the Ottoman architecture of the Massawa, the palace of Abba Jifar in Jimma and other Shrines in Bale.

Islamic art is the visual expression produced from the 7thc onwards by people (not necessary by Muslims) who lived with in the territory that was inhabited by or ruled by culturally Islamic

population. Islamic art is not all restricted to religious art, but includes all the art of the rich and varied cultures of Islamic societies as well. It frequently includes secular elements and elements that are frowned upon, if not forbidden, by some Islamic theologian. Apart from the ever-presented calligraphic inscriptions, specifically religious art is actually less prominent in Islamic art than in Western Medieval art, with the exception of Islamic architecture where mosques and their complexes of surrounding buildings are the most common remain. Figurative painting may cover religious scenes, but normally in essential secular contexts such as the walls of palaces or illuminated books of poetry. The calligraphy and decoration of manuscript Quran is an important aspect, but other religious art such as glass mosque lamps and other mosque fittings such as tiles, wood work and carpets usually have the same style and motifs as contemporary secular art, although with religious inscriptions even more prominent.

History of Mosque Construction in Ethiopia

The first mosque must have appeared in the Ethio-Eritrean region from the time of the advent of Islam. Arabic sources from the heydays of the Islamic principalities (9th–16th cent) mention a number of mosques. However, with the expansion of the Christian empire beginning in the 14th cent., a large number of rural mosques in the coastal areas were converted in to a church. Christian emperors banned the construction of mosques within the territory under their jurisdiction. Muslims had to revert to the use of zawiyas which fulfilled all the functions of the mosque. Ruins of mediaeval mosque (by no means the oldest in the area) have been discovered recently in north-eastern Shawa, in a steep hill called Goze, to the north-west of the town of Shawa Robit, there is an ancient mosque with walls and roof made of stone slabs. The structure is still intact.

At Turu Sina, not far from Kemise, there is a mosque which also serves as a place for mystical retreat. It was constructed with split logs of big and tall trees. Other ruins of mosque were found in Wesiso Nora and Asberi in the plain of Rasa. In Harar, which has been the site of a great number of mosques since at least the 12th century.

The revival of mosque building started in the 19th and 20th cent. Three periods can be singled out: the development under the influence of the Turks, Egyptians and Yemeni Arabs, the Italian occupation, and the post-war period. The ottoman and later Egyptian occupation of Eritrea brought about a rapid development of Islam and many mosques were constructed during the 19th cent. From the mid-19th century a significant growth in mosque construction on Massawa Island is registered, their number tripling from four in the 1840s to twelve in the 1890s. In addition,

Islamic court records from the mid- to late-19th century show that wealthy merchants in Massawa had endowed various kinds of real estate property to local mosque.

At the same time new mosques were built in Harer, whose rulers also patronized mosques in distant areas. The architectural styles of Harari mosque reflected the influence of those existing in the Islamic world, particularly in Egypt. The same period gave impetus to the construction of the first mosque in Addis Ababa. The oldest mosque in the capital was founded in 1898 on a site not far from the imperial palace. It was built on the initiative of an Indian Muslim mason.

The idea of construction of a big mosque came from the Turkish envoy, who was sent to Menelik II in 1904. In the name of the local Islamic community of Addis Ababa he submitted a formal request for permission to build a main mosque in the capital. Though Menelik agreed, no such mosque was built prior to the Italian occupation. A mosque was built in Gonder in 1900/01 on a plot of land obtained with the permission of Menelik II. Banin Sefar mosque was founded in 1911. The Italians, in an attempt to win the support of the indigenous Muslims, adopted a pro-Islamic policy. They restored the old mosque in Massawa and promoted construction of new ones, both in Eritrea and later in Ethiopia. They financed the principal mosque of Asmara, which was also renovated by the Italians in 1937. In Ethiopia, the Italians constructed new mosque in Addis Abeba, repaired those at Seqota, Debarq, Islamge (Addis Alam in Gonder), Dangila, Hayq, Dese, etc.

The post-war period, and particularly the post-1974 years witnessed an unprecedented boom in mosque construction throughout the country, due to the liberalization of religious policies. In many cases the financial costs of construction were covered by the Muslim community, and in recent years, by external Islamic philanthropic organizations, or by anonymous, pious and rich individuals based inside and outside Ethiopia and Eritrea. Numerous new mosques appeared in Addis Ababa (there is a growing trend of mosque being constructed in new neighborhoods), Asmara and elsewhere. Many mosques have been constructed in the towns and rural areas of the regional states of Oromiyaa, the south, Amhara and Afar. Harar probably remains the town with the highest concentration of mosque in relation to total area and population.

In Ethiopia there are different types of mosques can be distinguished, based on the materials out of which they are constructed and the architectural style.

Zawiya:-is the most basic type Islamic school, and the earliest one to emerge and spread in the rural areas. For many centuries, Zawiya was the dominant type. Zawiya buildings are constructed

out of wood and mud, and often have a thatched roof but neither a dome nor a minaret. They do not differ much from ordinary houses except that they have a large prayer hall and a prayer niche. Sometimes the symbol of the star and crescent can be seen on the roof.

Mosques in Towns: - more spacious Mosques made out of cut stones and bricks (or coral stones in coastal Eritrea), and at first attached to the residences of the pious and wealthy merchants and philanthropists, started to be constructed. They had ceilings supported by stone pillars, and were covered with imported or locally-made corrugated iron sheets. Architecturally, they reflected modified forms of ottoman and North African styles. Each of these Mosques usually had a simple (and sometimes domed) minaret but not a large dome.

Mosques with modern architectural style: - Since the 1980s a modern architectural style, reflecting the influence of the Arab Middle East and the Indo-Pakistani world, has been introduced. A typical Mosque has a semi-circular but not a bulbous or onion-shaped dome, as found in India under the Mughals (1526–1857) and in Asia in general, a square minaret, as in North Africa, and sometimes, a polygonal one. The construction of large domes and more than one minaret started only recently. The style of Mosque is often determined by persons and organizations financing their construction. Pictures and images are traditionally excluded from the Mosque Elaborately-designed arched doors and glazed windows, exquisite carpets, bookshelves, wall clocks, calligraphic inscriptions from the Quran on ceilings and walls, and large chandeliers are some of the new features.

Naming of Mosques in Ethiopia

Mosques are popularly identified by the names of the neighborhoods or quarters of the towns in which they are located. In today's Addis Ababa, with the exception of al-Gami al Anwar, the Mosques (estimated at 146 in total) are better known by the names of localities, ethnic groups, philanthropists who financed their construction, important personalities, and public institutions than by their official designations.

Calligraphy

Calligraphic design is omnipresent in Islamic art, where as in Europe in the middle age, religious exhortations, including Quranic verses, may be included in secular objects, especially coins, tiles, metal work, and most painted miniatures include some script, as do many buildings. Other inscriptions include verses of pottery, and inscriptions recording ownership or decoration. Two of the main scripts involved are the symbolic Kufic and Naskh scripts, which can be found

adorning and enhancing the visual appeal of the walls and domes of the buildings, the side of minibars and metalwork.

Chapter Five

5. Handicraft in Ethiopia

5.1 Handicraft in Ancient Ethiopia

Aside from Aksum and its surrounding area, only a few archaeological findings of handicrafts are known. In the tomb chambers of Yeha abundant pottery was found, probably indicating the professional ceramic production which was developed since the 6th or 5th cent. B.C. a wide variety of ceramics like jars, bowls, flasks, and beakers was produced. The process of imported metal probably started at the same time.

Among luxury goods, ivory worked with great competence. The carved Aksumite *stelae* and tombs show the high standards of the stonemason. Forgeable iron is extracted as steel through production of iron ore. Iron was imported to Aksum for further processing.

Tanning belongs probably to the oldest handicraft in Ethiopia. Preferably domesticated animal's hides, e.g. cattle, goat and also those of monkeys and wildcats. Unlike most African countries, where industrial fabrics drove out the local weaving production, in Ethiopia weaving manufactures are still prospering. Their products range from heavy cloth to light shawls. Where professional wood-workers are found, like the Gurage, they produce bowls, cups, stools, footed trays and combs.

There was a continuation in the handicraft production practices following the downfall of the Aksumite Kingdom. There are a number of sites and remains which could proof the handicraft skill of the post-Aksumite society. For example:- the church of Yimrehane Kiristos in Lasta and Wukir Meskele Kristos near Sekota and later the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are major symbols for the great craft skill and technology of the Zagwe period apart from their astonishing architectural features.

5.2 Handicraft in Medieval Period (1270-1632)

The skill and status of Ethiopian handicraft workers, and the range and quality of their production reflected both the subsistence character of the economy and the hierarchical development of the society. Craftsmanship took place at four distinct levels:

1st rural craftsmanship;

2nd ecclesiastical craftsmanship;

3rd craftsmen in moving capitals;

4th craftsmanship for the court and army;

a. Rural craftsmanship

Rural craftsmanship served primarily the peasantry, who were largely self-sufficient not only they grew their food but also constructed their own houses, and made the greater part of their household furniture, agricultural tools and clothing. Peasants for the most part lacked the equipment, and skill required for smelting and the manufacture of ironware. They were therefore dependent on blacksmiths for a wide range of articles including plough shares and the blades of axes, sickles, knives needles etc.

Peasant households which generally had no access to clay suitable for potting had likewise in most cases little knowledge of pottery work. They had therefore to make use of the specialized services of potters for such articles as cooking pots, clay plates and coffee pots. Many peasant families similarly lacked the equipment necessary for spinning and more specially weaving. They were therefore not adept at such work, and had to rely on specialized skills of weavers. Ironware, pottery, and cloth were therefore produced mainly by specialized craft-workers: blacksmiths, potters and weavers.

b. Ecclesiastical craftsmanship

The development of the church and founding of numerous religious establishments led to the growth of a large class of clergy; created a demand for a wide variety of religious handicraft items. These included: processional and hand crosses ecclesiastical basins and platens, cestrum, bells and chandeliers of gold, silver or bronze, fine curtains and religious tents, priest vestments, robes and turbans, ceremonial umbrellas and tallow candles etc. Some of these articles were made by monks specializing in handicraft activity, but others were the work of secular craftsmen, many of whom lived and worked in the vicinity of religious establishments. The finest religious artifacts were produced at or in the vicinity of Aksum where handicraft skills doubtless stretched back to the city's ancient days of greatness and other great religious centers.

c. Craftsmen in Moving Capitals

Throughout much of the medieval period the country had no fixed capital. The monarch, his courtiers and soldiers were constantly moving from one camp or "moving capital" to another. Craftsmen, like other camp-followers, accompanied the court and army on their long journey.

Craftsmen were in such demand that emperor Lebna Dengel took a keen interest in acquiring them from abroad. Some efforts were also made at about the same time to dispatch a few Ethiopians abroad for training. An ambassador from Lebne Dengel was sent to Goa with four slaves, two to be taught to be painters, and two others to be trumpeters but whether they ever returned to their native country is not recorded. Though Ethiopian artists were mainly churchmen. Some left the church and entered the emperor's service, as did most of the foreign artists who settled in the country.

d. Craftsmanship for the Court and Army

The existence of a highly evolved state, with a large court and huge armies, often numbering tens or hundreds of thousands of men, as well as numerous camp followers constituted another major focus demand of handicrafts. The court, with all its pomp and ceremony, was in constant need of many kinds of luxury goods, most of them made from gold and silver, or else from costly cloth or other imported materials such items of ostentation included gold, silver, and gilt crowns, costly mantles and other articles of apparel made of brocade, silk shirts, and tents besides decorated swords, spears, shields, ornamented saddles and finely wrought bridles and riding equipment.

Soldiers and their families, who tended to be better-off, and to dress better, than the populace at large, also exercised a significant demand for items of clothing of all kinds. For example, Emperor Libene Dengel employed a number of tailors, for the most part Muslims, who also made coverings for the royal horses.

5.3. Craftsmanship during Gondarine Period

Though craftsmanship in the countryside probably remained largely unchanged, the Gondar period was thus a time when artisans and artists increased both in numbers and skill, particularly in and around the capital and several other urban or religious centers. This development contributed to a great flourishing of the country's culture.

Gonder seems to have served as a point of diffusion for handicraft work in other parts of the country. Asme Giorgis stated that craftsmen from the metropolis made their way to Shawa in the 18th century, during local ruler Abbeye (1720-45) who is said to have received them well. These workers included many "*Falasha*" who entered his service and whom he treated respectfully. They made him axes and chisels with which the people of Shawa cleared the forest of Yifat, as

well as sickles, hoes and ploughshares which enabled them to cultivate the province more efficiently.

Gonder, in the early 19th century, was still, as for the previous two hundred years, the country's principal handicraft center. The handicraft of Gonder in its hey-day, included some of the finest possible description, but, with the city's decline, deteriorated markedly in quality. Much of the handicraft work of the city and its environs was carried out, as in the surrounding countryside, by Falashas and Muslims. The Falashas of Gonder, as elsewhere, were likewise prominent as blacksmiths, and were as important as potters that they were responsible for all the city's potting. The Muslims were also much involved in craftsmanship. They provided most of the city's weavers, and were also active in embroidering women's shirts, as well as in making caps for the Muslim population.

Gonder also had a community of foreign craftsmen, consisting mainly of Egyptians and Greeks, some of whom were involved in the repair of rifles because of the difficulty of obtaining new weapons their services were always in great demand. The city was also renowned for its parchment, carpets and tanned hides. The neighboring Qimant were also supplying the capital with most of its woods and were skillful carpenters.

The civil wars of the early 19th century, and the subsequent looting of the city by King Tewodros II in 1860's, led to the decline of craftsmanship in and around Gondar. A great number of Falashas had fled to Begemidir, Belesa and Lasta. Some had been received by the kings' command, and were employed in his work, while others earned a livelihood by their trades as blacksmiths, weavers, potters and house builders.

5.4 Handicraft in Modern Ethiopia

Since the coming to power of King Tewodros II, Ethiopian handicraft production got a new phase. So, this section presents the major aspects of handicraft production in Ethiopia from the mid-19th century to our own era.

Blacksmiths were responsible throughout the 19th century for the manufacture in many parts of the country of a wide variety of articles of considerable economic and military significance. These included plough-shares and the iron parts of peak-axes, sickles and other agricultural implements, as well as knives, spear-heads, swords, bullets and spare parts of rifles etc.

Smelting was carried out over a charcoal fire with the aid of one or more pairs of home-made bellows fashioned from sheep or goat skins. Though most blacksmiths made exclusive use of

simple, locally made tools, a few had access to foreign files being imported via Massawa. Many blacksmiths in the 19th century, as in the past, were Falasha. The old idea of blacksmiths possessed supernatural powers found expression in the widespread conviction that they could turn themselves into hyenas at night. As a result, Blacksmiths lived in a constant danger of persecution.

Potters were using earthenware to manufacture all sorts of cooking and food receptacles, such as bowls, dishes, pitchers and jars of many shapes and sizes, as well as *gullelat*, or clay center piece, often placed at the apex of churches or thatched houses. Such artifacts were usually red or black, the color depending on the method of firing. Most potters, a majority of whom were probably women, worked only with their hands, and had no equipment though a few of them used a horizontal potter's wheel.

Tanning was widely practiced, and since it did not require capital equipment, was largely carried out with considerable expertise by the ordinary peasantry rather than by specialist craftsmen. There were however, also a number of professional curriers, many of whom were Muslims. These and others turned a wide range of goods, among them saddles, shields, scabbards, cartridge and other belts, tents, articles of clothing, parchment and the like. Fine skins were produced in many parts of the country, notably at Gonder, as well as at Morat in Shawa, whose inhabitants were skillful in the field.

Wood-workers using the simplest of tools, mainly axes and hatchets, fashioned a considerable variety of household and other artifacts. These include doors, door-frames, beds, chairs, wooden parts of ploughs and spears. Most of these articles were crudely produced by peasants with only minimal experience of woodwork, but there were also more skilled, and specialized, craftsmen who produced objects of greater sophistication, including rifles-butts.

Basket making, which needed skill, but not equipment, was carried out exclusively by women. This work was of considerable importance, for basketry was widely used, in the manufacture of containers for all kinds of foods, both solid and liquid. Basket ware was sometimes rendered watertight, for the containing of liquids, by the application of cactus/*qwulqwal*. Several rural areas of high elevation, where sheep flourished were noted for their use of wool. The population of Semen Mountains and people of highland Manz in Shawa for example included many carpet-makers.

Apart from Gonder, there were other urban religious centers known as congregation of craftsmen. These included Aksum, Adwa and other towns in north and North West Tigray as well as Ankober and Angolela in Shawa, Dorze in South Ethiopia. In those areas there were jewelers, horn and ivory workers, shoe makers and the like.