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THEME AND VARIATION IN TWO TWENTIETH-CENTURY ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONAL PAINTINGS

By

Andrea Catherine Bour Plant

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ABSTRACT

THEME AND VARIATION IN TWO TWENTIETH-CENTURY ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONAL PAINTINGS

By

Andrea Bour Plant

This thesis presents a preliminary examination of the lives of two twentieth-century traditional painters, Qengeta Jembere Hailu and Marcos Jembere, and their representations of the popular theme, Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela. Interviews with the artists and the analysis of a number of paintings depicting this subject are used to identify the stylistic and iconographic differences between the paintings. Consistencies and variations are discussed in terms of their relationship to the artist's training and individual life experiences, and ultimately how they might reflect the history of the genre, its patrons, and Ethiopia.

To

my mom

Catherine Bour

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I wish to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation for
the unwavering support, patience, and guidance of my advisor,
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INTRODUCTION

In the years of 1993 and 1994, while completing my graduate studies in art history at Michigan State University, I had the opportunity to work on the exhibition, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity* as a graduate assistant. As the assistant to the chief curator of the exhibition, Raymond Silverman, one of my responsibilities was to work with other graduate students in cataloging a collection of twentieth-century Ethiopian paintings that had been recently acquired by field researchers for the Michigan State University Museum. Because the majority of these paintings included inscriptions written in the Amharic and Ge'ez languages, I worked very closely with two Ethiopian graduate students, Tibebe Eshete and Shiferaw Assefa, who provided the essential skill of translating into English the text featured within these paintings.

Quite often throughout the cataloging process, Tibebe, Shiferaw, and I found our way into discussions about the paintings, their inscriptions, and how they related to the images. Questions regarding the iconography of many of the individual paintings developed into lengthy conversations about the people, history, and art of Ethiopia.

Many of the paintings to be cataloged depicted historical themes featuring significant events in the history of Ethiopia, such as the Battle of Adwa (1896) or the Battle of Maqdela (1868). In discussing these themes with Ethiopian students and historians, I became particularly interested in those which represented the Battle of Maqdela and the Emperor Tewodros II, the emperor of Ethiopia at the time of the battle.

Regardless of the approximate date assigned to the paintings we were to catalog,

certain iconographic features that identified Tewodros and Maqdela could be seen. I became ever more curious as to whether or not a similar consistency could be seen in the stylistic treatment among the paintings as well. And, if innovations in the iconographic or stylistic treatment of these images could be found, what was the source for these changes? If these paintings were produced primarily for foreign patrons, were there any iconographic or stylistic changes in the popular historical or political painting themes that reflected the social or political environment at the time in which they were painted? Could the study of the consistencies or subtle inconsistencies somehow reflect the attitudes regarding the leadership in Ethiopia at the time the paintings were commissioned? Or, could such nuances offer a better understanding of the individual Ethiopian artist's life and experiences?

Painters Jembere Hailu and his son, Marcos Jembere, were two of the eleven individual artists whose work was featured in the *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity* exhibit. As with each of the eleven artists featured in the exhibition, field researchers conducted interviews with both Jembere and Marcos concerning their life and work. The interviews with the father and son highlighted the differences in their artistic training and life experiences. I also considered whether their paintings would reflect such differences.

Throughout this paper, I use the interviews with Jembere and Marcos and their two paintings of Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela to examine how the stylistic and iconographic inconsistencies that surface reflect the differences in both artists' training and life experiences. I hope to also demonstrate that despite a market which continues to be driven predominantly by tourists and the use of familiar themes ("popular" themes such as Tewodros and Maqdela, the Battle of Adwa, the legend of the Queen of Sheba

and Solomon, etc.), twentieth-century Ethiopian traditional painting is not a static, unchanging degenerate offshoot of Ethiopian religious painting, but a distinct genre that merits full consideration.

Currently, scholarship that examines the history of twentieth-century Ethiopian painting is limited. The first chapter of this paper provides a brief overview of the studies that have been published over the last fifty years that deal with traditional twentieth-century Ethiopian painting. The individual life histories of the two painters, Jembere Hailu and Marcos Jembere, are detailed in the following chapter, concentrating primarily upon their artistic training and those events that they suggested were important in their lives. Chapter three discusses events in the life and reign of Emperor Tewodros II that are most frequently found in so many of the twentieth-century traditional Ethiopian paintings illustrating his life. Examined in lesser detail are events from his life that appear less frequently.

How do the various subjects and compositional features found in the two paintings by Jembere and Marcos remain consistent with or deviate from similar features found in a number of other twentieth-century traditional paintings that depict the same theme? Chapters four and five investigate this question by comparing the similarities and variations in the style, subject matter, and inscriptions in both.

In conclusion, I draw upon observations from the stylistic and iconographic analyses of chapters four and five to demonstrate the importance of the individual painter and how his/her training and the context in which s/he paints lead to changes in the artistic interpretation of conventional themes of twentieth-century Ethiopian painting.

CHAPTER 1

INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRADITIONAL PAINTING

Until recently, art historical studies of Ethiopian painting have focused primarily on the traditions of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, such as illuminated manuscripts, icons, and mural paintings of the past. The study of the origins, artists, and themes of twentieth-century traditional Ethiopian artists have not received the same kind of attention. Although a discussion of the reasons why such biases exist goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that since the 1930s, the increasing popularity and production of twentieth-century traditional painting has prompted some scholars to perceive the tradition as a "mass-produced" or "commercial" deviant of "the great achievement of the past" (Chojnacki 1964, 11). Considering the fact that many of the paintings produced in Ethiopia today reveal stylistic and iconographic attributes associated with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and in part, continue to be commissioned for religious environments, this bias is even more puzzling. Fortunately, a number of scholars in the last half of this century have begun to examine twentieth-century traditional painting in a different manner.

Scholarly contributions to the study of twentieth-century traditional painting and the different approaches to examining traditional painting in the twentieth-century will be reviewed in this chapter. How these studies have furthered the identification of twentieth-century traditional painting as a distinct aesthetic expression also will be discussed.

Prior to the late 1960s, references to twentieth-century traditional Ethiopian painting were primarily descriptive. Of the many travelers who journeyed to Ethiopia at the turn of the century and returned to their homes to publish accounts of their travels, few offered much more than general impressions of, or personal preferences for, Ethiopian painting.

One of the first scholarly articles that examined socio-cultural aspects of traditional painting in the twentieth-century was written by Eugene Pittard in 1928. Swiss engineer W. E. M. Molly had collected a number of twentieth-century traditional Ethiopian paintings in the 1920s, and in 1928, the Musée d'Ethnographie Genève presented an exhibition of these paintings. Pittard used information about the paintings as it was communicated by Molly, and then provided brief, introductory anthropological analyses of the paintings. Although earlier writers had identified traditional painting as a distinctive style of painting in their writings and discussed the challenges of purchasing or commissioning such works, Pittard's article was important because it was the first to provide a worthwhile study of eight paintings that were created by a single artist, Behailu Gabre Mariam.

The rise in popularity of traditional Ethiopian painting after the coronation of Haile Selassie (1930) had a marked effect on the nature of the scholarship of the period.[1] An increased foreign presence in Addis Ababa brought an increase in visitors writing about their experiences in the city. Literature from the period featured observations on the popular themes of traditional paintings being produced in Addis Ababa, as well as the

[1] It was not until the diplomatic recognition of Ethiopia by foreign communities after the defeat of the Italians at Adwa in 1896, and the resulting increase in a foreign presence in Addis Ababa that a significant market for traditional paintings developed. Foreigners visiting or living in Addis Ababa created an

names of a number of the more popular painters of the period.

Contemporary writings from this period, such as Mérab's *Impressions d'Ethiopie* (1921-1929), Zervos' *L'empire d'Éthiopie* (1936), and Coon's *Measuring Ethiopia and Flight into Arabia* (1936), provided valuable observations on painting in Addis Ababa. Unlike some of the other works that offered general observations on the styles or themes of the period (Norden 1933), these authors identified specific themes and compositions that appeared more frequently and identified the popularity of certain religious saints, historical characters, and popular allegories. Zervos and Mérab both presented biographical information regarding individual artists who lived and worked in Addis Ababa at the time, including (when available) their names, where they had previously lived or worked, and brief references to the location of some of their works. Perhaps the interest of these writers in documenting traditional painting of the time was due to a rise in the popularity of collecting such paintings, but the historical insight offered in the writings of Mérab and Zervos is significant. Not until the 1980s would contemporary writings on twentieth-century traditional painting reveal such interest in the lives of living artists.

Scholars had yet to examine twentieth-century traditional painting from a historical perspective until 1966 when Pankhurst published "Some Notes for a History of Ethiopian Secular Art." An ambitious attempt to construct a history of secular painting in Ethiopia, this essay presented an extensive survey of travelers' accounts, royal chronicles, Ethiopian manuscripts, and mural paintings (dating back to as early as the eighteenth

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increased demand for traditional paintings. The simultaneous advent of photography among Ethiopia's ruling elite also created a new demand for painted portraits at the time.

century) which featured or described specifically secular subjects.[2] Pankhurst introduced a historical framework for the development of twentieth-century painting in Ethiopia by examining the important cultural and historical factors (such as the increase in consumers of such paintings in Addis Ababa or the introduction and acceptance of photography by the ruling elite) that gave rise to the development in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries of secular themes and painters. Establishing a historical tie from the contemporary secular artist to those individual court artists and painters from the nineteenth century, Pankhurst formally connected twentieth-century secular painting to what Chojnacki (1964, 11) referred to as "the great achievements of the past." In doing so, Pankhurst challenged scholars to view "secular" or twentieth-century traditional painting as they had nineteenth century Ethiopian painting – as an expression of the historical, social, and cultural environment in which it was produced.

Scholarship in the following decades dealt more with the examination of popular themes and the interpretation of iconographic elements and less with the historical questions that had been presented by Pankhurst in 1966. The 1985 exhibition, *Mensch und Geschichte in Äthiopiens Volksmalerei*, was the first to focus strictly upon traditional paintings from the twentieth-century.[3] The accompanying catalog, written by Walter Raunig and Girma Fisseha (1985), documented an extensive grouping of various collections of traditional paintings, organized key information on the popularity of certain topics, such as artists and artistic centers, and identified various stylistic characteristics.

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[2] Reflecting the problems of "classifying" a distinct type of painting that had not been adequately examined by scholars, Pankhurst introduced the term "secular" to distinguish traditional paintings of the twentieth-century from their nineteenth century (commissioned primarily for religious environments) precedents. His use of "secular" and the author's use of "twentieth-century traditional" direct the reader to the same form of painting.

Although many of the catalogue entries were basically descriptions of the paintings, Girma and Raunig's work is nevertheless a very important one. It provided scholars with a long-overdue introduction to the wealth of information featured in twentieth-century traditional paintings. Most of this information still remains largely unused.

In 1985, Heinrich Schöller and Girma Fisseha co-authored a preliminary examination of a number of twentieth-century traditional paintings that represented the popular theme of open-air courts. Rather than providing a topical description of the iconography of the painting or detail its subject matter, the authors went one step further and supplemented their iconographic study with introductory cultural-historical interpretations:

> The depiction of Ethiopian courts in popular paintings is the expression of a distinct Ethiopian feeling for law and order, which has its roots in the people. Possibly one can regard the court scenes as an expression of an Ethiopian 'Volksgeist' from which the traditional law emanates, a law which cannot be 'made' but, . . . 'is and comes to be with the people.' Herein lies, in addition to its artistic importance, the legal-anthropological value of this art form (Schöller and Girma 1985, 161).

Attempting to assign deeper meaning to the iconography of just one of the many popular traditional painting themes (open-air court scenes), this article was instrumental in shifting inquiries away from those of the collector to those of the scholar.[4]

The trend in scholarship to examine popular themes of twentieth-century traditional painting continued in 1986 at the First International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art where new questions regarding the life history of the twentieth-century

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[3] As mentioned earlier, Pittard (1928; 1947) had previously written about traditional paintings appearing in an exhibition, but this exhibition featured over one hundred and twenty traditional paintings.

[4] This interpretation was of an introductory nature and, as the authors stated, would "have to be supported by the examination of specific contemporary documents and travelers' reports" (Schöller and Girma 1985, 161).

traditional painter were introduced.

At the conference, both Girma Fisseha and Pankhurst presented historical analyses of a number of thematically related paintings. Girma Fisseha offered introductory considerations on the relevance of hunting scenes in traditional painting. Pankhurst (1989) built upon the ideas explored in Schöller and Girma's examination (1985) of open-air court themes with the paper, "The Battle of Adwa (1896) as Depicted By Traditional Ethiopian Artists." Comparing the iconographic elements of a broad collection of paintings that depicted the famous Battle of Adwa, Pankhurst constructed a chronology for development and changes that he observed various painters' representations of the Adwa theme over the previous three-quarters of this century. This marked the first time that a scholar had presented a comprehensive historical analysis of a twentieth-century iconographic theme.

A new regard for the traditional painter as individual artist was presented at the conference by Girma Kidane (1989) in his paper, "Four Traditional Ethiopian Painters and Their Life Histories." Providing brief biographies and individual photographs of four established traditional painters, Girma confronted long-held biases concerning the anonymity of twentieth-century traditional painters. As Pankhurst (1966) had underscored the importance of determining the individual identity of artists and how their background and artistic training reflect the history of twentieth-century painting, Girma's attention to the details of each of the four artists' personal lives emphasized how important they are in the study of their paintings. The differences in the lives of the four artists Girma discussed suggested further examination into the differences or similarities of their paintings.

Raunig also presented a short paper at the 1986 conference. In a brief summary, he discussed the future of twentieth-century traditional painting and its artists. Most importantly, "Ethiopian Folk Art Painting" recognized that "comprehensive stylistic research into Ethiopian folk art painting has still to be carried out" (1986, 70). And although his paper did not specifically address issues of classification, Raunig did indirectly introduce the use of yet another term, "Folk art," for those paintings produced in Ethiopia throughout the twentieth-century for primarily non-religious environments.[5]

In 1988, at the Tenth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Richard Pankhurst (1994) explored the popularity of yet another traditional theme, the representation of Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela. Presenting a brief overview of the six most popular themes used to illustrate the life and reign of Tewodros, Pankhurst provided valuable information regarding the iconographic elements featured in these themes. This work remains the only examination of the Tewodros theme in the visual arts of Ethiopia.

It was not until Ricci's *Pittura Ethiopica Tradizionale* (1989) that stylistic considerations of twentieth-century traditional painting were integrated with historical study. His catalog of the largely unpublished collection of traditional Ethiopian paintings in the Istituto Italo-Africano in Rome, included translations of inscriptions found in several of the ninety-three paintings and various observations concerning history, style and iconography. Ricci's study, in contrast to earlier works, explored the distinctive or unique characteristics of each painting, such as its execution, organization, and iconography. His examination also included the study of inscriptions, as well as historical facts associated with each of the paintings. In doing so, he was able to pose questions and

[5] Elizabeth Biasio (1993) later explored, in depth, the various terms used to classify this type of painting.

offer comments about their origins, influences, and authorship. Despite the introductory nature of his study, Ricci directed scholarship beyond standard historical inquiries, such as that of Pankhurst (1966), toward a more comprehensive, art historical methodology. However, Ricci's use of the term "contaminated" to identify those twentieth-century traditional paintings that exhibited European influences perpetuated the bias of Ethiopian painting as timeless or stylistically static until the advent of European influence – an influence that invariably led to its "degeneration." The connotations associated with such terminology did little to complement the advances Ricci had made in presenting twentieth-century traditional painting from an art historical point of view.

Scholarly biases toward the "great achievements of the past" (Chojnacki 1964, 11) continue to be seen in some of the papers presented at the Second International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art held in 1990 in Warsaw. One such example is seen in Chojnacki and Paul Henze's introductory comments to the published proceedings of the conference. Discussing Ethiopian painting, they state that (1993, 13) "although such paintings were produced to satisfy the demands of diplomats and visitors to the country, some are worthy of recognition as genuine works of art," and reveal the common positive biases toward earlier forms of painting.

Girma Moges' paper, "African Characteristics in Traditional Ethiopian Art," presented at the Second International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art, did not support such a bias. Presumably weary of Western scholars referring to traditional paintings as part of a "contaminated" genre or one in which European influence is prevalent, Moges explored those African influences that could be discovered within traditional paintings. However, his paper proved methodologically problematic because it

presented a number of stylistic attributes associated with various African sources or influences without providing a sound basis for such observations. It did, however, provide another important contribution to the construction of an accurate and comprehensive history of twentieth-century traditional painting in Ethiopia – that concerning the African influence.

Questions explored by Elisabeth Biasio in the paper, "Twentieth-century Ethiopian Paintings in Traditional Style: 'Traditional,' 'folk,' or 'popular' art?," at the Third International Conference of the History of Ethiopian Art held in Addis Ababa in 1993, addressed semantic issues. She focused on a set of issues currently facing scholars studying the history of twentieth-century Ethiopian paintings. Problems such as the terminology used in the discussion of twentieth-century Ethiopian paintings or the classification of such works. Her analysis identifies the numerous challenges paintings that manifest so many origins, influences and transformations pose for the Western trained scholar. What surfaced in Biasio's inquiries were scholars' apparent disregard for the single artist's perspective of twentieth-century Ethiopian painting. Persistent questions of terminology, classifications and stylistic developments could, perhaps, be more adequately addressed given detailed accounts from individual artists regarding such issues. Except for Girma (1989) and Girma and Silverman (1994), Silverman and Girma (1999), and Silverman (1999) few scholars have examined the life histories of Ethiopian painters. Ultimately, without such information, few comparative studies or comprehensive histories may be written regarding Ethiopian painting of the twentieth-century.

The importance of the artist in the history of Ethiopian traditional painting was

demonstrated in the publication of individual artists' profiles for the exhibition, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity*, authored by curator Raymond Silverman (1994). Qes Adamu Tesfaw and Qengeta Jembere Hailu were two of the eleven featured artists trained in the religious style featured in the exhibition.[6] Rather than reiterate the introductory scholarship of the last twenty years on traditional painting, Silverman focused on the lives of Adamu and Jembere as they were communicated by each artist in field interviews that he and colleagues Girma Fisseha and Neal Sobania conducted in April, May and June of 1993.

If Biasio's paper of 1993 had raised questions regarding the theoretical distinction between "traditional," "folk" and "popular art" or treating Ethiopian painting as a generalized, monolithic entity, Silverman's presentation of the actual lives of twentieth-century painters underscored the misapplication of Western styled categories and terms. The histories of Adamu and Jembere have certain affinities, such as the similarity in the religious environment in which both were artistically educated and the fact that both had made painting their profession. However, their life experiences are quite diverse and this is significantly reflected in their painting style – thereby stressing the need for specific research focused on individual traditional painters who are alive, regardless of their conformity or non-conformity to categories such as "secular" or "sacred" painters.

In 1994, Girma Fisseha and Raymond Silverman presented the paper "Two Generations of Traditional Painters: A Biographical Sketch of Qangeta Jembere Hailu and Marcos Jembere," at the 12th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies. Using the painters' autobiographies as the point of focus, Girma and Silverman reinforced the approach mentioned above and offered a new approach to the study of twentieth-century

[6] Qes and Qengeta are terms that refer to religious offices within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Ethiopian painting. As in the exhibition, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity*, in which the stylistic differences of traditional painters challenged longstanding views of repetition and mass production, the lives of father Jembere and son Marcos proved to contradict notions of decline or "contamination" (in traditional painting) as a consequence of diminished "spirituality" or an affinity with religious painting. Moreover, this investigation of the work of two painters, in this instance, Jembere and Marcos, perhaps serves as the best example to date of the consistencies and variations that exist within the form and style of twentieth-century traditional painting in Ethiopia.

The essay, "Jembere and His Son Marcos: Traditional Painting at the End of the Twentieth Century," featured in the book, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity* (1999), again examined the well-documented works of traditional painters Marcos Jembere and Jembere Hailu. In this essay, however, Silverman and Girma place the work of each painter in the broader context of twentieth-century painting in Ethiopia and identify a number of neglected topics relevant to the study of traditional painting, such as portraiture and religious painting.

Silverman and Girma use different works of Jembere and Marcos to demonstrate that traditional artists frequently work in more than one idiom. In so doing, they challenge aspects of previous scholarship and present a new direction for future studies. Starting, rather than concluding, with the works of each painter, traditional painting is examined on its own terms. By focusing first on the individual artist, their life history, and the stylistic consistencies or inconsistencies of their collective works, instead of the general or less specific commonalties of theme and style, one can begin to build a historical context for the tradition. This paper draws upon the methodological approach

presented in the essay, "Jembere and His Son Marcos: Traditional Painting at the End of the Twentieth Century," (1999) by first exploring the life histories of Jembere and Marcos. This is followed by the close analysis of two paintings representing the same subject produced by each of the artists as a vehicle for exploring some of the factors that have influenced the evolution of their work, as well as the work of other traditional artists.

CHAPTER 2

JEMBERE HAILU AND MARCOS JEMBERE

This chapter presents concise life histories of two artists who are the focus of this paper, Jembere Hailu and Marcos Jembere (Silverman and Girma 1999; Girma and Silverman 1994). I will review their artistic training and events they consider to be important in their lives. This biographical information will be used in developing the stylistic and iconographic comparisons presented in later chapters.

Marcos Jembere is a second generation traditional painter. At thirty-eight years old, his artistic training and life experiences contrast those of his father's, Jembere Hailu (1913 - 1993). Unlike his father and many of the other painters who moved to Addis Ababa during the first half of this century, Marcos did not receive painting training as part of a traditional church education, nor did he teach himself. He was instructed by his church-educated father, Jembere. At the age of four he began to learn drawing and painting at his father's side. As he matured, his father provided instruction on the fundamental technical aspects of traditional painting, such as the mixing of colors, the stretching of canvas, how to sketch the outline of the composition directly on the cloth canvas with pencil or charcoal, and how to apply different pigments, one layer at a time. Marcos also learned to work on several different paintings at the same time, applying one layer of pigment to one painting and, while waiting for it to dry, treating a separate painting with its own layer of pigment. By observing his father at work and copying his

paintings, Marcos was also taught more advanced aspects of painting, such as how to make paintings "proportional," which subjects are the most prevalent in traditional painting, and how to identify significant figures in paintings with captions or labels.[7] Once Marcos acquired the necessary skills to work with his father, he assumed an apprenticeship-styled working arrangement with Jembere, first preparing certain aspects of the paintings for his father to complete, then eventually working on his own paintings for market. Ultimately, as he has stated, Marcos developed his own form of painting traditional themes but one stylistically similar to that of his father.[8]

Marcos received additional painting instruction in the art classes he attended in both primary and secondary school. In school, Marcos learned what he has termed "modern arts, such as using straight lines and correct proportions."[9] Art instructors recognized his exceptional talent and strongly encouraged Marcos to further his education at a school of fine arts. Marcos subsequently sought his father's authorization to leave Ethiopia and pursue his dream of attending a foreign arts school abroad. His father's refusal to support his ambitions forced Marcos to remain in Ethiopia and as a result, he has yet to attend art school. This incident put a strain on the relationship between father and son. Nevertheless, Marcos continued to paint during this period. Since 1971, he has worked full-time as a civil servant. He still maintains the hope of someday attending art school.

Today, Marcos works as a supervisor in a government motor pool. He cites his

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[7] Marcos Jembere, interview by Girma Fisseha and Raymond Silverman, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, April 25, 1993.

[8] Marcos Jembere, interview by Girma Fisseha and Raymond Silverman, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, April 25, 1993.

[9] Marcos Jembere, interview by Girma Fisseha and Raymond Silverman, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, April 25, 1993.

job and the period of the *Derg*, or the provisional military council which ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991, as having seriously effected his interest and motivation to paint.[10] Marcos has resumed painting and has even attempted to sell his paintings through various art and curio stores in Addis Ababa over the past several years.

Jembere Hailu was born in a small town near Debra Tabor in 1913.[11] Jembere completed the first stage of his traditional church education at the age of eleven. As he learned to read and write by studying the *Dawit* (Psalms of David) and different aspects of *zema* (religious music), Jembere continued his education by attending *qine* (spiritual poetry) school, first at the monastery of Hega Vashra in Gojjam and then at Welda. The final years of Jembere's church education were spent in Samada and Kidane Mehret in Gaynt, where his studies were devoted to *zemmare* (refined and complex types of religious music) and the school of *aquaqua* (the mastery of the drum and sistra and the "so-called dance of the priests"). Jembere's painting instruction began at the church of Tegbabe Mariam in Amhara Sayent. There, while studying the Old and New Testaments, he observed his uncle, Aleqa Alemu, as he painted. A well recognized artist, Alemu instructed Jembere in the essential components of church painting, such as the art of writing or calligraphy employed to label significant figures in paintings, and various canons of the church painting tradition. As communicated by Jembere, these canons (which to date have yet to be thoroughly documented by scholars) included standards for the depiction of prominent holy figures, such as the depiction of St. George on a white horse and the depiction of St. Mercurius on a black horse, or the rendering of the

[10] The market for traditional paintings has always been reliant upon foreign patronage in the capital. During the period of the *Derg*, there was a dramatic drop in tourism in Ethiopia, and thus a poor market for traditional painting.

Madonna as wearing a "heavenly" blue cape. Additional aspects included the compositional arrangement of saints, such as that of St. Michael to the right of Mary, for her protection, and St. George to her left. The representation of figures, such as rendering non-believers in profile with one eye and believers frontally with both eyes, appears to have been equally as important as the assignment of particular colors for certain figures, such as the dark-colored devil, and the angels who are represented using light colors.

Jembere began painting for his uncle in 1929 at the church of Enatitu Mariam in Debra Tabor. Alemu, Jembere and three other painters worked together on the church which was commissioned by the governor, Ras Gugsa Welle of Begemdir. However, a 1930 rebellion staged by Ras Gugsa against Ras Tefari Mekonnen, the future Haile Selassie I, halted completion of the project and Jembere returned to his parents' home.

Jembere's first independent commission came in 1931 when the Dejazmach Wendwossen Kasa, the new leader of Begemdir, requested Jembere to paint the reception hall of his palace. Jembere received an official position as Secretary to the Dejazmach in appreciation for his work. His increasing prominence as a painter however, was short lived, for in 1936 he was forced to stop painting as a result of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Serving in the army of Wendwossen Kasa (who was killed in 1937), Jembere endured tremendous personal losses – his father was killed at the Battle of Maychew in 1936 and the death of his uncle Aleqa Alemu in 1939 proved to be even more devastating. Nevertheless, Jembere continued his service first under the Fitawrari Yalegal, who, with the aid of the British army, defeated the Italian General Nasi in 1941.

The years following the restoration of Ethiopian independence were marked with

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[11] The following account of Jembere's life draws upon the essays published by Girma and Silverman in 1994 and Silverman and Girma in 1999.

personal difficulties for Jembere. Despite his outstanding service to Ethiopia, Jembere was not immediately recognized, due to problems he encountered with the law. Jembere's most recent comments regarding these problems attribute to his alleged involvement in the 1946 Eritrean independence Muslim league, *Rabita al-Islamia*, as the cause of his two year incarceration during this time. He claimed that he was released from prison following an investigation of his presumed involvement. In an earlier account, Jembere indicated that the problem stemmed from his accidentally killing a man following an argument and his subsequent evasion as the source of his problems during this period. During this time he supposedly assumed the life of a *shifta* (a bandit or renegade) and sought sanctuary at the monastery church in Gheghera in Wello, where he was afforded asylum by the priest Memher Sefu. (This report appears to fit more logically into subsequent accounts of Jembere's life.) In appreciation for his protection, Jembere offered to paint the monastery church in Gheghera. Unfortunately, due to sanctions associated with his having divorced his first wife at this time, he was only permitted to paint the exterior parts of the church, rather than the Sanctuary area.

Jembere moved to Addis Ababa in 1948, and upon appeal to the Emperor Haile Selassie I for recognition of his service to the Ethiopian cause during the Italian occupation, Jembere was rewarded with land in the Arat Kilo district of Addis Ababa, as well as financial support for the construction of a house. Jembere states it was at this time that he was introduced to the acclaimed traditional painter, Belatchew Yimer (1869-1957), and would often observe him as he made paintings to be sold. Consequently, Jembere developed his own style of painting, creating interpretations of popular themes, as well as new subjects for the traditional painting market, including his well-known

scenes of everyday life set in his homeland, the Lake Tana region of Ethiopia. It was at this time that Jembere experimented with painted portraits, which had become increasingly popular among the ruling elite since the introduction of photography in Ethiopia in the early twentieth-century.

Jembere sustained a successful career as a traditional painter until the 1974 Revolution. The *Derg* discouraged tourism and a Western foreign presence in the capital and as a result, virtually destroyed the market for traditional paintings. His home and nearly all the possessions owned by Jembere and his second wife, Bezunesh, were confiscated by agents of the *Derg* government. Jembere stated that as a result, he painted nothing during this period. He had just begun painting again before his death in 1993. Hindered by cataracts during this time, his paintings show a dramatic difference of style from his earlier work.

This brief summary of the lives of father and son reveals a rather dramatic contrast. From childhood, Marcos has consistently had an avid interest in painting. Although he grew up in a time of great political turbulence, Marcos appears to have sustained an unwavering aspiration to become a professional artist. The experiences of Jembere, on the other hand, seem to be tied to painting as much as they are to history; his life, in essence, is a living document of the history of Ethiopia and its painting traditions. Interestingly, both painters have asserted their individuality in interpreting common themes and subjects associated with traditional painting. It is a unique opportunity then, given the comments provided by both artists, to examine in the following chapters, the manner in which such individuality is expressed.

CHAPTER 3

EMPEROR TEWODROS II (1820 - 1868)

> For after all, rising from the dusts of 19th century Abyssinian anarchy, it was he who for the first time seriously challenged the hegemonic power of the corrupt clergy and the warring regional lords and who attempted to establish peace and order in the country. With the boldness that characterized his actions, it was he who took the first initiative to create a strong and modern Ethiopia out of the dwindling and decadent Empire . . . Naturally, a man of such a stature could not fail to capture the imagination of Ethiopian creative writers and that is why, next to the Italian invasion of the country, he has become one of the most popular historical themes. Accordingly, Tewodros alone has inspired the writing of six works by some of the major Ethiopian novelists and playwrights (Taye Assefa 1983, 115).

Since the beginning of the twentieth-century, the life and reign of Emperor Tewodros II has been a popular subject in traditional painting. Among the more popular themes in traditional painting, scenes from his life and reign are found as frequently as those which represent relatively more significant battles from the history of Ethiopia, such as the Battle of Adwa (1896) or Emperor Yohannes' march to Matamma (1889). The factors contributing to the popularity of Tewodros' life among visual and literary artists have yet to be examined. Although a number of scholars have presented detailed historical studies of his life and reign, none have presented a comprehensive analysis as to why his life remains such a popular subject among the people of Ethiopia.

In the paper "Emperor Tewodros II and the Battle of Maqdela (1868) as Depicted

in Ethiopian Popular Art" Richard Pankhurst identifies six "types of Tewodros paintings" that have been repeatedly produced in the twentieth-century (Pankhurst 1988, 281). Each type includes the image of the Emperor Tewodros, most typically in the following compositional arrangements: "Portraits; Maqdela battle scenes, featuring his suicide; Pictures of his law court and punishments; Scenes of his feasts; Paintings depicting his suicide; Composite pictures." However, there is little if any discussion of the socio-cultural or political environment of the times during which certain types of Tewodros paintings were more popular than others. This is yet another vital question that remains to be explored by scholars. If it was in fact foreign visitors to Addis Ababa and Ethiopia who fueled the production of traditional paintings in twentieth-century Ethiopia, did they also contribute to the popularity of certain themes – such as those of Tewodros that Pankhurst has identified? Or were certain themes more popular at certain times during the twentieth-century because of the social or political environment in which the artists who produced specific paintings lived? Additionally, if Pankhurst has identified as many as six popular "Tewodros themes," what were the sources that the painters used for these particular themes?

This chapter provides a historical background to those events from the life and reign of Tewodros that Jembere Hailu and Marcos Jembere have featured in their paintings. Understanding the actual history of Tewodros' life helps to identify continuities as well as innovations in each artist's representation of two different "Tewodros themes" – scenes from his battle with the British at Maqdela and scenes from his law court and punishments. The continuities and differences between the two painters' treatment of these themes will be discussed in following chapters.

Historical accounts of the early life of Kasa, as Tewodros was named prior to his coronation, typically focus on his life as a *shifta* and his continual struggle for the governorship of Qwara.[12] Most historians view the experiences Kasa encountered during this period as the stimulus for a number of objectives he later tried to pursue as Emperor. His younger years, from his birth (c. 1820) to approximately 1839 when he was about 20 years old, were heavily influenced by the powerful Dejazmach Kinfu of Qwara. The former marriage of his estranged father, the *Mesfin* Hailu Welde Giyorgis of Qwara, to the niece of the famed *Zamana Masafent* Dejazmach Maru of Dambya, made Kasa the step brother of Kinfu.[13] It was probably because of Kinfu's father-like relationship to Kasa, that he received a fine education in Qwara at the convent of Mahbere Sillase (Rubenson 1966, 29). Despite his illegitimate birth and the supposed common status of his mother, Weyzero Attitegeb, Kasa became a well-educated young man, versed in Ethiopian history, literature, and warfare, in addition to more worldly subjects, such as the Arabic language and European history.[14]

Kasa was quickly acclimated to the political warfare of the *Zamana Masafent.* Accompanying the Dejazmach on the frequent military campaigns and probably participating directly in the violence of many of them, it was during this time, as

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[12] Qwara was the northwest region of what is now present-day Ethiopia.

[13] The *Zamana Masafent* is usually referred to as the "Era of the Princes," which endured roughly from 1750 to 1850 and was, as Shiferaw Bekele (1990, 26-27) states "the period when Ethiopia was divided within itself into several regions with no effective central authority . . . the lords constantly fought against each other for aggrandizement of their territory and to become the guardians of King of Kings at Gondar. . . . Coalitions and alliances between the lords were constantly formed and dissolved in this period . . . internal crisis was further aggravated by the doctrinal divisions within the church."

[14] Most scholars assert the common status of Tewodros' mother who is said to have worked as a market vendor selling koso, a purgative ingested to cure tapeworm. See Taddesse Tamrat (1991, 117-125), for an account of the koso-vendor story typically discussed in reference to Attitegeb. This includes a rarely

Rubenson (1966, 31) points out, that "some traits in Kasa's character – bravery almost to the point of recklessness, a kind of fatalism and a certain disregard of human life," were most likely formulated. The death of Kinfu in 1839 marked a new period in Kasa's life. Kasa sought the governorship of Qwara, and for about ten years, constantly contended for the position with the Yajju Ras Ali II (r. 1831-1853) and his powerful mother, the Empress Manan Liban.

The question of Kasa's official legitimacy repeatedly obstructed any rightful claims he could make to the territory, and regardless of his exceptional military ability or popularity among the people, he was forced to attain the governorship by force.[15] Threatened by the potential of an illegitimate heir seizing power, the Empress Manan continually attempted to shut Kasa out of the Yajju realm. Kasa in turn took on the life of a *shifta* and formed his own sizable army.

During this *shifta* period Kasa became notorious not only for his pillaging of caravans, villages, and farms but also for sharing his booty with the peasants of Qwara. It was Kasa's *shifta* days, as Bahru Zewde (1991, 28) explains

> that were probably the most formative period of his life. It was then that some of the enduring features of his personality were confirmed . . . his simplicity and disdain for pomp. He lived the life of his followers, taking part even in ploughing and sowing. Another feature was his concern for social justice. His distribution of money that he had acquired by robbery to the peasants, so that they could buy ploughs, had an element of Robin Hood about it.

Kasa became increasingly popular among the people of Qwara during this period.

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included reference to her later life (see d'Abbadie, 1868) in which she becomes a nun and wears a white *qob*.

[15] It has almost always been assumed that Tewodros invented any affiliations with actual royal ancestors. Rubenson (1990, 19) however, calls for a re-examination of the possibility that real royal ancestry did actually play a role in his rise to power.

Consequently, the Empress Manan repeatedly attempted to stifle his power. One legend which historians often use to illustrate the failure of Manan and her supporters to stop Kasa is that which involved the Qanjazmach Wendyerad. Apparently it was Qanjazmach Wendyerad who had boasted to Manan that he "would bring in the son of the *koso*-vendor" (Rubenson 1966, 37). As an example of his vengeance and pride for his mother, Kasa supposedly forced Wendyerad to drink an entire horn of *koso* before his *shifta* army.[16]

Manan herself even provided her own granddaughter Tewabech's hand in marriage to Kasa in an attempt to prevent his opposition to the Yajju line. But it wasn't until 1847, when Kasa ultimately defeated and imprisoned the Empress and her husband Yohannes III near the northern shores of Lake Tana, that he was officially presented the governorship of Qwara. Yet, the governorship which the Ras Ali seemingly awarded to Kasa to contain his rise to power, merely further empowered him to dominate the surrounding regions.

It took an embarrassing defeat in 1848 against the Egyptians at the Battle of Dabarqi for Kasa to emerge as a mature contender among the *Zamana Masafent* leaders. Probably the single most significant outcome of this defeat was "his lifelong obsession with the 'Turk,' and his wild dream of liberating Jerusalem from their rule" (Bahru 1991, 28). But Kasa also observed the keen discipline and advanced weaponry of the Egyptians and immediately sought to instill both in his troops. Consequently, his troops became an unstoppable force (primarily due to their fine discipline) and for the next seven years consecutively defeated each of the key figures of the *Zamana Masafent*.

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[16] Rubenson (1966, 19) attributes the source of this legend to the chronicle written during Tewodros' life by Zeneb.

The Battle of Ayshal (1853), in which Kasa's army defeated and exiled Ras Ali, is commonly referred to as the end of the *Zamana Masafent*. However, it actually was not until Kasa's army defeated the forces of Dejazmach Wube of Simien at the Battle of Deresge (February 1855) that the *Zamana Masafent* was finally and completely dissolved. The equally as significant provinces of Yeju, Wello, Tigray, and Shewa however, still remained unallied with Kasa's cause and it would be the control of these distant provinces that would plague Kasa to his death.

On February 11, 1855, merely two days after the Battle of Deresge, "in Wube's own church, Deresge Mariam, Abuna Salama crowned Kassa as Tewodros II, King of Kings of Ethiopia" (Marcus 1994, 64). [17] The selection of the name Tewodros was a decisive move on the part of the Emperor to identify directly with the peasants.

> By taking this regal name, the new emperor laid claim to the national myth about the hallowed reign of Tewodros I (r.1412-1413), who reputedly redistributed land to the peasants and who came to be regarded as a 'hidden Mahdi' who would return to bring justice to the people (Marcus 1994, 65).

Rubenson (1966, 51) and Marcus (1994, 68) concur that Tewodros felt a great sense of responsibility and mission in taking this name and possibly even believed that he was indeed the apocalyptic "slave of Christ" as mentioned in the *Fikkare Iyesus*. [18] Consequently, from the outset, Tewodros established objectives which addressed social justice for the common people, such as reforms in the government and land ownership,

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[17] Marcus (1994, 63-64) describes the ramifications of the 1854 Council of Amba Chara at which Kasa presided and joined forces with Abuna Salama as a "call to Orthodoxy" or a reassertion of the *Tawahedo Doctrine*, i.e. the belief in the inseparability of Christ's human and divine natures. In sum, the alliance brought Kasa a major supporter of a unified Ethiopia, a believer in the separation of civil and sacred affairs, and a religious official who was needed in the ceremony of his imperial coronation.

[18] According to Prouty and Rosenfeld (1981, 68), the *Fikkare Iyesus* is "an apocalyptic work which predicted that Christ would bring a man named Tewodros to power after a long period of corruption, perversity and lawlessness."

both to foster their support and attain his own personal goals.

Scholars also agree that Tewodros, in attempting to implement such radical reforms, was the first modern minded Emperor of Ethiopia. Donald Crummey (1969, 457) supports this, writing that:

> Tewodros is the father of modern Ethiopia in the sense that he conceived the idea of a united, strong, and progressive Ethiopian state, the peer of any other state in the world . . . he was Ethiopia's first monarch with a concept (however vague) of modernization, to the vigor and relevance of his response to the new forces of foreign influence which became felt throughout the first half of the nineteen century, and to the extraordinary breadth of his personality, which must be seen in the context of this response.

Indeed it was in response to both increasingly threatening European and Islamic powers that Tewodros developed two persistent obsessions: one, of ruling a unified Ethiopia and the other, of modernizing the nation to the level of foreign (specifically European) technologies so that resistance to Muslim forces could be maintained (Crummey 1969, 459, 462). These two major concerns would greatly effect Tewodros' policies as Emperor.

In striving for unification, Tewodros first established a series of military reforms. He replaced the regional armies of the past with a centralized national army, introduced a new hierarchy of command for the varying levels of leadership, and initiated an actual wage based compensation system (for the soldiers as well as governmental officials), instead of the previously accepted method of pillaging (Bahru 1991, 33). The Emperor was also quick to realize that military unification meant little unless it was supported by domestic unification. He thus initiated new reforms which specifically focused on

reversing the anarchy of the *Zamana Masafent.*[19]

By introducing such reforms as his "policy of general pacification," the Emperor promoted security and prosperity for the citizens of his Empire (Pankhurst 1991, 133). He encouraged the common people to return to their "lawful avocation, the merchant to his store, and the farmer to his plough" (Lejean 1855, in Pankhurst 1991, 133) and introduced a new administration of justice to thwart thieves and other criminals, such as bandits who looted the countryside.

In the new form of administration, any wronged individual was encouraged to plea their case directly before Tewodros, wherever he set up camp (Morgan 1969, 259).[20] The system, according to Rubenson (1966, 55), succeeded to a near-excessive extent, in terms of the amount of time Tewodros had to invest. It did not, however, subdue the severity of punishments for major crimes such as execution or mutilation for robbery, murder, treason or rebellion.

> The type of mutilation which Tewodros prohibited was the emasculation of captured enemies. He also abolished the established custom that kinsmen of a murderer or even someone who had caused the death of another person by accident had to answer with their lives or a ransom even if they were completely innocent of the crime or accident (Rubenson 1966, 55).

These reforms are often overlooked when compared to the severity of those punishments that Tewodros employed to condemn offenders he thought deserving of penance. Despite using excessive violence, Tewodros made valid inroads to protect and provide justice and economic development for the Ethiopian people (Marcus 1994, 68). His reform of the Ethiopian Orthodox church however, had yet to be achieved.

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[19] See Pankhurst (1991, 127-144) for a review of the numerous additional reforms that Tewodros attempted to implement as Emperor.

Tewodros' attempted reforms directed toward the Ethiopian Orthodox clergy were related to his two fundamental concerns. First, to unify the doctrinally divided Orthodox church was to attain political unification. As Rubenson (1966, 72) explains, "in the predominantly Christian population of the regional kingdoms or chieftainships that Tewodros set out to unify, the authority of the spokesmen of the Church was more wide-spread than any other." Second, in order to maintain his national army, critical to resisting foreign (i.e., Egyptian and/or Muslim) powers and securing the respect of European (Christian) powers, Tewodros sought a more substantial financial base (Bahru 1991, 35).

Earlier, at the Council of Amba Chara in 1854, it was arranged that the Abuna Salama would become the functional head of the Church in return for Tewodros' enforcement of the *Tawahedo Doctrine*.[21] Consequently, Tewodros had clearly instituted a separation of the powers of Church and State, while the Abuna had established some sense of unification among the clergy. This arrangement stood in direct conflict with the economic policies Tewodros attempted to implement (Bahru 1991, 35).

Tewodros first sought absolute authority over the clergy by insisting that they remove their turbans, or *temtem*, in his presence (Bahru 1991, 35). A gesture typically reserved exclusively for the inner sanctuary of a church, i.e. in reverence to God. The clergy refused. Instead of backing down, Tewodros again attempted to assert his supreme authority as well as foster additional governmental revenues for the support of his army by proposing a fixed limit to the untaxed land owned by a church. He proposed that any

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[20] See Schöller and Fisseha (1985) for a descriptive account of the judicial proceedings of the open-air court.

[21] See footnote seventeen for a detailed explanation of the 1854 Council of Amba Chara and the *Tewahedo Doctrine*.

land which exceeded the limit would be given to tax paying farmers and that the excess or unassigned clerics in a church would work and pay taxes (Rubenson 1966, 66; Morgan 1969, 261). Four years later, despite the outrage of the clergy, Tewodros enacted the proposed land limit, thereby alienating the church and directing all responsibilities for unification to his military forces (Rubenson 1966, 72; Bahru 1991, 35).

From 1857 to 1861, perpetual rebellions (often instigated by mistaking enemies as loyal allies) in the provinces of Wello, Gojjam, Lasta and Shawa, forced Tewodros and his troops constantly to journey to each of the provinces and battle for control. Tewodros became increasingly dependent upon the force of his military to control the opposition and the number of his soldiers (and the revenue to support them) rapidly increased (Morgan 1969, 262). As his failed attempts became more frequent, violent methods became standard, and his troops were forced to return to the previously established method of gratification – looting. "Tewodros found himself the emperor of only that part of Ethiopia through which he and his large army marched, and no amount of pillaging and looting and terrorism seemed to make much of a difference" (Marcus 1994, 69). Yet to be addressed however, was his alliance with European powers against the impeding Muslim forces and their assistance in instructing his own countrymen on the manufacture of modern weapons.

In the village of Gafat, near Debra Tabor, Tewodros established a gun-foundry and workshop in which all foreigners who entered the country were forced to instruct Ethiopian youths on the manufacture of personal weapons and major artillery, especially, the manufacture of cannons (Rubenson 1966, 74; Bahru 1991, 34). The whole mismatched attempt in which only a limited number of functional weapons were

manufactured, underscores Tewodros' obsession with acquiring the necessary fire power to consider Ethiopia an equal to European and other powers of the world.

Tewodros not only sought the Europeans' assistance for their newer technology but also support in Ethiopia's resistance to Islam. In 1862, Tewodros appealed to England and France in letters which requested support against Islam and stated that he wished to send envoys to their courts to discuss the possibility of future diplomatic exchanges (Rubenson 1966, 84). And although Tewodros included Russia, Austria, and Prussia in this diplomatic campaign, it was "towards the British that he manifested a special, almost affectionate regard. It was to be one of his tragedies that this affection went unreciprocated" (Bahru 1991, 36). Tewodros observed at least two separate instances in which Britain had communicated with diplomats in Ethiopia but had not acknowledged his letters or their contents. Insulted by this demonstrated lack of regard for what Tewodros found Ethiopia's most immediate concerns, he imprisoned a number of the British diplomats and foreign missionaries.

The years from 1863 to 1866 were marked by a number of improperly interpreted and mishandled attempts by the British to negotiate with Tewodros for the release of the captives. In 1866, the Queen of England (who was previously unaware of the situation) was finally informed of the quandary and responded by sending a special envoy with a letter of conciliation to Tewodros. The letter asked for the delivery of the hostages at Massawa in exchange for the Emperor's initial demands for diplomatic alliance. Again, as a consequence of mistranslation, Tewodros imprisoned the messenger and sent his final envoy to the Queen.

The final request by Tewodros specifically demanded that an assortment of

various weapons and instructors for artillery construction be sent to Ethiopia in exchange for the captives. In April 1867, Tewodros received Britain's surprising letter of agreement to meet the aforementioned demands. The same letter, however, also issued a warning. Unless the captives were released in Massawa, the Queen would send an army to Ethiopia to retrieve her subjects (Marcus 1994, 70). By this time, Massawa, as well as nearly every province in Tewodros' empire, did not acknowledge Tewodros as Emperor. Thus, Tewodros was unable to meet the British in Massawa, never responded to the Queen's final attempt to negotiate, and thereby invited the British to invade Ethiopia.

Concurrent with his foreign problems were the domestic problems with which Tewodros had been struggling since 1857. The years of 1864 through 1867 brought increasing random acts of brutal force and violence to silence provincial uprisings, such as the burning and looting of Gonder and areas of Dambiya in 1864 (Crummey 1971, 123). When Menelik of Shewa (r. 1889-1913) escaped from Maqdela in July of 1865,

> Tewodros ordered twenty-nine Wello dignitaries massacred and a dozen Amhara notables beaten to death with bamboo rods. . . . In mid-1867, when the imperial garrison in Gojjam defected, Tewodros mindlessly ordered eight hundred innocent Wello soldiers slaughtered because he felt, with no evidence, that they were about to desert (Marcus 1994, 70).

Near the end of 1867, the Emperor was forced to leave his capital, Debra Tabor, (which he burned upon departing) and seek shelter at the only remaining territory of his empire, the natural fortress of Maqdela. Arriving six months later at Maqdela, the 60,000 soldier army Tewodros once directed, now numbered no more than 5,000. Meanwhile, as Queen Victoria had advised in her letter of 1867, Sir Robert Napier and his Anglo-Indian army of 32,000 entered Ethiopia through Massawa in October 1867.

The Dejazmach Kasa of Tigray (the future Emperor Yohannes IV, r. 1872-1889)

assisted in the search for Tewodros and the British prisoners he held captive. The British faced the Emperor at Maqdela on April 10, 1868. Fitawrari Gabreye, an old friend of Tewodros, led the Ethiopian troops in their attack on the British on the plain of Aroge, just below the Maqdela fortress. Tewodros however, remained with the cannon, above the plain at Fala, the ridge between Maqdela and adjacent peaks (Rubenson 1966, 88).

The actual battle lasted no more than three hours. The 2,000 British troops with their highly effective artillery easily crushed Tewodros' 4,000 war weary soldiers, armed with locally crafted weapons. At the end of the day, 700 to 800 Ethiopians had been killed and nearly 1500 had been wounded, whereas two British soldiers had been killed and a mere twenty wounded (Rubenson 1966, 89).

The following morning, Tewodros sent a last minute peace delegation to Napier. Napier would only agree to peace with the personal surrender of the Emperor. Tewodros responded with a desperate but confusing letter in which he suggested suicide over surrender.

> More important, the whole letter, which was directed as much to the Ethiopian people and posterity as to the British general, indicated that the writer had reached the end of his dream, his struggle – and endurance. He did not even use his royal titles: King of Kings, elect of God – or the glorious throne-name under which he had striven so hard to change Ethiopia: he wrote simply as 'Kasa, whose trust is in Christ' (Rubenson 1976, 265).[22]

Saturday evening, Tewodros made his first suicide attempt, but was thwarted by his few remaining followers. He consequently released a first group of prisoners to Napier with yet another letter. This letter stated his intentions to send the General an Easter gift of cows and sheep in addition to the remaining prisoners. Tewodros had intended the gift as a peace settlement or actually as an attempt to prevent the British

from storming Maqdela yet one more time. In a somewhat confusing exchange, Napier never fully understood the Emperor's intention but did receive the remaining prisoners on Sunday. Tewodros thus interpreted the exchange as deception and on April 13, 1868, dissolved his army from Maqdela and faced the bombardment of 3,500 British soldiers on Maqdela with no more than twenty men (Marcus 1994, 72).[23] The British stormed the butte in a matter of hours and just before they discovered Tewodros, he had held a pistol to his mouth and killed himself. The British concluded their mission by looting the Maqdela treasury, collecting a sizable quantity of valued national treasures for their trip home, including an extensive collection of illuminated manuscripts and books (including the copy of the Kebra Negast which Tewodros is said to have kept under his pillow) and official regalia, such as the Emperor's crown and the royal seal. The eight year old son of the Emperor, Alemayehu was handed over to the British by his mother, Teruwarq, to be cared for in England in accordance with Tewodros' pre-suicide request.

Tewodros was buried on April 14, 1868, without a ceremony, on the Maqdela plateau, and three days later, the British left Maqdela but before doing so razed it to the ground. The British began their journey home, and as they had stated prior to their entry at Massawa, with no intentions of conquest or occupation, entirely evacuated Massawa by June 1868.

It is without question that both Britain and Ethiopia created their own individual myths about the Battle of Maqdela and the suicide of Tewodros. The British perhaps overdramatized the Battle as being more significant than history actually states – the

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[22] See also Pankhurst (1987, 23-42).

[23] Rarely mentioned is the inability of Tewodros or his soldiers to flee from Maqdela because they had been surrounded by both British and Oromo forces. Rubenson even writes of Napier's offer to the surrounding Oromo of 50,000 thalers for the Emperor's capture (Rubenson 1976, 267).

Ethiopians possibly too readily transformed an Emperor who had actually sealed his fate prior to the standoff at Maqdela into a symbol of "the spirit, virtues and aspirations of the Ethiopian people" (Rubenson 1991, 14).[24]

A detailed analysis of these interpretations of history requires research which extends beyond the scope of this paper. This chapter is a selective overview of the life and reign of Tewodros that includes those aspects of his life which are most frequently depicted in paintings of Tewodros – scenes from his youth, his violent administration of justice, the conflict at Maqdela and his suicide before the British troops. The following chapters consider how the life history of Tewodros is represented by two artists from two different generations. The events from his life that the artists illustrate in their paintings are indicative of the socio-political environment in which they were raised. Their paintings ultimately reflect their own interpretation of a popular theme.

[24] The British, who spent nine million pounds on the expedition and had only two soldiers fatally wounded, perhaps invented much of the drama to rationalize their involvement in what was little more than an "incident" (Rubenson 1991, 13). Bates (1979, 202) writes "the Battle of Magdala, as it was called in the newspapers and periodicals of the day, was generally reported as a great victory for British arms, but, as a staff officer who was writing for *Blackwood's* at the time remarked, there was in truth, 'little of stirring military or military prowess to record.' The *Times* correspondent, who tried hard to be fair and forgiving, added sadly: 'as a patriot, perhaps the less I say of this siege the better'."

Conversely, the Napier expedition, in honoring the promise only to rescue the captives and not to occupy or overthrow the areas in which they traveled, stood in bold contrast to the "scramble for African colonial possessions" (Bahru 1991, 4) of the later century and was perhaps viewed as an embarrassment to the British. Thus we encounter the need for Maqdela to be presented in more of the tone of the following century or as a critical victory of Colonial powers.

CHAPTER 4

TWO TWENTIETH-CENTURY TRADITIONAL PAINTINGS: A FORMAL ANALYSIS

Chapter three presented a brief account of Tewodros' rule and the popularity of his image in twentieth-century Ethiopian painting. This chapter compares two paintings of Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela, painted by Marcos Jembere and Jembere Hailu, so that formal continuities and differences between the two paintings can be identified. Because of their thematic consistency, these two paintings provide an excellent opportunity to examine questions of tradition and change associated with twentieth-century painting in Ethiopia.

The paintings under discussion both illustrate scenes from the royal court of Emperor Tewodros, various forms of punishment, and the Battle of Maqdela. Figure one was painted by Jembere Hailu in the mid-1980s and was purchased by the Zürich Völkerkundemuseum (no. 10032) from the well-known curio shop owner, Solomon Belatchew. Figure two was painted by Marcos Jembere having been commissioned by Raymond Silverman in 1993 for the Michigan State University Museum collection (no. 7557.14) for the exhibition, *Ethiopia: Traditions of Creativity*. Overall, the stylistic treatment in both paintings seems quite similar. Both paintings are "composite themes" that portray different periods of time and their respective images from the Emperor's life (Pankhurst 1994, 287).

As stated in earlier chapters, Marcos learned to paint from his father, Jembere.

Because of this, certain stylistic consistencies between their two paintings, such as their treatment of subject matter, composition, or use of line, are easily recognizable. For instance, both Marcos and Jembere feature Emperor Tewodros in both the upper left and upper right corners of their paintings and use a sharp crevasse to define the landscape elevations. Both also use horizontally placed figures to frame the lower borders of different subject areas.

The artistic influence of father on son is most noticeable in each artists' use of line and gesture to communicate the intensity of their subject. Almost indistinguishably, both painters use the line and direction of guns, spears, and swords to direct the viewer's eye toward different areas within their paintings. Both also identify the particular figures within the compositions and the action in which each participates by differentiating each figures' line of vision or the angle of the tilt of their head. An example of this can be seen in the sweeping diagonals in the soldiers' gestures in the lower right corner of Jembere's painting or those soldiers that Marcos has depicted scaling the hillside on the ladder, whose eyes progressively direct the viewer to the immediate action of the scene at the peak of the plateau.

Marcos uses the same black contour lines as his father to delineate the form of the figures in both paintings. Volume and movement are communicated in an identical fashion with the use of strong black drapery lines that parallel the movement of the figure and accentuate individual actions. Individual figures are somewhat indiscriminately differentiated by skin color in both paintings, however both exhibit consistent representations of the Emperor and the British army with lighter colored skin.

While it may be difficult to distinguish the paintings of Marcos from those of his

father, the two paintings which feature the Tewodros themes do reflect certain stylistic distinctions. Marcos has created a more compartmentalized and rigorously structured composition than his father. The intent of Marcos to delineate between various scenes is obvious in the decorative borders he uses to separate each scene. Depth of space appears to be a primary concern. Unlike his father, Marcos uses depth-building techniques to construct the environment for each subject area. Tree lines are used to create depth within each punishment scene and simple overlapping is used to create the expansive mountain bluffs between which soldiers march in the central panel.

Jembere relies upon the individual figures themselves to fill the space and create depth, favoring social, not linear, perspective. He includes fewer figures, typically paints each in a larger size, and stresses the interaction between individual figures through line and gesture. As a result, Jembere creates a more intimate view to each thematic grouping. This is made apparent by comparing the interior scenes at the upper left corner of both paintings.

The difference in the painting styles of Jembere and Marcos is subtle. Jembere's influence is readily noted in the figures that Marcos paints. But the apparent concern of Marcos for formal elements, such as perspective and compositional arrangement, presents interesting questions. Can these differences be attributed to the painting education each has received? Did Jembere's own experience in the military effect his expressiveness when painting historic battle scenes? Or does his style reflect the formal education he received as a painter in the Orthodox church? Has the artistic training that Marcos received in primary and secondary school overshadowed that which he received from his father at home? Before questions of influence, innovation, and individual style can be

discussed, the iconography used by Marcos and Jembere must first be examined. Observing both artist's stylistic and iconographic treatment of the same theme, true similarities and differences between the two paintings can be identified.

Figure 1 - Qangeta Jembere Hailu, *Emperor Tewodros' Law Court and The Battle of Maqdala*, ca. 1986. Museum für Völkerkunde der Universität Zürich (20032)

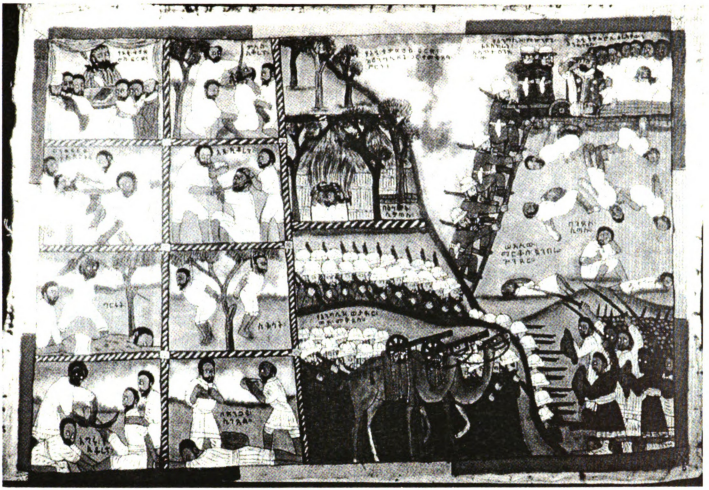

Figure 2 - Marcos Jembere, *The Judgement of Emperor Tewodros*, 1993. Michigan State University Museum (7557.14)

Figure 3 - Bahaylu Gabra Maryam, *Bataille de Magdala*, ca. 1926. Ethnologische Museum Geneva (no number)

Figure 4 - Artist unknown, *The Battle of Adwa*, ca. 1909. Smithsonian Institution (51876)

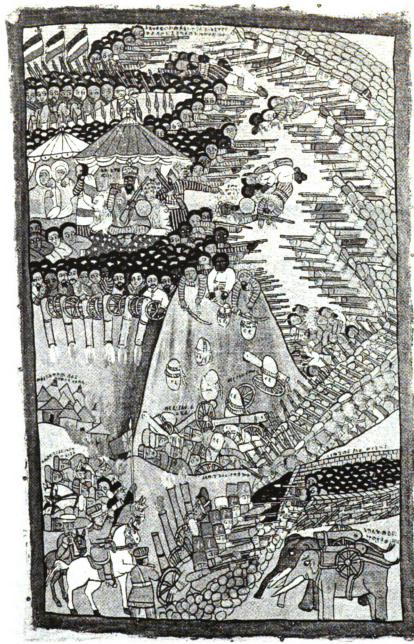

Figure 5 - Balatschaw Yimer, *The Battle of Maqdala*, ca. 1930.
Museum für Völkerkunde der Universität Zürich (12207)

Figure 6 - Artist unknown, *The Battle of Magdala*, ca. 1935. Collection of Geoffrey Harmsworth

Figure 7 - Artist unknown, *The Tribunal of Emperor Tewodros II 1855-1868*, ca. 1930.
Museum für Völkerkunde der Universität Zürich (16841)

Figure 8 - Artist unknown, *The Suicide of Emperor Tewodros (1855-1868)*, before 1966. Collection of Dr. Wolfgang Till

Figure 9 - Berhanu Yimenu, *Battle of Maqdala*, ca. 1990. Michigan State University Museum (7359.6)

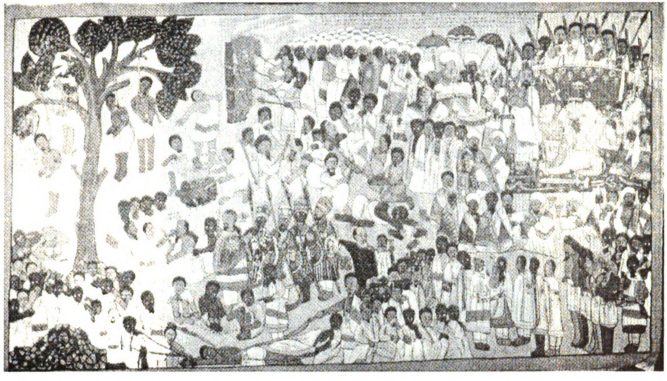

Figure 10 - Artist Unknown, *The Judgement of Emperor Tewodros*. Michigan State University Museum (L202.11)

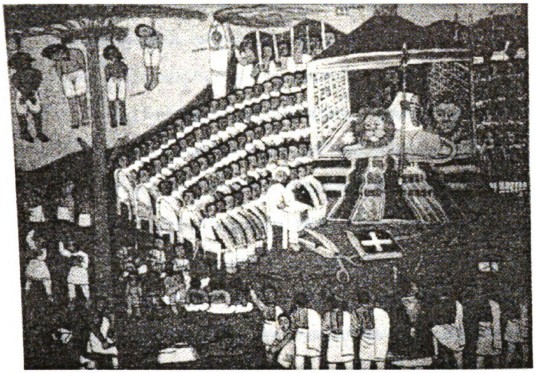

Figure 11 - Artist Unknown, *The Tribunal of Emperor Tewodros.* Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS: ICONOGRAPHY & INSCRIPTIONS

Traditional paintings that represent the Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela date to the early decades of the twentieth-century such as figure 3.[25] These paintings closely emulate earlier interpretations (figure 4) of the Battle of Adwa, a theme that had been established around the turn of the century.[26] New, independent themes, such as scenes in figures 5 and 6 of the assault of the Maqdela *amba* (or mountain), and portraits of Tewodros, surfaced later in the 1930s and 1940s. Following the liberation of Ethiopia from Italian occupation in 1941, new subjects and themes related to Tewodros and his life emerged. In addition to the prevalent Maqdela theme, Tewodros is presented in scenes of open-air courts and the issuing of punishments (figure 7), suicide paintings (figure 8), and festive, royal banquet scenes. Composite themes featuring separate sections or subject areas have been noted only recently in traditional paintings of the last twenty to twenty-five years, such as the two paintings under discussion or the painting by Berhanu Yimenu (figure 9).

The iconography used to depict Tewodros in paintings is easily identified but, like that used to represent the Battle of Adwa, much remains to be examined in detail. Similarly, a detailed historical analysis of such images has yet to be undertaken. In this chapter, I compare the subject matter and inscriptions used by Jembere and Marcos to

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[25] I wish to thank Professor Richard Pankhurst for his valuable comments regarding this subject. This chapter references information presented in his 1994 paper, "Emperor Tewodros II and the Battle of Maqdela (1868) as Depicted in Ethiopian Popular Art."

represent the popular "Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela" theme, and demonstrate that not only the subject matter used by both painters, but the inscriptions that are featured with the various scenes, reflect a distinct interpretation by each artist.

The two paintings present similar compositional groupings. Three particular thematic areas are found in both paintings: the interior view of Tewodros seated in his court, various scenes of punishment, and the troops at Maqdela and the suicide of Tewodros just before the British siege. Inscriptions are included in each of these sections.

Both artists represent the Emperor seated in his court in the upper left corner of the painting. The captions, figures, and material culture included in this area of each recall those found in traditional paintings (figures 7, 10, 11) that depict the Emperor at his court of justice. Both painters identify Tewodros with his signature beard, coiffure, and spear, and use the gathered folds of curtains to frame the scene. Differences are noted, however.

Jembere introduces this scene with the caption, "Emperor Tewodros' Law Court" and using social perspective, emphasizes the importance of the two central figures through their size. Tewodros is uncharacteristically represented in profile. The throne-like structure upon which he is seated with the perched lions at his feet contribute to the grandeur of the setting and are nearly identical to those used to depict Tewodros in figure 10. The physical proportion of the columnar figure to the right rivals that of the Emperor and suggests that he is of comparable political importance (Pankhurst 1994, 287). The book which he presents before Tewodros includes the caption, "*Fetha Nagast*" and identifies this figure as "a distinguished priest who, according to tradition, reads from the

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[26] The Battle of Adwa theme is considered to be one of the oldest in traditional painting, typically recognized as the first "traditional painting theme." See Pankhurst (1966, 5-80;1986, 78-103).

Fetha Nagast before the *Gebbi* (palace) in order to present the spiritual, religious and also the worldly law in the form of a report" (Schöller and Girma 1985, 166) or, because of the *temtem* he wears, the Abuna Salama.[27]

Marcos introduces this panel with the caption "the judgement of Emperor Tewodros" and represents this subject in a different way than his father. The signature beard, coiffure, and spear, easily identify Tewodros, but instead of using relative proportion to communicate Tewodros' importance, he uses the table top to physically distinguish the Emperor from the other figures. Despite the blue robe used to signify his regal status, he is not as readily identified as in Jembere's rendering. The book, as in Jembere's painting, bridges the interaction between figures and serves as a focal point in the scene. Marcos does not, however, literally label the book "*Fetha Nagast,*" but suggests this fact by including a cross on the cover. Apparently representing the same theme as his father, but relying more on subtle iconography, Marcos depicts one of the figures seated at the opposite side of the table wearing a *temtem*, suggesting that this is the Abuna Salama. Another figure, with a tied neckerchief, is recognizable as one of the distinguished priests who reads the law to the court, as noted in earlier representations of this subject.

The second subject area found in both paintings is comprised of various panels that illustrate the assignment of punishments. Though not a theme strictly reserved for representations of the Emperor Tewodros, open-air court and punishment themes are typically associated with the reign of Tewodros. This connection may have been

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[27] According to Prouty and Rosenfeld (1981, 68) the *Fetha Nagast* or "Laws of the Kings," was produced in the 13th century as a compilation of Old and New Testament sources. Comprised of over 50 chapters that address spiritual and temporal conduct, the work includes definitions of crimes and punishments, rules for

established through the historic judicial reforms that were implemented during Tewodros' reign, commonly referred to as his "new system of justice".[28] Punishment acts represented in both paintings by Marcos and Jembere pattern those depicted in earlier works (figures 7, 10, 11) but variations can be noted in both interpretations.

Despite rendering those acts of punishment that are frequently found in open-air court scenes, such as flogging, hanging, and beating, Jembere has reinterpreted some minor details. The hanging scene, which includes the caption "hanging," does not feature a mourning female figure, almost always found in similar scenes, such as in figures 10 and 11. The scene in which a bloodied figure is strewn across the ground, which contains the caption "flogging," features the unique representation of a figure who points administratively at the victim. Jembere abbreviates the iconography in this area and simply communicates the authority of the standing figure through his pointing gesture and the book clenched to his chest. Jembere neglects to include the more typical elements such as an identifying costume or position to communicate that this figure is a *Ligaba* (court supervisor) or a priest, often shown reading from the *Fetha Nagast* in open-air court and punishment scenes (Pankhurst 1994, 289).

Jembere's most innovative interpretation of the punishment theme, however, is found in the panel that includes the captions "Dejazmach" and "*koso*" and shows two figures forcing the captive to drink from a cup. Because of the captions, the captive can be clearly identified as Wendyerad, the rival figure from the early historical accounts of

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marriage, property and its inheritance. For a brief explanation of the significance of the *temtem* see Chapter 3, 30.

[28] Scenes of open-air courts and punishments include other famous Ethiopian rulers, such as Emperor Haile Selassie (Schöller and Girma 1985, 168-171). Plowden (1868, 150), however, credits Tewodros as having initiated the process. See also Chapter 3, 28-29.

Tewodros' life, and the cup and *ensero* (or clay jug) as containing *koso*-infused liquid.[29] According to chronicles that were written during this period of Tewodros' life, Wondyerad was forced to drink an entire horn of *koso* before Kasa's *shifta* army because he had vowed to "bring in the son of the *koso*-vendor alive."[30] In this section of the painting, Jembere has demonstrated his characteristic "reinterpretation of traditional themes" (Pankhurst 1994, 287) by presenting a new subject, or the unique form of punishment and one particularly relevant to the historical theme of the painting itself, to an established theme, or scenes of open-air court and punishments.

In contrast to his father, Marcos relies upon those more conventional acts of punishment used in earlier open-air court and punishment scenes to communicate the actions of this particular section within the painting. The punishments that Marcos presents, captioned in the left column as "flogging," and "amputation of the leg," and in the right column as "cutting of the tongue," "amputation of the arm," "hanging," and "stoned to death," are invariably used to communicate Tewodros' administration of justice, with the exception that Marcos has not included the additional burning at the stake subject, as depicted in previous examples (figures 7, 10, 11).

The influence of his father's iconographic conventions are detected, however, in two different ways. He has first included the reinterpreted punishment scene of his father's, captioned "Wendyerad being forced to gulp the bitter liquid of *koso*." And has also used the similar physical setting and additional accoutrements, such as the *ensero*, to suggest the setting of the scene. This melding by Marcos of the conventional subjects of

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[29] Rubenson (1966, 37) refers to Wendyerad's official office as that of *Qenjazmach*. This suggests a slightly less elevated status than the title of *Dejazmach*, as Jembere has written.

[30] See Chapter 3 for a detailed account of this story. See also Rubenson (1966, 37), especially footnote eight for the origin of this tradition.

earlier representations of this theme and the newer, reinterpreted iconography of his father, is also noted in the following section of the painting.

This final subject area of the paintings, that which represents the March of Tewodros and his troops to Maqdela followed by his suicide before the British, and the relationship of the captions and the subject matter that both artists have selected to use in these areas, underscores their distinct expressions.

Jembere's caption, featured directly above the equestrian figure in the lower left corner of the painting, reads, "Emperor Tewodros marches against Maqdela" and that placed above the cannon states, "cannon called Tewodros, was pushed to Maqdela." Both texts allude to the artist's interpretation of the imagery he presents. The equestrian figure of Tewodros, with his signature coiffure, elaborately dressed horse, and spear in-hand, surrounded by those remaining followers, armed with spears, indicates they are in fact marching to conflict. Jembere's inclusion of the oversized blue cannon being pushed by two soldiers specifically references the acclaimed super-mortar named "Tewodros" which, "was dragged in 1867 all the way up to the Maqdela massif at considerable sacrifice" (Bahru 1991, 34). Indeed, the subject matter and details of this area refer to Tewodros' march with his troops to Maqdela prior to the actual battle.

Like the captions Jembere has used in this area, the subject matter – Tewodros armed on horseback, surrounded by armed soldiers who work to advance the oversized cannon – provides immediate historical reference to the events leading up to The Battle or Tewodros' march to the Maqdela *amba*. Recalling earlier paintings that represent The Battle and the assault of the *amba*, such as figures 5 and 6, the vertically stacked subject grouping to the right of the crevasse can be identified as two separate or successive

events – i.e., a central conflict in the Battle and Tewodros' suicide at Maqdela.

In this area, Jembere has again included only those symbols and captions that communicate the most identifiable and dramatic aspects of the assault of the *amba* and the suicide. Drawing upon conventional iconographic elements, Jembere represents Tewodros' soldiers in white, wielding blood-covered spears, and facing the firing guns of the darkly uniformed British soldiers. The groups are identified with the label "Ethiopian army" on the left, and "English army" at the right. The figure positioned at the lower right border of this area strongly resembles those images of Tewodros in the upper and lower left sections of the painting. He is, however, rendered with a slightly different coiffure and in a location not typically used for representations of Tewodros. His importance is conveyed through relative size and his position among the stack of bodies. This is echoed in the caption that borders his face and reads "Fitawrari Gabreye fell", identifying this particular scene as one representing the Battle of Aroge (where Gabreye was slain) that occurred on April 10, 1868, or roughly two days before the actual Battle of Maqdela.[31]

The final event, the suicide of Emperor Tewodros, is then depicted in the upper right corner area of the painting. Again, Jembere has presented the most recognizable symbols of this particular event – the elevated flat *amba*, the brick wall, and the cannon, in addition to the oversized, bloodied figure, and mourning onlookers. The captions, "Lord Napier, the Englishman," "death of the Emperor Tewodros," and "Alemayehu," and subjects used, quickly identify the scene and its key figures. Lord Napier supported by a few of his soldiers is represented in a dark, British uniform. Tewodros is easily

recognized through his relative proportion, and in a supine position, deceased. The relatively diminutive proportion of the young man who is dressed in white who gestures dramatically is presumed to be Tewodros' mourning son, Alemayehu. Dressed in a black robe, Teruwarq, the wife of Tewodros, mourns beside Alemayehu, above the fallen Emperor's body.[32]

Jembere's new, subtle interpretations to these standard subjects can be seen, however. Rather than emulate the historically accurate, older representations of Tewodros' suicide in which the Emperor sits in his tent, off in the distance, and kills himself by placing the revolver in his mouth (figure 6), Jembere has shown Tewodros in a unique position, already lying down rather than standing, with the revolver pointed at his temple.[33] This introduced both his personal idea of the scene and those of contemporary works. The anachronistic use of the Ethiopian flag, which was not introduced until the early years of the twentieth-century, wrapped around the torso of Tewodros, also demonstrates Jembere's innovative treatment of the theme, reflecting more the time period in which Jembere lived rather than that of the Emperor's suicide.[34]

One final observation related to the Maqdela scene reflects yet another instance of Jembere's personal expression of the subject matter. Falling from the face of the plateau are five figures, presumed to be Ethiopian because of their white clothes. Bound and bloody, they are obviously adversaries of the Emperor. Their identity is not disclosed in

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[31] The placement of the slain Gabreye at the front line recalls representations of the Battle of Adwa, in which Emperor Menelik's famed warrior, Fitawrari Gabeyehu, is represented slain, in the same position (i.e., at the front line).

[32] This is an literal representation of the historical account in which Alemayehu and Teruwarq are present when the British stormed the plateau.

[33] According to Henry Stanley, a special correspondent for the New York Herald who accompanied the British expedition and reported the Maqdela campaign, the revolver was inscribed, "Presented by Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, to Theodorus, Emperor of Abyssinia, as a slight token of her gratitude for his kindness to her servant Plowden, 1854" (1874, 449).

either of the captions which read "prisoners thrown down from Maqdela *amba*" and "avalanche of stones." Insight into the possible identities of these figures is offered in an account written by one of Tewodros' European prisoners at Maqdela, Henry Blanc. In providing an account of the mass executions which Tewodros ordered on April 9, just three days before the Battle, Blanc (1970, 389) describes this particular scene in Jembere's painting:

> As every prisoner was brought out he (Tewodros) inquired his name, his country, and his crime. The greater part were found guilty, hurled over the precipice, and shot below by musketeers sent there to despatch (sic) any one who still showed signs of animation, as many had escaped with life from the awful fall. Some 307 were put to death, and 91 were reserved for another day. These last, strange to say were all chiefs of note; many of whom had fought against the Emperor, and all, he knew, were his deadly enemies.

Given the increasingly violent measures that Tewodros exercised in his final years to suppress rebellions and desertions, the exact identity of these prisoners is unknown. The subject itself is found only in recent traditional themes, such as in the painting by Berhanu Yimenu that dates to the 1980s (figure 9). The boulders which drop from the plateau follow earlier, established interpretations of the subject. The inclusion of the prisoners (rather than the soldiers as in figure 9) who fall from the *amba* alongside the boulders, is unique.

In this section of the painting, Jembere's choice of subjects and their accompanying captions directly recount the most important historical figures or elements of the composite theme. In the instance of the Battle of Maqdela, he chooses the most significant stages to summarize the scene: the march, the Battle of Aroge, and the Emperor's execution of his Ethiopian enemies, followed by his suicide before the British.

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[34] See Chojnacki (1963, 60-61).

Jembere's use of captions echo this iconographic approach by succinctly identifying the scene.

The rendering of this scene in Marcos' painting reveals a different interpretation. A number of the same iconographic elements used by Jembere are noted but, as in the previous discussions concerning his treatment of specific themes, Marcos depends less on the immediate social perspective and conventional symbols, such as Fitawrari Gabreye or the cannon, to draw attention to the most dramatic aspects of the subject. He instead relies upon stylistic elements, such as perspective, to aid the viewer in distinguishing one event from another, or line, to direct the viewer through the various subject areas and action taking place within each.

Examining the different elements in this part of the painting, it is difficult to determine whether or not events occur successively or simultaneously. At the lower left corner, a group of soldiers, easily identified as British because of their pith helmets, dark uniforms and pale complexions, are separated from the surrounding action by a dark contour line. In separating the soldiers from the surrounding activities with the contour line, and positioning them in the immediate foreground, Marcos communicates that these troops are marching at a lower elevation, and thus not directly engaged in an actual battle. The caption corroborates this in stating "The British soldiers heading to Maqdela."

To the right and beyond this framing contour line, a battle scene features the British soldiers on the left and the Ethiopian soldiers on the right. The standard identifying element in the Aroge battle scene, Fitawrari Gabreye, is not included. Missing is Jembere's sense of drama, such as the blood dripping from the swords or smoke discharging from the rifles. The subtle contour line seen behind the Ethiopian troops, and

the positioning of the British troops marching down toward to a lower elevation at the right, suggest that the conflict depicted could in fact be the Battle of Aroge at the foot of the Maqdela *amba*. Yet, without a caption or specific symbols, this scene simply provides a view of a battle.

More of Jembere's influence can be noted in the iconography that Marcos employs to render the execution of prisoners, suicide of Tewodros, and the *amba* assault. The signature revolver and braided coiffure immediately identify the standing figure as Tewodros. Unlike his father's use of social perspective, Marcos accentuates the Emperor's importance by depicting him wearing an ornate, red robe. The symbolic blue cannon is placed in a historically accurate position, at the edge of the plateau, but Marcos renders it in a more naturalistic proportion and again, relies less upon its size to identify the scene.

Following earlier representations, such as figures 3 and 5, and that of his father's, Marcos has included the diminutive figure of Alemayehu, the dramatically gesturing Teruwarq, and other bereaved supporters. They stand above the crowned figure of Tewodros, dressed in a blue robe, laid horizontally at their feet. The contrasting images of Tewodros, alive and dead, side by side, is an iconographic component not encountered in other examples studied by the author.

Specifically, Marcos has emulated the crown and royal attire featured in those scenes (e.g., figures 3 and 5) in which Tewodros is depicted committing suicide alone, separated from the chaos, aiming the revolver at his temple yet portrays the deceased monarch dressed in the attire of someone who is still Emperor, wearing a crown and blue robe. Lacking are the dramatic red lines of blood upon Tewodros' face, as in his father's

image of the Emperor, or the political icon of the Ethiopian flag. Marcos has appropriated those identifying symbols featured in earlier interpretations of Tewodros' suicide and combined them with a rendering similar to his father's of the Emperor's dead body at the feet of his family and supporters.

Marcos has also offered visual clues in his portrayal of Tewodros in the act of suicide before the British officers. Depicting the two officers wearing different hats than each of the soldiers who climb the ladder, he suggests that this is Lord Napier and perhaps a subordinate British officer. The caption above confirms this stating, "British officers saluting the corps." However, Marcos has presented another interpretation of the event, for according to various accounts, Napier and his troops arrived shortly after the suicide of Tewodros, they did not, as Marcos has communicated, actually witness the event as it took place.[35] This specific interpretation echoes images of Tewodros' suicide dating to the later part of the twentieth-century such as figure 8, rather than earlier representations in which he is seated alone in his tent.

Like Jembere, Marcos has depicted a number of presumably Ethiopian prisoners falling from the face of the *amba*. Careful attention has been given to the gestures of each as they descend through the air. He stresses the impact of their descent by emphasizing facial expressions and the bloodied areas on their bodies. The caption, "thrown into the valley" suggests that the rendering of this subject offers a more literal interpretation than his father's – the events described in Blanc's message (1970, 389) where the survivors of the fall were "shot below by musketeers sent there to dispatch any one who showed signs

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[35] Stanley (1867, 480) includes reference to such ladders in his account of the *amba* assault: ". . . an entrance was forced by means of the ladders near the gate, and by the leading men of the 33rd, who scaled a rock and turned the defences of the gateway. The enemy were driven to the second barricade, and when that was carried all resistance ceased . . . Close to the second gateway lay the body of Tewodros."

of animation." This area demonstrates Marcos' concern with the more formal qualities of this subject, such as the gestures of the prisoners who fall through the air, or the rendering of the plateau base, and his selection of subjects to represent the theme.

The burning structures at the left of the composition recall a theme found in earlier Maqdela renderings, such as figure 5. Marcos has added an additional element however, by placing figures inside the blazing structures. This caption, which reads, "dying ablaze," provides no further information regarding the setting or the subject. Situated in the distant Maqdela landscape, it may represent one of two different themes. These structures could be the ancillary huts atop the Maqdela mount that were burned because of their proximity to the targeted plateau. Such a representation is quite probable, as a similar scene is reported by Myatt (1970, 161):

> The guns opened fire at about 15.00 and continued for an hour. The ranges were rather long for accurate shooting but the top of the Maqdala was about three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile wide so that it was a difficult target to miss completely and shells were soon bursting among the hundreds of mat-huts covering the *amba*.

Yet, Marcos has positioned this scene opposite the *amba*, removed from the general activities. Considering his father's rendering of different scenes that occurred at Maqdela on different days, it is also possible that this is a brief reference to the extreme violence of Tewodros in the final months just before the Battle. Marcus (1997, 70) defines this period as one "characterized by burning, looting, killing and more mass executions." Again, without the immediately recognizable symbols or captions such as those that his father employs, it is difficult to identify the exact event.

The black and yellow striped band framing all but one side of the scene suggests

that this may in fact be a subject Marcos wished not to directly relate to the Maqdela theme. Studying the same colored band that surrounds other sections of the painting, this does seem quite possible. Or, he may have included this scene as a reference to a specific event that occurred many months before the Battle of Maqdela, such as during the later part of 1867, when Tewodros and his remaining followers burnt Debre Tabor, looted weapons, and "blasted a road to Maqdala" (Rubenson, 1966, 82).

Overall, this area of the composition in both paintings reflects that the iconography and captions used by both artists to communicate the many themes about the life of Tewodros are different. Jembere's painting presents an immediate, abridged, historical perspective. His captions identify the most important figures and subjects. Little, if any, additional imagery is included as a background or setting. Marcos presents a more literal perspective. He uses images and historical details that provide less identification and more description. Captions included in his painting do not immediately identify lesser known subjects, nor do the iconographic details. Given these differences and others that occur in other areas of the compositions, the question arises as to how these iconographic variations and a different use of captions, combined with those individual stylistic characteristics discussed in chapter four, ultimately reflect the individual life history and training of both artists?

CONCLUSION

THEME & VARIATION: LIFE & ART

Scholars have, until recently, discounted the significance of interpreting the life and work of the individual artist in twentieth-century Ethiopian traditional painting. Because their paintings are mostly produced for tourists and repeatedly feature popular themes and subjects, little, if any, consideration has been given to the individual artist's relationship to the painting, its subject, or audience. This paper has demonstrated that despite the popularity of certain themes, such as the Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela, traditional paintings reflect differences in style and iconography. Such differences are tied to the life experiences and histories of the individual artist, their patrons or markets, and the socio-cultural environment in which they live.

The stylistic and thematic inconsistencies in the work of Jembere and Marcos discussed in this paper reveal differences in lives of father and son. Jembere's painting reflects both stylistic and iconographic conventions of the Orthodox church. His overtly didactic interpretation of the Emperor Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela reveals his previous experiences as a church painter. As in mural paintings, the importance of the key historical figures is clearly stated both visually, through the use of social perspective, line, and gesture, and in text, through the use of captions. Overall, the various subject areas in his compositions feature fewer figures and lack added architectural details or depth-building features within the landscape, and consequently, seem more intimate and focused on the event, very much like the mural paintings found in Ethiopian Orthodox

churches.

The artistic training Marcos received from his father, and the academic instruction he received in school, are evident in his representation of Tewodros and Maqdela. His rendering of figures, in addition to his use of decorative borders and colors, reflect the influence of the Orthodox painting traditions conveyed through his father's instruction. His concern for formal, academic elements is recognized in his use of simple, depth-building techniques and topographical features to establish an environment or setting to each subject area. By using linear perspective, and other means for creating an illusion of depth in the various subject areas in his compositions, such as simple overlapping or tree lines, he reveals the formal instruction he received in school. Captions included in his painting serve as narratives or title-like phrases to each subject area and differ in effect when compared to those used by his father.

The individual life histories and experiences of the two painters become increasingly more important as the iconographic inconsistencies between the two paintings are noted. Both Jembere and Marcos draw upon the conventional iconographic elements of established Tewodros themes, such as the scenes of punishment or *amba* assault, but have also, in their own way, developed new interpretations of the subjects. Jembere, for example, elects to represent Tewodros with the Abuna Salama, whereas Marcos presents Tewodros seated at a table with a number of both religious and non-religious advisors. Jembere includes the typical scenes of punishment to convey Tewodros' system of justice, but reinterprets each theme by adding precise historical detail, as in the use of Wendyerad being forced to drink *koso*. Marcos demonstrates the influence of both established views of punishment scenes and the iconographic

innovations of his father, such as the *koso*-drinking scene, but still asserts his own style by framing each punishment scene with a decorative border, and using tree lines and shrubbery to create an individual setting for each activity. Perhaps the most interesting expression of each artist's individuality is seen in their portrayal of the British siege of Maqdela and the Emperor's suicide.

Jembere and Marcos repeat the easily recognizable elements of the Maqdela suicide theme. The British officers saluting the Emperor and the mourning figures of Alemayehu and Teruwarq directly reference conventional imagery used for the theme. Yet, Jembere presents an extraordinary view of the subject by representing Tewodros lying horizontally on the ground, pointing the revolver at his temple (rather than in his mouth), wrapped anachronistically in the Ethiopian flag. Prisoners, not just boulders, tumble from the Maqdela mount.

Marcos also renders a distinct impression of the scene. He, too, includes the conventional, identifying elements of the suicide theme, but creates a new impression of the event by combining the familiar, standing figure of Tewodros, dressed in regal attire, aiming the revolver at his temple, using his father's convention of depicting the Emperor, lying on his back, stretched horizontally at the feet of mourning onlookers. Asserting his "own style," he depicts the Emperor as deceased but still wearing a crown rather than wrapped in the Ethiopian flag.

If such stylistic differences exist due to differences in artistic training, what then can be said about the different iconography that both artists have used in their paintings of Tewodros and the Battle of Maqdela? As one of the most popular historical themes in Ethiopia, the demise of Emperor Tewodros at the Battle of Maqdela and his system of

justice provide a particularly interesting opportunity for the question to be explored of how the life experiences and the socio-cultural environment in which the artist lives effects their interpretation of a subject as important as this one.

Jembere's painting features fewer figures, presents a more immediate view of the action, and includes identifying historical captions. Are his paintings more graphic due to his life experiences as a soldier and the personal losses he experienced as a result of political conflict? Was he personally identifying with Tewodros' patriotism when he painted the Emperor wrapped in the Ethiopian flag, or did this have more to do with the patron to whom or market in which he would sell the painting, or merely his interest in creating a new interpretation of a popular theme? Has he included figures such as Fitawrari Gabreye or Abuna Salama because of his admiration and identification with the patriotism of Gabreye's sacrifice or the supreme authority of the Abuna Salama as a representative of the Orthodox church? Why has he portrayed Tewodros in profile – a pictorial convention usually used to depict evil or bad characters in a painting?

Does Marcos offer a stronger narrative statement in his painting than his father due to the modern, public education he received? Did he learn to present a more descriptive interpretation rather than the more immediate, didactic-styled imagery that we see in his father's paintings? Did the long term influence of the *Derg* somehow effect the openness or immediacy of the images he selects when presenting a highly political topic, such as Tewodros and his system of justice? Are his paintings more concerned with formal elements and less with the expressive and dramatic, due to personal preference or do they simply reflect the preferences of the market or patrons who purchase them?

Without additional information from the two painters or further research on the

history of twentieth-century traditional painting, it is difficult to determine the exact impetus for the stylistic and iconographic innovations identified in these two paintings. Ideally, a detailed examination and comparison of various paintings portraying different themes would provide a stronger basis for conclusions about the individual interpretations and expressions in the works of Jembere and Marcos. However, in demonstrating the significant differences that do exist in the subject matter and style in just two of their works portraying a common theme, this paper has refuted the longstanding belief that paintings of this genre are mass produced, with little individual creativity.

If noticeable differences in style and iconography exist between just two paintings of the same subject painted by father and son, what is to be discovered upon studying two that represent the same subject painted by two artists with radically different artistic backgrounds, life experiences, or patrons? Additionally, what can be learned in analyzing the style and subject matter used to portray specific themes over time? Studying specific time periods in the twentieth-century when certain themes in traditional painting were more popular than others might offer insights into the political, social, and economic climate in which the individual artist lived. It may also tell us something about the influence or role individual patrons played in the popularity of certain themes, painting styles, and the genre as a whole.

Over the last 100 years, the individual traditional painter, until recently, has been viewed as an anonymous producer of tourist art. The emergence of individual traditional painters in twentieth-century Ethiopia has yet to be examined. Once biographies of individual traditional painters are established, thematic studies concerning the popularity

or innovations in iconography might be developed. The history of the consumers or destinations of traditional paintings might also be studied.

Other questions emerge. In terms of foreign patrons or markets, has the imagery of particular traditional themes influenced or effected the perceptions foreigners maintain of Ethiopia? For instance, did the popularity of certain militaristic themes fuel Western visitors' impression of Ethiopia as a "violent society." If so, did this consequently effect the manner in which Ethiopia has been depicted in Western media, such as maps, comics, or newspapers and magazines? In terms of domestic patrons, what new genres of painting have developed in Ethiopia since the rise in popularity of twentieth-century traditional painting? What stylistic or iconographic influence has traditional painting exerted over these new genres?

As valid expressions of life and society in Ethiopia, additional inquiries into the styles and influences of individual artists not only lead to new interpretations of the twentieth-century traditional painting, but to the history of Ethiopia and its people.

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