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The Art of Politics: Portraits of Ethiopian Emperors Throughout History

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The Art of Politics

Portraits of Ethiopian Emperors Throughout History

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Abstract

This study seeks to uncover the significance of painted portraits of Ethiopian emperors within the Ethiopian culture. By evaluating artworks throughout Ethiopian history and interviewing the art community and scholars, the author has attempted to draw a relationship between power, religion and art. In doing so, this study reveals how emperors have historically legitimized their power within the context of religious imagery. It follows this pattern until the decline of the monarchy and the rise of realism in the twentieth century. This transition highlights the tension between tradition and modernity as well as the ideological changes which caused them.

ISP Topic Codes: 103 (Art History), 517 (Regional Studies: Africa), 403 (Religion)

Introduction: Sociology of Art

The study of art through a sociological lens has been a documented field of academia dating back to the nineteenth century. Situating individual works within the wider framework of contemporary institutions, customs, mores and roles provides insight into the value-orientation of viewers as well as those within the art (Deinhart 1975). Yonas Admassu, Director of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum, wrote, "Art does not discover, it constitutes; and the relation of what it constitutes to the real, while certainly complex, is not one of verification." This excerpt describes how art is more than a surface representation of contemporary culture and can be used to comment on social institutions that run deeper than the layers of paint. History is composed of long bands of unchanging social and political culture, punctuated by periods of upheaval and reorientation. Art works to document both of these aspects and can be used in a methodological study revealing political posturing through imperial images (Smith 1997).

Framework and Literature

Hans Himmelheber and Eberhard Fischer were among the first intellectuals to question and document the structuring of African art study. After extensive and diverse fieldwork studying African facial representations in different mediums, both researchers concluded that the western framework for art evaluation lacked the proper cultural context to study African Art. Western culture emphasizes individual identity, which is reflected in artistic features like physiognomic likeness and conveyance of personality through facial expression. Contrarily, African culture emphasizes social identity, which is represented through image identification by context and aesthetic generalization (Borgatti 1990). Original contextualizing is necessary for

proper analysis of non-western art. An Ethiopian perspective from which to approach imperial art history is the preferred foundation of this project.

Historian Richard Pankhurst's article "Some Notes for a History of Ethiopian Secular Art", published in the Ethiopian Observer in 1966, contains the most thorough history of Ethiopia royal portraits available. Appearing first within Orthodox Christian manuscripts and murals, Emperors were abstractly pictured within biblical stories and alongside saints. It was not until the Gonder period that church art and imperial representations were separated with the rise of secular art. The development of realist portraits of Ethiopian emperors did not take form until the early twentieth century, with the development of photography and the influence of Western art. Despite this resent timeframe, the iconography within contemporary portraits echoes that of the past (Pankhurst 1966). This article documents the history of portraits but allows for further analysis regarding how art and politics weighed upon each other throughout history. The examination of this relationship involves accounting for symbolism, evolution and response of/to the art. The art pieces in this paper are looked at holistically as the erection of social edifice, which has generated the values underlying Ethiopian history.

Methodology

This study is based on the primary analysis of art pieces and interviews with scholars specializing in Ethiopian history. In order to properly contextualize the works of art, I studied Ethiopian art tradition at length within the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library. Artists, movements, methods and perceived symbolism were studied to assist in my analysis of collected works. Next, I chose the works in this paper based on referrals from scholars and art texts which documented the location or enclosed particular pieces. I spent days visiting the University of

Addis Ababa, hospitals, churches (both Orthodox Christian and Rastafarian), shops, museums and galleries for the purpose of gathering resources and speaking to people who are surrounded by the art and could shed light on its significance. With this mission, I was able to interview an artist, nurse, gallery owner and multiple history scholars. Most interviews were informal with just a brief questionnaire prepared in advance in order to initiate a less structured dialogue regarding perceptions of art and past emperors.

Obstacles to my research included logistical hindrances and the language barrier. Pertaining to logistics, I was constantly subject to unplanned events like closed galleries or the travel of possible interviewees. In addition, time constraints prohibited me from exploring art resources outside of Addis Ababa as well as following further leads deeper into the field. With additional time, I would have liked to delve further into the art community by including more artists, teachers and private collectors. Also, I would have distributed a general questionnaire to a wide sample of citizens in order to get a sense of how Ethiopians view past leaders and value artistic traditions. The language barrier prevented a nuanced understanding during interviews which would have shed more insight into my work. This led to basic responses to my questions by the interviewees who answered with a limited English vocabulary or responded in Amharic with my basic understanding.

Ancient Ethiopian Portraiture: Aksumite Coinage

The first royal portraits were issued in the form of currency beginning in the third century A.D. under King Endubis. Stuart Munro-Hay, a prolific writer on Aksumite coinage wrote, “The symbolism of the coinage was of crucial importance in a world where such mobile items formed an excellent medium for propaganda” (Heldman 1993). The propaganda the author discusses

surrounds the divine affiliation of the king. Prior to Ethiopia's conversion to Christianity, coins pictured the disc and crescent and were inscribed with "Son of Mahrem", a deity of import. Around 330 A.D. King Ezana, the first Christian king, changed the previous symbols to a cross, pictured in the same spot above the head of the sovereign. Inscriptions following Ezana's rule read "By the grace of God" or similarly religious sentiments like, "MHDYS, by this cross he will conquer". The king's bust was always donned in fringed robes, bejeweled and holding a sword, spear, or in Christian times, a hand cross. Coins throughout the Aksumite Era, until it's downfall in seventh century, pictured the king on both sides to emphasize the importance of the royal position in the state (Heldman 1993). The depictions of the kings, with the exception of few, were always full-faced. This tradition became affiliated throughout time with the representation of "good" used to differentiate against the profiled representation of "evil". This association carried on into the modern era as a British traveler A.E. Pease noted that profiled coins minted during the rule of Emperor Menelik II shocked the country in 1894 and, "materially interfered with its circulation" (Pankhurst 1989).

Upon studying the coins, it is clear that the portraits were more symbolic than in the likeness of the king himself. This is proven by the fact that when the abbreviation of the king's name is not engraved, as on a coin gilded in mid to late forth century, that it impossible to identify the sovereign based on the resemblance to kings pictured on other coins. One king's features are not discernable from the next, signaling a more abstract representation of the Aksumite kings. This craft tradition carries a significant meaning covered later in the paper and continues to be practiced today.

Ancient Aksum competed in trade with South Arabia, India and Ceylon (Heldman 1993). The circulation of currency would have been the predominant foreign representation of Aksum

abroad as well as a unifying domestic symbol. The divine affiliation of the king therefore, was not only used to distinguish currency, but also to assert socio-political superiority over economic competitors using an omnipotent image of a chosen empire. The elaborate tiaras and weaponry further related wealth and ferocity more than a distinguishable countenance could convey.

In addition to the foreign arena, the coins served to "diffuse images of power to villages within the Aksumite kingdom" (Sheferaw 11/30/06). The coinage therefore was an important ideological instrument by which Aksum could unite its citizens. The assertion of Aksumite identity via religious and imperial images permeated even the most remote locales which became familiar with their rulers through this currency. These coins are the foundation on which the Ethiopian artistic traditions of garnering political authority are based.

Fetha Nagast and Kebra Nagast

The relationship between the sovereign and the church was made concrete with the reinstitution of the Solomonic line reclaimed by Yekuno Amlak in the fourteenth century. The new emperor validated his reign by ordering the Fetha Nagast or “law of kings” to be written. This document appointed the descendents of Solomon the divine right to rule. Moses is quoted in the text, “Thou shalt in any way set him king over thee whom the Lord thy God shall choose, one from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee” (Pankhurst 1966). This proclamation of divine appointment bound the emperor with the church indefinitely.

Two generations after the rule of Emperor Yekuno Amlak, the Kebra Nagast (The Glory of the Kings) was finalized after centuries of hagiographic development and shaping dating back to pre-Christian Ethiopia (Sheferaw 11/30/06). The Kebra Nagast traced the emperor’s direct lineage to the tribe of Judah within the context of the Queen Sheeba and King Solomon

relationship. The consequence of this text was to shape the Ethiopian identity to this day; “The validity of such national narratives as Kebre-Nagast lies not in their correspondence to objective truth…but in their fulfillment of one of the social functions of literature: the visionary reconstruction of the past for the purpose of social direction" (Yonas 1995). This quote illustrates how this perhaps exaggerated text did more than give the current emperor a religious ancestry, it combine governmental power with the church which made the emperor spiritually associated thereafter. This resulted in the kings' activity being regarded as a divine duty, free from blame, replacing the crown with a halo of righteousness. “They became invulnerable, invincible and solidly clad in spiritual armour so that even capricious nature seems to have no visible effect on them…the politics of the empire is indeed in the service of Christianity" (Yonas 1995). This document created a leader anointed by God and a country obedient to that celestial authority.

A newfound power fell into the hands of the emperor who found it vital to the daily function of Ethiopia. In a letter written to Lord Granville of Britain August 10th, 1872, Emperor Yohannes IV wrote, “There is a book called Kirra Negust which contains the Law of the whole of Ethiopia and the names of shums, churches and the provinces are in this book. I pray you will find out who has this book and send it to me for in my country my people will not obey my orders without it" (Admassu 1995). This excerpt illuminates the influence that this document came to garner over hundreds of years until it became indispensable to the manifestation of imperial power.

These national narratives, viewed as official documents, glorify images that draw on celestial imagery. The fusion of the imperial position with the church consolidated the power of the emperor as his followers regarded him not only as their administrator but also as the hand of

God. These proclamations, however, did not have the circulation to popularize them immediately. The function of art in propagating these images proved indispensable to the emperor's power consolidation with its reach to the deeply religious Orthodox Christian Ethiopians.

Lapse in Artistic Representation

Logically following the establishment of the Fetha Negast and Kebra Nagast would be the appearance of emperors within Christian art. However, in the nearly four hundred-year gap between the documentation of these texts and the Gonderene Period, there lacks substantial examples of this kind. Christian art in the form of manuscripts and murals were produced during this time but secular imagery, including that of royalty, was noticeably absent. The few examples that do exist were either not widely exposed or lacked popular appeal. Instead of dismissing this substantial disconnect, it is important to attempt to account for it so that these texts can be considered the artistic departure for imperial representation in Christian art.

There are several possible reasons that may account for this at least four hundred year lapse between the literal documentation of divine kingship and its artistic portrayal. One such explanation could be the destruction Christian relics in the war between the Muslims led by Ahmed Gran and the Christians ending under the leadership of Emperor Galawedos in 1543 A.D.. This reasoning is often cited to explain the lack of Christian materials prior to this time but fails to fully account for the inconsistency of existing relics that have survived. Within manuscripts that did survive that tumultuous period, there are appearances of emperors such as King Lalibela but these examples are not prevalent. It is unlikely that the wars can be

accountable for the disappearance of an entire art movement and as a result, it is more likely that a secular movement had not yet taken place.

Another possibility is that it took the foreign influence of secular art that appeared in the Gonderene period to spur the development of the royal portrait. This explanation also is deficient in the respect that prior to the capital's relocation to Gonder, many Portuguese Jesuits were present within the country and they would have likely had a similar effect on artistic subject matter. While it is sufficed to say that the period after marked a far more open forum for foreign communication, this cannot be the complete explanation.

A further alternate rationalization is that in the period prior to the Gonderene Era, there was a prolonged time of displaced capitals. This nomadic tendency might have postponed the establishment of a substantial artistic community, which would have led rise to a new secular movement. According to history scholar Shefere Bekele, Francisco Alvarez's popular account of displaced capitals is not entirely accurate. Prior to Gonder, capitals moved only short distances due to lack of sophisticated sewage drains. It was necessary to move when camps became too putrid and unhealthy. Even in the period of Gonder, there were biannual moves surrounding the rainy season to avoid spikes in malaria and floods while capitalizing on crop domestication (Sheferaw 11/30/06).

A last explanation suggested by Rita Pankhurst and verified by other scholars is that the division of labour which distinguished the Gonderene Era could have lent itself to a new artistic movement (Pankhurst 11/24/06). Increased specialization may have allowed some religious scholars to focus only on painting, giving rise to a community of artists invested in capturing the current trends of the time and departing from tradition. It is probable that any or all of these

factors contributed to the noticeable interval between the literary and artistic representation of divine right.

Church Art Tradition

Christian church art has a history that is as ancient as the religion's birth in Ethiopia. The function of this art originated as a, "valid expression of traditional society in which every form...is fashioned as an appropriate symbolic revelation of those supernatural powers that are believed to govern the terrestrial order." The physical expression of this symbolism took a unique form distinguished by abstraction, which served religious function over idolism. Lack of background or differentiating features on any of the figures efficiently represented visual prayer for illiterate followers or the many who lacked access to written manuscripts. This method allows for size relative to importance over perspective and makes no aim at realism. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of Christian art is chronicling bible stories and in doing so, it preserves the sanctity of the figures involved by refraining from their literal depiction (Chojnacki 1983).

The Gonderene Period (1635-1855 A.D.)

As discussed in a prior section, the establishment of the Ethiopian capital in Gonder marked a turning point in artistic expression. "In re-establishing social and political order, Fasilidas and his successors…sought to rebuild the state and its society in close association with the Christian church and under their aegis the arts of architecture, painting, poetry and writing flourished" (Heldman 1993). The city was located at the intersection of regional and international networks, which fused international influences with domestic centralization. The

construction of two or three-dozen churches attracted hundreds of scholars who reproduced antiquated works as well as composed new treatises.

During this time both royal chronicles and church art began incorporating images of emperors, both ancient and contemporary. There was a growing tendency to illustrate secular subjects with distinguishing features from Ethiopian culture, although they still claimed no physical likeness to the actual personalities themselves. Garments and crowns identified royalty but the disproportional size of the eyes and hands among other traditional features prevailed (Pankhurst 1966). The access and exposure to these paintings made them a popular venue to record history and use the church to promote the power of the emperor. In order to study the paintings during this period, it is practical to categorize the art according to a chronological theme, the first being popular portrayals of bygone emperors. Many scholars of the Gonderene Era took up chronicling history by recording records of earlier generations. This reflection on history also was manifested in physical form with the introduction of historical figures in the contemporary art.

Two of the earliest sovereigns remembered were Abraha and Asbeha, the Aksumite kings responsible for the introduction of Christianity. They are pictured under a representation of the Holy Trinity in the Tamre Yesus manuscript in Church Tana Cherkos created during the reign of Emperor Takla Haymanot II (1769-1777) (Pankhurst 1966). The Kings' picture paired with that of the Trinity emphasizes the impact of these rulers on the modern identity of Ethiopia. As the new centre of the church, Gonder sought to strengthen its connection to the past and establish its permanence by remembering pious Christian kings.

Another historical figure often pictured during the Gonder Period is that of Emperor Yekuno Amlak (1270-1285). In a piece titled *Book of Isaiah, Book of Daniel, Apocryphal Books and the Wealth of Kings*, a miniature portrait of Yekuno Amlak represents the significant restoration of the Solomonic line (See Appendix A). This late eighteenth century picture synthesizes the Wealth of Kings based on the Biblical account of David and King Saul. The allegory tells how Ethiopia's reigning Zagwe Dynasty lost favour with the Lord, who instructed Abba Takla Haymanot to anoint Yekuno Amlak, declaring that the kingdom be returned to him and his offspring forever (Heldman 1993). In the miniature, Amlak is pictured wearing eighteenth century regal clothes as he receives a rich delegation from the east. This artwork's incorporation of current fashion further attempts to place Amlak and his heroic deed into the modern Gonderene framework. This incongruity perhaps reinvented the Emperor in a more applicable context, aligning his motives with the glory-seeking Gonder emperors. The expression of contemporary culture and the narration of religious right further melded Gonder to the past.

The Gonderene Emperors were among the first to experience the depiction of themselves during their reign. Their portraiture, mainly within the context of church art, was utilized for a variety of reasons. A mural in the Church of Iyasu I (1682-1706) on Kebran, Lake Tana, pictured Iyasu "lying in heaven with Christ standing over him and his rifleman around him" (Pankhurst 1966). The new trend of founding and endowing churches during this time found the incorporation of the emperors' picture as homage for their patronage. This pious image allowed emperors to be considered with reverence over respect, which spurred religious compliance from their subjects (Sheferaw 11/30/06). Artists also found the need for represented personalities for the purpose of funerals and other processions. "Artists engaged in painting of Emperors, Kings

and Rases actually seen by the public, were under pressure to depict what he saw rather than what he imagined as in the case of religious or legendary themes" (Pankhurst 1966). This more realist portrayal, not like the realist art we know today, but the identification by recognizable props and inscriptions was made use of during both Emperor Bakaffa's funeral as well as Iyasu II's. Effigies of these rulers were paraded presumably as a token of remembrance.

A third use of imperial depiction during this time was for stabilizing rule. The influential nobility regarded both Empress Mantuab and Emperor Iyasu II as usurpers to the throne. To combat this image, they attempted to legitimize their rule using art which associated them strongly with old traditions (Sheferaw 11/30/06). A piece entitled *Emperor Iyasu II with his mother Empress Walata Giyorgis* from an eighteenth century manuscript depicts a sagely Empress as the largest and therefore the most important figure in the painting (See Appendix B). The elaborate crowns and fabrics adorn the figures whom gesture with the sign of benediction. This piece's inclusion within a church manuscript demonstrates how this family sought to establish their legitimate right to the throne through encouraging their portrayal within the church. Their patronage and the resulting artworks sought to establish the respect the nobility continuously challenged.

Towards the end of this art renaissance, the evolution of technique was on the cusp of a dramatic change. A piece, *King Sahle Sellassie of Shoa* (1813-1847), taken from a manuscript in St. Stefanos Church, Lake Hayq, embodies the style of the Gonderene Period before the shift to realism (See Appendix C). The use of ceremonial umbrellas and relative size gives the Emperor his elevated status. Also, the increased use of shading allows for depth as a precursor to a three dimensional trend to follow. The adornment in customary clothing and presence of weaponry also gives the picture a contemporary value and its placement within a church manuscript binds

the present to the country's religious tradition. This artwork epitomizes the secular movement within the Christian context during the Gonderene Era. In the years following this work, the two realms would become increasingly divergent with the rise of outside influences and technological advancements.

Modern Portraiture: Emperor Tewodros

Emperor Tewodros' controversial reign has become glorified in retrospect as Ethiopians praise his heroism in a time when their independence was threatened. The portraits of the Emperor were largely painted post-humus and it is important to take into account the evolution of his image and how he is remembered. Tewodros was the first emperor to be photographed and although that famous picture captured him in death, it marks the first occasion that we can take his likeness into account within the context of art. Prior to this photograph, Europeans produced many etchings of him, which are distinguished by his famously plaited hair and unique fashion sense. These etchings became the basis of the plethora of realistic art pieces produced after his death. Although suspicion may have arisen about the accuracy of Western portrayals of the Ethiopian Emperor, the existing photo of him proves that the likeness to the etchings is uncanny (Sheferaw 11/30/06).

There are two predominating themes in which Tewodros is remembered; as the less popular villain and as the much more accepted national hero. The villain persona stems from his over-ambitiousness as a soldier within feudal Ethiopia in which he engaged in continual warfare. Although he was considered a religiously devout, his hatred for the church cannot be denied. The church did not support Tewodros as he represented the departure from the historic Solomonic line and in response, the Emperor reigned violence upon the religious institution that

had long supported the power of the imperial position. This “violent and capricious” identity has manifested itself in the samurai-like portrayal in several works (Tedesse 1990). In what Richard Pankhurt calls the “Ghenkis Khan image”, Tewodros is pictured with more slanted eyes, straight faced and occasionally with a band of fabric around his head. A good example of this depiction is Seyoum Wolde’s portrait of Tewodros. This image implies violence but can also be interpreted within the honorable framework of the samurai identity. Within this framework, we can interpret the Tewodros image as one that implies death for the sake of glory, the most honorable passing for a samurai warrior. Despite his belligerence, this picture insinuates that the struggle for Ethiopian identity is a praiseworthy duty in which violence cannot be considered with brutish intention.

The alternative theme is one that pictures Tewodros as a national hero. The name “Tewodros” refers to the messianic Christian tradition of salvation. This name is very applicable to how the Emperor is remembered best; as a saintly martyr (Teddese 1990). Contrasted with the samurai representation, Richard Pankhurst labels this figure the "Christ image" (Pankhurst 11/24/06). “Suicide of the Emperor is a literal and symbolic act- absolves him of all shortcomings he might have had and reinstates him as a symbol of not only personal courage but of the general sense of defiance, freedom and independence of which Ethiopians are supposed to ‘uniquely possess’" (Yonas 1995). This quote puts into words the popular images, which picture Emperor Tewodros taking his own life.

Whereas the outside viewer may consider the Emperor with a gun to his head a morbid illustration, the implication is far from gruesome. A famous piece that captures this moment is called *The Suicide of Emperor Theodore* which was previously housed in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (See Appendix D). In this image, Tewodros faces the saluting leader of the

British forces, Robert Napier, as the Emperor holds the gun to his head and forms the sign of benediction with his fingers. The style of painting resembles that of traditional Christian art in that there is no attempt at realism which may signify the religious connotation with the Emperor's martyrdom. The inconsistencies in representing the actual event serve to preserve the Emperor's image in a meaningful way. The British commander and Tewodros never actually met and Tewodros killed himself following the loss in the Battle of Maqdalla in 1868 by putting the gun to his mouth. It is obviously more effective in remembering Tewodros as a hero if he kills himself dramatically staring into the eyes of his enemy, refusing to be taken alive. A painting of Tewodros alone, with the barrel of a gun in his mouth may have given his countenance a fearful expression, his lips open and eyes wide. It is also important to note this popular image's ironic conflict with Christian values. Suicide is a sin of great magnitude in the Orthodox tradition but Tewodros continues to be considered a great hero by religious Ethiopians to this day. Perhaps this act of defiance was so profound in preserving Ethiopian identity that it overcomes the scorn associated with his cardinal sin.

Following Tewodros, Emperor Yohannes IV was the first sovereign to be photographed in life and as a result, portraits of the emperor started to become less generic. However, it was not until the reign of Menelik II that photography became more mainstream and a realist artistic movement really took form. During the later years of Menelik's reign and continuing into the twentieth century, art became a more accessible and prolific form of documentation and aesthetic. It was during this century that events became more regularly documented with eyes looking back on a more idealize past.

Emperor Menelik II

“Menelik is less of a proper name for the identification of an individual than it is a trope for a set of attributes imputed to the community the name represents” (Yonas 1995).

Emperor Menelik II, the father of modern Ethiopia, reigned during an artistic era marked by the popular realist expression and secularization of art. The increased availability of photographic technology amplified the expectation that portraits would appear in likeness to the represented figure (Pankhurt 1966). This photographic accessibility paired with the rise of Europeans settling within Ethiopia who brought their preference for realist art, created an art-imitating life trend among the younger generations of painters. This realist movement coincided with the secularization of art. The influx of foreigners to live and to work gave rise to the demand for folk art during Menelik’s rule. More non-religious artists appeared but apprenticed in monastery schools due to the lack of other art-training options (Rauning 1989). This new generation of artists’ work created a secular realm that included depictions of traditional Ethiopian life, battle scenes and portraits. The increased output of the newfound tourist art created new venues for the pieces as well. Up until the end of the eighteen hundreds, art was solely acquired by the church and royal courts (Rauning 1989). Ethiopian art now found its way into Ethiopian homes, schools, governmental buildings and abroad. The diaspora of royal portraiture implies that the image of Ethiopia would now be conveyed through the face of the emperor.

Despite this rise in realism and secularism, the rule of Emperor Menelik II marked the straddling between old and new. Art pieces represent the Emperor both in the church tradition, as part of a visual prayer wrought with religious implications as well as in the detailed secular manner that became popular at the time. The best examples of this divide are the paintings in Entoto Raguel, on the outskirts of Addis Ababa. During Menelik's reign, the renowned artists

Alaka Lukas and Alaka Heruy were commissioned to adorn the church with traditional paintings, which would include the portrayal of the patron Emperor. The artists needed the help of their sons, Sahlu and Emailaf, to complete the task and allowed them to use photographs of the Emperor to paint his face. The painting of Emperor Menelik II with Saint Raguel depicted on the inner walls of the church demonstrates this generational divide that captures the artistic split at the time. The painting pictures the Emperor with fine detailed features grasping the scepter of power held by the larger Saint Raguel who is painted in the traditional manner with generic features marked by large eyes. Angels similar to those painted on the ceiling of Sellassie Church on the outskirts of Gonder are painted above the two predominating figures. In the lower right corner, the Entoto Raguel Church is painted along side the very realistic face of Menelik's secretary who is buried near the rock-hewn church behind the modern structure. The two political faces within the painting clearly contrast with the method of painting the faces of Raguel and the angels. It appears that the realist movement had ejected political figures from the sanctified religious imagery. This differentiation created a division between the political and religious realms that perhaps the movement, artists and the Emperor had not anticipated. The division is not full-fledged however; it is clear in this painting that the Saint is departing political right to the Emperor through their mutual grasp of the scepter. The effect is curious; here you have recognizable face of the emperor which no longer shares the artistic context as the religious figure which imparts him power. A holy hierarchy is absolutely defined within this painting, not only in size but in the portrayal of realistic facial features. The Emperor's distance from the divine has grown by his differentiating portrayal.

Another interesting contemporary piece combining old and new traditions was reportedly seen by the Bourg de Bozas mission during Emperor Menelik's reign in the Church of Mariam

(presumably in Entoto). This piece is described as picturing Menelik I greatly resembling Menelik II and picturing the Queen of Sheeba in the likeness of Taitu. Ras Mekonnen reportedly modeled as one of the courtiers (Pankhurst 1966). The use of realism serves an obvious purpose in the piece. The suggestion in modeling the ancient story of the Solomonic descent after the contemporary rulers concretes their lineage and sense of tradition. In contrast with the previous piece and the movement as a whole, this painting uses real depiction to embrace the religious association of the emperor closer than before.

The division between the traditional art and popular realism is reinforced in other contemporary pieces of the Emperor. A painting entitled *The Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu, with St. George* acquired by the Smithsonian in 1910 clearly illustrates the strength of old traditions (See Appendix E). The royal couple is painted without regard to facial differentiation and is accompanied with a plethora of religious symbols. Angels hold the ceremonial umbrella above their heads and lions implying power and descent from the Tribe of Judah stand at their feet. St. George is painted in the upper left corner, small but fierce, imparting the protecting religious influence of the warrior saint. The painting, if isolated, would be seen as a continuance of the old church painting traditions as no sign of modernity can be associated with its imagery.

The last piece discussed can be contrasted with *The Emperor Menelik II* which was housed by the church of Raguel of Entoto in 1966 but on last visit, could not be traced (See Appendix F). In this painting, Menelik's face is vividly realistic, eyes enrapturing the viewer instead of large and vacant as in religious portrayals. His dress is regal as he holds his scepter in proportional hands, an ornate crown adorning his head. The painting does not have a distinguishing background like church paintings but this piece lacks religious likeness otherwise. It is a clear depiction of his power with its ornate costuming but it does so without incorporating

church influence. This anonymous painting captures the expression of power in a secular context, expressing influence by prestige rather than religious association.

Beginning in Menelik II's era, an artist is granted more choices within their art. The accessibility of photographs and popularity of secular subject matters allowed artists to work outside of the traditional church art prototype. These choices raise issues of personal style and desire of the artist as well as the demand of the venue, whether it is foreign tourists or a governmental institution. This increase in choice allows us to more aptly gauge how Ethiopians viewed or wished to view their emperors.

Rise in Battle Scene Depictions

The rule of Emperor Menelik II also witnessed the rise in popularity of wartime depictions as a part of the secular art genre. The portrayal of emperors as warriors is a symbolic tradition that has spanned from the glorification of wartime victories within royal chronicles to the current flex of military might today. It is possible that imagery of the warrior-king stems from the warrior-saints of the Old Testament, heralded by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Saint George, arguably the most popular patron saint of the country is always recognized atop his steed, wielding a spear against an evil dragon. The holy-warrior is a symbolic fusion of the church and the assertion of might for righteousness (Sheferaw 11/30/2006). Psalm 143:1 reads, "Blessed be the Lord my God, who instructs my hands for battle, and fingers for war." Emperor Iyasu I was honored with these words within his royal chronicle following battle during the tumultuous Zamana Masafent (Pankhurst 1986). It bonds his military mission with the might of God, who is heralded as the ultimate weapon over material force. Wartime rhetoric and imagery therefore is inextricably bound to a religious mission. The warrior emperor depiction follows in

the same tradition, a symbol of strength in acting as the hand of God. The defender and protectorate symbolism also preserves the glory of Ethiopia's independent tradition, a value that has defined the country's identity today.

The most popular battle scene depiction during Emperor Menelik II's reign was his victory in the recent 1896 Battle of Adwa. The evolution of how this battle is remembered coincides with the changes in political environs. Most paintings, whether painted soon after the event or today share many similar features. These include the insertion of St. George among the canons and soldiers as it was on his saint day that the battle was fought and he is largely attributed as having a hand in the victory. Other shared features includes the righteous Ethiopians pictured on the left, full-faced versus the profiled evil Italians on the right (except regarded as good in death) as well as the prevalence of national colors and commanding presence of Emperor Menelik II. The greatest change in the painted version of the battle has been the predominance and demeanor of the political figures involved. After Menelik's death in 1913 and the rise to power by Ras Tafari, his father Ras Mekonnen entered the battle scene and became an increasingly predominant figure, sometimes even taking a central position. In addition, changes in warfare and the new style of monarchy changed Menelik from a hands-on warrior with spear in hand to a commander supervising from afar with a telescope or on a throne under an umbrella holding a manuscript as in Solomon Belachew's painting done in June 1952 (Pankhurst 1989) (See Appendix G). The connotations of these changes are two fold. The first implication is that Sellassie's acceptance hinged largely on his father's reputation and prestige, which is increasingly pictured in the paintings. Associating the son with the father's politics and heroism served to legitimize the rising leader. The second implication is the change in monarchial values. The progression of Emperor Menelik from a warrior to an onlooker represents Emperor

Haile Sellassie's ruling philosophy. This changed the emperor's position from the "one of us" philosophy to the wiser but aloof paternal figure which Sellassie was regarded. This new position was afforded greater intellectual prestige but alienated the warrior-king imagery during the last emperor's regime. The evolution of this painting through different political eras is reflected in Stanislaw Chojnacki's words, "the traditional view of history is a projection of the present onto the past" (Pankhurst 1986). History is not only remembered differently but is manipulated as a function of present exigency.

In addition to remembering recent battles like that of Adwa, the rise in war depictions also involved older glorified battles which capitalized on the warrior imagery of the emperor. This conquering persona lends itself to the idea of aggressive nationalism, representing the emperor as a uniting emblem of past patriotic victories. In a twentieth century painting entitled *Emperor Galawdewos defeating Ahmed Gran*; the Emperor is painted in battle, recognizable by the crown atop his head (See Appendix H). His forces are distinguished from the enemy Muslims because they are shown full-faced, armed with straight-shafted swords and painted with closely cropped hair. The Muslim adversaries are painted with their curved swords and longer hair in motion while fleeing. The title and painting itself capitalizes on the Christian dominance which resulted from the warring. The righteous forces, even though all involved could be considered Ethiopians outside of the foreign assistance, are clearly painted be the Christians led by the Emperor. The subject matter of this painting clearly asserts the throne's connection with Christianity as it assumes a threat to the religion is a threat to the crown.

Another remembered battle painted in the twentieth century is captured is a piece titled, *A Battle in the 1870's between Emperor Yohannes IV and the Egyptians* (See Appendix I). The clutter of this painting elicits the sheer magnitude of modern warfare, employing modern

weapons and picturing the bloodshed. The Emperor is painted outside the front lines, atop his steed but under the ceremonial umbrella, noticeably removed from the bloodshed. This piece was probably completed during the reign of Emperor Haile Sellassie, whose ruling philosophy seems to have imparted itself on this earlier battle like that of Adwa which both took place prior to his rule. This piece reinforces the idea that paintings of battles represent more than glorified victories, they mark political contrasts which are exposed through the present view of the past.

Emperor Haile Sellassie

Emperor Haile Selassie was a well-known patron of the arts. During his reign, Ethiopian artists were encouraged to study abroad and the first fine arts school opened in the country during the 1950's. These advancements led to the mastering of western techniques like perspective, depth and expert modeling of figures (Chojacki 1973). Artists returned to country with an enhanced grip on the western secular aesthetic. The Emperor himself wished to portray himself in a more secular manner in order to lessen the alienation of different religions and make the imperial position more inclusive of the dozens of ethnic groups Ethiopia represented. In order to accomplish this image, Emperor Sellassie preferred to be pictured and painted wearing a business suit. The son of Sellassie's state portrait painter, Solomon Belachew, explained that the artists themselves would go to public ceremonies to snap pictures and paint the Emperor based on those snapshots. In his tourist shop near Piazza, the third generation artist, Gebre Kristos Solomon, revealed the hundreds of photographs his father had taken along with the business-like portrait of the Emperor which remained in his collection of his father's work. The painting pictured Sellassie in a navy suit, without a crown and only his royal insignia on his lapel to identify his status (Gebre Kristos 11/20/06). This portrait aptly captured Sellassie's conscious

split, not with tradition so much as the Christian association of the throne. He believed his secular appeal would translate into a unified country.

However, not all saw this maneuver as consistent with the traditions the monarchy of the past was willing to die to preserve. The Director of Port Administration under Sellassie wrote, "It did not occur to us that the symbol of national unity could so easily and carelessly be swept away. A new generation had grown up without learning Ethiopian culture, rooted in biblical traditions previous to the establishment of the Church in Rome" (Gaitachew 1993). As the Emperor tirelessly attempted to bridge Ethiopia and the rest of the world, some saw his international image, donned in the uniform of a British Field Marshal as a, "shadow of a rather tawdry commissioner in borrowed finery" (Gaitachew 1993). Many saw his clothes and international image as the rejection of Ethiopian cultural values and heritage. This negative sentiment increased during his regime aided by his continual absence, ignoring of domestic unrest regarding land tenure and military dissatisfaction. These issues paired with the rising student movement for individual freedoms, was enough to end the monarchy altogether.

During the years of the Darg, images of Sellassie were buried but not lost. In the National Library, the wall-size painting of Sellassie was not removed but his face was covered. The Ethiopian regard for their history reaches beyond the consideration of politics (Sabela 11/27/06). The Darg did, however, attempt to tarnish the image of the Emperor with anti-monarchy rhetoric and propaganda. The faults of the monarchy were emphasized and humiliated as exemplified by the Darg's public exposure of the "impure profits" made from the government ownership of the St. George Beer factory. The years of the Darg attempted to strip Sellassie's honor but it was preserved and later restored by the Rastafarian community. Post-Darg Ethiopia

largely looks fondly upon the last years of the monarchy. This can be accredited to the rise and popularity of the Rastafarian religion (Sheferaw 11/30/06).

The Rastas who consider the Emperor to be a messianic figure within their religion, embraced the Emperor's remaining family and made it their prerogative to restore the sanctity of the past monarch. The religion along with popular figures like Marcus Garvey and Bob Marley recast Sellassie as the emerging African leader cited in the Bible, who represented Black independence and salvation. This imagery was certainly confirmed in a physical manner upon visiting the Rastafarian Church in Jamaica, on the outskirts of Shashemene. Although not yet completed, the church houses a wall-size painting hanging picturing Emperor Sellassie in a manner usually associated with Saint George, atop a steed, spearing an evil dragon. Next to this depiction is the country of Ethiopia wrapped in the symbol for "Jah" or God, in the Rastafarian faith. This painting borrows from the Ethiopian Orthodox repertoire of saintly images to recast the Emperor within Christian familiarity. The Rastafarian faith admittedly shares many values of the Church and this image capitalizes upon their shared resources. The Emperor attempted not to be politically associated with the Church during his reign but despite his secular efforts, he became a central religious figure within the Rastafarian faith.

Ironically, the Emperor who attempted to sever the strict association of the crown from the Orthodox Christian Church became wrought with religious imagery during and following his reign. Upon visiting the St. Paulos Hospital in Gulele, Addis Ababa, it was obvious the Emperor's patronage continued in the footsteps of Gonderene tradition. In a three-panel piece completed by master Afewerk Tekle, Sellassie is painted in his desired paternal way but is also cloaked in religious context. In the center panel, the suit-clad Emperor is picture in the clouds, light emanating from his figure onto the sick patients below, who supplicate in his direction. The

hospital is pictured on the top left, shadowed by the wings of a female angel, whose wings bear the Ethiopian colors. The two other accompanying panels depict the Emperor assisting the weak. This painting not only gives heroic credit to its founder but also suggests other-worldly character. The use of light and elevation denote Emperor Sellassie's status as a saintly figure who imparts his goodwill on behalf of the downtrodden. Upon speaking to a nurse working at St. Paulous, it is obvious that painting's placement within the walls of the hospital has an effect on those who come across it. She spoke of Sellassie's positive memory as well as his lasting benevolence as he continues to "save the patients" by having contributed the stones to build the hospital (Anon. 11/23/06). This proximity with the past seems to remain strong where the image of the Emperor is there to remind the caretakers and patients who has enabled them.

Another celebrated painting of Selassie is entitled *The Emperor Haile Sellassie with Ethiopia stretching forth her hands to God* (See Appendix J). This painting pictures the emperor sitting on a throne in elaborate dress with a female personified Ethiopia crowned and raising her palms toward the sky. There is a bearded Lord, hands outstretched and the all-seeing eye painted beneath him next to a white bird emanating light onto the Emperor below. The trinity of the country, the Emperor and God carries heavy religious intonations. The interweaving of the three characters binds them together, Sellassie and Ethiopia in positive favour under the heavens. The sanctified personification of the country elicits perceived innocence and acknowledged surrender to religious fate. The religious dominance over the two figures illustrates that despite Emperor Sellassie's attempt at a more secular reign, religion has prove to be a more permanent institution in Ethiopia than the monarch.

Linking a History of Political Portraits: Concluding Analysis

The imperial position, Christianity and art are three historical facets predominant in the shaping of "Ethiopian" identity today. From the times of Aksumite coins to the most recent imperial portraits, the overlap of religion, art and politics have combined to give each element a deeper significance beyond the physical realm. It is apparent through the analysis of art pieces that the development of the royal portrait within Christian art sought to legitimize the throne. The pictorial representation of divine lineage and religious right within church manuscripts and murals established a firm connection between Christianity and politics which surely proved to be a mutually beneficial relationship. The monarchy was historically regarded as the head of the Orthodox Church which was granted protection, political influence and ideological reach under the imperial wing. In return, the monarch received a strong religious affiliation which developed into a holy persona that people came to revere as the instrument of God. Under this guise the emperor became an infallible figure of righteousness whose power had no terrestrial limits.

Surely this image was made firm within literature and political propaganda but it is important to acknowledge how art served to spread these ideas to the corners of Ethiopia, where government could not physically assert its authority. With low literacy rates but high religious fervency, visually linking politics and Christianity within the church helped reach the rural subjects who normally might have felt isolated from the regime. Using the churches the emperors endowed as political venues to legitimize their rule, the monarchy could utilize religious identification as their political support.

The increased secularization of art and decline of the monarchy in the twentieth century has brought several interesting matters of art and power to light. The fact that these two significant events coincided is an interesting fact that deserves supposition into whether there is a causal relationship involved. Perhaps Emperor Sellassie's attempt to separate his position from

the church debased significant power which had previously forcibly united the country. His propagation of the secular image as witnessed by the art movement might be evidence of this usurpation which eventually resulted in a regime attacked on all sides. The people had stopped considering the throne as a holy impartment and began to question the legitimacy of authoritarian rule.

Logically following this discussion, the most pressing question that arises from this study is this; does art garner power or does the power facilitate the art? This question spurs many others but before we address it, it is important to take into account what the idea of this argument implies. The debate suggests that art has the capability to legitimize a government and discounts the possibility that it is religion alone which has served to do so. It insinuates that the creative medium can be credited with grounding hundreds of years of history by depicting ideas which already exist in other forms. Conversely, the opposite side of the debate certifies that a solitary line of rulers, who are not artists themselves, have created new art movements by leveraging their power. This indicates that the art was created after the fact as a manifestation of the power already held by the monarch, painted in reverence or respect for the powerful leaders.

A definite conclusion to this question would deny the simultaneous possibility of both. We have evidence of portraits that were painted of emperors hundreds of years after their rule which obviously does not assert their contemporary power but does draw parallels between the past and the present power in order to serve the current emperor. Also, this example recognizes the lasting influence of the past emperor which indicates that the art resulted from his power. Based on this example, it is safe to conclude that both sides of the debate are relevant to the art-power relationship in Ethiopian portrait history.

This study realizes the significance of aesthetic imagery in documenting the direction of power. Through these pieces, one can analyze not only phases in art but also those of the monarchy. The struggles of the monarch in battling adversaries or asserting authority over his territory are all documented within the art tradition which shapes the national identity. Each artwork tells a compelling story about the Emperor and his relationship to the people of Ethiopia. By accounting for the symbols, patterns and context, we are able to create a chronological picture of how power was generated in this country throughout history. Art, religion and power are the heirlooms of Ethiopian tradition and tools for realizing the past.

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