

NAILS AND BLACKSMITHS IN ETHIOPIAN ART (13TH–19TH CENTURIES)¹

CLAVOS Y HERREROS EN EL ARTE ETÍOPE (SIGLOS XIII-XIX)

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ABSTRACT

A wholly indigenous, non-Hebraic form of Jewish religion emerged in the northern highlands of Ethiopia, where Christianity had predominated since the mid-fourth century and Islam flourished from the seventh. Adherents, who prefer the name Beta Israel (House of Israel), eventually lost their land rights by imperial decree (1414–29). The slur *Falasha* (landless), circulating in Ge'ez as well in Hebrew, Arabic, and Portuguese sources from the 1520s, captured their dispossession. Dispersed and reduced to tenant farming, the Beta Israel took up weaving, pottery, and most notably ironwork, despised trades associated with demonic magic (*buda*). The convergence of religious identity and occupational caste gradually solidified between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. I adduce art historical evidence to show that imported anti-Jewish tropes, disseminated in Ethiopia through Catholic missions and embassies, coalesced with native traditions to redefine the Beta Israel in diabolic terms.

KEYWORDS: Ethiopian art, Blacksmiths, Nails, Ironwork, Beta Israel, Jews, Anti-Judaism, Jesuits, Catholic missions.

RESUMEN

Una forma de religión judía totalmente autóctona y no hebraica surgió en las tierras altas del norte de Etiopía, donde el cristianismo había predominado desde mediados del siglo IV y el

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Islam floreció a partir del siglo VII. Los adeptos, que prefieren el nombre de Beta Israel (Casa de Israel), acabaron perdiendo sus derechos territoriales por decreto imperial (1414-1429). El calificativo de *Falasha* (sin tierra), que circula tanto en ge'ez como en fuentes hebreas, árabes y portuguesas desde la década de 1520, recoge su enajenación. Dispersos y reducidos a la agricultura de arrendamiento, los Beta Israel se dedicaron a la tejeduría, la alfarería y, sobre todo, la herrería, oficios despreciados y asociados a la magia demoníaca (*buda*). La convergencia de la identidad religiosa y la casta ocupacional se consolidó gradualmente entre los siglos XV y XVII. En este artículo apporto pruebas históricas del arte para demostrar que los tropos antijudíos importados, difundidos en Etiopía a través de las misiones y embajadas católicas, confluyeron con las tradiciones nativas para redefinir el Beta Israel en términos diabólicos..

PALABRAS CLAVE: Arte etíope, herreros, clavos, herrajes, Beta Israel, judíos, antijudaísmo, jesuitas, misiones católicas.

Syrian missionaries from Tyre brought Christianity to the northern highlands of Ethiopia around 333 CE, where the ruler of the Aksumite kingdom converted and promoted the new religion. A fourth-century basilica recently excavated in the Yeha region (northeast of Axum) confirms that the Ethiopian Orthodox Church represents the oldest continuous Christian presence in Sub-Saharan Africa.² Islam arrived already in the lifetime of the Prophet, establishing its principal center of influence farther to the southeast at the location later known as Harar. But most extraordinary was the emergence of a wholly indigenous, non-Hebraic Judaism between the Semien Mountains and Lake Tana, its origins a matter of modern scholarly debate, not to mention medieval, and still popular, myth.³ Adherents adopted the denomination Beta Israel (House of Israel), about whom Steven Kaplan's 1995 book remains the standard history.⁴ Their Torah (*Orit*) comprises, in codex form, the Ge'ez translation of the Octateuch from the Greek Septuagint. So, too, their corpus of religious literature, their beliefs, and their communal structures all reflect the imprint of Ethiopian Orthodox monastic currents.

The accretion of Judaic elements over many centuries and through multiple Eastern Christian channels inflected the unique version of the non-Chalcedonian (monophysite) Orthodoxy practiced in Ethiopia. Circumcision, Saturday Sabbath observance, and Levitical dietary proscriptions were retained. Reverence for the children of Israel inspired the national foundation story in the early medieval epic *Kebrä Nägäst*. At the same time, however, Ethiopian Christianity absorbed negative constructions of Judaism common to all the early Eastern and

² M. J. HARROWER et al., "Beta Samati: discovery and excavation of an Aksumite town", *Antiquity*, 93-372 (2019), pp. 1534-1552.

³ F. FAUVILLE-AYMAR, "Desperately Seeking the Jewish Kingdom of Ethiopia: Benjamin of Tudela and the Horn of Africa (Twelfth Century)", *Speculum*, 88-2 (2013), pp. 383-404.

⁴ Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, New York, 1995 remains the standard history. It can be supplemented with the more recent study of S. DEGE-MÜLLER, "Between Heretics and Jews: Inventing Jewish Identities in Ethiopia," *Entangled Religions. Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Religious Contact and Transfer*, 6 (2018), pp. 248-308.

Latinate churches. The *Kebrä Nägäst*, for example, mobilizes a widely shared conceptual split between “Israel” of the Old Testament and the “Jews” of the New: while the former served the invention of a spiritualized genealogy, the latter, cast in the role of Christ’s antagonists, epitomized wickedness. Christian polemicists everywhere habitually mapped the rhetorical figure of the “Jew(s)” onto their opponents in internal religious and political disputes.⁵ Not surprisingly, therefore, in Ethiopia the defamatory label *ayhud* (Jews) was applied to enemies of the state and church regardless of actual religious affiliation, be they the mythic evil queen Gudit, credited with destroying Aksum in the tenth century, or later insurgents and heretics.

The Beta Israel enter the written record only in the fourteenth century. They had then begun to rebel against incorporation into the nascent imperial state under the Amhara rulers of the Solomonic dynasty. The emperor Yeshaq (1414–1429), known for his repressive stances against the Muslim population and fractious monastic movements, implemented a new measure against defiant Beta Israel. Those who refused submission to imperial rule, demonstrable through conversion to Orthodox Christianity, lost their land rights. From the 1520s, the pejorative appellation “Falasha” (landless) circulated in Ge’ez as well in Hebrew, Arabic, and Portuguese sources. Dispersed and reduced to tenant farming, the Beta Israel took up weaving, pottery, and most notably blacksmithing, despised trades associated with demonic magic (*buda*) personified by the hyena.⁶ The convergence of religious identity and occupational caste gradually solidified between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. The status of Beta Israel artisans improved with their employment in imperial building projects undertaken during the Gondarine period (1632–1769), but thereafter plummeted dramatically.

My longstanding interest in the visual dimensions of religious polemic sparked my detour into Ethiopian studies. My larger project explores how ironwork as the craft emblematic of the Beta Israel, *buda*, and the reputedly carrion-feeding hyena became interlinked nodes of anti-Jewish animus. Here, I can present only a digest that focuses on two motifs, nails and blacksmiths. Sorting out the role of anti-Judaism in the social construction of the Beta Israel is a complex matter. For as Kaplan warns, the religious dichotomy between ‘Christian’ and ‘Jewish’ to which Europeanists are accustomed cannot be superimposed on the Ethiopian context. In Ethiopia, the relation between the two religions should rather be understood along a continuum and divisions between the communities traced to the social ramifications of political conflict.⁷ Still, David Nirenberg’s critical work on the Christian representation of Judaism and its discursive function in Western thought has the potential to put Beta Israel studies on a new theoretical footing. The rhetoric of anti-Judaism itself produces Jews, subsuming the Beta Israel into a scripted part within a cosmic drama. Prior to their encounter

⁵ For instantiations in early Syriac Christianity, see *Jews and Syriac Christians: Intersections across the First Millennium*, A. M. BUTTS, S. GROSS (eds), Tübingen, 2020, editors’ “Introduction,” pp. 12–18, and especially A. H. BECKER, “Syriac Anti-Judaism: Polemic and Internal Critique,” pp. 46–66 and J. E. WALTERS, “Anti-Jewish Rhetoric and Christian Identity in Aphrahat’s Demonstrations,” pp. 291–319. An exhaustive documentation of the Latin and later European traditions is provided by D. NIRENBERG, *Anti-Judaism: the Western Tradition*, New York, 2014.

⁶ H. SALAMON, *The Hyena People: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia*, Berkeley, 1999.

⁷ S. KAPLAN, “Indigenous Categories and the Study of World Religions in Ethiopia: the Case of the Beta Israel (Falasha),” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 22-3 (1992), pp. 208–221, esp. pp. 213–214; KAPLAN, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, pp. 156–162, 164–165.

with missionaries in the late nineteenth century, the Beta Israel never used the word *ayhud* self-referentially.⁸

According to current scholarly consensus, political and economic developments internal to Ethiopian society account for the formation of the Beta Israel as an ethnoreligious caste.⁹ Notwithstanding overwhelming evidence in support of this position, I would argue that external ties to Western Europe, which intensified from the fifteenth century, concomitantly had a profound impact on the representation of this outgroup.¹⁰ Yeshaq's initial exchange with the Crown of Aragon (1427) paved the way for an influx of painting from Latin Christendom, then preoccupied with the graphic description of the torments inflicted on Jesus during the Passion and with the devotional image of the Man of Sorrows. Portuguese emissaries (1487–1526) and soldiers (1541–1543), and especially the Jesuit missionaries who followed (1555–1634), came harboring anxieties about *conversos* and Judaizing heresies.¹¹ The penetration and local adaptation of Catholic visual culture from the Tigray region to Lake Tana continued long past the 1634 expulsion of the Jesuits and well into the eighteenth century; indeed, domesticated variations on early modern prints remained canonical into the twentieth.¹²

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 10; DEGE-MÜLLER, "Between Heretics and Jews," p. 258.

⁹ In addition to the publications cited in nn 4 and 7, see J. QUIRIN, "The Process of Caste Formation in Ethiopia: A Study of the Beta Israel (Falasha), 1270–1868", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 12-2 (1979), pp. 235–258; IDEM, "Ethnicity, Caste, Class, and the State in Ethiopian History: The Case of the Beta Israel (Falasha)", in *The Rising Tide of Cultural Pluralism*, C. YOUNG (ed.), Madison, 1993, pp. 200–221; IDEM, "Society and the State: Reflections from the Northwest, 1300–1900", in K. FUKUI et al. (eds.), *Ethiopia in Broader Perspective: papers of the XIIIth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Kyoto, 12-17 December 1997*, Kyoto, 1997, pp. 221–241; IDEM "Caste and Class in Historical Northwest Ethiopia: The Beta Israel (Falasha) and Kemant, 1300–1900", *Journal of African History*, 39 (1998), pp. 195–220; IDEM, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920*, Hollywood, 2010 (Philadelphia, 1992); D. FREEMAN, "Understanding Marginalisation in Ethiopia", in *Peripheral People: the Excluded Minorities of Ethiopia*, D. FREEMAN, A. PANKHURST (eds.), Lawrenceville NJ, 2003, pp. 301–333, esp. pp. 303, 314–316; A. WION, "Medieval Ethiopian Economies: Subsistence, Global Trade and the Administration of Wealth", in *Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea*, S. KELLY, (ed.), Leiden, 2020, pp. 395–424, esp. p. 410.

¹⁰ These exchanges are discussed at length in M. SALVADORE, *The African Prester John and the Birth of Ethiopian-European Relations, 1402–1555*, London, 2016; V. KREBS, *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy*, London, 2021.

¹¹ L. C. SHABOT, "Los portugueses en Etiopía y la problemática de los ritos 'judaicos'," *Historia y grafía*, 17 (2001), pp. 209–240; IDEM, "Ethiopian Christianity as Heresy: The Development of the Concept in the Portuguese and Jesuit Sources," in *Proceedings of the XVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Hamburg, 2003*, Wiesbaden, 2006, pp. 649–655; L. COHEN, *The Missionary Strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555–1632)*, Wiesbaden, 2009, pp. 39, 161–162, 180–186; A. MARTÍNEZ D'ALÓS-MONER, "Paul and the Other: The Portuguese Debate on the Circumcision of the Ethiopians", in *Ethiopia and the Missions: Historical and Anthropological Insights*, V. BÖLL et al. (eds.), Münster, 2005, pp. 31–52; F. SOYER, *Antisemitic Conspiracy Theories in the Early Modern Iberian World: Narratives of Fear and Hatred*, Leiden, 2019, esp. pp. 116–117.

¹² Besides the literature cited in nn 30, 31 below, see: S. CHOJNACKI, *Ethiopian Icons: Catalogue of the Collection of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa University, Milan, 2000, esp. pp. 20–23; C. BOSCH-TIESSÉ, "The Use of Occidental Engravings in Ethiopian Painting in the 17th and 18th centuries", in M. J. RAMOS, I. BOAVIDA (eds.), *Indigenous and the Foreign in Christian Ethiopian art: on Portuguese-Ethiopian contacts in the 16th-17th centuries*. Papers from the Fifth International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art (Arrabida, 26-30 November 1999), Burlington, VT, 2004, pp. 83–102; M. GERVERS, "Two Late Sixteenth-Century Roman Engravings from the Rock-Cut Church of Maryam Dengelat (Haremat, Tigray)," in *Ethiopian Art – a Unique Cultural Heritage and Modern Challenge*, W. RAUNIG, P. ASFA-WOSEN ASSERATE (eds.), Orbis Aethiopicus 10, Lublin 2007, pp. 160–184.

Yet *pictorial* evidence relevant to Ethiopian conceptions of Jews has not to date been factored into the study of the Beta Israel. By the same token, historians of Ethiopian art have shown little interest in the depiction of Jews, let alone in its implications for popular attitudes towards the Beta Israel. The titular identification of Jews as bad actors in the Christian story is so taken for granted that the discontinuity in the visual modalities of representation hardly seems a problem worthy of analysis. Distinct strains of anti-Judaism and their relative chronologies in the Ethiopian context have to be disentangled. Art historical sources and methods, combined with ethnographic resources, help, on the one hand, to clarify particular anti-Jewish discourses and their pathways, and, on the other, to show how the different varieties ultimately cooperated, from the early modern period, in the othering of the Beta Israel.

The usual locus for the representation of Jews, identified by inscription, is in the iconography of the Passion. But consider the scene of Christ's Crucifixion between two thieves in the thirteenth-century wall paintings at Yemrehana Krestos near Lalibela (Fig. 1).¹³ The image features five enormous nails to either side of Jesus on the Cross. This number, unique to the Ethiopian conception of the Crucifixion, implicates a magical incantation widely disseminated in the late antique world. The five Latin palindromic words of the Sator Arepo square, in Ge'ez transliteration, were adopted as the talismanic names ascribed to the nails of the Crucifixion.¹⁴



Fig. 1. Crucifixion,
13th c, Yemrehana
Krestos. Photo:
Author

¹³ Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and Michael Gervers are co-authoring a monograph on this important church; I was not able to access their 2011 work published by Skira. In the meantime, see BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, GERVERS, "The Church of Yemrāḥannā Krestos and Its Wall-Paintings: A Preliminary Report", *Africana Bulletin*, 49 (2001), pp. 9–47.

¹⁴ SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS became SĀDŌR 'ALĀDŌR DĀNĀT 'ADĒRĀ RŌDĀS. E. A. W. BUDGE, *The Bandlet of Righteousness: an Ethiopian Book of the Dead. The Ethiopic text of the Lefāfa sedeq, in facsimile from two manuscripts in*

The five nails and their names were invoked in prayers for protection, for the healing of wounds, and cursing. Their formulaic invocation appears several times in the *Lefäfe sedek* (Bandlet of Righteousness), “a magical text that offers a list of powerful holy names purported to have been handed down by Mary.”¹⁵ The five nails’ iconic display at Yemrehana Krestos, I propose, is the earliest extant evidence in any medium of the tradition echoed in the Ethiopic Sator Arepo formula popular to this day. This talismanic heritage, very rarely visualized, must also inform the unusual depiction of Christ’s body in the Crucifixion scene in the Psalter of Belen Sagad (Paris, BnF, MS Éth. Abb. 105, fol. 11r), dated 1476–1477: blood streams from five nails wounds (hands, feet, chest) apart from the side lance wound (Fig. 2).¹⁶ The thorns arrayed around Christ’s head makes the Psalter image one of the earliest depictions in Ethiopian art of the tortuous crown, to which I will return momentarily.

The Yemrehana Krestos and Psalter Crucifixions supply medieval antecedents for an oral tradition reported in 1932 by an elderly painter Qes Kasa to Marcel Griaule, then leading a French art collecting expedition based in Gondar.¹⁷ Kasa related that “the nails used to nail Our Lord were five in number, two in the hands, two in the feet and the fifth nail, according to some manuscripts, was pressed into his head, and according to others in his breast.”¹⁸ Wilhelm Staude could document such iconography, however, only in twentieth-century images of the *arma christi* with five nails and of the dead Christ with a prominent nail wound in the chest.¹⁹ Interestingly, Kasa’s own drawings of the Nailing to the Cross and the Crucifixion, included in his idealized program for wall paintings in an Ethiopian church, adhere to iconographic convention and do not entail five nails.²⁰

Altogether missing from the two medieval scenes are figures of inimical actors. Their absence is all the more salient in light of the motif of the five nails within the devotional literature

the British Museum, London, 1929, pp. ix, 37–40, 66, 72, 75, 78; W. STAUDE, “Die ikonographischen Regeln in der äthiopischen Kirchenmalerei”, *Archiv für Völkerkunde*, 13 (1958), pp. 236–308, esp. pp. 275–280; IDEM, “Les cinq clous du Christ et l’icone impériale éthiopienne”, *Ethnologische Zeitschrift*, 1 (1971), pp. 5–25; O. LÖFGREN, “Äthiopische Wandmulette”, *Orientalia Suecana*, 11 (1963), pp. 95–120, esp. 106.

¹⁵ I here quote Prof. Dan Levene’s succinct characterization (personal communication).

¹⁶ The manuscript is named after the governor (*aqatsān*) of the northern province Sarawē for whom it was written during the reign of the negus Ba’eda Maryam (1468–78). E. BALICKA-WITAKOWSKA, “Le psautier éthiopien illustré de Bel en Sägäd”, in *Imagines medievales: Studier i medeltida ikonografi, arkitektur, skulptur, måleri och konsthantverk*, R. ZEITLER, J. O.M. KARLSSON (eds.), Acta Universitatis, Ars Swetica 7, Uppsala, 1983, pp. 1–46, esp. pp. 12–13; A. WION, C. BOSC-TIÉSSÉ, “Les manuscrits éthiopiens d’Antoine d’Abbadie à la Bibliothèque nationale de France”, in *Antoine d’Abbadie, de l’Abyssinie au Pays basque, voyage d’une vie*, J. DERCOURT, M. HUREL (eds.), Biarritz, 2010, pp. 75–116, esp. pp. 91–96; J. GNISCI, “The Dead Christ on the Cross in Ethiopian Art: Notes on the Iconography of the Crucifixion in Twelfth- to Fifteenth-Century Ethiopia”, *Studies in Iconography*, 35 (2014), pp. 187–228, esp. pp. 217–219.

¹⁷ The expedition was called Mission Dakar–Djibouti, after its two termini. C. BOSC-TIÉSSÉ, A. WION, *Peintures sacrées d’Éthiopie: Collection de la Mission Dakar-Djibouti*, St-Maur-des-Fossés, 2005, pp. 106–121. Kasa’s notes are preserved in Paris, BnF, MS Éth 579).

¹⁸ STAUDE, “Les cinq clous,” p. 6 and (in German trans.) “Die ikonographischen Regeln,” p. 276.

¹⁹ STAUDE, “les cinq clous,” p. 25, figs. 9–11. For a nineteenth-century example of the *arma christi* with five nails, see J. MERCIER, *Art that Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia*, Munich, 1997, p. 74, fig. 72.

²⁰ STAUDE, “Die ikonographischen Regeln,” pl. 1 (between pp. 256–57), and for a better reproduction BOSC-TIÉSSÉ, WION, *Peintures sacrées d’Éthiopie*, p. 111.



Fig. 2. Crucifixion, 1476-77, Psalter of Belen Sagad (Paris, BnF, MS Éth. Abb 105, fol. 11r). Photo: BnF

of the *Kidana Mehrat* (Covenant of Mercy), the pact whereby Jesus accords his mother intercessory privileges on behalf of her worshippers. Of the diverse Marian texts associated with the *Kidana Mehrat*, a central theme within Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the one at issue here relates the Virgin's Five Sorrows. According to Enrico Cerulli, a French version of a Latin source was transmitted to Ethiopia at the tail end of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century via an Arabic rendition.²¹ The penultimate sorrow refers to Jesus' Crucifixion between two thieves. At some point in the lament's Ge'ez dissemination, a variant, found in a late seventeenth-century manuscript, took an especially accusatory and graphic turn. The Virgin recalls "when they [the Jews] crucified Thee between two thieves on the day of the Eve of the Sabbath, and thou wert naked, and they drove five nails through thy body."²²

By then, Ethiopia's opening to European courts had initiated an artistic sea change that both encompassed formal expression and the iconographic repertory. New episodes of the cruelty inflicted on Christ amplified the Passion narrative. Stanislaw Chojnacki identified the earliest known image of Christ Crowned with Thorns in a Ritual for Passion Week from the Tigray region; made in the late fifteenth century by the same scriptorium as the Psalter of Belen Sagad, it belongs to the monastery Dabra Abuna Marawi Krestos.²³ Two figures each lodge a spike into a veritable halo of them, while two others raise poles to participate in the torment (fol. 137v, Fig. 3). The long, straight thorns thrust into Christ's head recall the type of crown that appears in the Psalter Crucifixion. As Chojnacki explains, the Marawi Krestos scene combines the making of the crown (the inscription states the soldiers "plait a crown of thorns") with act of striking in a representation of the Mocking of Christ (Matt. 27:28–30, Mk 15:17–19, Jn 19:2–3). Both the Psalter and the Ritual are remarkable for Passion miniatures in which Christ's antagonists wear Jews' caps: the Arrest in the Paris manuscript (BnF, MS Éth. Abb. 105, fol. 10v); the Arrest of Christ and Flagellation in two registers (fol. 117r) and Christ before Pilate (fol. 123v) in the Marawi Krestos book. The motif of the Jews' caps attests the reception of (unspecified) northern European xylographs. In contrast to the western iconographies underlying the Arrest, Flagellation, and Pilate scenes, the Crowning depicts the soldiers

²¹ E. CERULLI, "La festa etiopica del Patto di Misericordia e le sue fonti nel greco 'Liber de transitu' e nel racconto latino dei Cinque dolori di Maria", in *Studi bizantini e neoellenici* 9, *Silloge bizantina in onore di Silvio Giuseppe Mercati* (1957), pp. 53–71, esp. from pp. 64ff. The author, p. 68, dates the Ethiopic translation from the Arabic to reign of Dawit I (1389–1411). I am indebted to Prof. Wendy Laura Belcher for this reference.

²² E.A.W. BUDGE, *The miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the life of Hannâ (Saint Anne), and the magical prayers of Ahêta Mikâêl: the Ethiopic texts edited with English Translation*, London, 1900, p. 19, translated from the text of Lady Meux MS 2, for which Budge uses the designation A, fol. 1b; he dates the manuscript to the reign of Dawit II (1508–1540), p. xvi. It now has the shelfmark Oslo-London, Schøyen Collection, MS 248 (private communication from Prof. Belcher, who reports a date of ca. 1682–1706). Budge republished this lament in *Legends of Our Lady Mary the Perpetual Virgin and Her Mother Hannâ, translated from the Ethiopic manuscripts collected by King Theodore at Makdalâ & now in the British Museum*, London, 1922, pp. 58–59. For other manuscripts in which this version of the "Five Sorrows" can be found, see the concordance in E. CERULLI, *Il Libro etiopica dei Miracoli de Maria e le sue fonti letterarie del Medio Evo latino*, Rome, 1943, p. 67, and for further commentary on the "Five Sorrows", pp. 336–337.

²³ S. CHOJNACKI, *The Kwer'ata re 'esu: Its Iconography and Significance. An Essay in Cultural History of Ethiopia*, Istituto universitario orientale, Supplemento agli Annali 42, Naples, 1985, pp. 7–12. On the manuscript, see Marilyn Heldman, cat. no. 89. in *African Zion: the sacred art of Ethiopia*, New Haven, 1993, p. 189 with several color plates.



Fig. 3. Christ Crowned with Thorns and Mocked (Dabra Abuna Marawi Krestos, fol. 137v). Photo: courtesy of Michael Gervers

specified in the gospel texts rather than Jews. The soldiers' strict profile, leaving only one eye visible, marks their evil-doing nature but otherwise their physical type and attire assimilates them ethnically to Ethiopian figures in the rest of the manuscript.

Chojnacki further outlined the transformation of the Crowning/ Mocking iconography of the Marawi Krestos miniature into the Ethiopian Man of Sorrows.²⁴ The Portuguese embassy led by Rodrigo de Lima (1520–1526) included a painter Lazaro de Andrade, who remained in Ethiopia. Through the embassy or its painter, a Luso-Flemish panel painting of a devotional type of Ecce Homo came into the possession of the negus (king), who elevated it to a royal paladium. Stolen by the British in 1868, the panel is known today only in a 1917 photograph.²⁵ A Ge'ez titulus inscribed on the panel reinterprets the haloed and bramble-crowned portrait in narrative terms, “how they strike the head of Our Lord.” The imperial icon and its plethora of later copies were subsequently called *Kwer'ata re'esu*/ “the striking of His head.” The half-length portrait image proliferated in a number of variants from the late seventeenth century. In one type, the golden rays turn not into plant spikes but into iron nails (Fig. 4).²⁶ Two diminutive figures wielding hammers or axe-like cudgels drive the nails into Christ's skull. The

²⁴ CHOJNACKI, *The Kwer'ata re'esu*, pp. 12–64. See also Ewa Balicka-Witakowska, “Kwe'rata Re'esu,” *Encyclopaedia ethiopica*, vol. 3, Wiesbaden, 2007, pp. 465–468; C. BOSC-TIESSÉ, *Les îles de la mémoire: fabrique des images et écriture de l'histoire dans les églises du lac Tānā, Éthiopie, XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 2008, pp. 357–363.

²⁵ The panel has been secreted away since 1950 in the private collection of a Portuguese art historian whose estate has forbidden its consultation or photographic reproduction. For a detailed account of painting's itinerary, see J.J. HESPELER-BOULTBEE, *A Story in Stones. Portugal's Influence on Culture and Architecture in the Highlands of Ethiopia, 1493–1643*, British Columbia, 2011, pp. 177–182.

²⁶ Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, inv. no. 3892, Chojnacki, *Ethiopian Icons*, cat. no. 90, pp. 126, 349. This particular rendition happens to have five nails, but many do not. For other examples, see CHOJNACKI, *The Kwer'ata re'esu*, fig. 14 (now in Washington DC, National Museum of African Art, no. 2004-7-3, with reproduction



Fig. 4. *Kwer'ata re'esu* ("the striking of His head"), Diptych (Addis Ababa, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, no. 3892), late seventeenth century. Photo: courtesy of Michael Gervers

display of bloody wounds in Christ's upturned palms pictorially elides the nailing action of the Crowning with that done on the Cross.

Chojnacki and other commentators suggest that the tormentors, similarly depicted in other Passion scenes, represent Muslims on account of their non-Ethiopian headgear and attire.²⁷ This reading certainly makes sense in light of Ethiopia's struggle against the devastating jihadist campaign led by the imam and general Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi from the Adal Sultanate (1527–1543). Yet Ge'ez tituli in some works nonetheless explicitly identify the figures as Jews.²⁸ It is the conventional anti-Jewish framing of the Passion narrative that establishes the identity of Christ's tormentors – the "they", subject of the verbs of torture – by virtue of which

online), figs. 15, 23–27, 33, 36. Additional examples include: liturgical pendant, seventeenth century, from Godjam, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, inv. no. 3984, CHOJNACKI, *Ethiopian Icons*, cat. no. 109, pp. 138, 361; diptych (left panel), late seventeenth century, Munich, Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, inv. no. 86-307678, J. MERCIER, B. EL-HABIB RIOTTOT, *L'Arche Éthiopienne: art chrétienne d'Éthiopie. 27 septembre 2000–7 janvier 2001, Pavillon des arts, Paris*, Paris, 2000, p. 134; triptych (right panel), c. 1700, private collection, *ibid.*, p. 145; diptych (right panel), c. 1665–1669, from the church of Abba Antonios, Gondar, now in Paris, Musée du Quai Branly, inv. 71.1931.74.3389, BOSC-TIESSÉ, WION, *Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie*, pp. 40–41.

²⁷ CHOJNACKI, *The Kwer'ata re'esu*, p. 26.

²⁸ E.g., *Kwer'ata re'esu*, diptych from the church of Abba Antonios, in the Musée du Quai Branly, cited above n. 26; BOSC-TIESSÉ, WION, *Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie*, p. 41, for the inscriptions and translations, p. 63 for their commentary on the othering representation of Jews in Gondarine and post-Gondarine art.

the visual allusion to Muslims can perform its symbolic function. Lindsay Kaplan argues this point with respect to Latin Christian works of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries that feature African Muslims. To quote from her as yet unpublished essay: “Interpellated into the category of enemy of the faith, originally constructed with regard to Jews, Muslims anachronistically appear as antagonists of Jesus... the criminal behavior of the Jews derogates the image of the ‘African’ Muslim, rather than the reverse.”

The iconography of the Nailing to the Cross arrived in the form of imagery ultimately harking back to Albrecht Dürer's composition for his woodcut series “the Small Passion” (1508–1511).²⁹ Historians of Ethiopian art have identified two proximate models. Antonio Tempesta's copy of the Dürer in the *Evangelium arabicum* (Rome, 1591), repeated therein four times (pp. 135, 221, 355, 451), inspired the scene's treatment in a Gospel book of 1664–1665 (London, BL, MS OR 510, fols. 71r, 117v, 185v and 232r).³⁰ Eighteenth-century images rely instead on a baroque framing of the scene in Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* (Antwerp, 1593, pl. 127) and the latter's French derivative (e.g., *Abrégé de la vie et passion de Notre Sauveur Jesus Christ*, Paris, 1663, fol. 32r).³¹ In the Western prints, the executioners vigorously go about their gruesome tasks oblivious to Jesus' suffering, if not relishing it. The Dürer/Tempesta composition additionally foregrounds strewn ironworkers' tongs and loose nails, while the Nadal includes fulsomely bearded onlookers wearing caps and long robes, i.e., Jews.

Ethiopian renditions of the Nailing to the Cross variously reprise or revise the appropriated iconographic templates.³² A singularly local interpolation stands out, however. Blacksmiths forging the nails with their bellows, tools, and anvil are sometimes insinuated into the scene

²⁹ H. BUCHTAL, “An Ethiopic Miniature of Christ Being Nailed to the Cross”, in *Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studi etiopici* (Roma 2–4 aprile 1959), Rome, 1960, pp. 331–335.

³⁰ J. LEROY, “L'évangélaire éthiopien illustré du British Museum (Or. 510) et ses sources iconographiques,” *Annales d'Éthiopie*, 4 (1961), pp. 155–181, esp. pp. 163–166; A. MARX, *When Images Travel to Ethiopia: Impact of the Evangelium Arabicum printed 1590 in Rome on a 17th-Century Ethiopian Gospel – Documentation and Synoptic Presentation of their Images – Wenn Bilder nach Äthiopien reisen: Einfluss des 1590 in Rom gedruckten Evangelium Arabicum auf ein äthiopisches Evangeliar* (17. Jh.) – Dokumentation und synoptische Gegenüberstellung ihrer Bilder, Aachen, 2019. On the Tempesta woodcuts, see Richard S. Field, *Antonio Tempesta's Blocks and Woodcuts for the Medicean 1591 Arabic Gospels*, Chicago, 2011.

³¹ J. MERCIER, “Les sources iconographiques occidentales du cycle de la vie du Christ dans la peinture éthiopienne du dix-huitième siècle,” *Journal asiatique*, 287-2 (1999), pp. 375–394, esp. 376–377; IDEM, “La peinture éthiopienne à l'époque axoumite et au XVIII^e siècle”, *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendu des séances*, 2000, pp. 35–65, esp. pp. 45–60; BOSCH-TIESSE, *Les îles de la mémoire*, pp. 99–111, 314–327; J. M. MASSING, “Jerome Nadal's *Evangelicae Historiae Imagines* and the Birth of Global Imagery”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 80-1 (2017), pp. 161–220, esp. pp. 214–220. For an interesting adaptation of the Nadal engravings in Ethiopia, see the triptych studied in A. MARX, “The Yellow Hat – An Unusual Icon from Ethiopia,” unpublished paper presented at The 9th International Conference of Art and Architecture in Ethiopia, 2nd–6th Sept. 2013, University of Vienna (Austria), https://www.academia.edu/5655463/The_Yellow_Hat, [accessed September 29, 2021].

³² However, the panel painting of c. 1600 (private collection) reproduced by CHOJNACKI, *The «Kwer'ata re 'esu*, fig. 10, does not fit this paradigm. It conflates the Crucifixion (thus, Christ upright on the Cross) between Mary, John and the two thieves with the Nailing, carried out by two diminutive figures hammering Christ's hands; a central figure below holds up a nail. The scenes of the Mocking and Deposition appear below the Cross.

(Fig. 5).³³ They occur nowhere else in the repertory of Passion imagery that spread throughout the global orbit of Catholic missionizing. This compositional motif recycles elements used in other Ethiopian iconographies and likely reflects observed craft practices.³⁴

Ethiopians traditionally regarded ironworkers as fearsome sorcerers. A uniquely Ethiopian inflection of the late antique magic lore centered on the figure of King Solomon offers a rough parallel to the pictorial interpolation of smiths in the iconography of the Nailing. The Ethiopian narrative of Solomon's Net adds the motif of blacksmiths who capture the wise Temple-builder while he dreams and bring him before their demon king; Solomon's powerful incantation of divine names reduces the contingent to ashes and forces the arch-demon to confess his crimes.³⁵ European accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth century commented on the derogation and shunning of blacksmiths. Describing how the itinerant encampment of the negus Lebna Dengal (1508–1540) spatially mirrored the hierarchies of Ethiopian society, Francisco Alvarez, chaplain in the embassy of Rodrigo de Lima, observed that the smiths (presumably needed for provisioning the army with weapons) were confined to a place on the outskirts next to prostitutes.³⁶ A century later, the Jesuit Pedro Páez reported in his *History of Ethiopia* (1622) that the negus Zar'a Ya'eqob (1434–1468) had metalworkers put to death for their sorcery.³⁷ Relying

³³ Tituli, trans. Mesert Oldjira: Below Christ's rib cage, "How they nailed him." Below Pilate, and continuing down at right, "How Pilate washed his hands with water [and] how the Jews asked Pilate to hang Jesus. And how they let Barnabas live." On the paintings in Ura Kidane Mehret, see BOSCH-TIESSE, *Les îles de la mémoire*, pp. 372–73. Other examples of the Nailing with blacksmiths: Life of Tekle Haymanot and legends of Mary, late eighteenth or nineteenth century, MS from Däbrä Marqos (reproduction online at the website run by Michael Gervers, Mäzgäbä Səlat: Treasury of Ethiopian Images, Ethiopia.deeds.utoronto.ca, ref. no. DM-2007.005:298); wall painting, Mādhānē Alām (Adwa, Tigray Province), west exterior wall of the maqdas, early nineteenth century (reproduction at *ibid.*, ref. no. MG-2000.050:026); in the scene painted on the wall at the Emmanuel Church, Balchi (near Sankora, Arusi Province), an executioner picks out a nail from the flames with his pincer to use it in nailing Christ to the Cross, late nineteenth or early twentieth century (reproduction, *Ibidem*, ref. no. MG-1993.002:019), website accessed September 24, 2021.

³⁴ See, for example, the two smiths, one with bellows at the firepit and the other with anvil and hammer, make an icon frame in the story of Euphemia, in a late seventeenth-century Gondar Homiliary, Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W. 835, fols. 72v–73r. The Ge'ez titulus between the pair, fol. 72v, is translated "And how a blacksmith toiled in making a panel for a picture of Saint Michael," in the digital facsimile at <https://art.thewalters.org/detail/6245/gondar-homiliary-2/>. See also J. MERCIER, "Ethiopian Art History," in *Ethiopian Art: the Walters Art Museum*, D. E. HOROWITZ (ed.), Baltimore, 2001, pp. 45–73, esp. p. 65, no. 23; the catalog entry by C. GRIFFITH MANN, pp. 108–109. A group of three smiths appear in a scene in the Acts of Fileppos (1274–1348), third abbot of the monastery Dabra 'Asbo (renamed Dabra Libanos), founded by Takla Haymanot, in the eighteenth-century hagiographic cycle, London, BL, MS Or 728, fol. 181r.

³⁵ BUDGE, *The miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary...and the magical prayers of Ahēta Mikāēl*, pp. li–lvi; S. EURINGER, "Das Netz Solomons. Ein äthiopischer Zaubertext", *Zeitschrift für Semitistik und verwandte Gebiete*, 6 (1928), pp. 76–100 (esp. pp. 81–82, 86, 93, 97–98); 178–99 (esp. p. 197), 300–14, (esp. pp. 301, 303–305, 309) and 7 (1929), pp. 68–85 (esp. p. 71); LÖFGREN, "Äthiopische Wandmulette", pp. 105, 111–118; J. MERCIER, *Ethiopian Magic Scrolls*, New York, 1979, pp. 8, 19; IDEM, *Le Roi Salomon et les maîtres du regard: Art et médecine en Éthiopie*, Paris, 1992, pp. 123, 138–139, and the contribution by M. RODINSON, "Comment un roi israélite est devenu un magicien universel", pp. 132–135; Mercier, *Art That Heals*, pp. 48–50.

³⁶ *The Prester John of the Indies: A True Relation of the Lands of the Prester John being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520 written by Father Francisco Alvares*, Ch. F. BECKINGHAM, G. W.B. HUNTINGFORD (eds.), 2 vols, Cambridge, 1961, 2: 437–445, esp. pp. 443, 445.

³⁷ *Pedro Páez's History of Ethiopia, 1622*, I. BOAVIDA, H. PENNEC, M. J. RAMOS (eds.), Ch. J. TRIBE (trans.), 2 vols., London, 2011, 1, pp. 109–110.



Fig. 5. Nailing of Christ to the Cross with blacksmiths making the nails at lower right; Pilate washing his hands at left and Jews with hooked noses demanding Christ's execution, Ura Kidane Mehret (Zege Peninsula, Lake Tana), west exterior wall of the maqdas, later eighteenth century. Photo: Author

on an Ethiopian monk living in Rome, as a source Abba Gregorius, living in Rome, the German orientalist Hiob Ludolf wrote in his 1681 history (4.5):

The Jews are almost the only persons that employ themselves among them in weaving of Cotton: they also make the Heads of their Spears and several other pieces of Workmanship in Iron, for they are excellent Smiths; a sort of Trade otherwise abhor'd by the Habessines; which Gregory confirm'd with a smile, saying, That the silly vulgar people could not endure Smiths as being a sort of Mortals that spit fire, and were bred up in Hell.³⁸

The nefarious stigma of sorcery thus attached to the Beta Israel, whose livelihood had largely come to depend on the forge (men) and kiln (women).³⁹ The fiery transformation of

³⁸ H. LUDOLF, *A New History of Ethiopia: Being a Full and Accurate Description of the Kingdom of Abessinia, Vulgarly, Though Erroneously Called the Empire of Prester John*, (trans. J. P. GENT), London, 1684, pp. 390–391.

³⁹ By the eighteenth century in the Gondar area, Muslims had replaced the Beta Israel in specialists in weaving, KAPLAN, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, p. 100 and 195, n13. On *buda* applied to the Beta Israel, *Ibidem*, p. 109; QUIRIN, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews*, pp. 13, 32–33, 98, 100–101, 110–111, 126, 134–137, 141–145,

matter correlated supernaturally with the shapeshifting hyena, alleged since Antiquity to alternate between male and female, a queer behavior that compounded the creature's reputation for uncleanness.⁴⁰ Does not the animal, ubiquitous in Ethiopia, sound its double nature through bestial cries that resemble the human voice? Modern era travelers and missionaries (from the 1770s) relate the pervasive popular belief that the Beta Israel embodied the essence of the hyena into which they morphed at night to devour corpses or consume their victims' blood.⁴¹ Not unlike the reductive association of Jews with the filthy lucre of money-lending in medieval/early modern Europe, which prevailed despite Lombard and Florentine control of major banking houses, the collective identification of the Beta Israel with hyena *buda* assumed in Ethiopia the force of a governing stereotype. The fact that other non-Amhara groups may have confronted, and continue to confront, similar accusations in no way dissipates the particularizing fixation of the stereotype on the Beta Israel nor does it diminish the collective dehumanization of this outgroup.

Still, the question remains, why insert blacksmiths at work in scenes of the Nailing to the Cross? The significance, and conceptual derivation, of the motif has heretofore escaped notice. Oral testimony recorded in the early twentieth century characterizes the Beta Israel as descendants of the blacksmiths who made the nails for the Crucifixion.⁴² This infamous genealogy, however, is not timeless folklore. It originated in western European sources. French literature of the thirteenth century and English manuscript illumination of the fourteenth

154, 160, 163. For a study not connected to the B. ISRAEL, N. FINNERAN, "Ethiopian Evil Eye Belief and the Magical Symbolism of Iron Working", *Folklore*, 114-3 (2003), pp. 427-433.

⁴⁰ F. LAUCHERT, *Geschichte des Physiologus*, Strasbourg, 1889, p. 24 for the references to Classical sources; F. HOMMEL, *Die aethiopische Übersetzung des Physiologus nach je einer Londoner, Pariser und Wiener Handschrift*, Leipzig, 1877, p. 70; C. SUMNER, *The Fisalgwos*, Ethiopian Philosophy 5, Addis Ababa, 1982; L.S.B. MACCOULL, "The Coptic 'Triadon' and the Ethiopic 'Physiologus'", *Oriens Christianus*, 74 (1991), pp. 141-146; G. MURADYAN, *Physiologus: The Green and Armenian Versions with a Study of Translation Technique*, Leuven, 2005; M. PRENDERGRAFT, "Thou Shalt Not Eat the Hyena: A Note on «Barnabas» Epistle 10.7", *Vigiliae Christianae*, 46-1 (1992), pp. 75-79; S. E. GLICKMAN, "The Spotted Hyena from Aristotle to the Lion King: Reputation is Everything", *Social Research*, 62-3 (1995), pp. 501-537; D. HASSIG, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 145-155; M. BROTTMAN, *Hyena*, London, 2012; S. DRAKE, *Slandering the Jew: Sexuality and Difference in Early Christian Texts*, Philadelphia, 2013, pp. 31, 87; M. BAYNES-ROCK, "Ethiopian Buda as Hyenas: Where the Social is More than Human", *Folklore*, 126-3 (2015), pp. 266-282; A. KRASS, "The Hyena's Cave: Jeremiah 12.9 in Premodern Bestiaries", *Interfaces*, 5 (2018), pp. 111-128. Remarkably, the widespread Christian usage of ancient hyena lore for the dehumanization of Jews has been neglected in analyzing the fixation of the motif on the Beta Israel. For comparative purposes, see: D. J. SAPIR, "Leper, Hyena, and Blacksmith in Kujamaat Diola Thought", *American Ethnologist*, 8-3 (1981), pp. 526-543; J. W. FREMBGEN, "The Magicality of the Hyena: Beliefs and Practices in West and South Asia", *Asian Folklore Studies*, 57 (1998), pp. 331-344.

⁴¹ J. BRUCE, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile in the Years 1768, 1769, 1770, 1771, 1772 and 1773*, 5 vols, Edinburgh, 1790, 4, pp. 107-120, observed. pp. 108-9, that people in Gondor "firmly believe that these animals [hyenas] are Falasha from the neighbouring mountains, transformed by magic, and come down to eat human flesh in the dark in safety". KAPLAN, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, p. 111-114. SALAMON, *The Hyena People*, pp. 7-8, 35-39, 65-71.

⁴² W. HEINTZE, "Where the Blue Nile Rises", *Jewish Missionary Intelligence*, September 1933, p. 108; R. A. REMINICK, "The Evil Eye Belief Among the Amhara of Ethiopia", *Ethnology*, 13-3 (1974), pp. 279-291, esp. p. 286, reports testimony from "an old Amhara peasant farmer," who related, "The blacksmiths made the nails and the carpenters made the cross and while Christ hung on the cross he cursed those people whose skills made it possible to crucify him". KAPLAN, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, p. 113; SALAMON, *The Hyena People*, pp. 8, 37.

elaborated apocryphal narratives of the Jews' role in fashioning the nails used to affix Jesus on the cross.⁴³ But the visual pairing of the Nailing episode with an image of ironworkers at the forge appears in the *Speculum humanae salvationis* (c. 23, ll. 31–58), according to which the Jews, prefigured by the archetypal smith Tubalcain, invented nails for the express purpose of impaling bodies to the cross.⁴⁴ The profusely illustrated text, translated into multiple vernacular languages, survives in hundreds of copies (manuscripts, blockbooks, and incunabula) produced between the early fourteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The message of the *Speculum*'s typologically generated conjunction is subtly referenced in the Dürer (who surely knew a German edition), which incorporated a smith's pincers and nails into the action. And that message was further narrativized in Ethiopia through the influence of the Nadal repertory. The imported tropes of Jews as the originary smiths, as makers of the nails for the Crucifixion, and as supervising the nailing of Christ's body condensed, in the above-mentioned Marian lament, into the Jews themselves carrying out the action.

The same chapter of the *Speculum* on Christ nailed to the Cross may perhaps have left its trace in another visual pairing that I have thus far found only in a single Ethiopian artwork. Following the scene in the *Speculum* of Tubalcain at work in his forge, the very next typological image depicts the martyrdom of the prophet Isaiah to illustrate, quoting Berthold Kress's summary of the relevant passage, that "the Jews cut Isaias in two with a wooden saw. This prefigures that they separated Christ's soul from His body – but they failed to separate His divinity from either" (for ll. 59–76). The Nailing and Sawing episodes appear together, above the Deposition, in the lower corner of the right panel of a diptych from the church of Qaha Iyäsus at Gondar, now in Paris (Musée du Quai Branly, inv. no. 71.1931.74.3388), a work dated to the end of the seventeenth or early eighteenth century (Fig. 6).⁴⁵ The visual configuration of the triple horizontal bodies, with the martyred prophet sandwiched between the tortured and shrouded bodies of Christ, strongly suggests a meaningful parallelism best explained by the typological rationale offered by the *Speculum*. The use of Isaiah in the Catholic source to exemplify the inseparability of Christ's divinity and humanity takes on new emphasis through the monophysite lens of the Ethiopian icon.

In contrast to the Dürer/Tempesta and Nadal images, the *Speculum humanae salvationis* seems not to have provided Ethiopian artists with compositional models. Rather, it

⁴³ G. D. SCHMIDT, "A Fell Woman and Full of Strife: the Legend of Hédroit, the Smith's Wife", *Mediaevalia*, 11 (1985), pp. 47–61 (I thank James Marrow for this reference). The earliest image of the smith's wife holding nails for the crucifixion appears among the late thirteenth-century stone carvings at Strasbourg Cathedral, west façade, central portal, tympanum, second register from the bottom). See also the Queen Mary Psalter, London, BL, Royal MS 2 B VI, fol. 252v, 1310–1320, and the Holkham Bible Picture Book, London, BL, Add MS 47682, fol. 31r, c. 1327–1340. M. P. BROWN, *The Holkham Bible Picture Book: A Facsimile*, London 2007.

⁴⁴ For the fullest compendium of reproductions across the corpus of *Speculum* manuscripts and early printed editions, see the website of B. KRESS, "The *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* – summary of the text," at https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/Speculum_intro.html, with chapter 23 at https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/Speculum_summary.html#ch23, accessed September 22, 2021. A. WILSON, J. L. WILSON, *A Medieval Mirror: Speculum Humane Salvationis 1324–1500*, Berkeley, 1985, on the history of the work from manuscript to print, and pp. 186–87 for chapter 23.

⁴⁵ BOSCH-THIESSÉ, WION, *Peintures sacrées d'Éthiopie*, pp. 44–47, with a transcription and translation of the Ge'ez tituli.



Fig. 6. Nailing of Christ to the Cross, Sawing of Isaiah, Deposition, right panel, diptych from the church of Qahā Iyāsūs at Gondar, c. 1700 (Paris, Musée du Quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, inv. no. 71.1931.74.3388). Photo: © musée du quai Branly - Jacques Chirac, photo Claude Germain

purveyed long-established anti-Jewish tropes that, translated into local iconographic formulae, supplemented the Nailing episode. The notion that Jews had invented nails assumed a new, and particular, salience in Ethiopian culture. The leitmotif reframed ironwork: it Judaized an occupation deemed repugnant. The diabolic role of smiths in talismanic incantations and their association with bloodthirsty hyenas, portrayed in saints' lives as fire-breathing, devil-bearing mounts, coalesced with novel proof of Jewish malevolence.⁴⁶ The smiths' direct participation in nailing Christ to the Cross set up the figures as pictorial surrogates for the Beta Israel, to whom devolved the ignominious task of judicial executions and mutilating corporeal punishments.⁴⁷ Visual images inspired by Latin Christian and Catholic sources functioned to compensate for, if not negate, the very similarities between Ethiopian Orthodoxy and Beta Israel religion on which specialists insist, not to mention supply an odious genealogy that repudiated Beta Israel claims to a shared biblical ancestry.

In the face of Portuguese and eventually Jesuit assertions that Judaic practices had corrupted Ethiopian Christianity, Ethiopians defended their religious customs. Shortly after the arrival of the Jesuits in 1555, the negus Galawdewos (1540–1559) penned a missive to the king of Portugal João III (r. 1521–1557) or to the viceroy of Goa expatiating on his faith. Galawdewos maintained that Ethiopians do not observe the Sabbath, circumcision, and dietary laws “like the Jews who crucified Christ, saying: his blood is upon us and upon our children.”⁴⁸ As Leonardo Cohen has shown, the distinctions that Galawdewos drew had nothing to do with Beta Israel traditions, but rather reflected knowledge about Portuguese Jewish customs that the negus must have already acquired from his Catholic interlocutors.⁴⁹ During the succeeding decades of Jesuit activity, culminating in the 1622 conversion of the negus Susneyos (1607–1632) to Roman Catholicism, missionaries' can only have further propounded that Ethiopians must not be “like the Jews.” How could such schooling have failed to amplify, even exacerbate, the logic of ethno-religious differentiation with respect to the Beta Israel?⁵⁰ Notwithstanding the ejection of the Jesuits from the country after the accession of Fasiladas (1632–1667) and the definitive Ethiopian rejection of Catholic dogma, imported visual apparatuses fueled local iconographies of Jewish enmity that rhymed with globally proliferating tropes of sadistic Jews, their spikey instruments of torture, consumption of blood, and exploitation of wealth

⁴⁶ For images of fire-breathing hyenas bearing devils, see the Life and Acts of St. Tekle Haymanot, in London, BL, MS Or 723, fol. 69r, and MS Or 728, fol. 56r, both eighteenth-century manuscripts. I thank Eyob Derillo, Curator of Ethiopian manuscripts at the British Library, for alerting me to this iconography.

⁴⁷ J. ABBINK, “A Socio-Structural Analysis of the Beta Esra’el as an «Infamous Group» in Traditional Ethiopia,” *Sociologus*, 37-2 (1987), pp. 140–154, esp. pp. 150–151.

⁴⁸ E. ULLENDORFF, “The *Confessio Fidei* of King Claudius of Ethiopia,” *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 32-1 (1987), pp. 159–176, quote at pp. 171–172.

⁴⁹ L. COHEN, “The Portuguese Context of the *Confessio Fidei* of King Claudius,” in *Ethiopian Studies at the End of the Second Millennium*. Proceedings of the XIVth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, November 6-11, 2000, B. YIMAM (ed.), 3 vols., Addis Ababa, 2002, 1, pp. 152–168.

⁵⁰ M. W. AREGAY, “The Legacy of Jesuit Missionary Activities in Ethiopia”, in *Missionary Factor in Ethiopia: Papers from a Symposium on the Impact of European Missions on Ethiopian Society*, Lund University, August 1996, G. HAILE et al. (eds), Frankfurt am Main, 1998, pp. 31–56, esp. p. 39 suggests that Portuguese/Jesuit “overemphasis on the Jewishness of Ethiopian Christianity might have contributed to the revival of dormant prejudices against the Falasha of central Ethiopia”.

and power to the detriment of their neighbors.⁵¹ Recourse to Catholic imagery integrated Ethiopia into modern circuits of defamatory knowledge about Jews that, as recent studies by Magda Teter and François Soyer reveal, stretched from Western Europe to Poland and Peru.⁵² Ethiopia's relative isolation between the end of the Jesuit adventure and the arrival of Protestant missions in the nineteenth century did not preclude absorption of European anti-Jewish discourses and stereotypes.

⁵¹ In the early eighteenth-century Qwesquam Apocalypse, London, BL, MS Or 533, fol. 68r the woman seated on the scarlet beast of Rev 17:1–18 is interpreted through the trope of Jewish wealth, see R. McEWAN (with D. McEWAN, ed.), *Picturing apocalypse at Gondär: a Study of the Two Known Sets of Ethiopian illuminations of the Revelation of St. John and the Life and Death of John*, Turin, 2006, pp. 179–182. The trope is developed in the Amharic commentary on that scriptural text, R. W. COWLEY, *The Traditional Interpretation of the Apocalypse of St. John in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church*, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 328–329; Cowley, p. 23, dates the formation of the commentary tradition to the Gondarine period.

⁵² M. TETER, *Blood Libel: On the Trail of an Antisemitic Myth*, Cambridge, MA, 2020, pp. 89–207, 236–278; F. SOYER, “The Passion of Christ in the Church of San Cristóbal De Rapaz: An Example of Medieval Anti-Jewish Iconography in Colonial Peru?”, *eHumanista/ Conversos*, 5 (2017), pp. 392–416.