This is to certify that the

thesis entitled

AN EXAMINATION OF THE METHODS
USED IN THE STUDY OF
ETHIOPIAN ART

presented by

MICHELLE L. CLIFFORD

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

M.A. degree in ART

Major professor

Date 8/2/94

AN EXAMINATION OF THE METHODS USED IN THE STUDY OF ETHIOPIAN ART

By

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A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Art

1994

ABSTRACT

AN EXAMINATION OF THE METHODS USED IN THE STUDY OF ETHIOPIAN ART

By

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This study examines the different methods that have been used in the study of the Christian art of Ethiopia. By taking a close look at how scholars have described and evaluated the theme of the Annunciation in Ethiopian religious painting, an understanding of the methods involved in the study of religious art becomes evident. Several questions will be raised that reveal the lack of awareness regarding the crucial cultural factors that enhance one's understanding of the Ethiopian tradition of religious painting. In an attempt to answer some of these questions, an alternate method is offered, one that has been formulated by Annabel Jane Wharton in her study of the art of the Byzantine periphery. This method will present additional questions and provide an alternate path for pursuing the study of the Christian art of Ethiopia.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Figure

1-3, 5-14 Stanislaw Chojnacki, "The Annunciation in Ethiopian art," *Nubia et Oriens Christianus*, figs. 1-6, 11, 13, 14, 21, 24, 25, 30.

4 Marilyn Heldman, *Miniatures of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela*, fig. 11.

15-20 Annabel Jane Wharton, *Art of Empire*, figs. 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.17, 2.23, 2.25.

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INTRODUCTION

The present study attempts to understand the different methods being used by scholars to investigate the art of Christian Ethiopia. A majority of the work produced by these scholars consists of preliminary studies which include descriptions of the paintings as well as basic analysis of the iconography. When possible, actual imported models which may have influenced Ethiopian artists are discussed. While these types of studies are important, they focus almost exclusively on the historical aspects of the art. Therefore, several crucial factors are neglected. An understanding of religious, economic, political, and social factors that have a significant bearing on a country and its people would serve to enhance our understanding of Christian Ethiopian painting.

The first step in investigating the methods used in the study of Christian Ethiopian art includes an understanding of the body of work that has already been undertaken. The first chapter will present the state of the research, and the methods with which the main contributors are working. Stanislaw Chojnacki has also proposed a direction which he believes the research should follow. His notions will play an important part in determining the work that still needs to be completed.

The next step includes a closer look at how scholars have dealt with a specific subject prominent in Christian Ethiopian painting, which will further illuminate how the exclusion of other cultural aspects affects the research. I will be looking at the studies that examine the theme of the Annunciation found in Ethiopian wall painting, manuscript illumination, and panel painting. This will provide an in-depth look at how many of the prominent scholars provide possible answers to the iconography, prototypes, influences, and changes to one specific theme in the religious art of Ethiopia. By looking at the

methods of these scholars, many questions arise that are not answered and perhaps not even considered. These questions will reveal the deficiencies in the methods, and help one to understand why and how the method could be improved.

An examination of alternative methods used in art history may help to comprehend how the study of Ethiopian art could be improved. Annabel Jane Wharton investigates the art found outside of the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in a different manner than scholars of Ethiopian art. A close examination will reveal Wharton's many strengths in understanding the art of the periphery. The Byzantine influence is often mentioned as an important contributing factor to the style and iconography of Ethiopian art, providing additional reasons for the success of Wharton's method. The improvements possible in the study of Ethiopian art will become more clear after an examination of Wharton's methodology.

While it is extremely difficult to come up with conclusive solutions when the study of Ethiopian Christian art is still in its preliminary stages, suggestions for further research can be made. Questions can be raised that will help us understand where the research stands and where it might go in the future. It is on this note that I leave the reader.

In preparing the following paper, I have been limited by certain factors. While sources written in French are included, German and Italian sources have been accessed through the research of scholars writing in English. In addition, I have limited my research to secondary sources due to my limited access to the original works of art. However, because of the nature of this study, in which I concentrate mainly on analyzing the methods used by Ethiopianists, I do not believe these factors have hampered my analyses.

CHAPTER 1

STUDIES IN ETHIOPIAN ART

The study of Ethiopian art is relatively new. Most of the work in this area has been accomplished only in the last five decades. While Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian cultures, its religious art is little understood by most people, including scholars. A brief history of the field will serve to introduce the main contributors and their methodologies.

Several chronologies designed to classify the religious art of Ethiopia have appeared in this brief amount of time. A close look at these chronologies and their accompanying theories is necessary to understand the field as it stands today. The survey of Ethiopian research that is presented here is primarily based upon the review of the discipline published in 1983, by Stanislaw Chojnacki, the former curator at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum in Addis Ababa.[1] Other scholars have since made contributions to the field. Their accomplishments will also be acknowledged.

Broad surveys of Ethiopian culture began to appear in the 1950s that included many descriptions and commentaries on the art. Examples of these types of surveys include Beatrice Playne's book of travels, and Sylvia Pankhurst's cultural history of the country.[2] In the 1960s and 1970s, there were general surveys of Ethiopian art published that appeared as chapters in cultural studies of the country and introductions to exhibition

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[1] Stanislaw Chojnacki, "Introduction" in *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1983), 15-37.

[2] Beatrice Playne, *St. George of Ethiopia*, (London: Constable Publishers, 1954); Sylvia Pankhurst, *Ethiopia: A Cultural History* (Essex: Lalibela House, 1955).

catalogs. These types of works were useful in sparking interest in a relatively unknown art.

More recently, many different attempts at the classification of Ethiopian paintings appeared. It is necessary to point out one dominant feature of the chronologies designed by the Ethiopian scholars. Most of the dates begin with the fourteenth century due to the lack of material evidence that can be dated earlier. In 1961, Otto A. Jäger and Liselotte Deininger-Engelhart identified three major divisions of Ethiopian painting. The first period runs from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, with the end coinciding with the invasion of Ahmad Grañ in the middle of the sixteenth century. The art of this period is said to show the "intensive religious life [that] was dominant at that time."[3] Jäger describes this period as the independent formation of the Ethiopian culture, but he also accepts the opinion that Ethiopia was highly influenced by the civilizations of Arabia and Egypt. Jäger believes, moreover, that Ethiopian art was also re-interpreted in the Ethiopian fashion.[4]

The second period culminated with the rule of the Emperor Fasilädäs, in 1632 to 1667, in the new capital city of Gondar. The authors classify the art of this period as the "Gondar style." The third period started around 1700, and is classified as being more of a "deviation from the older Ethiopian style,"[5] which they attribute to the repetition of standard pictures and the secularization of many religious themes.

The next effort at classifying Ethiopian painting was presented by Jules Leroy in 1964. He later made elaborations to this original treatise in 1970 and 1975, when his efforts were joined with those of Guy Annequin and Claude Lepage. Their theory divided Ethiopian history into two periods, which they designated as the medieval and the

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[3] Otto Jäger and L. Deininger-Engelhart, "Some Notes on Illuminations of Manuscripts in Ethiopia," *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici* 17 (1961): 46.

[4] Otto Jäger, Jules Leroy, and Stephen Wright, *Ethiopia: Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Graphic Society/UNESCO, 1960), 15.

[5] Otto Jäger and L. Deininger-Engelhart, "Some Notes ," 47.

Gondarene. Again, the Moslem invasion of Ahmad Grañ was used to designate the major division of the periods. Leroy believes that "even though that war was responsible for the destruction of innumerable works of art...it did bring some advantages through the influx of foreigners which, as usual, Ethiopia saw as a means of cultural enrichment."[6] Leroy also suggests that Grañ' s invasion was responsible for the establishment of schools, or scriptoria, which served as a means of cultural enrichment, and caused many stylistic changes.[7]

Leroy's main argument can be summed up as follows: during the medieval period, Ethiopian painting was mostly influenced by Eastern Christianity, while during the Gondarene period, the main influence was from the art of Western Europe. Leroy does acknowledge the presence of Italian artists and craftsmen before the fifteenth century, but he refers to them as mostly "anonymous, which is neither regrettable nor suprising since it is certain that not a single one of them could compare with contemporary artists at work in Italy."[8] Annequin agrees with Leroy,[9] while Lepage does not discuss the issue. Lepage divides the ancient, or medieval, period into five main stages starting from about the tenth or eleventh century up to the sixteenth century. The chronology of each stage follows the dates of certain representative works which Lepage does not clearly establish.[10]

Richard Pankhurst agrees with Leroy's main argument. In regards to manuscript illuminations, he discusses the rise of the new capital of Gondar in the seventeenth century that coincides with a renaissance in Ethiopian art. The painters and illuminators

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[6] Jules Leroy, "Ethiopian Painting in the Middle Ages," in *Churches in Rock: Early Christian Art in Ethiopia*, ed. Georg Gerster (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1970), 66.

[7] Ibid., 65.

[8] Ibid., 66.

[9] Guy Annequin, "De Lebna Denguel à Théodoros, quatre siècles d'art et d'histoire (début XVIe-fin XIXe siécles)," in *Éthiopie millénaire: préhistoire et art religieux* (Paris: Petit Palais, 1974): 53-57; as cited in Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 25.

[10] Claude Lepage, "Histoire de l'ancienne peinture éthiopienne," in *Comptes-rendues des séances de l'academie des manuscripts et belles-lettres* (1977), 325-376; as cited in Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 25.

began to rely less heavily on their Byzantine heritage and to develop a freer representational style.[11] Like Leroy, Pankhurst acknowledges the new and different path that Ethiopian painting took after the establishment of the Gondarene dynasty.

Another chronology was created in 1968 by Ernest Hammerschmidt and Otto Jäger who designated four different periods of art production. The "symbolic" period covers the art from the time before the fourteenth century; the "sacred" period characterized the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries comprises the "dramatic" period. From the seventeenth century onwards, the art is characterized as "narrative."[12] Many of the works cited are from the churches of the Lake Ṭana region where Jäger did most of his traveling.

There are also several chronologies that have been proposed for the division of Ethiopia's history. Like the chronologies created to understand Ethiopia's religious paintings, these remain controversial. Roger Schneider gives Ethiopian history a three part division.[13] The first period ranges from 500 B.C. to the end of the rule of the Zagwé dynasty in 1270. The second period begins in 1270 and lasts until the middle of the nineteenth century. The modern period begins in the middle of the last century. Schneider believes in the unique development of Ethiopian culture, and also that Christianity did not act as an impetus for change, but that the Ethiopian culture is the continuation of an imported civilization from West Asia.

Seyoum Wolde rejects Schneider's theory regarding the development of Ethiopian culture, and devises a classification of his own.[14] His pre-Christian era ended by about the

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[11] Richard K. Pankhurst, "Ethiopian Manuscript Illumination," *Azania* 19 (1984): 105.

[12] Ernest Hammerschmidt and Otto Jäger, *Illuminierte äthiopische Handschriften*, Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutchland XV, ed. Wolfgang Voight (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1968), 12-15; as cited in Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 26.

[13] Roger Schneider, "The History of Christian Ethiopia," in *Churches in Rock: Early Christian Art in Ethiopia*, ed. Georg Gerster (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1970), 36-41.

[14] Seyoum Wolde, "The Profile of Writings on Ethiopian Medieval Christian Art", in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies*, ed. Taddese Beyene, vol. 2 (Huntington: Elm, 1989), 165.

first quarter of the fourth century A.D. The second period begins in the fourth century and lasts until the middle of the nineteenth century. The modern period begins with the appearance of Imperialism and the struggle against it. His classification makes the medieval period extremely long, but it contains several subdivisions and two main halves. The first half ends with the Zagwé dynasty. These examples of historical chronologies exemplify how difficult it is determine a commonly accepted chronology of both Ethiopia's religious art as well as its history.

A more recent classification has been developed by Marilyn Heldman. Her chronology begins in A.D. 333 when Christianity was officially introduced into Ethiopia. The little art that survives from the Aksumite period are mostly imported marble furnishings that date from the sixth century. During this time, Heldman believes specific Christian styles and icons found in the early manuscripts of Gospels and wooden ceiling panels depicting the terrestrial world, or "the Lord's estate," a typical Byzantine theme of the fifth and sixth centuries, were introduced.[15] The period between the downfall of the Aksumite empire in the seventh century and the establishment of the Zagwé dynasty in 1137 is virtually undocumented. Consequently, very few manuscripts can be dated during the reign of this dynasty. Two gospel books containing additional depictions of "the Lord's estate" and murals at the church of Mary at Lalibela are examples of the evidence Heldman cites.[16]

The Zagwé dynasty ended in 1270 with the establishment of the Solomonic dynasty. Heldman designates the third period as the Early Solomonic period which lasted from 1270 to 1527. There is still much that needs to be discovered concerning this period, although it is considerably better documented than any previous period. It was then that Heldman believes several different painting styles were developed, and many of the

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[15] Marilyn Heldman, "The Heritage of Late Antiquity," in *African Zion: the Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 118.

[16] Marilyn Heldman, "The Zagwe Dynasty: 1137-1270," in *African Zion: the Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 133.

emperors attempted to hire European artisans. Heldman discusses the iconography and stylistic characteristics of the art from this period as having Byzantine, Coptic, and indigenous influences.[17]

Heldman designates the final period as the Late Solomonic period. This period begins around 1540 with the invasion of Ahmad Grañ and ends in 1769. Like Lepage, she does not attempt to deal with the modern period. There exist few dated works from the first century of this period. Heldman characterizes them as following models derived from Western European engravings and popular prints which replaced models lost in the early sixteenth century. This period "reflects an interest in imported visual models, and it seems likely that even without the devastation caused by Grañ, Ethiopian painters would have been receptive to the influx of western European prints."[18] Heldman acknowledges the development of the Gondarene style during this period. Her chronology ends with the Gondarene dynasty in 1769.

Stanislaw Chojnacki questions the attempts of Leroy and Lepage at classifying the history of Ethiopia's religious art. He challenges Leroy's theory based on the loose chronology. Chojnacki points out the fact that there are one hundred years between the invasion of Ahmad Grañ and the establishment of the Gondarene dynasty. This would indicate a large gap between the fading of the fifteenth-century art and the appearance of the first examples of the Gondarene school.[19] The simplicity of Leroy's argument is also questioned by Lanfranco Ricci.[20]

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[17] Marilyn Heldman, "The Early Solomonic Period: 1270-1527," in *African Zion: the Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 141-143.

[18] Marilyn Heldman, "The Late Solomonic Period: 1540-1769," in *African Zion: the Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, ed. Roderick Grierson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 193.

[19] Stanislaw Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting: Indigenous Developments, the Influence of Foreign Models and Their Adaptation from the 13th to the 19th Century* (Wiesbaden: Franz Stiener Verlag, 1983), 24.

[20] Lanfranco Ricci, "La pittura etiopica, durante il medioevo e sotto la dinastia di Gondar...(Recensioni)," *Rivista di studi orientali* 29 (1964): 325-43; as cited in Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 24.

Chojnacki disagrees with many of Lepage's theories that rely on establishing dates for the art, which Chojnacki believes are not clearly established. One example that Chojnacki cites is the date Lepage gives the murals in the church of Mary on Mount Qorqor in Gär'alta. Lepage relies on the assumption that the church was directly connected with the monk Ewostatewos (1273-1352) and was therefore actually painted by his disciples. The claimed connection is undermined if one attempts to trace Lepage's references.[21] Without firmly established dates for the art, Lepage's chronology remains unsubstantiated.

Another point of disagreement concerns the art Lepage chooses to represent each period. Chojnacki questions whether it is actually representative of any larger group. Chojnacki also objects to Lepage's emphasis on the medieval period. Lepage's chronology only covers the tenth through the sixteenth centuries. Chojnacki believes that Lepage's theories are inadequate because he does not deal with what is commonly referred to as the modern period. He argues that without considering the entire history of Ethiopian art, it is difficult to understand Ethiopian history as a whole.[22]

Chojnacki finds that these discrepancies in the theories may point to the fact that it may not yet be time to attempt such broad generalization about a field in which so little is known. He argues that "every piece of Ethiopian painting which happens to appear is immediately assigned to some period with no reason given for doing so and before it is compared with similar paintings. One cannot properly judge what is not identified and described."[23] Chojnacki suggests a new approach. He states that "instead of the main preoccupation with dividing its corpus into clear-cut periods and 'stages of evolution', the

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[21] Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 23-24.

[22] Ibid., 25.

[23] Ibid., 27.

study would concentrate on the combined investigation of the paintings, the people who produced these and the spirit of the locality where the creation took place."[24]

Chojnacki points out several reasons which explain why there is so much disagreement in the field. One reason is that many theories are not supported by material evidence. One of the reasons for this is that many works of art are continually being discovered. For example, Chojnacki cites the 1943 article written by Ugo Monneret de Villard on the Majestas Domini, or Christ in Majesty.[25] At the time the article was written, only one example of this subject was known. Two decades later when Lepage dealt with the same subject, he was able to look at a dozen different examples.[26]

To avoid further mistakes, Chojnacki believes that scholars should first record and describe the paintings. A search for a piece's iconographic origin must then be initiated with a chronological discussion of its appearance throughout the centuries. These types of preliminary studies have already begun to be published and usually fall into two categories. The first is concerned with the investigation of a single work or a set of murals or paintings. The main focus of this type of study is to provide a complete description of the work. Several types of iconographical studies have been published by Marilyn Heldman, Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, Jules Leroy, and others.

Over twenty years before Chojnacki's suggestions for future work in the field, Leroy conducted this type of research on an "Italian Madonna" found in an Ethiopian manuscript at the British Library.[27] He discusses at length the iconography and style of the painting of the Virgin Mary, which may be an original Italian work or one influenced

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[24] Ibid., 36.

[25] Ugo Monneret de Villard, "La Majestas Domini in Abyssinia," *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 3 (1943): 36-45. Unfortunately, I was not able to read the contributions of Monneret de Villard. Therefore, it is not clear whether his theory suffers or is invalidated by a lack of material evidence.

[26] Claude Lepage, "Dieu et les quatre Animaux Célestes dans l'ancienne peinture éthiopienne," *Documents pour servir à l'histoire de la civilisation éthiopienne* 7 (1976): 67-112; as cited in Chojnacki, Major Themes, 27.

[27] Jules Leroy, "Une 'madonne italienne' conservée dans un manuscrit éthiopien du British Museum," *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 18 (1962): 77-82.

by Italian art. I believe that by looking at a particular theme and its occurrence throughout Ethiopian history, this type of work will eventually allow for a more accurate history of Ethiopian art. When a complete history of each artifact is known, more general characteristics will become more evident.

Many scholars give Chojnacki a prominent place in the study of Ethiopian art. Since the early 1980s when Chojnacki's major study on the iconography of Ethiopian themes in art was published, many other scholars have made important contributions to the field. Ewa Balicka-Witakowska has been working extensively since the middle 1980s, evidently influenced by Chojnacki. Her articles include several treatises on the iconography of the Deposition in Ethiopian painting. Balicka-Witakowska has examined this theme throughout its history, and proposes several iconographic models from which Ethiopian artists may have obtained their inspiration. Chojnacki believes that these prerequisite studies are necessary for building the foundations of future research.

Balicka-Witakowska uses stylistic observations to understand the primary influences as well as an investigation of iconographic themes. She explains the derivations from the Eastern and Western models are determined by the artist's personal decision as to how he or she could best reproduce the subject. She explains the change of iconography in one particular type of Deposition by the fact that "we can surmise, that the artist could not manage such a complex multi-figural composition and therefore picked only the central, most significant group."[28] In addition to understanding the complex changes that imported models underwent in the hands of the Ethiopian artists, she deals extensively with the "problems the Ethiopian painters had in copying crowded, perspective pictures with many superimposed details."[29]

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[28] Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "The Iconography of the Deposition in Ethiopian Painting," in *Proceedings of the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art* (London: Pindar Press, 1989), 17.

[29] Ibid., 19.

In addition to more general works, Marilyn Heldman has published several studies along these lines. She works extensively with a single image or a set of Ethiopian paintings documenting the art, establishing a chronology, and providing an iconographic origin. Heldman's work on the miniatures of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela is one example. This extensive study encompasses thorough research into a singular group of miniatures. Heldman describes her task as follows:

> ... to discover evidence of the devotional and creative involvement of the artist ... which will commence with an examination of the relationship of the style of this manuscript with others of the same period. A final section will be devoted to an analysis of the miniatures, involving comparisons of stylistic traits and features with foreign styles in an attempt to discover the source of the models used by the artists ... of the Gospels.[30]

The full importance of Heldman's contributions will be discussed in the following chapters.

The second category of preliminary work includes studies that are aimed at the chronological description of a single theme as well as the establishment as to whether it is of local origin or copied from an imported model and what the model might be. Monneret de Villard has done this type of work on the iconography of the Virgin found in the church of S. Maria Maggiore.[31] Chojnacki has himself participated in this type of discovery with extensive work on the equestrian figure of St. George which appears frequently in Ethiopian painting. In the first part of his work on St. George, Chojnacki attempts "to classify and set in chronological order the different types of the Saint's portrait in Ethiopian art."[32] With this task accomplished, the second part of the article thoroughly investigates a particular type of St. George. By breaking down the descriptions of each type by century, Chojnacki avoids fitting the theme into any specific

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[30] Marilyn Heldman, *Miniatures of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela, an Ethiopic Manuscript Dated AD 1400/01*, Ph.D Dissertation (St. Louis: Washington University, 1972), 47.

[31] Ugo Monneret de Villard, "La Madonna di S. Maria Maggiore e l'illustrazione dei Miracoli di Maria in Abissinia," *Annali Lateranensi* 11 (1962): 9-20.

[32] Stanislaw Chojnacki, "The Iconography of Saint George in Ethiopia, part I," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 11 (1 1973): 57.

period.[33] He has also published similar studies dealing with the image of the Virgin Mary and scenes from the life of Christ.

This brief historiography of Ethiopian art helps one to understand the work that has been accomplished. As Chojnacki continually stresses, there remains a great deal of work to be done at the preliminary level before one can begin to understand the full ramifications of all the discoveries that are continually being made. This preliminary work has already begun in many different stages. In the following chapters, an attempt will be made to understand more fully how the study of Ethiopian art compares to related fields of art history, and how further contributions can be made. An in-depth look at an example of the preliminary work of Chojnacki and other Ethiopian scholars will reveal the methodologies at work in the study of Ethiopian art.

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[33] Stanislaw Chojnacki, "The Iconography of Saint George in Ethiopia. part II," Journal of Ethiopian Studies 11 (2 1973): 51-93.

CHAPTER 2

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ETHIOPIAN ANNUNCIATION

The popularity of the Cult of the Virgin Mary in Ethiopia is well-known. Scenes from her life are important components of manuscripts, triptychs and church mural paintings. I have chosen to discuss the Annunciation because of its popularity in Ethiopian art. Many scholars have examined its iconography and traced its origins in Christian art. I will discuss the evidence presented by Chojnacki, Balicka-Witakowska and other Ethiopianists in their research on the subject. Chojnacki has composed the most comprehensive evaluation of the Annunciation in Ethiopian painting. Therefore, I will concentrate largely on his methods and the evidence he presents. This discussion will serve as a basis for the questions which will arise in the following chapter.

A majority of the preliminary work has been done on the known examples of the Annunciation. One of the earliest studies was published by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska.[1] She remarks on the special celebrations and commemoration that this event has in Ethiopia, and offers brief descriptions of eleven representations of the Annunciation generally accepted to have been created before the sixteenth century. Stanislaw Chojnacki elaborates on Balicka-Witakowska's work and adds twenty-two more examples portraying the Annunciation, including several examples created after the sixteenth century.[2]

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[1] Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, "Observations sur l'iconographie de l'Annonciation dans la peinture éthiopienne," in *Proceedings in the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian studies, University of Lund, 1982* (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, 1984), 149-164.

[2] Stanislaw Chojnacki, "The Annunciation in Ethiopian Art: Its Iconography from the 13th to the 19th Century," in *Nubia et Oriens Christianus: Festschrift für C. Detlef G. Müller zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. P.O. Scholtz and R. Stempel (Köln: Verlag Jürgen Dinter, 1987), 281-351.

Chojnacki classifies the eleven paintings discussed by Balicka-Witakowska and his additional examples, dating from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, into five types.[3] This classification is based on primary and secondary iconographical characteristics of the paintings. Chojnacki believes that

> the Ethiopians have borrowed the above five types of the Annunciation from Eastern Christian art, that was to be expected for the Ethiopian culture that sat at the edge of Eastern Christian culture, adjacent to Arab civilization.. We shall indicate the possible impact of the particular branches of that culture on the Ethiopian iconography of the Annunciation.[4]

The first type that Chojnacki describes shows Mary seated on the left, seated in a chair. She is in the act of spinning, although she has dropped the spindle. Gabriel stands in front of her with one of his wings outstretched while the other remains folded. The dove which usually represents the Holy Spirit is not included. Behind the figures, there are traces of architecture. The two examples that fit this type are the wall painting at Gännätä Maryam in Lasta and the Gospels of Qeddus Qirqos, Tigré.

Chojnacki describes this type as having evolved from the earliest known form of the Annunciation. The same disposition of figures is found in three Roman catacomb paintings of the fourth century depicting the Annunciation. How the Ethiopians may have been exposed to these forms is not explained. This arrangement is also found in the mosaics of S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, dated 432-40. It continues into the fifth and sixth centuries, and then gradually faded away in Byzantine art, being used only occasionally after the tenth century.

Gännätä Maryam (fig. 1) dates to about 1270-1285.[5] Balicka-Witakowska also relates this type of Annunciation to its earliest form known from catacomb paintings. Mary is shown as the Theotokos, or the Mother of God. Her hand gesture symbolizes her

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[3] The scope of this paper makes it difficult to discuss all of the given examples. However, representational works of each style and century will be discussed to understand the methods that both Chojnacki, Balicka-Witakowska, and other scholars have used in their respective studies.

[4] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 299.

[5] Please see Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," p. 283, for a discussion regarding this date which is different than the date originally given by Balicka-Witakowska.

submission to the will of God according to Balicka-Witakowska. However, Chojnacki does not find this explanation convincing when referring to the drawing by Balicka-Witakowska. Claude Lepage first published these paintings and describes Mary as holding "in her left hand a small reed while she has dropped the spindle that hangs in front of her."[6]

The miniature found in the Qeddus Qirqos Gospels (fig. 2) displays an iconography similar to that of the Annunciation at Gännätä Maryam. Therefore, Chojnacki believes this also to be directly related to the oldest representation of the theme. Chojnacki notes a similarity between the Annunciation of the Qeddus Qirqos Gospels with a fifth or sixth-century Coptic relief. The miniature is dated to the middle or the second half of the fourteenth century due to its similarities with the Gospels at Däbrä Maryam Qohayen, dated 1361. In the Qeddus Qirqos Gospel's Annunciation, Mary raises her hands in suprise and ceases to spin. Similar to the wall painting at Gännätä Maryam, the spindle has fallen out of her hand . The manner in which she holds the skein of cotton in her left hand reflects the position of Ethiopian women while spinning. Stylistically, these two examples are quite different. It is in the iconography that one finds the many similarities.

In the second type, Mary is again seated on the left. Initially, she was depicted with the palm of her right hand showing while holding a small basket in the left hand. Later, she is shown in the process of spinning. Gabriel is on the right facing Mary with both of his wings folded. He holds a staff in his right hand and stretches his left hand out to Mary. A dove descends within a cloud from the sky. In this type, the main differences include the position of Gabriel's wings and the addition of the dove. Three of the examples that Balicka-Witakowska and Chojnacki discuss are the Gospels at Maryam

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[6] Claude Lepage, "Peintures murales de Gännätä Maryam (Rapport préliminaire)," *Documents pour servir à l'histoire des civilisations éthiopiennes* 6 (1975): 69; as cited in Chojnacki, *Annunciation in Ethiopian Art*, 283.

Magdalawit, the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela, and the Gospels now located at the Palace Library.

Both Balicka-Witakowska and Heldman point out that, like the first type, this Annunciation scene results from its earliest form.[7] The prototype is believed to have a Syrian-Palestinian or Alexandrian origin. However, Chojnacki explains how two different traditions seem to be combined. First, the way in which Mary shows her confusion with the right hand is reflective of the Hellenistic tradition found in the first type. Second, the manner in which she holds the basket in her left hand as well as the gesture Gabriel makes with his right hand are reflective of the Coptic tradition.[8]

The dove representing the Holy Spirit flies above the figures descending towards Mary. Chojnacki has not found the dove in early Christian painting except for the Annunciation scene at S. Maria Maggiore in Rome. The dove is also missing from Byzantine art of the ninth to late eleventh centuries, including wall paintings of Asia Minor and Annunciation scenes of Syrian origin. However, artists of Constantinople do seem to have included the dove more often at a later date, which Chojnacki does not specify. The motif also becomes more popular in Western art starting in the ninth century. Regardless of these occurrences, Chojnacki believes that the origin of the dove will be found in the relationship between the Zagwé Kingdom in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Ethiopia and the Crusader Kingdom in Palestine.

Both the Gospels at Maryam Magdalawit and the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela are similar in iconography, style, and composition. Chojnacki believes they derived from the same prototype. It is therefore convenient to discuss the two together. The Gospels of Maryam Magdalawit (fig. 3) contain one representation of the Annunciation. The manuscript can be dated by its colophon, which can be interpreted as either 1363 or 1439.

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[7]Marilyn Heldman, *Princess Zir Ganela*, 139.

[8] Chojnacki refers to the book by G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'évangile aux XIVe, XVe et XVIe siècles* (Paris, 1916), 71-2.

While Balicka favors the earlier date, Chojnacki believes the older date is equally possible on stylistic grounds.

The Annunciation depicted in the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela (fig. 4) is dated to 1400. Marilyn Heldman describes the miniatures of Princess Zir Ganela and comes to the conclusion that the Annunciation reflects a twelfth-century Byzantine model, although it follows the "old-fashioned version of the image, with the Virgin seated on the left. Mary holds an object in her left hand that should be identified as the basket of red wool which she has been spinning."[9] Heldman follows the Palestinian legend which describes Mary spinning woolen thread for the veil in the temple. Chojnacki reasons that it is more likely for her to be spinning cotton thread because Ethiopian garments are made of that fabric, and spinning was characteristic of the labors of Ethiopian women.

Heldman does not make any mention of the basket in Mary's hand depicted in both miniatures. Chojnacki believes it to have been present in the prototype which the Ethiopian artists copied. Balicka-Witakowska mentions its appearance in the oldest representations of the Annunciation, but the basket is usually placed near her feet. The basket also appears at her feet in Cappadocian wall paintings of the ninth and eleventh centuries. However, the basket is found in Mary's left hand in the fifth or sixth-century Coptic relief in wood and Coptic manuscript, no. 597. Chojnacki suggests that Heldman revise her theory in light of the possible Coptic impact on this Annunciation.

Mary's right hand is also a point of debate in the miniatures. Byzantine iconography starting in the sixth century includes a gesture by Mary that expresses her reaction to Gabriel's message. Showing her palm indicates confusion or apprehension. This gesture is also found in Cappadocian wall paintings. In both of these Ethiopian miniatures, the position of Mary's thumb does give the impression that she is indeed showing her palm. However, the nails on her fingers are shown in a manner suggesting that the top of the hand is being shown. Balicka-Witakowska concludes that "the faulty

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[9] Heldman, *Princess Zir Ganela*, 139-40.

human anatomy is characteristic of Ethiopian painting."[10] While Chojnacki remarks that Balicka-Witakowska never discovered whether Mary's palm was showing in the prototype that the Ethiopian artists copied, Chojnacki believes that it was. He believes that the artist "faithfully rendered Mary's gesture, though he neither was aware of its meaning nor probably ever heard about the Byzantine rules of painting.... He complied with the local manner of drawing hands that include nails, and this changed our perception of Mary's gesture."[11]

The dove found in the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela is similar to that found in the Armenian manuscript, Matenadaran No. 7739, according to Chojnacki. This would suggest an Armenian influence. However, this manuscript is a singular example. The dove virtually never appears in early Armenian Annunciation scenes.[12] There is also Armenian influence in the trefoil design with the lamp hanging inside at the top. Heldman believes it to have evolved from Byzantine and Armenian frames of the Evangelists' portraits. Because the Ethiopian frame differs from the latter by the lack of the ornament within the tympanum, Chojnacki relates the form to Islamic art.

When looking at the miniature of the Annunciation found in a book of the Gospels in the Palace Library (fig. 5) dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, the basic composition and some details in this Annunciation derive from what may be the same prototype as that of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela and Maryam Magdalawit, according to Chojnacki. This additional example of an Annunciation theme was not discussed by Balicka-Witakowska. However, Chojnacki notes that in the process of copying, the prototype was changed significantly. The figure of Mary is similar to the figure of St. Luke located on the facing folio, and she sits on a similar ornate chest. Also,

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[10] Balicka-Witakowska, "Observations ," 151.

[11] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 285.

[12] L.A. Dournovo, *La miniatura armena* (Milano, 1961), pl. 1; as cited in Chojnacki, *Annunciation in Ethiopian Art*, 301.

the act of spinning has been rendered in an extremely accurate manner. Chojnacki states that this example is the earliest instance known to him of the spinning taken directly from life.

Chojnacki classifies the last three types by a significant change that began with the sixth century resulting in a new arrangement of the figures. Mary is now located on the right side of the composition. Chojnacki also believes that the three types influenced each other during the fifteenth century, particularly in the second half. In type 3, Mary is seated as Gabriel approaches. Her body is in a frontal posture with her legs and feet turned to the right. She looks to the angel who approaches her from the back. His left wing is outstretched over Mary, and his right wing is folded. Chojnacki relates this form to the tale told of the Annunciation by the Syrians and the Palestinians. After she hears the message from the angel, she is astonished and remains seated. This form has thus originated from Palestine and Gaza. It is also found in Coptic art. Chojnacki adds that although this Annunciation coincides with the twelfth-century form in Byzantine art of the Virgin seated and spinning, he believes that the Ethiopians have borrowed the model for depicting the third type from Coptic art due to the absence of the dove, although he does not give any specific reasons. An example of this type is Betä Maryam at Lalibäla in Lasta.

The painting at Betä Maryam (fig. 6) is dated to about the twelfth or thirteenth century, and is the earliest known example of Mary's posture with her body turned to the right. According to Balicka-Witakowska, this theme has evolved from a Byzantine prototype of the eleventh century. Chojnacki notes that the way in which the Virgin holds the thread in her left hand and the spindle in her right hand are similar to a ninth-century Coptic miniature, ms. 597 in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. While Balicka-Witakowska does acknowledge a similar fact, she refers to ms. 574 in the same library as containing the miniature. Chojnacki corrects her mistake by pointing out that ms. 574 has only one miniature, and it is not an Annunciation scene.

Claude Lepage also sees a Coptic influence in this Annunciation. Lepage notes its similarities to late Coptic art that has been influenced by the Fatimid art of Egypt.[13] Therefore, although this painting reflects a prototype devised in Palestine and Gaza, it most likely passed through a Coptic channel before reaching Ethiopia. Although it is impossible to ascertain whether a dove was depicted at Betä Maryam due to excessive damage, the dove was not shown in the Coptic representation. The third type of Annunciation was popular with Ethiopian artists up until the seventeenth century.

The fourth type designated by Chojnacki is similar to the previously described Annunciation. Mary is seated on the right with her legs and feet turned to the left. However, Gabriel now stands to the left and is facing her. His left wing is outstretched and his right wing is folded. This arrangement was known to the Ethiopians by the fourteenth century and became predominant in fifteenth-century Annunciation scenes with a variety of details. A miniature in the Krestos Täsfanä Gospels originally located in Däbrä Hayq Estifanos in Wallo and one in the book of Gospels at Däbrä Seyon Maryam in Gär'alta, Tigré are examples of this fourth type.

The Gospels of Krestos Täsfanä (fig. 7) can be dated around 1300 to 1325 according to Chojnacki. These dates are based on the death of Krestos Täsfanä.[14] Balicka-Witakowska designates this Annunciation as Syrian-Palestinian because it first appeared in sixth-century Palestine. She identifies the object at Mary's feet as a basket from which Mary draws out thread with her left hand. The thread changes color in her hand, and Balicka-Witakowska associates this with the Ethiopian interpretation of the two natures of Christ, divine and human. Chojnacki finds it hard to argue about a "detail which is very poorly executed."[15] He believes that it may simply be a spindle, pointed

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[13] Lepage, "Histoire de l'ancienne peinture éthiopienne," 334; as cited in Chojnacki, *Annunciation in Ethiopian Art*, 282.

[14] Chojnacki refers to the dates determined by Paulos Sadua, "Un manoscritto etiopico degli evangeli," *Rassegna di studi etiopici* XI (1952): 9-28.

[15] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 283.

downwards and elongated. He points out that the spindle at Gännätä Maryam is similar in detail and composition.

The miniature in the Gospels of Däbrä Seyon Maryam (fig. 8) is not yet dated. Chojnacki describes some details as pointing to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, while other details are characteristic of the fifteenth century, such as the three-quarter view of the faces and Gabriel's hair which covers one side of the head. Chojnacki tentatively ascribes the manuscript to the first half of the fifteenth century. Balicka-Witakowska does not discuss this miniature of the Annunciation.

According to Chojnacki, the miniature derives from the same prototype used by the artist of the Krestos Täsfanä Gospels. It illustrates the moment when Mary drops the spindle upon seeing the angel. However, she is seated in an Oriental manner with one leg folded under. This is unique in this Annunciation scene and is generally rare in Ethiopian painting of the thirteenth through sixteenth centuries. A similar type is found in the wall paintings of Gännätä Maryam which shows Christ sitting in a similar manner. Therefore, this form of Mary with her legs crossed goes back to the thirteenth century, while her feet and slippers are fifteenth-century details. Chojnacki says of the unique slippers and feet; "Whoever has added these details to Mary's figure did it blindly. The resulting faulty anatomy does not help to identify the form beneath Mary."[16] Chojnacki's guess is that the artist meant to depict the front part of Mary's throne or the carpet upon which she is seated. He believes this to reveal the impact of Islamic art and customs on the miniature.

In type 5, Mary is depicted on the right, but she is now standing. She shows the palm of her right hand and holds the spindle in her left hand. Gabriel approaches Mary on the left, holds the staff in his left hand, and gestures to Mary with his right hand. A dove descends from the sky in a ray of light. Buildings with a trefoil architectural design can be seen in the upper tier of the image.

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[16] Ibid., 291.

Chojnacki believes that this type mirrors the Byzantine Annunciation scene conceived by the ninth to eleventh-century artists of Constantinople which is also reproduced in some rock churches in Asia Minor dated to the same period. This type rarely appears in the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries in these areas. Some hints at how the Byzantine model reached Ethiopia can be seen in the Kibran Gospels.

The Kibran Gospels (fig. 9) at Lake Ṭana reflects an eleventh-century Byzantine Annunciation, according to both Chojnacki and Balicka-Witakowska. Jules Leroy also finds it to be faithful to the Byzantine schema.[17] It is the earliest known instance of the Virgin standing with her arm breast-high in an Ethiopian Annunciation scene. She shows Gabriel the palm of her right hand and holds a skein in her left hand.

Chojnacki discusses two details, the trefoil ornamentation and the dove, that help trace the origins of this miniature's possible Byzantine prototype. Both of these details are also found in type 2. If these details were added to the prototype before it entered Ethiopia, it may have happened in a Christian kingdom of the Near East. Chojnacki believes that a prototype from Lesser Armenia would explain the Armenian character of the Kibran Gospels. A possible prototype used by the artist of the Kibran Gospel is proposed by Chojnacki. The fourteenth or fifteenth-century manuscript Eth. No. 50 in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (fig. 10) contains a miniature depicting the Annunciation scene. Several scholars have studied this miniature and have established the artist as an Armenian.[18] From these facts, Chojnacki concludes that an expatriate painter, possibly an Armenian, created the Annunciation in the Ethiopian manuscript, using an eleventh- or twelfth-century Byzantine model, and that the miniatures in the Kibran Gospels must have been copied from a model that derives from the same period in Byzantine art. The miniature in manuscript No. 50 gives a clue to who might have painted that model.

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[17] Otto Jäger, Jules Leroy, and Stephen Wright, *Ethiopia: Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York: Graphic Society and UNESCO, 1960), 11.

[18] C. Conti Rossini, "Miniature armene nel ms. Et.N. 50 della Biblioteca Vaticana," *Rassegna di studi etiopici* 2 (1942): 191-92; G. Grébaut and E. Tisserant, *Codices aethiopici Vaticani et Borgiani* (Città del Vaticano, 1935), 209; as cited in Chojnacki, *Annunciation in Ethiopian Art*, 286.

After classifying the earlier representations of the Annunciation, Chojnacki describes many examples of the theme that can be dated to the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries. The paintings in this group were not described by Balicka-Witakowska, who concentrated her study on Annunciation scenes dated to the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries.

There are two types of the Annunciation that appear in the sixteenth century. The first type is similar to the Annunciations of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries in that it depicts Mary in the act of spinning. Chojnacki knows of only one example of this theme. This Annunciation is part of a triptych IES Coll. No. 6589 (fig. 11) that included the Nativity, the Baptism of Christ, and the Flight into Egypt. The central panel which most likely depicted the Virgin and Child has been lost.

Chojnacki explains in great detail how this triptych reveals the impact of Western European art. Mary is seated on the right. There are two yellow stripes on both sides of her probably meant to represent the legs of her chair. Mary does not look at Gabriel, but instead faces the viewer. Chojnacki adds that this posture is not found in an Ethiopian Annunciation before the sixteenth century, although it appears frequently in the European rendering of the scene in the late Middle Ages. Mary's long flowing hair is also a European convention. In fifteenth-century portraits, Mary covers her head with the Syrian *maphorion*. In the late fifteenth century, she is depicted with an uncovered head. Chojnacki uses this as evidence to illustrate how easily the Ethiopians adopted new forms, even when they were inconsistent with established rules. He wonders whether the Ethiopian artist gave the same meaning to Mary's covered head as did the Byzantine artist.

Mary's robe is depicted with a deep cut collar that Chojnacki finds difficult to attribute to Western European influences. He, therefore, connects this detail with the Ethiopian custom of women to strip from the waist up to perform certain daily chores.

Chojnacki draws a parallel between this and the depiction of Mary spinning by explaining how both illustrate the artist incorporating a daily task into art.

Chojnacki makes a note concerning the Western European influence in the gesture of the angel. Gabriel's hand is raised, denoting speech. The arrangement of his fingers is identical to that of two portraits attributed to the Italian painter, Niccolò Brancaleon. The angel is portrayed without wings and his head adorned with a crossed nimbus, an attribute of the Trinity. Chojnacki believes that this may be the influence of the ancient apocryphal text, the *Testament in Galilee of Our Lord Jesus Christ*. This becomes a characteristic also evident in the seventeenth century.

The second type of Annunciation is found in nine separate triptychs, seven of which have been previously described by Chojnacki.[19] All of the triptychs are remarkably similar, and were most likely created by the same artist. The main differences in this type of Annunciation is that Mary is not shown spinning, and Gabriel is not carrying a staff. Chojnacki asks the question as to why the Ethiopian artists gave up the theme of spinning that was considered essential for so long. In answer, he points once again to the Italian artist, Brancaleon, who introduced this new form of the Annunciation into Ethiopia. One example believed to have been executed by Brancaleon that illustrates this theme is a miniature located in Wafa Īyäsus in the Gonca district of Gojjam (fig. 12).[20] The similarities between this miniature and the triptychs are interesting.

Brancaleon does not follow the story of Mary spinning. He leaves out the spindle and the fleece of cotton, as well as the thread and the basket. Instead, Mary stands erect with her hands crossed on her breast and listens to Gabriel. A vase of flowers is placed in front of her, and two buildings are evident in the background.

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[19] Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 102-108.

[20] Chojnacki refers to the work done this artist by Diane Spencer in "Travels in Gojjam, St. Luke Icons and Brancaleon Re-discovered," *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* XII (2 1974): 212-219.

Chojnacki traces all of the above nine triptychs to the Italian artist. The figures of Mary and Gabriel as well as their garments have been copied almost exactly from Brancaleon's miniature. Chojnacki comments that the lesser-skilled Ethiopians have not clearly delineated the hands of Mary. They also eliminated all the extra details such as the vase of flowers because their symbolic meaning was not known to them. Neither the heavenly sphere nor the buildings are present in the triptychs. However, these details have already appeared in the Kibran Gospels. The dove had already disappeared by the fifteenth century. Gabriel has lost his wings as well as his staff in the Ethiopian triptychs, although both of these details are shown in the Brancaleon miniature. However, the hands are copied exactly. Chojnacki judges the Ethiopian result as an "iconographically ineffective figure."[21]

The conclusion reached by Chojnacki from this situation is the following: although the miniature by Brancaleon proves his influence on the Ethiopian Annunciation, the triptychs also illustrate the Ethiopian response of adapting the new image to the spirit of Ethiopian painting. The triptychs are not exact copies of the Brancaleon miniature. Chojnacki gives the triptychs a *terminus post quem* of 1520, the year of the Italian expatriate's death. While his influence seems to have been widely accepted, the traditional theme of Mary spinning was resumed in the seventeenth century.

Art of the seventeenth century was created in the First Gondarene style according to Chojnacki. This century saw the introduction of an entirely different type of Annunciation. The basic form of this type is shown in the triptych, IES Coll. No. 4187 (fig. 13). Mary is shown on the right seated on a *bercuma*, a type of Ethiopian armchair. Her body faces the viewer while her legs and feet are drawn sideways and point to the right. She is spinning with her left hand raised to hold the cotton while her right hand holds the spindle. The moment depicts Mary's suprise at the appearance of the angel who

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[21] Chojnacki also comments on the confusion that the artist or a writer may have encountered while copying what he proposes as the original model; see Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," n. 80.

approaches from the left and stands at her back. She gazes at him as he raises his left hand in gesture. This gesture is opposite from the Byzantine in which Gabriel gestures with the right hand.

Chojnacki discusses the miniatures of Brit. Lib. Or. Nos. 635, 639, and 641 as the most accomplished miniatures, although each has their own peculiarities. These miniatures contain an important detail added by the Gondarene artists to the imagery of the Annunciation. Mary is still in the act of spinning, although now she sits in front of an open book upon a lectern. Chojnacki believes that other details such as the *masoba warq*, or the basket with a lid, and the plaited cap under the *maphorion* of Mary have been copied from the popular portrait of the Virgin of the S. Maria Maggiore.[22] This connection would indicate that the Gondarene artist was exposed to either the Greek, Byzantine, or Western European idea of Mary being literate and therefore learned in the ways of the Bible. This idea may have been expressed by the introduction of the lectern and open book.

Chojnacki discusses another factor which may link the lectern to a possible model. This involves the two traditional versions explaining Mary's actions at the moment Gabriel appears. In one, she is spinning at the moment Gabriel arrives while in the other, she is reading the book. The Ethiopians, like the Byzantinists and the West Europeans, supported both views. In European art from the eleventh century onwards and in Byzantine art from the fourteenth century onwards, the spinning was abandoned while the Ethiopians continued to depict it until the seventeenth century. It is at that time that the lectern first appeared in the Ethiopian Annunciation scenes along side the spindle creating a form unique to Ethiopia. It is not clear if Chojnacki supports a Byzantine or Western European influence, or a combination of both.

The next new feature of the seventeenth-century imagery of the Annunciation is the appearance of Gabriel as an old man with gray hair and a beard. Prior to the

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[22] Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, 236-7.

seventeenth century and the eighteenth century onwards, he was depicted as a young man. Chojnacki takes an in-depth look at the religious texts and commentaries and finds no agreement which would explain Gabriel's appearance. He theorizes about the possibility that this imagery may have come from an Armenian living in Ethiopia. During the eighteenth century, Gabriel is again depicted as a young man.

The Second Gondarene style is characteristic of the eighteenth century. Once again, a completely new Annunciation replaced all previous scenes described so far. It marks a break in the tradition of Mary's spinning. Chojnacki believes that the Second Gondarene artists may have been inspired by a scene engraved in the *Evangelium arabicum*, a book of the Gospels in Arabic first copied by the Ethiopians about 1667-8. This Ethiopian copy, which is located in the British Library, corresponds to the main features present in the Second Gondarene style. Although minor details may have been changed from the prototype, Chojnacki points out the fact that the Ethiopian artists "always copied its main features."[23] He then describes the prototype assuming that the Annunciation scene in the *Täbiba täbiban* (fig. 14), or the Wisdom of the Wise, is the closest copy. Mary is shown kneeling and reading the book open on the lectern in front of her. Her halo, along with Gabriel's, is shown in perspective, evidence of the European influence. Gabriel is in the air with his wings outstretched. The flowering spike in Gabriel's left hand and his robe are also believed by Chojnacki as borrowed from European art. Other changes include the deletion of the dove, Mary's gesture, and Gabriel is often depicted twice, once arriving and the second time delivering the message.

Chojnacki describes the many changes that took place throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the attributes and details now found in the Annunciation scenes are attributed to Western European art with few exceptions. In the latest examples that Chojnacki discusses, Mary is shown as an Ethiopian girl. Chojnacki concludes that the artist seems to have thoroughly transformed the established form of the

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[23] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 315.

Annunciation, but he adds: "Nevertheless, he creatively adapted the foreign image to the local lore and took the force of transformation from Ethiopian everyday life."[24]

In his conclusion, Chojnacki attempts a chronology for the Annunciation forms in Ethiopian art during the thirteenth through the nineteenth centuries. He disagrees with the scholars that support theories emphasizing the Eastern Christian origins of the art before the sixteenth century, and the Western European origins of the art after the sixteenth century. Chojnacki states that his comprehensive study on the Annunciation makes it clear that such an evaluation is not justified by the facts. By looking at the seventeenth-century Annunciation, its form goes back to an Eastern Christian model already known in Ethiopia by the thirteenth century.

The work that has been presented here is relevant to the study of Ethiopian art. These types of preliminary studies are important in order to continue work in the field. By classifying the many different examples of the Annunciation in Ethiopian art into five types, Chojnacki organizes the art into manageable groups. These groups make the task of tracing iconographic models more feasible by allowing the scholar to recognize certain common traits and differences by which to understand the iconography and its influences. However, I also believe that the type of work presented above leaves considerable room for improvement. This type of preliminary work is extremely valuable. However, several important questions arise that are not discussed or considered. After consideration of these questions in the following chapter, a new method will be discussed which may help in discovering the answers.

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[24] Ibid., 320.

CHAPTER 3

QUESTIONING THE METHODS USED IN ETHIOPIAN ART

In the previous chapter concerning the Annunciation in Ethiopian painting, a lot of discussion centered around the interpretation of specific details in the composition. After determining a possible prototype for many of the examples, Chojnacki attempts to explain the presence of these details. He discusses the Ethiopian artists as having always been fascinated with new imported models although they continue to adhere to the established models. Chojnacki sums up the study of Ethiopian art and the task at hand based on the fact that

> Ethiopians freely borrowed models from any province of Christian art and that they tried to adapt these models to their cultural environment. Any investigation of Ethiopian art is, in fact, chiefly a study of these tenacious efforts at needed adaptations, which are often very creative efforts and are always culturally significant. That is why we must first study the contents of the paintings to discover their meaning as understood by the Ethiopians.[1]

But does Chojnacki actually attempt to understand the paintings of the Ethiopians as they themselves do? The details in the Annunciation scenes described by Chojnacki and other Ethiopianists are mostly attributed to imported prototypes that the artists copied. This type of conclusion arises from the fact that many of the details of the Annunciation are not rendered accurately according to these scholars. They believe that the Ethiopian artists have misinterpreted the iconography of the imported model that they copied.

In the discussion of the Annunciation in the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela (fig. 4), scholars have questioned the interpretation of the Mary's gesture by the Ethiopian

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[1] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 321.

artists. While Mary seems to be revealing her palm by the position of the thumb, the nails on her fingers are shown, suggesting the opposite. Balicka-Witakowska explains this by the fact that "the faulty anatomy is characteristic of Ethiopian painting" and "the artist neither did relate Mary's gesture with her attitude towards the message nor had the technical capabilities to express it."[2] Chojnacki adds that the artist "faithfully rendered Mary's gesture, though he neither was aware of its meaning nor probably ever heard about the Byzantine rules of painting.... He complied with the local manner of drawing hands that include nails, and this changed our perception of Mary's gesture."[3] Does this suggest that without a prototype the Ethiopian artists could not correctly render a hand? If the artist had wanted to depict the hand as anatomically correct, could he not simply refer to his own hand?

Chojnacki also uses this reasoning in regards to the miniature of the Annunciation in the Däbrä Seyon Maryam Gospels (fig. 2). He explains the unique manner in which Mary sits by concluding that "whoever has added these details to Mary's figure did it blindly. The resulting faulty anatomy does not help to identify the form beneath Mary."[4] If the artist did not understand the detail, why did he add it? Chojnacki assigns this miniature to the fourth type in which Mary remains seated. Therefore, his guess explaining the ambiguous form as a rug or the front part of the throne seems to be the most logical. Simply because Chojnacki is confused by the rendering of the detail does not mean the artist misunderstood his model. To assume that the Ethiopians did not have the technical capabilities to correctly render anatomy is to ignore many other factors which may explain how this detail was chosen to be represented.

Many of the problems related to interpreting the details of the Ethiopian Annunciation scene as it appears throughout history could be helped by an understanding

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[2] Chojnacki's translation of Balicka-Witakowska, "Observations ," 151.

[3] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 285.

[4] Ibid., 291.

of the study of iconology. While the study of iconography involves the identification of subject matter in the figurative arts, iconology refers to the examination of the meaning and tradition of pictorial motifs. Iconology involves understanding a work of art in terms of its cultural environment. An investigation of the relationship between Ethiopian culture and its art is enriched by an understanding of iconology. By investigating such factors as the religion and politics of Ethiopian history, the meaning of a particular motif in Christian Ethiopian art can be determined by the culture from which it develops. An understanding of these important factors may result in less misinterpretation by Chojnacki, Balicka-Witakowska, and other scholars.

Therefore, the first step in comprehending how the artists transformed the imported models to interpret the religious themes according to their cultural traditions is to understand how religious, social, political, economic, and other human institutions may have affected Christian Ethiopian art throughout history. The lack of analysis of the social and cultural environment present in most studies of Ethiopian art results in the neglect of many important aspects to be found in the religious art of Ethiopia. One example of this concerns the various chronologies set up to classify this art. What was the criteria used in determining the periods and dates? Very few scholars attempt to set up their reasoning based upon the religious, social, political, and other cultural factors. No understanding of the era in which the religious art is produced is discussed. How would a comprehension of a complete Ethiopian society enrich our understanding of their art?

Unfortunately, there is a lack of sources one can use to understand the religious history, political, economic, and social history of Ethiopia. Like the study of Ethiopia's religious art, these fields are also in preliminary stages. Many questions arise when investigating the art of Christian Ethiopia. For example, what was happening inside of Ethiopia when these artistic changes took place? Were there more important changes taking place inside the Ethiopian church? What were the political agendas of the new

Ethiopian emperors? What about the social and economic changes that were taking place during this time?

In spite of the inadequate amount of work done on the cultural aspects of Ethiopia, scholars have produced studies which are relevant to understanding how different cultural factors affect each other, and in turn, the art. Donald Levine attempts to understand the situation of the Ethiopians of today by means of social analysis.[5] In setting up a structure from which to understand contemporary Ethiopia, he looks upon Amhara culture as a history, an outlook on life, a way of growing up, a social structure, a kind of psychological orientation, and as a combination of opposites. To accomplish these tasks, Levine attempts to understand the character of the Amhara.

Levine believes that "if we seek some theme with which to gain an entree into the spirit of their society and culture, we will do well to attend to the sphere of poetry."[6] The formula used by the Amhara in their favorite form of verse is referred to as "wax and gold." The wax refers to the figurative meaning of the words while the gold refers to the actual significance of the verse hidden in the words. This entire poetic tradition functions as a social convention in supplying humor and wit to daily life, as well as festive occasions, and criticizing one's enemies and authority figures in a socially approved manner. In this case, one would not think of looking at the poetry of the Amhara without an understanding of its social implications. Along these same lines, one would not investigate Amharic society without consideration of the effect of the wax and gold tradition. However, in interpreting Christian Ethiopian art, this type of cross analysis of cultural factors is rarely considered

The main themes in Levine's book include defining the nature of the traditional culture and its more enduring beliefs and traditions to understand Ethiopia's quest for

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[5] Donald Levine, *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965).

[6] Ibid., 5.

modernity. Therefore, the first step is to attempt an understanding of some aspects of Amhara culture and an assessment of their positive relevance for Ethiopia in transition. To achieve this goal, Levine examines the legacy of Gondar and Manz in order to set up an historical framework from which to evaluate the present situation. When considering the progress of modernization in Ethiopia, a look at the country's history serves to provide a rationale for contemporary society. This process is also relevant when considering the religious art of Ethiopia. To fully comprehend the changes and developments in the art, an historical framework would serve as a basis for its understanding.

One of the most important aspects of Ethiopian society is religion. Since the introduction of Christianity in the fourth century, the religion has played a part in the politics, economy, and foreign relations of Ethiopia. The history and religion of Ethiopia have been directly related to each other for more than fifteen-hundred years. Even in the most recent publications in the field of Christian Ethiopian art, this important link has been ignored. The 1993 catalogue which accompanies the current exhibition, *African Zion: the Sacred Art of Ethiopia*, does not, in any way, relate the religious and political history of Ethiopia to its religious art. Heldman presents an art historical chronology, as previously mentioned, and several other scholars discuss the history of religion, foreign contacts, and politics, but there has been no attempt to link these important factors to the religious art. What exactly do scholars say about the effects of religion on Ethiopia? How might the religious history of Ethiopia be related to its art? To answer these questions, a look at what has been written in religious history is necessary.

Taddesse Tamrat has considered the history of the church and state in Ethiopia from 1270 to 1527.[7] When considering his research, it is important to look for ways in which an understanding of Ethiopia's religious history affects its art history. Some of the

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[7] Taddesse Tamrat, *Church and State in Ethiopia 1270-1527* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

previously discussed chronologies use the period of the Zagwé dynasty as an important period in the history of Christian art. However, the reasons why a particular scholar would choose the Zagwé dynasty and another scholar would designate the invasion of Ahmad Grañ as important is never discussed. So why do Heldman and Schneider designate the Zagwé period as being important to the history of Ethiopian religious art? Taddesse describes "a new Christian dynasty [which] emerged in the first half of the twelfth century and took control of the whole system.... It has been known in traditional history as the Zagwé dynasty ..."[8]

This period represents a culmination of a natural political development within the Christian kingdom. During this time, the Zagwé king, Yimrha, inaugurated the tradition of rock-hewn churches, and relations with Egypt increased. The number of Ethiopian pilgrims to the Holy Land increased, and many sites in Jerusalem were given to Ethiopians in 1189, during Salah-al-Din's occupation.[9] How might these events affect the religious art that was being produced at this time? Although very little survives from this period, some information may be gained through an understanding of the religious events of the time. Did an increase in relations with Egypt affect the art? Or were there other traditions that could have been an influence?

Other important events in the religious history of Ethiopia include a revival of monasticism in the fourteenth century. The early stages of the movement were characterized by a sense of independence which found its expression in the background of the political and military revival of the Christian kingdom. When Īyäsus-Mo'a settled at the island church of St. Stephen in Lake Hayq, he stated that monasticism was to used as an effective vehicle for the expansion of the church. How would this development of monasticism affect the religious art? If the clergy were interested in the expansion of the

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[8] Ibid., 34.

[9] Ibid., 58.

church, would not art be an effective vehicle to serve them in this purpose? If so, would the art reflect the tastes of the clergy or the people?

Similar to the method of Taddesse, Richard Pankhurst sets up a framework to understand the history of foreign contact in Ethiopia. Pankhurst states, "The civilisation and culture of Ethiopia has been profoundly affected by its history"[10], and this history has been profoundly affected by foreign contact. After the establishment of the Zagwé dynasty, Emperor Yekuno Amlak claimed to be a descendent from King Solomon and Queen Sheba. In keeping with this tradition,[11] the dynasty required that the *Abuna*, or head of the Ethiopian church, be a foreigner. More specifically, he was to be an Egyptian consecrated by the church of Alexandria. During the fifteenth century, many of the rulers attempted to establish diplomatic relations with Christian Europe. In 1439, Ethiopian delegates were sent to the ecclesiastical Council of Florence. Also during this time, delegates were sent to India through the auspices of the Portuguese.

After the invasion of Ahmad Grañ, Ethiopia attempted several more foreign alliances with Europe to obtain firearms. These relations culminated in the seventeenth century with the missionary activity of the Portuguese Jesuits. They were expelled in 1632-3 by Emperor Fasilädäs who was a strict follower of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. These are only a few of the examples of the immense international activity of Ethiopia throughout its history. Scholars acknowledge foreign influence on Ethiopian art. However, an attempt to connect specific events with artistic trends has not been attempted.

One example of this is the way in which scholars deal with the presence of Niccolò Brancaleon in Ethiopia and his influence. Chojnacki traces nine triptychs depicting the Annunciation from the sixteenth century to a scriptoria in Tigré located in

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[10] Richard Pankhurst, "Christian Ethiopia," in *Religious Art of Ethiopia* (Stuttgart: Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, 1973), 21.

[11] This also refers to the tradition of the introduction of Christianity to Ethiopia by the Greek Christian, Fromentius in A.D. 330. He is still venerated by the Ethiopian Church, and is known as Abba Salama.

Northern Ethiopia. Because of the remarkable uniformity of these triptychs, Chojnacki is able to deduce what the model may have looked like. He believes that it was the Italian artist, Brancaleon, who introduced this model to the Ethiopian artists. Therefore, Chojnacki believes it was he who was responsible for the change in iconography. According to Chojnacki, Brancaleon represents a profound change in the iconography of the Annunciation. However, reasons as to why a country whom scholars describe as strongly nationalistic and independent would suddenly drop a theme so integral to their art as that of spinning for a completely new model proposed by an outsider are never considered. One needs to keep in mind that the triptychs that Chojnacki describes comprise a very small sample. Was this the only scriptoria producing scenes of the Annunciation during this period? If so, Brancaleon's influence may not be as great as one is led to believe. If this iconography was present in other works of art during the sixteenth century, can they all be attributed to the influence of the Italian? He was certainly not the first traveler to Ethiopia. Why were other travelers not as influential to the Ethiopian art? What about travelers to Italy? Could Brancaleon have been working in the Tigré scriptoria and copied the work of the Ethiopian artists?

More importantly, what was going on in Ethiopia when this great change appeared? What were the diplomatic relations with Italy and other countries at that time? What changes were taking place in the church? How and why might the economy have been affected in the sixteenth century? Part of the answer to this problem can be found in the political climate in Ethiopia during the late fifteenth century. Taddesse explains that "the desire to establish contacts was not only a European concern, but Ethiopian pilgrims in Palestine also expressed their unreserved enthusiasm for breaking the long isolation of their country from the Christian world."[12]Brancaleon came to Ethiopia during this period of open relations with the rest of the world. Chojnacki mentions that a century later when the Ethiopian artists picked up the theme of the Annunciation, Mary is once again shown

[12] Taddesse, *Church and State in Ethiopia*, 252.

spinning. No explanations for this change are given. However, by looking at history, one can see that when the artists once again depict the Annunciation, it is almost a century after the invasion of Grañ. This may be attributed to the events described previously by Pankhurst. The Portuguese Jesuits living in Ethiopia were expelled in 1632-3 by Emperor Fasilädäs who was a strict follower of the Ethiopian Orthodox faith. This isolation from the West was not broken until the late eighteenth-century arrival of James Bruce, the Scottish scholar and traveler.[13] This is a likely explanation for the abrupt change Chojnacki acknowledges in the art of the Annunciation.

In some aspects of Chojnacki's studies, he does attempt to conduct in-depth research concerning other details of the Annunciation scenes. When looking for a possible reason to explain why the artists of the First Gondarene period depicted Gabriel as an old man, he looks outside of the art for an answer. Chojnacki explains that this change is not evident in the eighteenth century so it was most likely used exclusively by the First Gondarene artists. After ruling out the possibility that the Ethiopian artists invented the new form themselves, Chojnacki fails to find any texts or commentaries that would agree with this change. He considers social factors that may explain this new portrayal of Gabriel. In many traditional societies, the elderly have a distinguished role. Ethiopia was not an exception to this rule. It is also known that older people were used for passing difficult messages. However, if these were the cause of the change, Chojnacki believes it would imply a changing attitude towards the elderly that arose in the seventeenth century which does not seem to be the case. Although Chojnacki does rule out these explanations, their inclusion is important. It demonstrates how much an understanding of the social as well as other factors can aid our understanding of Ethiopian art.

Chojnacki looks to the daily life of the Ethiopian people to explain the collar of Mary's dress in the triptych, IES Coll. No. 6589 (fig. 11). He states that the "deep cut

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[13] Heldman, *Princess Zir Ganela*, 3.

collar as hardly fits with the spirit of the Annunciation."[14] Again, instead of looking to the possible imported prototypes or influence from other cultures, Chojnacki discovers an explanation within the Ethiopian culture. If Chojnacki can attribute the deep collar of Mary's robe to the Ethiopian custom of women stripping from the waist up to perform certain daily chores, then why not attribute some of the other changes that occur in the Annunciation to similar factors?

In the Gospels of the Palace Library (fig. 5), Chojnacki describes Mary as pressing "the fleecy cotton between the index finger and the thumb of her left hand and produces the thread by rotating the reed on her thigh with her right hand."[15] He considers this miniature as the earliest example known to himself of the spinning taken directly from life. When describing the earlier miniature in the Qeddus Qirqos Gospels (fig. 8), Chojnacki observes that the manner in which she holds the skein of cotton reflects the Ethiopian style of spinning. This is not difficult to understand. The artist, no doubt, had a fair amount of exposure to the practice in daily life. Would the artist need a prototype to demonstrate the methods and techniques of spinning? This would hardly seem likely in a culture in which spinning plays such a large part.

Chojnacki is not the only scholar guilty of ignoring important religious, political, and social factors. According to Seyoum Wolde, Jules Leroy makes similar mistakes. Wolde describes Leroy as having not

> treated the problems of iconography from the point of view of social, political, economic and other human reflections in the represented figures. Leroy has not tried to interpret the represented figures beyond their religious importance. He neglects the question of time and space which is very important for iconological description and analysis of works of art in general.[16]

Wolde asks the reader to keep in mind the efforts made by the scholars of Ethiopian religious art and be aware of the similarities of the repeated generalizations made in the

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[14] Chojnacki, "Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 303.

[15] Ibid., 292.

[16] Wolde, "Profile of Writings " 169.

studies. He also gives Chojnacki a prominent place in the study of Ethiopian art. Wolde describes the statements of Chojnacki as an antithesis to Leroy and other scholars. However, in light of such scholars as Marilyn Heldman, I believe that these same problems apply to Chojnacki as well.

Marilyn Heldman is one scholar that has begun to integrate a religious and political understanding of Ethiopian society into the comprehension of its art. Her most ambitious work to date is her research on the miniatures of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela. In the introduction, Heldman states,

> before proceeding with a study of the miniatures of the Gospels ..., a word must be said of the difficulties encountered in the study of Ethiopian painting of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries, the period to which the miniatures of the Gospels ... belong, and an outline of the historical background and cultural milieu of the Christian empire of Ethiopia must be presented.[17]

This introduction functions as a link between the culture of Ethiopia and its Christian art. Heldman presents the means to fully understand not only the Gospels of Zir Ganela, but other religious art produced during the same time.

Heldman also brings up the problem concerning an understanding of the style of Ethiopian painting. She says that "although scholars have given some attention to Ethiopian miniatures, no attempt has been made to define the nature of Ethiopian style." Heldman gives a great deal of attention to describing the style of Ethiopian painting which she believes "can offer important insights into the development of the painting of the period, which in turn will allow us to define the proper relationship of the miniatures ... to other miniatures of the period."[18] In the process of understanding the unique style of Ethiopian painting, many ideas regarding iconology are also touched upon. When describing the human figure in Ethiopian art, she compares it to similar traditions in art history by explaining that "the *raison d'etre* of medieval art, Byzantine, Hiberno-Saxon or Ethiopian, was the presentation of sacred truths by a series of pictographic images.

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[17] Heldman, *Princess Zir Ganela*, 1.

[18] Ibid., 29.

Naturalistic representation was not a necessary element for the achievement of this purpose."[19] Therefore, instead of Ethiopian artists being incapable of rendering the human anatomy, as repeatedly explained by Chojnacki and Balicka-Witakowska, changes in the art from the prototypes can be explained as a result of a particular cultural environment. The artists created in an environment in which

> because the human figure is a symbolic image, it is considered conceptually rather than naturalistically and is depicted as a composite of significant parts ... [The] artist was free to depict figures and to create miniatures without referring directly to the natural world and without constant copying directly from his model.[20]

Heldman also uses this process of understanding iconology when investigating the connections between Ethiopia and the Byzantine Empire as revealed in the Kibran Gospels. She looks at several miniatures of the manuscript that seem to follow Byzantine models of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. Heldman relates the miniatures which include the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Presentation in the Temple, the Baptism, and the Anastasis as belonging to the Twelve Great Feasts of the Greek Orthodox Church. When describing the Nativity, Heldman discusses the specific Byzantine iconography such as the first bath of the Christ child. The inclusion of St. Joseph, who watches the midwives prepare Christ's bath, is common in Late Byzantine art. These details are also seen the Kibran Gospels. However, Heldman remarks upon one change in the Ethiopian composition. This is the identification by inscription of one of the midwives as Salome. In Ethiopian literature, Salome is a companion and helper of the Virgin Mary. Instead of interpreting this change as a result of the Ethiopian artist misunderstanding his prototype, Heldman attributes the change to the desires of the artist.

However, there are still questions that can be raised concerning Heldman's work in the same study. She discusses the Anastasis, or Christ's Triumph over Death, as also having been copied from a Byzantine model. The theme is not unknown to Ethiopians

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[19] Ibid., 36.

[20] Ibid., 38-39.

according to Heldman, but they have copied the model with no recognition of the identities of John the Baptist, Solomon, and David. Her reasoning is that the figures do not bear inscriptions as is customary in Ethiopian painting, and also, "the crowns of David and Solomon in the Byzantine model were copied as peculiar headdresses because they were not recognized as crowns."[21] It is not clear as to what the prototype that Heldman is referring to actually looked like. Could this not also be a change in the iconography chosen by the artist to better suit his audience? What did the crowns of the Ethiopian nobility look like? Was this type of iconography necessary for the expression of their faith in this particular miniature? Regarding the inscriptions, was this the only exception to this rule, or was this done in other Ethiopian paintings?

Another remarkable feature of Heldman's work is the lack of reference to other scholars working within the field of Ethiopian Christian art. In her dissertation on the Gospels of Zir Ganela. and more recent studies, Heldman makes no reference to previous studies by Chojnacki, Balicka-Witakowska, or many other scholars. Instead, she makes use of art historians working in other fields of art history such as the Byzantinists, Kurt Weitzmann and Otto Demus. This lack of a critical dialog within the field of Ethiopian scholarship is unfortunate. The work Heldman does is of a singular nature. Her work does not have the advantage of receiving the input of other scholars in Ethiopian art. However, after the criticisms put forth in this paper, it would seem unlikely that other scholars would have a great deal to contribute to Heldman's work.

The work of Marilyn Heldman is of paramount importance. It is she who is incorporating the critical understanding of Ethiopia as a whole. In this chapter, I have pointed out some of the weaknesses in the field as it exists today, and in the process, raised many questions that must be considered for further research. The answers to many of these questions are difficult to ascertain. To further understand the contributions of Heldman, and to begin on a path to improve studies in the field, I will use Heldman as a

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[21] Marilyn Heldman, "The Kibran Gospels: Ethiopia and Byzantium," in *Proceedings of the Fifth International Conference on Ethiopian Studies* (Chicago, 1980), 360.

guide and look outside the field of Ethiopian art. I will investigate an alternate methodology being used in the study of Byzantine art which may prove more effective.

CHAPTER 4

AN ALTERNATE METHOD

To begin to answer some of the questions brought up in the previous chapter, I will examine a successful method being applied to the "peripheral art" of the Byzantine empire. This approach has been developed by Annabel Jane Wharton, a Byzantine scholar.[1] Wharton's formula is largely art historical, taking several cultural features into account. Her understanding of the art of the Byzantine empire will be useful in further evaluating the methods employed in the study of the religious art of Ethiopia. Therefore, the task at hand is to understand how Wharton analyzes the art produced in the Byzantine empire outside of its capital in Constantinople.

The limits of Wharton's study as outlined in the first chapter of her book, "Approach", are understandable. The types of media discussed are limited to monumental painting and architecture. By concentrating in this manner, she eliminates the problems associated with understanding other more portable arts such as manuscript illumination, where the problem of provenance is inherent. The study is also restricted to ecclesiastical architecture. However, to fulfill the purpose at hand, I will examine the method as it applies to painting, or in this case, wall painting.

Wharton concentrates her study on the Middle Byzantine period which dates from the end of Iconoclasm in the ninth century to the Latin conquest of Constantinople in 1204. She believes that this is the period in which Byzantium realized its most cohesive and centralized form.

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[1] Annabel Jane Wharton, *Art of Empire: Painting and Architecture of the Byzantine Periphery* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988.

The most important features of her study are the interrelated premises underlying the artistic production of the Byzantine empire. First of all, she emphasizes that art is not devolutionary, an idea that is prevalent in art history. She states that the "often unstated or even unconscious assumption that a creation degenerates as it is distanced from its archetype has long been recognized and criticized in fields related to art history."[2] This idea will become extremely important when we look at Wharton's methods in light of Ethiopian art.

The second premise on which she bases her study explains how works of art are the products of not only the masters who produce them and those who subsidize them, but also of the audience for whom they were intended. If there is the possibility that the development and refinement of modes of expression were molded by the expectations of the intended audience, then the nature of the audience must be considered.

The final premise on which this study is based states that all art has an ideological dimension that affects both the selection of subject matter and the way in which it is presented. In a society in which most people were non-literate like Byzantium, art was used as an important medium for reinforcing the world view of those in power, more so than in literate societies. However, it is argued here that if the audience did have an impact on the art produced, they were not passive recipients of elite propaganda.

Finally, Wharton defines the parameters for the use of the word "provincial." Most of the surviving Byzantine monuments are situated not in Constantinople, but in its periphery. However, this art is often mislabeled as "provincial." This word is often used by art historians in a derogatory manner to specify low quality works of art. Instead, Wharton offers the following definition:

> A provincial work must be either located in the provinces or have a provable and direct association with the provinces. The work must be seen to respond (whether in its iconography, program, or style in the case of the figural arts, or in its plan or superstructure in the case of architecture) to identifiable local circumstances or traditions, whether they be social and political, geographic and

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[2] Ibid., 10.

> geological, or artistic. A work must also exhibit a reaction directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, to metropolitan impetus.[3]

In conclusion, she believes that provincialism is not a derogatory term, but a term signifying a creative process.

This introductory chapter also provides a "historical and a methodological setting for a discussion of the art of the specific provinces.[4] According to Wharton, without an awareness of the centralized character of the Byzantine state, Constantinople's cultural authority and the limits of its influence, cannot be fully appreciated. Also, with a lack of knowledge regarding the influence that holy sites and icons held, one cannot comprehend the function of art in Byzantium. This is an important feature of Wharton's study. The cultural background sets up an understanding for the art being produced in the empire's capital, as well as how it arrives and is transformed and recreated in the provinces.

Wharton discusses four major provinces: Cappadocia, Cyprus, Macedonia, and South Italy. She emphasizes the distinct character of each region dealing with each one individually. However, due to the scope of the present study, a full analysis of all these examples is not possible. The basic components of her method and its workings will become evident by looking at a single province. We will now look at the manner in which she evaluates the art and architecture of Cappadocia.

When Wharton discusses Cappadocia, she first defines the setting and the audience. She believes that the geography of this region, which is located in the central area of the Anatolian plateau in modern Turkey, explains its attraction as a great monastic center. The political climate of the area was also conducive to monastic life and artistic production. Wharton believes that Cappadocia is different from other Byzantine provinces "where artistic developments occasionally contradict political and social ones, [in that] the historical framework in Cappadocia appears to have molded the evolution of

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[3] Ibid., 12.

[4] Ibid., 1.

the province's art."[5] Cappadocia was a frontier province under pressure from the east during the seventh through ninth centuries. Border raids by the Moslems were responsible for a period in which no churches have survived.

After Armenia became an independent state and an effective buffer zone between Byzantium and the Arabs in the second half of the ninth century, the first significant group of churches of the Middle Byzantine period were created. This was due in part to the emergence of a new military aristocracy. While the area remained relatively rural, it was also quite prosperous from the beginning of the tenth century to the first three quarters of the eleventh century. This is the period in which most of Cappadocia's artistic production took place.

This new elite is important to consider when understanding the audience responsible for much of the art and architecture produced in the region. Dedicatory inscriptions provide some evidence concerning the relation between the elite, the local population, and the monks. These inscriptions suggest that support for monasticism came from a broad spectrum of the provincial community. Along with the painted inscriptions described above, it is the graffiti which gives a more detailed insight into the nature of the broader audience of these Cappadocian wall paintings. This graffiti mostly includes formulaic prayers including the graffitist's name. The identities of a wide range of literate members of the community are described, including priests, women, and foreigners, in these writings.

The Byzantine empire lost the central plateau of Asia Minor including the region of Cappadocia to the Turks in 1071. The transition of power from the Christian Byzantines to the Moslem Turks was a bloody ordeal. It caused a fundamental disruption in the life of Cappadocia's inhabitants. Monuments were still in ruin when the Crusaders journeyed through at the end of the eleventh century. Churches were converted to

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[5] Ibid., 14.

mosques or destroyed. The Christian people were impoverished and Christian art lost its patronage. Wharton presents this background to understand the Cappadocian situation.

The monuments Wharton discusses that belong to the ninth century are the cave churches. The art historical value of these monuments is enhanced by several factors. They survive in large numbers, allowing stylistic development to be accurately traced, and they are located in a specific geographical area. Also, their decorations are consistent in medium and scale.

One example of these cave churches is the Chapel of Nicetas the Stylite near Ortahisar (fig. 15). This church, similar to many other Cappadocian churches, has a longitudinally barrel-vaulted narthex and a small nave terminated by an horseshoe-shaped apse. In reference to the interior decoration, Wharton states that there is no reason to search for any external models. She explains,

> although an art historian cannot afford to deny the validity of using style as a means of dating and association, the cogency of such efforts depends on many factors, one of which is the degree of an image's formal complexity. The less complex the technique and the fewer the number of visual stratagems in a painting, the more problematic are comparisons made with works outside its immediate vicinity. The vivacity of the frescoes of the Chapel of Nicetas depends on their simplicity. Relating them to works far removed territorially and/or chronologically is methodologically suspect: Similarities may imply only a shared level of craft, not specific links.[6]

Instead of dating the chapel by stylistic means, Wharton uses an inscription that dedicates the church to the secular patron. The word *kleisourarch* is mentioned in this inscription which indicates a commander of a military district. Although the dates are not specific as to when a *kleisourarch* was established in central Anatolia, it is generally believed to be during the reign of Theophilus (829-42). This date along with the emphasis on figural decoration suggests that this church received its decoration after the Iconoclastic Controversy and before the disappearance of the *kleisourarch* in the middle decades of the ninth century.

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[6] Ibid., 20.

Wharton's descriptions of the tenth century monuments are general. Basic descriptions of both the architecture and decorative program are provided, although specific iconographic themes are not discussed. Instead, Wharton concentrates on answering the basic questions set forth in the first chapter. For example, there is a distinct attempt to discern the audience for whom the wall paintings were created. It is also important to understand the adoption of metropolitan forms in the province, and its subsequent adaptation.

The central monument associated with the tenth century is Tokalı Kilise (Buckle Church) in the Göreme Valley (fig. 16). Three separate churches were built on the foundation. The Old Church was built over the first sanctuary, It was carved and first decorated in the second half of the ninth century. Wharton arrives at this date by comparing the style of the painting to fresco fragments similar in palette and style in the Chapel of Nicetas. No donor's inscriptions survive in the Old Church. However, a funerary chapel painted by the same artist of the Old Church, Ayvalı in Güllü Dere, contains many dedications. The various inscriptions suggest that the monastery connected with the chapel had broader support than that of a single lay patron. Certain iconographic elements, such as the dense Christological narrative and the Last Judgment, intimate that the program was determined by the chapel's funerary function and its monastic audience. This suggests that monastic control of the program continued into the tenth century.

A similar program of narrative to that of the Old Church is found in another early tenth century church, Kılıçlar Kilise (fig. 17). This church has been dated to about A.D. 900 on the basis of the close stylistic associations of its fresco decoration with the miniatures in the Commentary on the Book of Job in the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice, dated by inscription to A.D. 905. Kılıçlar Kilise's plan, as well as its decoration, reveals external stimulus. The cross-in-square plan of the church became popular in Constantinople in the early tenth century. Its corner bays covered with cupolas are another architectural convention widely used in the capital.

The most recent building of Tokalı Kilise, the New Church, reveals a distinct shift in the narrative program which complements the changes taking place in the architecture seen at Kılıçlar Kilise. This program is one of the most elaborate to survive in Byzantium from the Middle Ages. Certain scenes are given special prominence such as the Annunciation, Nativity, and Crucifixion. These scenes have been enlarged and are set apart from other images by frames. This is unlike older churches in which the viewer's eye travels unbroken across the images. The images have changed from being an illustration of truths embedded in a text to an embodiment of these truths. The formal differences in these new images represent the change from didactic narration to festival icon.

Another interesting aspect of this church is the icon of the Virgin Eleousa, or Virgin of Tenderness. The high status of the image is enforced by its many copies found in the churches in the vicinity. It could be an imported image from the capital. However, the inscription, "Queen of the Asomaton," suggests that the icon lost its metropolitan connotation in favor of its local association with the Monastery of Archangels. Wharton suggests that "Meaning and form are transformed in the process of provincial assimilation."[7]

A regional bias is shown in the emphasis on certain scenes of the decoration program. There are prominent scenes of St. Basil, the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, and St. Hieron. The forty soldiers martyred at Sebaste dominate the hagiographic repertory of the nave. Another military martyr, George, is located next to the local saint, Hieron. Although he is not known as a military saint, Hieron is dressed in military costume. The military bias of the program may reflect the patronage of the new military elite. In the safety of the provinces, they show resentment to imperial power with depictions of popular saints, such as St. Basil, confronting the Arian Emperor Valens.

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[7] Ibid., 30.

Like its decoration, the architecture of the New Church suggests that the patrons were not entirely dependent up on metropolitan inspiration. Its unique type is certainly not an invention of the local masons. However, there seems to be little evidence that would suggest that this type was imported from Constantinople. Close analogies to this type are found in Mesopotamia. It would seem that when new forms were sought, it was not always necessary that metropolitan types be adopted.

Wharton discusses the Middle Byzantine feast program which emerged as a popular form of church decoration in the eleventh century. This program includes the portrait of Christ as Pantokrator at the apex with the Virgin occupying the conch of the apse. The dominance of this program is evident in several Cappadocian churches of the middle eleventh century. Wharton shows that the monuments of this century provide indication of the accessibility of current artistic trends in Cappadocia and the creativity of the local response to metropolitan importations.

St. Barbara in the Soganlı Valley (fig. 18) is dated to 1006 or 1021 by inscription. The plan and the program of the church are not hierarchical. The Majestas Domini occupies the space of the Pantokrator. While the church holds onto more traditional forms, it is distinctly different than its tenth-century counterparts. Many elements of the painting are characteristic of Metropolitan miniatures. Like Kılıçlar Kilise, this church seems to have been an influence to several local variants in Cappadocia.

In many of these local churches, there is a shift from depicting the Majestas Domini to the Deesis. Both themes share many layers of meaning: liturgical, epiphanic, and eschatological. While the Deesis is quite similar to the Majestas Domini, it presents a stronger statement regarding intercession, rewards, and faith. In this type of image, Wharton finds the expression of political as well as spiritual reality. Access to worldly authority was similarly mediated. Therefore, the Deesis embodies both imperial ideology

and theological dogma. The new popularity of this image in Cappadocia would seem to reflect "the provincial assimilation of the worldview of the center."[8]

The shift from the monastic control of church decoration in the ninth century to that of the lay patron is extremely apparent in the second and third quarters of the eleventh century. The military elite stills played an important role as patrons of art. Full-length portraits of these people appear in the church nave. The well-to-do promoted themselves by patronizing art forms associated with the capital. Wharton brings up the interesting point that many of the names lack titles. This would suggest that these individuals were not among the highest echelons of the Empire, but instead members of the provincial establishment.

The prominence of donor portraits in such churches as Karanlık Kilise (fig. 19) and Çarıklı Kilise, two examples of the eleventh century Column Churches, also emphasize the importance of non-monastic patronage. This trend may be associated with an increased appropriation of metropolitan forms. Churches took the form of the cross-in-square type which was a relatively conservative plan in the eleventh century compared to the many innovations taking place elsewhere in the region. Three of the churches' painted programs were done by the same artist whose work is comparable to several metropolitan monuments such as the manuscript of Menologion of Basil II (ms. Vat. gr. 1613).

The narrative programs are a response to local artistic traditions. Many of the festivals portrayed in the Column Churches are shared with other members of the group. At Çarıklı Kilise, the Virgin Eleousa represented on the south wall and the prothesis apse is modeled on the Eleousa icons of the New Church.

Wharton finishes up the chapter with a discussion of the Chapel of Daniel in Göreme and its frescoes (fig. 20). Judging by the low quality of pigments and simple surface preparation, these frescoes represent a contrast to the decoration of monuments such as Tokalı Kilise or the Column Churches. This may be explained by the fact that the

[8] Ibid., 44.

decorative program of the Chapel of Daniel was donated by individual donors. Wharton suggests that these images represent a dissociation with the capital and a revival of the ninth-century visual traditions. Different from the ninth century is the fact that these images were commissioned not by monks, but by the local peasantry. The direction of monasticism seems to have changed in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. After the Seljuk invasion, the region was isolated, and the "Orthodox Christians in Cappadocia had neither the material resources nor the links to the imperial core that would allow them to continue to adapt metropolitan artistic ideas to local circumstances."[9]

In the conclusion, Wharton once again stresses the fact the many provinces associated with the Byzantine Empire must be treated individually for they all tell different stories as to the artistic traditions and cultures in these regions. Cappadocia reveals a great deal of metropolitan influence where as more remote regions, such as South Italy, show relatively little evidence of stylistic development dependent on the capital.

Within these distinct perspectives, there lies room for broad generalizations that can be applied to these provinces. The importation of new forms can often be associated with elite patronage that also supported local traditions. Local artisans developed their own individual modes of expression. Artistic ideas generated in the capital were adopted by donors of all social levels as a means of affirming their status.

Wharton's study of these four provinces also points out the relationship between monasticism and the arts of the Empire. The unique style of monastic institutions in these regions is characterized by the lack of interference from the authority of the secular church, the lack of monastic links, and the flexibility of the monasteries. These factors drastically affected the artistic style throughout the Empire. While many church programs demonstrate specific religious preoccupations, there is no one dominant style that can be characterized as a "monastic style."

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[9] Ibid., 52.

Several of these features of Wharton's methods make it suitable to apply to the study of Ethiopian art for several reasons. Her study of the art of the Byzantine empire's provinces provides many interesting and important issues to consider when understanding how models and artistic forms are diffused throughout a region. She understands artistic traditions as being created in the "peripheral areas" as opposed to being an alteration of an imported style or specific model. Most importantly, the foundation Wharton provides to understand the nature of the art being discussed is indispensable. The cultural environment from which art grows is an important aspect of any art historical discussion. These and many other aspects of Wharton's methods will be considered in light of the research that has been previously examined on the Ethiopian Annunciation.

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATION OF WHARTON'S METHOD

The strengths of Wharton's approach in studying the art of the Byzantine Empire become more evident when applied to the major methods at work in Ethiopian scholarship. In this final chapter, I will take a closer look at what Wharton has accomplished and how her methods may help one to better understand Ethiopian art. I will be using specific examples from her work as discussed in the previous chapter, and compare them to similar situations discussed in connection with Ethiopian art. Many questions will be raised in the process. While these questions cannot be answered within the scope of this paper, one hopes that they may be accessible with additional research.

There are some limitations to applying Wharton's method to the study of Christian Ethiopian art. The most obvious one is the fact that Ethiopia was never an official part of the Byzantine Empire. Wharton's definition of provincial art does not include the art of Ethiopia. This would entail a response to "identifiable local circumstances or traditions, whether they be social and political, geographic and geological, or artistic", Also, it can be argued that Ethiopian art does "exhibit a reaction directly or indirectly, positively or negatively, to metropolitan impetus." However, Ethiopian art is not a "provincial work...located in the provinces or [has] a provable and direct association with the provinces."[1] Regardless, the influence that the Byzantine Empire had on Ethiopian art is supported by most Ethiopian scholars. The prestige and power of Constantinople in the medieval world is well-known. While it is more difficult to understand the actual influence that the Byzantine empire may have on Ethiopia since

[1] Wharton, *Art of Empire*, 12.

it was not technically part of its geography, it is likely that its influence would have reached Ethiopia. It may have traveled through Coptic channels, as many of the Ethiopian scholars have stated.

One of the most important aspects of Wharton's study is the formulation of a framework for interpreting the culture of Constantinople and its influence on the provinces. A context of the area is given before looking at the art. An introduction that sets up a framework from which to understand the art of a culture is one of the methods that makes Heldman and Wharton's work exemplary. As Wharton states, "Without an awareness of the centralized character of the Byzantine state, Constantinople's cultural hegemony and the limitations of its influence cannot be fully appreciated. Without a sympathy for the power of medieval images and holy sites, it is impossible to begin to understand the social functioning of art in Byzantium."[2] A similar approach also works when studying Ethiopian art.

Wharton provides a rationale for limiting her discussion to specific examples. She chooses to discuss only wall painting and architecture, leaving out manuscripts. The reason for this exclusion involves the complexities of provenance when studying manuscripts. In Wharton's case, it may be difficult to determine whether a manuscript was produced in one of the provinces or at the capital. With Ethiopian manuscripts, they may have been produced in many of the countries where scholars find iconographic influence. Paleographic studies may limit the countries in which an Ethiopic manuscript may have been produced, but it is still probable that an Ethiopic manuscript may have been produced outside of Ethiopia by an Ethiopian artist. Has the question of provenance ever been considered in these manuscripts, especially those discussed in the previous chapters? Is it possible that a manuscript may have been produced outside of Ethiopia by an Ethiopian artist living abroad? Would this then result in a different set of variables to explain iconography?

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[2] Ibid., 1.

One of the more interesting premises on which Wharton's theory operates is given in the first chapter. Here she states that art is not devolutionary, as many art historians have proposed. This concept was introduced in the previous chapter, and throughout Wharton's study, her rejection of this idea is consistently present. When describing the Chapel of Nicetas the Stylite, Wharton rejects the notion of looking to outside models to explain the iconography present in the interior. While this may only apply to certain monuments, and certainly not to all Ethiopian monuments, her explanation for doing so is valid. Once again, her reasoning is that

> although an art historian cannot afford to deny the validity of using style as a means of dating and association, the cogency of such efforts depends on many factors, one of which is the degree of an image's formal complexity. The less complex the technique and the fewer the number of visual stratagems in a painting, the more problematic are comparisons made with works outside its immediate vicinity....Similarities may imply only a shared level of craft, not specific links.[3]

This quotations contains two major ideas that are relevant to the study of Ethiopian art. First of all, Wharton implies that although the art of two different regions may have similar characteristics, it does not necessarily imply that the two influenced each other in any way. Is it possible that many of the elements in Ethiopian art have not been borrowed or copied, but have simply grown out of similar traditions or cultural contexts?

Also related to this is the relationship between Constantinople and Cappadocia, or more generally, the relation of the center to the periphery. In the Ethiopian scholarship relating to Christian art, Ethiopian religious art is usually considered as a derivation of imported models. The art is rarely looked at as product of its own environment. In other words, Ethiopia is not considered as being the center of the Ethiopian artistic tradition. This also true of many Byzantine studies of the empire. Wharton takes the opposite approach and looks at the peripheral areas of the Byzantine Empire as being the center. This is an important insight gleamed from her study. How would the study of the

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[3] Ibid., 20.

religious art of Ethiopia change if one looked at Ethiopia as the center of a particular tradition rather than as a deviation from one artistic center?

The second idea relates to the degree of an image's formal complexities. According to Wharton, the comparison of images is more difficult with art composed of few visual conventions. Scholars criticize the simplicity of Ethiopian painting without giving consideration to the many factors involved with the art. Leroy refers to many examples of Ethiopian art as being simplistic and child-like.[4] Chojnacki judges the images of Gabriel in Ethiopian paintings of the Annunciation copied from the model of Brancaleon as being "iconographically ineffective figure[s]."[5] What consideration have these scholars given to the importance of accurately depicting the details by Ethiopian artists? What are the standards that these scholars are using to judge Ethiopian art?

Those scholars who criticize the Ethiopian artist for failing to accurately depict details such as anatomy, architecture, movement, and other features are judging the artists by European standards. Chojnacki looks at an Annunciation scene executed by Brancaleon and compares it to nine different representations of the same subject by Ethiopian artists. He believes that the Ethiopian triptychs were copied from Brancaleon's model. Chojnacki points out that several of the details found in the Italian artist's painting are eliminated in the Ethiopian compositions because their meaning was not know to the Ethiopian artists. Chojnacki also states that the crossed hands of Mary are not clearly delineated because the artist was less skilled than Brancaleon. However, the Ethiopian artists have rendered the gesture of Gabriel exactly.

The art of Brancaleon grows out of a Western European tradition while the art of Ethiopia is a product of a completely different cultural environment. Chojnacki and other scholars do not judge Ethiopian religious art according to its individual environment, but

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[4] Jules Leroy, *Ethiopian Painting in the Late Middle Ages and During the Gondar Dynasty* (New York: Praeger, 1967).

[5] Chojnacki, "The Annunciation in Ethiopian Art," 305.

by the standards of European art. How accurate is it to judge Ethiopian art by the standards of Western European art? Instead, one needs to understand the religious painting of Ethiopia in the context of its own cultural environment. While it is helpful to study Brancaleon's influence in Ethiopia, it is inaccurate to judge Ethiopian art as an inferior copy of this European artist's work.

Other questions need to be addressed to understand why Ethiopian artists chose to depict the Annunciation and other subjects as they did. For example, what is the purpose of the Ethiopian paintings? Is it to accurately depict a particular religious event, or do these paintings instead hold a spiritual meaning similar to Ethiopian magic scrolls where naturalism is irrelevant? If the paintings fit a more spiritual purpose as opposed to a didactic purpose, then the manner of execution would be perfectly suited the art. As previously discussed, Marilyn Heldman provides a context for understanding the function of Ethiopian art in her work. She discusses the miniatures of the Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela in light of the Ethiopian cultural environment in which they were produced.

Byzantine art is often praised for the spirituality that it possesses, and Ethiopian art is often compared to Byzantine art. Has anyone wondered why Ethiopians look to so many Byzantine prototypes for their own art? If the Byzantine empire was as great an influence as so many scholars believe, then why are they so reluctant to compare the spiritual connections between Byzantine art to the Ethiopian art? The manner in which Wharton understands the character of Byzantine art may explain the nature of Ethiopian art. A transformation in the style of narrative in the New Church of Tokalı Kilise is explained by Wharton as follows:

> The image is no longer read as an illustration of truths embedded in a text; rather, it is contemplated as the embodiment of those truths. The formal differences between these two images reflect a dramatic change in the way they function within their programs, representing a fundamental shift from didactic narration to festival icon.[6]

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[6] Wharton, *Art of Empire*, 30.

Wharton understands a stylistic change in the art of the New Church in terms of changes which occur in Cappadocia as well as Constantinople.

Could Ethiopian art have gone through a similar change earlier in its history? If the art of the Byzantine Empire could affect the religious art of Ethiopia, other aspects of Ethiopian culture also have been influenced. The Christianity of Ethiopia was greatly affected by changes in the Byzantine Empire. This was achieved partly through the Coptic church which has had ongoing relations with Ethiopia for several centuries. While many of the similarities between the Coptic church and the Ethiopian church have been studied, the differences are usually ignored. Therefore, scholars explain how Ethiopian art is similar to Coptic art, when the differences between the two may reveal more about Ethiopian iconography. Creating a context for the Ethiopian cultural environment and, in this case, the Coptic church, provides a basis to understand the contributions of each tradition.

In Wharton's research, it is clear that the local artisans developed their own individual modes of expression. This is also true of Ethiopian art. However, most scholars of Ethiopian art ignore this certainty. Instead, they concentrate on discovering how Ethiopian artists copied outside artistic traditions rather than create their own. Perhaps less emphasis should be placed on how the Ethiopian artists "misinterpret" the model, and more emphasis placed on why they changed certain details, and how these details serve to fulfill the Ethiopian purpose of religious art. Again, these are the types of issues which relate to questions concerning iconology. Wharton and Heldman use the study of iconology to answer these same questions in their research.

While Chojnacki, Balicka-Witakowska, and other Ethiopianists succeed in interpreting many of the possible prototypes for much of the known painting of Ethiopia, how accurate can these be without a critical understanding of the cultures that produced the art? If the scholars of Ethiopian religious art were to look at the cultural environment of Ethiopia, would many of their theories hold up? I have acknowledged and challenged

some of the premises upon which the study of Ethiopian religious art is based. It should be obvious that much more research needs to be conducted before we can truly understand and appreciate the contributions of Ethiopian art. Scholars need to consider asking another set of questions similar to what I have begun, to allow the full development of the field of Ethiopian religious art. As Seyoum Wolde so succinctly put it, "the carrying out of comprehensive and in-depth studies in the art history of medieval Ethiopia will not only benefit Ethiopian studies, but will also provide a coherent perspective to the world of art as a whole."[7]

[7] Wolde, "Profile of Writings," 170.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1 Wall painting, 1270-85, Gännätä Maryam, Lasta

Fig. 2 Gospels, 14th century, Däbrä Seyon Maryam, Gär'alta, Tigré

Fig. 3 Gospels, 1363 or 1412, Maryam Magdalawit, Amba Dära, Tigré

Fig. 4 Gospels of Princess Zir Ganela, 1400/01, Pierpont Morgan Library (M. 828)

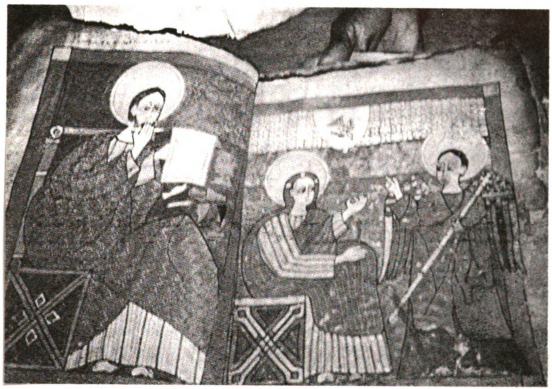

Fig. 5 Gospels, 15th century, Palace Library, Maqalé

Fig. 6 Wall painting, 12th-13th centuries, Betä Maryam, Lalibäla

Fig. 7 Krestos Täsfanä Gospels, ca. 1300-25, National Library, Addis Ababa

Fig. 8 Gospels, 14th century, Qeddus Qirqos, Adaga Hamus, Tigré

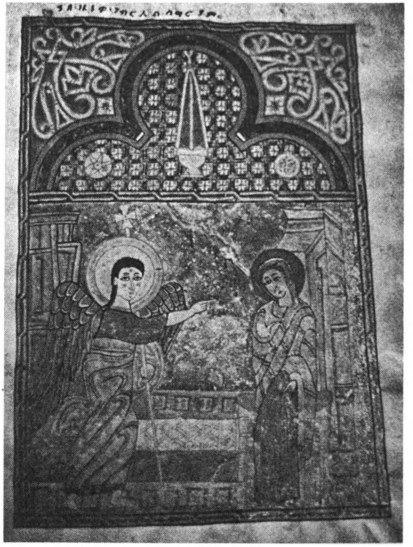

Fig. 9 Gospels, ca. 1412, Kibran, Lake Ṭana

Fig. 10 Prayer of the Virgin at Parthia, 14th-15th centuries, ms. Eth. No. 50, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

Fig. 11 Triptych, left panel, 16th century, IES Coll. No. 6589

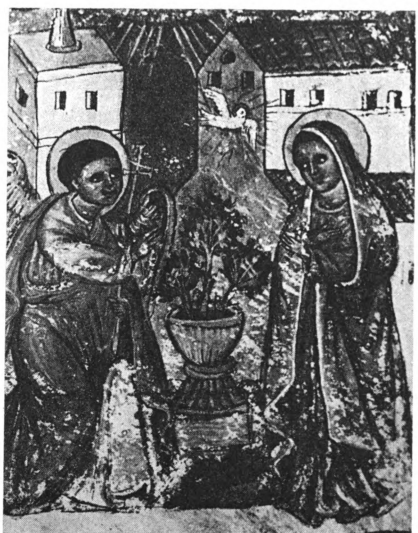

Fig. 12 Wällätä Dengel Book of Miniatures, by N. Branceleon, ca. 1480-1520, Wafa Iyäsus, Gonca in Gojjam

Fig. 13 Diptych, left panel, ca. 1630-1700, IES Coll. No. 4187

Fig. 14 The Wisdom of the Wise (*Täbiba täbiban*), 18th century, Coll. B. Juel-Jensen, Ms. 36

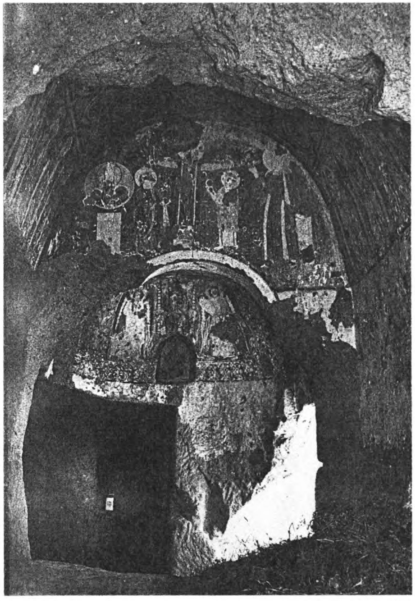

Fig. 15 Nicetas the Stylite, 9th century, near Ortahisar

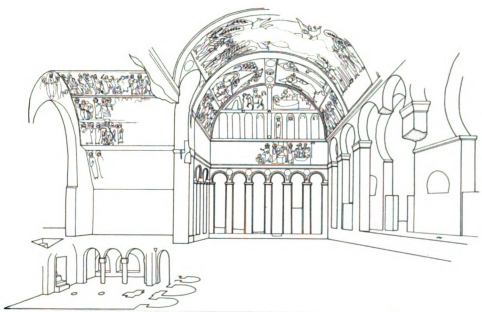

Fig. 16 Tokalı Kilise, 10th-11th century, Göreme Valley

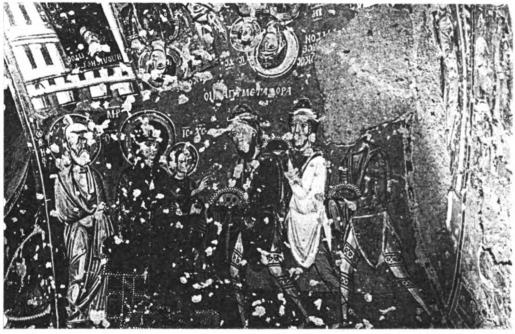

Fig. 17 Kılıçlar Kilise, 10th century, Göreme Valley

Fig. 18 St. Barbara, 11th century, Soganlı Valley

Fig. 19 Karanlık Kilise, 11th century, Göreme Valley

Fig. 20 Chapel of Daniel, 11th century, Göreme Valley

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