

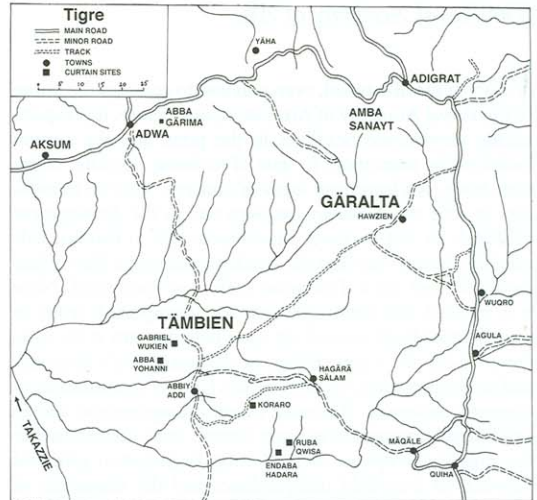
# The tablet-woven hangings of Tigre, Ethiopia: from history to symmetry

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IT IS NOT UNCOMMON for craftsmen to reproduce patterns designed for expensive materials using cheaper ones. Frequently unaware of what they are reproducing, or inspired by derivatives rather than the original, they may introduce their own peculiar renditions leading to additional corruptions and misinterpretations. This process can reduce a narrative to a series of unconnected images.

A case in point is the transfer from silk to cotton of images from two monumental silk tablet-woven hangings, panels from which were carried to England following Lord Napier's punitive expedition to Ethiopia in 1868. One panel (Fig.2) is now in the British Museum (hereafter referred to as BM1),<sup>1</sup> while an entire three-panel hanging (Fig.3) is held by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (hereafter referred to as ROM).<sup>2</sup> All came from the Treasury of the defeated King Tewodros in Maqdala. It was reported at the time that the king had taken them from the 'cathedral' of Gondar, a former capital which he had ransacked and burned in 1854. Two other silk pieces (Fig.6) hung in the ancient abbey of Abba Gärima near Adwa in northern Tigre (Fig.1). In the early 1960s Guy Annequin photographed one of them covering the entrance to the sanctuary (Fig.4). The other was said then to be kept inside the sanctuary.<sup>3</sup>

The hangings at Abba Gärima are reported locally to have been donated to the monastery by the powerful Tigrean ruler, Ras Mikael Sehul (active c.1686–1780), who married a daughter of the Gondarine Queen Mentebuab.<sup>4</sup> Silk is not produced in Ethiopia, but royalty seems to have imported it in considerable quantity and maintained a monopoly on its use.<sup>5</sup> Such enormous pieces as these silk hangings, whose panels measure approximately 535 by 70 cm., could well have been manufactured in the former royal capital of Gondar. Nevertheless, widespread local tradition associates them, and their



1. Map of north-central Tigre, showing sites where tablet-woven hangings have been found.

cotton derivatives, with a village near Adwa and this may yet lead to a fruitful explanation of their origins.

An article by Ewa Balicka-Witakowska and the present writer, published in this Magazine in 1996, contains a more detailed description (and illustrations) of the figural decoration of BM1, and argues that it represents in six registers the royal family and its court (Fig.2).<sup>6</sup> The top three registers depict the enthroned king flanked by two angels; the crowned queen attended by four females carrying flywhisks or cased books; and the prince flanked by four males, three of whom carry

The locations of hangings discussed here are abbreviated thus: AG: Abba Gärima; AY: Abba Yohanni; BM: British Museum, London; GW: Gabriel Wukien; Hadara: Enda Abba Hadara; Koraro: Koraro Maryam; Qwisa: Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa; ROM: Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. In the text, numbers 1 to 3 immediately following the location refer to the hanging in question at that site. The upper-case letters (A–J) following the location designate the panel in each hanging, while the ensuing numbers (1–6) indicate the particular register on that panel, counting from top to bottom. Illustrations: Arabic numerals 1–11 indicate the sequence of principal illustrations. Roman numerals i–xii refer to groups of related images reflecting the arrangement of the British Museum (BM) and Toronto (ROM) panels, while the Arabic numerals associated with them refer to specific images within each group. The author is indebted to Ewa Balicka-Witakowska for assistance in interpreting the iconography on the tablet-woven hangings; to Peter Collingwood and Helène Moussa for their assistance in identifying tablet-weaving in Egypt; to the late Guy Annequin for permission to reproduce his photograph as Fig.4; to Kebede Amare (Commissioner of Tourism of the Tigre) and Paul Henze for leading me to the sites in the Tämbien region of Tigre where the cotton hangings are to be found; to Ramzi Jibrán Bikhazi, Ingrid Hehmeyer and Ghada Jayyusi Lehn for the tradition linking Sahul (Yemen) with the shrouds of the Prophet Muhammad; to Ken Jones for preparing the illustrations; and to Gillian Long for library research and editing.

<sup>1</sup> London, British Museum, Department of Ethnography, no.1868.10-1.22.

<sup>2</sup> Toronto, Royal Ontario Museum, Textiles Department, no.926.26.1.

<sup>3</sup> In an unpublished paper, a copy of which he provided to the author, Guy Annequin described his visit to the monastery and the hangings which he found there: 'Le cube du maqdas, nu aujourd'hui, était recouvert jusqu'à dans les années 1950 de peintures. Un incendie dont les traces s'observent par endroits les a emportées. Mais une immense tenture, pour délabrée qu'elle soit, capte vite l'attention. Elle masque les degrés et la porte qui donnent accès au maqdas. Nulle part ailleurs nous n'avons observé de tapisserie semblable. Au centre d'un décor dépourvu et géométrique fait de damiers et de chevrons, dix silhouettes humaines, schématiques, se détachent, disposées sur deux registres. Des prêtres, sans doute, puisqu'ils brandissent d'une main une croix, et de l'autre le mequauama. Une croix plus petite marque chaque poitrine. Une seconde tenture de ce type serait conservée dans le maqdas. Elles proviennent, disent les prêtres, d'un village tout proche du mont Damo Galila, à une dizaine de kilomètres au sud d'Adoua.' It is not clear whether the second hanging, patterned but with no images, was stored in the sanctuary, or was suspended there in front of the tabernacle, as is the case with the cotton counterpart in the church of Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa.

<sup>4</sup> M. Henze: 'Tablet-woven Curtains from Ethiopia: New Light on a Puzzling Group of Textiles', *The Textile Museum Journal* (1999–2000), pp.84–100, esp. pp.88–89. Annequin suggested in a personal communication that if King Tewodros was



staff-crosses. The three lower registers represent five soldiers wearing the curved scimitar known as the *šotel* and presenting staff-crosses (Fig.iii.1); four shield- and spear-bearers wearing the *lamd*, which represents the lion-skin inspired cape (Fig.v.1); and five fusiliers armed also with cartridge belts and the *šotel* (Fig.viii.1).

The central panel of the ROM hanging depicts a somewhat similar, but abridged arrangement in four registers (Fig.5). Three bearded ecclesiastics wearing pectoral crosses and cone-shaped crowns, called *aklil*, holding diamond-shaped hand-crosses occupy the top. Below them is an orant queen whose stance, character and attributes are similar to those appearing in the second register of BM1. An enthroned king in the third register (Fig.vii.1) wears a simple diadem and sits between two attendants holding staff-crosses. The final register contains three warriors wearing the *šotel*, standing beside staff-crosses. Two are associated with flywhisks (*čera*), an attribute missing from the third because of lack of space. With the exception in BM1 of the king and angels whose hands are not visible (Fig.i.1), and the shield- and spear-bearers whose hands are holding their weapons (Fig.v.1), all the figures on both panels appear as orants. This stance points strongly to their participation in an ecclesiastical ceremony.

Complementing this impression, there appears in the upper right figural register of ROM (panel C/register 1; Fig.xii.1) a priest holding a Gospel book above his head. He wears the *lanqa* (the Greek *sticharion*) and is flanked by two large censers and some hand-crosses. To the right stands another priest wearing the *aklil* and the *lanqa* and, to the left, what appears to be a lay figure at prayer. The second, lower register in this panel (C/2; lower right in Fig.3) represents the Crucifixion, featuring a central, crucified Christ (without the cross) between two soldiers with evil profiles flanked by two figures who may represent the thieves crucified with Christ. Three small crosses above Christ's head mark Golgotha, while blue rectangles above the heads of the soldiers may symbolise the darkness before his death. Above the left-hand 'thief', a green square represents the sun, and over the other, a red square signifies the moon, which turned into blood.

The lower figural register in the left-hand panel of the ROM hanging (A/2) is a direct reflection of that Crucifixion scene (Fig.xi.1). Christ is represented by a large diamond-shaped processional cross, which is flanked by two pairs of similar, smaller crosses and, from top to bottom, four pierced



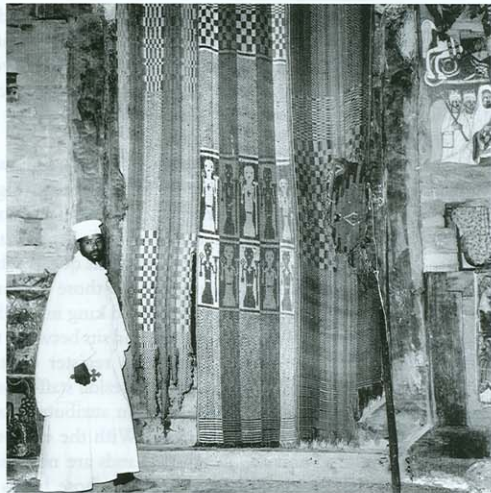
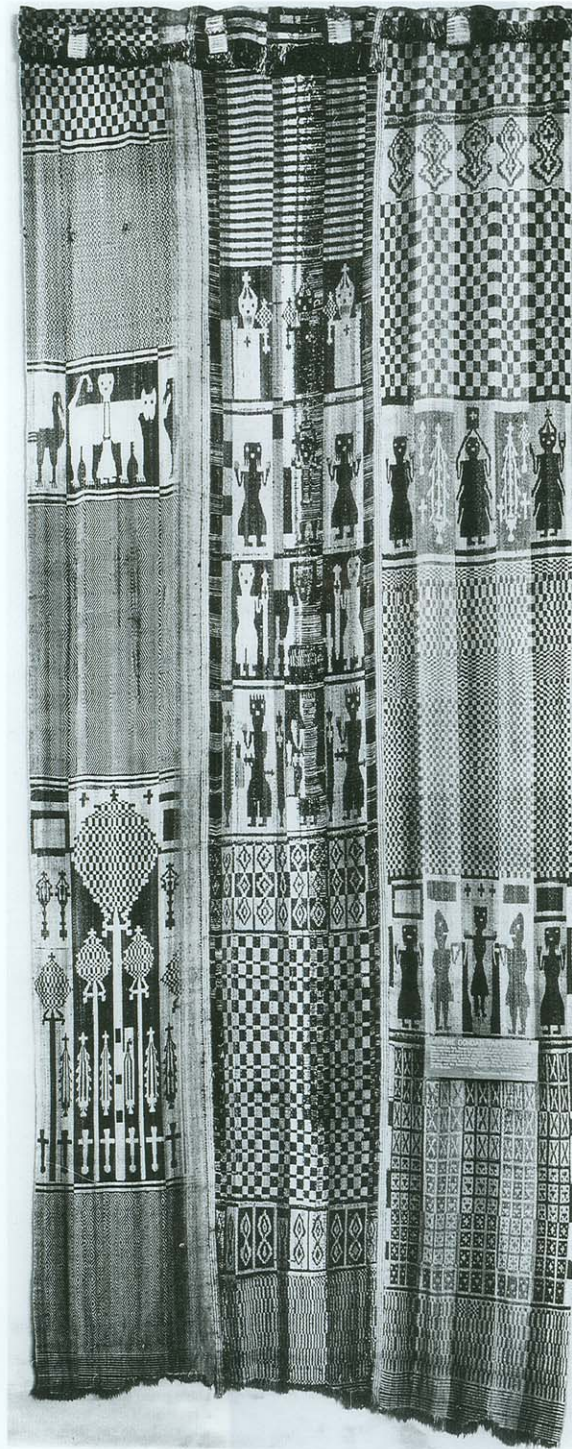
2. Section of Ethiopian hanging (here referred to as BM1) showing the Ethiopian royal family (registers 1–3) and the noble guard (registers 4–6). c.1721–30. Tablet-woven silk, 520 by 60 cm. (British Museum, London).

buried in the church of Endä Giyorgis in Fremonä, just six kilometres north-west of Adwa and thus probably no more than about ten kilometres from Abba Gärima, the silk curtains might have reached the abbey either in association with his burial, or with the English as they returned to the coast. For a reference to Tewodros's burial, see *Africa Orientale Italiana, Guida d'Italia della Consociazione Turistica Italiana*, Milan 1938, p.243.

<sup>3</sup> F. Alvares: *The Prester John of the Indies, a true relation of the lands of the Prester, being the narrative of the Portuguese Embassy to Ethiopia in 1520, written by Father Francisco Alvares*, vol.2, Hakluyt Society, Works, ser.2, no.114, Cambridge 1961, pp.117, 203, 296, 429, 434 and 448.

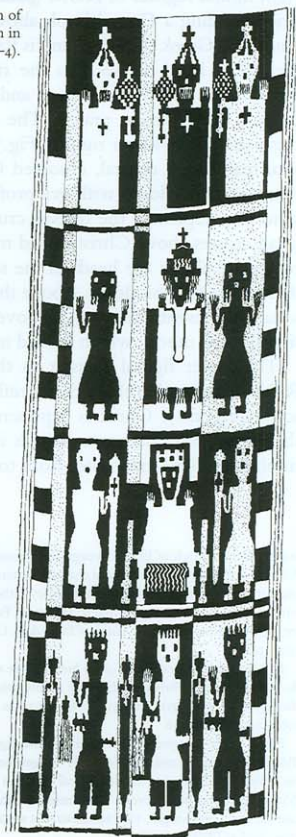
<sup>6</sup> For a more comprehensive study of the figural panel in the British Museum (BM1), the panel consisting entirely of geometric patterns known as BM2, and the three-panel hanging in the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM), see E. Balicka-Witakowska and M. Gervers: 'Monumental Ethiopian tablet-woven silk curtains: a case for royal patronage', *THE BURLINGTON MAGAZINE* 138 (1996), pp.375–85 (hereafter cited as EBW & MG).





4. Ethiopian hanging (here referred to as AG<sub>2</sub>) in three sections covering the entrance to the sanctuary of the monastery church of Abba Gäräma, Tigre, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven silk, 410 by 212 cm. (Photograph: Guy Annequin, c.1960).

5. Reconstruction of the central section in Fig. 3 (ROM/B/1-4).



3. Ethiopian hanging in three sections (here referred to as ROM/A-C) showing the essentially 'royal' central panel and ecclesiastical side panels, c.1730-38. Tablet-woven silk, 535 by 212 cm. (Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto).



hand-crosses, seven censers and eight simple hand-crosses. Golgotha is similarly represented by three small crosses, while the sun and the moon again appear as red and green squares. In the middle of the upper register (A/1; Fig.x.1) a man, who could be one of several saints whose attribute is a lion, stands beside a large feline and is flanked by two open-bill storks.<sup>7</sup>

The key to understanding the history and provenance of these hangings lies in the interpretation of those panels. Heavy silk door-hangings and alcove-curtains once adorned the round oratory beside Queen Menteuab's palace on the hill opposite Gondar at Qusquam.<sup>8</sup> Silk yarn of similar composition and dye base as that of the BM and ROM hangings is attached to a manuscript in the British Library (no.OR.590) which was made either for King Bäkaffa (1721–30), for Queen Menteuab, or for their son, Iyyassu II. If, as I believe, these same royal personages are represented in the three upper figural registers of BM1, this panel may well have been made during Bäkaffa's lifetime. The reduction from three royal figures on BM1 to two on the central ROM panel, and the depiction in these two registers (B/2 and B/3; Fig.5) of a crowned queen standing hierarchically above an enthroned king who wears merely a diadem, may indicate that this piece was made after his death, and at some time during Menteuab's reign of influence.<sup>9</sup> Queen Menteuab ruled as regent until Iyyassu II came of age in about 1738, and strongly influenced his and his son's government for many years afterwards.

The two triple-panel silk hangings at Abba Gärima (AG1 and AG2) are nearly comparable in size to that of the ROM hanging. Only the central panel of AG2 contains figural registers (Figs.4 and 6). At the very top are two rows of diamond-shaped crosses, below which are two rows of bare-headed priests in three-quarter length with pectoral crosses (Fig.ix.2). Each holds a cross in the right hand and a *maqwamiya* (prayer stick) in the left.<sup>10</sup> The iconography is fully ecclesiastic, unlike the predominately secular BM1 hanging and the integration of both in the central panel of ROM. It is very likely that the choice of woven images was determined by the patronage of their original location and by the event which they commemorated.<sup>11</sup>

#### Cotton derivatives

After the introduction of the ROM and BM hangings to the scholarly community in 1990,<sup>12</sup> Paul Henze rediscovered the pair of silk hangings at Abba Gärima in 1995, and in 1998 and 1999 he and his wife, Martha, found another very important group of tablet-woven hangings in three separate churches in the Tämbien region of central Tigre. However, these were all woven with heavy cotton yarn in natural white and brown hues.



6. One of two monumental hangings from the monastery of Abba Gärima, Tigre, Ethiopia (AG2), removed from storage for photography (November 2000). Tablet-woven silk, 410 by 212 cm.

In the rock-cut church of Gabriel Wukien they found three large curtains stretched across its entire width. Two (hereafter referred to as GW1 and GW2), each with four panels, include figural registers. A third (GW3) has three panels and only geometric decoration. In the nearby rock-cut church of Abba Yohanni they identified four truncated tablet-woven panels

<sup>7</sup> In Ethiopia, lions are associated with Abba Anbäsa of Hazbo, Abba Benjamin, Gäbrä Mänfäs Qeddus, Abba Samuel of Waldebba and Mamas of Cappadocia.

<sup>8</sup> E. Rüppell: *Reise in Abyssinien*, Frankfurt am Main 1840, II, p.116.

<sup>9</sup> EBW & MG, p.385.

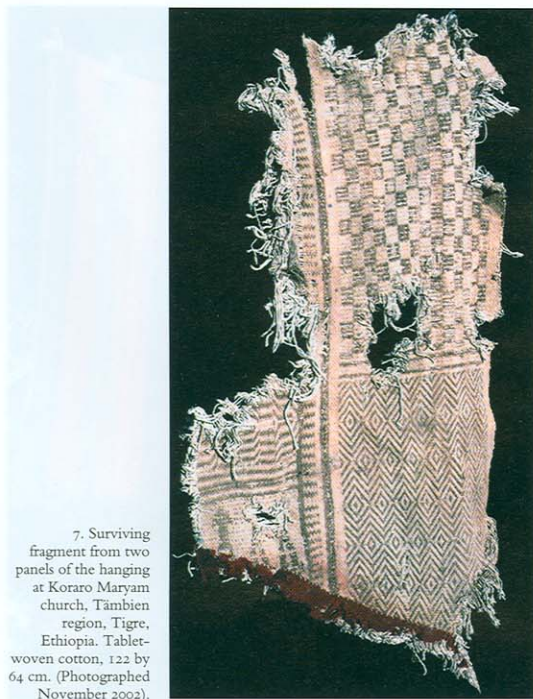
<sup>10</sup> For lack of space, the weaver was only able to enter the lower part of the *maqwamiya* of the orant in the upper right register.

<sup>11</sup> In June 1997 Annequin suggested that the presence of silk hangings may have

influenced the name of the church of Gemgja Maryam Ber biet in Gondar, founded by Fasilädäs and situated opposite his palace along the west wall of the castle complex. He interpreted '*gemgja*' to be 'silk', but in fact it means 'treasury'. The church is thus dedicated to the Virgin Mary, conceived as the spiritual treasury.

<sup>12</sup> This was the subject of an informal presentation made by the present writer at the Second International Conference on the History of Ethiopian Art, held in Nieborow, Poland, in 1990.





7. Surviving fragment from two panels of the hanging at Koraro Maryam church, Tāmbien region, Tigre, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven cotton, 122 by 64 cm. (Photographed November 2002).

(hereafter referred to as AY1 and AY2),<sup>13</sup> in which all motifs are based on the cross (Figs.xi.6–xi.9). At Koraro, east of the two previous churches, were fragments from two adjoining panels of another tablet-woven hanging (Fig.7) which had perished in a fire soon after January 1942. The shorter panel (at left) preserves the tops of three staff-crosses (Fig.iv.3). The longer (at right) has two registers with a chequerboard pattern on top and diamond shapes below.<sup>14</sup>

#### Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa

In November 2002, two more significant tablet-woven cotton hangings came to light, also in the Tāmbien region. The first, still hanging *in situ* inside the sanctuary of the church of Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa (Figs.8, 9 and 10), is composed of ten panels (here referred to as Qwisa 'A'–'J'), each approximately 45 cm. wide, making it the largest known single hanging of its kind. Officiating priests must push aside one of the outer panels in order to reach the *mānbāra tabot*.<sup>15</sup> As a result of the constant passing back and forth from three doorways,

the left-hand panel, 'A' (obviously the preferred side from which to approach the *tabot*) has been totally worn away from about two metres above the ground, as has much of the adjoining panel 'B' from about one and a half metres (at left in Fig.9).

Excepting the damaged panel 'A' and the penultimate panel 'I', all eight of the remaining panels contain figural registers as follows:

'B', two registers (Fig.9). 1: Two flat-capped figures in long tunics (*qāmis*), with staff-crosses in their right hands and their left hands raised in prayer. 2: Two (probably once a row of three) flat-capped figures, right hands raised in prayer, with prayer sticks in the left (cf. its mirror image in 'D'/2 below).

'C', two registers (Fig.10). 1: A row of three short-spouted aquamanilae. 2: A row of three chalices.

'D', three registers (Fig.10). 1: Three persons, probably standing on sanctuary steps, below a cross which may designate the top of a wooden *templon* or rood screen; a flat-capped orant priest with a pectoral cross flanked by two smaller assistants wearing knee-length trousers. One raises a prayer stick in his left hand, the other has a book in his right. 2: Three apparently flat-capped figures, one hand raised in prayer, a prayer stick in the other (cf. 'B'/2 above). 3: A pair of open-mouthed confronting felines, with clawed feet and long raised tails (Fig.x.3). In form, they recall the single feline with the man in ROM/A/1 (Fig.x.1).

'E', one register (Fig.xi.4). One long vertical register with a large diamond-shaped processional cross between two smaller ones, all topped with small crosses; four hand-crosses and four orants (two bare-headed and two with lion's mane headdresses) below what is possibly a stylised umbrella.

'F', four registers. 1 (Fig.xii.5): Two figures with deacons' crowns (*akliil*), and the *qapa* (Greek *phelonion*) over the *qāmis*, with censers in their right hands. One figure also holds a hand-cross. Twelve bells hang from the chains of one censer, and four from the other. Both censers have cone- or pyramid-shaped bases and are topped by crosses. 2 (Figs.8, 9 and 10): Three flat-capped orants wear the belted *qāmis*. The central and right-hand figures bear v-shape markings, indicating breasts; they may be nuns. 3 (Fig.ix.3): Four flat-capped orants, wearing pectoral crosses and straight *qāmis*-type garments, hold prayer sticks in their right hands. One figure also holds a long-handled metal cross. The weaver has overlooked the top of one prayer stick. 4 (Fig.9, lower right): Two framed rectangles, the lower thirds of which are filled, may represent tabernacles awaiting the placement, or return, of their *tabots* from procession.

'G', one register (Fig.iv.2). A single figural register with a row of five staff-crosses may be compared with staff-crosses in the upper figural register here in 'B' and in the single figural register in 'J'.<sup>16</sup>

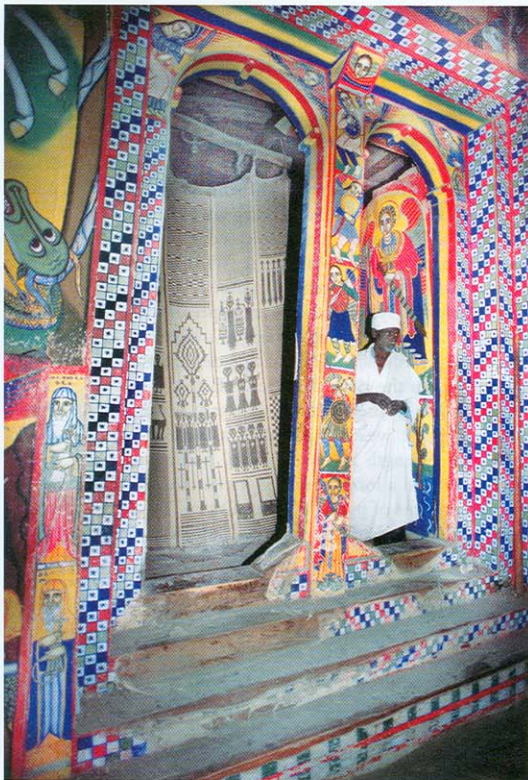
<sup>13</sup> AY1, with several registers bearing cross motifs, serves as the central panel in a three-panel hanging, the outer panels of which are plain weave made of similar hues of cotton. The remaining panels constitute the majority of what may have been a second curtain (AY2) which incorporates a fourth panel of plain weave. According to Henze, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.95, the tablet-woven panel measures approx. 22 cm. wide, and the plain weaves approx. 40 cm. wide. The truncation of the four-panel hanging (AY2) made it difficult to measure even from a stepladder. Approximations

are: panel 'A' 39 cm. wide; panel 'B' (plainweave) 45.5 cm. wide; panel 'C' 39 cm. wide and 290 cm. long; panel 'D' 24 cm. wide.

<sup>14</sup> The Koraro fragment measures 122 by 64 cm. The larger of the two panels retains its full width of 36.5 cm. For a more detailed description of this and other cotton hangings, see *ibid.*, pp.90–96.

<sup>15</sup> The *mānbāra tabot* is a free-standing or monolithic tabernacle in which the *tabot*, or Ark of the Covenant, is kept.





8. Hanging in the sanctuary of the church of Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa, Tām̄bien region, Tigré, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven cotton, approx. 370 by 450 cm. (Photographed November 2002).

'H', one register (Fig.vi.2). A single figural register depicts a mare with a foal framed between her legs. Horses were customarily depicted in oriental Christian art, including Ethiopian and Coptic, with eyes in front of their heads. The prominent 'tethering cords' attached to these heads might indicate that once there were pairs of confronting horses (cf. the more clearly rendered counterpart from Enda Abba Hadara, Fig.vi.1).

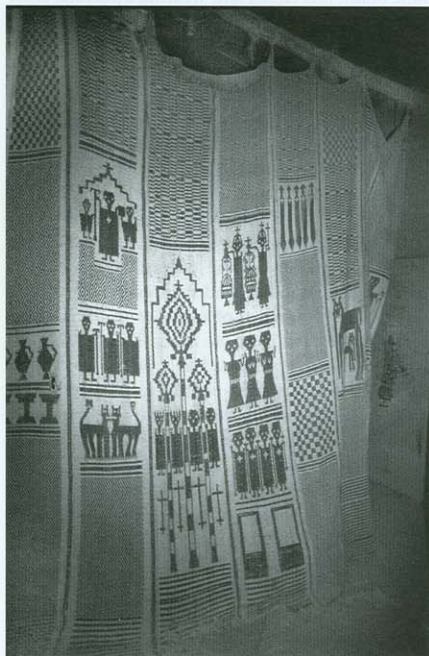
'J', one register (Fig.ii.4, reconstruction). A single figural register contains two figures with raised right hands, one holding a neck-high prayer stick, while the other, a far smaller individual, holds a proportionately oversized staff-cross.

Overall, the presence of praying figures, with feet pointed outwards and accompanied by church paraphernalia, suggests attendance at a religious ceremony. The registers depicting confronting felines, the mare and foal pair, and the row of staff-crosses may be heraldic or simply decorative in nature.

<sup>16</sup> Without the comparative material from other registers, these objects could be interpreted as straight swords in their scabbards with cone- or triangular-shaped pommels and narrow hilts. For an illustration of a sword which closely matches this description, see EBW & MG, fig.25 (an engraving of eighteenth-century Ethiopian weaponry from T. Lefebvre: *Voyage en Abyssinie*, Paris 1845-48).



9. Panels 'A' to 'G' of the hanging at Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa, Tām̄bien region, Tigré, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven cotton, approx. 370 by 450 cm. (Photographed November 2002).



10. Panels 'C' to 'J' of the hanging at Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa, Tām̄bien region, Tigré, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven cotton, approx. 370 by 450 cm. (Photographed November 2002).



## Enda Abba Hadara

The second hanging, found in November 2002, belongs to the monastery of Enda Abba Hadara (Fig. 11). Miraculously, it escaped a fire which recently consumed the former church and will be reinstalled in the sanctuary of the new one. This hanging consists of six panels, while a seventh containing no figural registers was formerly attached to the right-hand side. Of the six attached panels, the four inside ones contain figural registers while the outer ones are patterned throughout. More than half of the diamond-patterned register, second from the bottom of panel 'A', has been worn away, like that at Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa (Fig. 9) and also at Abba Gärima (AG 2/C; Figs. 4 and 6), by priests approaching the tabernacle sanctuary, in this case also from the left side. Six of the nine figural registers from Hadara have recognisable counterparts in the hanging from Qwisa.

'B', one register (Fig. xi.2). A single elongated figural register contains three pierced, diamond-shaped processional crosses below an umbrella, and is related to the group in panel 'E' from Qwisa (Fig. xi.4). It is also very similar to a second representation of processional crosses in its own panel 'D' (Fig. ix.3). In Fig. xi.2, two squares flanking the large, central cross recall those symbolising the sun and moon in ROM/A/2 (Fig. xi.1). The lower third incorporates among the staffs of the processional crosses other ecclesiastical attributes including three short-spouted aquamanilia, which in Qwisa were granted a register to themselves (panel C/1; Fig. 9); two pierced, diamond-shaped hand-crosses; and one chalice. A single orant, feet facing left, wearing a pectoral cross and slightly billowing knee-length trousers, is positioned at the bottom left side of the central processional cross.

'C', four registers (Fig. 11) is noteworthy in that all four figural registers have parallels in the silken BM1 and ROM central panel, and clarify several aspects which heretofore had remained uncertain. 1 (Fig. i.3; cf. Fig. i.1): The architectural frame with stepped roofline topped by a cross suggests that the three orants in this register are inside a church. The central figure wears a cap-like crown marked with a cross.<sup>17</sup> No legs or feet are visible on the figure, but the wave pattern extending from his shoulders to the ground suggests he is seated on a throne, enveloped in, and surrounded by, elaborate textiles. He is flanked by a pair of angels, whose wings rise to meet in a protective arch over his head. The other wing of the left-hand angel is represented as a small 'feathered' triangle extending from the right shoulder. A sword rises vertically from its right hand. The second wing of the angel on the right is rendered horizontally across its back (cf. the angels in BM1/1, Fig. i.1, and in GW2/C/1, Fig. i.2) with feathered ends pointing upwards. The raised left hand holds a staff-cross or sword. Both appear to wear the *qapa* over the *qamis* (cf. Qwisa F/1; Fig. xii.5) with feet turned outwards in an immobile stance. 2 (Fig. vii.2; cf. ROM/B/3, Fig. vii.1): The architectural frame in this register parallels that in the

first, with the addition of small squares facing inwards at the bottom suggesting pillar bases. A central bearded capped orant sits on a throne, the two front legs of which are clearly distinguished with a diamond-patterned textile hanging between them. He raises a metal hand-cross with his right hand. A row of three crosses on his chest may identify him as an *abuna* (bishop). Flanking attendants wear caps, pectoral crosses and belted knee-length trousers. The one to the left holds a *čera*, or flywhisk, in the right hand and a tall prayer stick in the left; the one to the right carries a cased book by the strap in his right hand (cf. BM1/2, Fig. 2). With feet turned inwards, they appear to face the central figure. 3 (Fig. xii.4): This scene derives ultimately from the event represented in ROM C/1 (Fig. xii.1). Centrally positioned is a diminutive lay figure wearing a short *lanqa*, with a single degenerated arm curving upwards from the right shoulder.<sup>18</sup> Below a narrow waist he wears civilian trousers which puff out at the thighs. On either side is a priest wearing the *aktil*, a waist-length *lanqa*, and belted knee-length puffed trousers, holding a censer in the right hand and a long-stemmed metal cross in the left. As in the first register of panel 'F' from Qwisa (Fig. xii.5), the right censer is more elaborate than the left one. This rendition, together with the right-facing feet of all three figures, suggests here too that the right-hand priest is to be seen in lead position. The dark rectangle to the left of each censer bearer's head may be inspired by the Gospel book held above the head of the central figure in ROM/C/1.<sup>19</sup> 4 (Fig. ix.4): Three flat-capped figures, presumably priests, hold prayer sticks in their left hands, with right hands raised in prayer. All wear pectoral crosses and belted knee-length puffed trousers. They fill the hierarchical sequence occupied by the military figures in BM1/4-6 and ROM/B/4.

'D', one register (Fig. xi.3). This single, elongated register is closely related iconographically to that in panel 'B' (Fig. xi.2). Three pierced diamond-shaped processional crosses are represented below an umbrella topped by a cross. Unlike 'B', a small square with a light centre (the moon) appears at the upper left of the large central cross, and a small diamond-shaped sun containing a cross with a dot on either side is situated at the upper right. This arrangement may reflect an ancient iconography, in which the church represents the *Anastasis* of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, and the cross within the diamond-shaped sun denotes Christ as *Sol invictus*, or Invincible Sun.<sup>20</sup> The three processional crosses appear to be supported at the bottom by two capped figures wearing pectoral crosses and knee-length trousers. Flanking them are two diminutive figures, the one to the left holding what is probably a book, in his left hand, while his counterpart to the right holds a cased book by the strap in his right hand.

'E', three registers. The three figural registers in this panel all have counterparts in the Qwisa hanging. 1 (Fig. x.2): Two confronting felines with clawed paws, tails raised over their backs and bared teeth recall Qwisa D/3 (Fig. x.3) and the single feline in ROM/A/1 (Fig. x.1). 2 (Fig. iv.1): A row of six

<sup>17</sup> For a crown of this type which belonged to King Tewodros, see EBW & MG, p. 379, fig. 19.

<sup>18</sup> That this u-shaped line must, in earlier versions of the scene, have been an arm is confirmed by comparing its shape to the right arm of the priest on the right that holds

the highly elaborate censer. The lower arm of the diminutive figure appears elongated as it must once have held a candle (cf. GW2/B/1; Fig. xii.2), which here is unrecognisable.

<sup>19</sup> There is no architectural frame here, but the fact that this third register is





11. Panels 'B' to 'F' of the hanging from the church of Enda Abba Hadara, Tām̄bien region, Tigre, Ethiopia. Tablet-woven cotton, 418 by 382 cm. (Photographed November 2002).

staff-crosses is similar to the row of five in Qwisa G/1 (Fig.iv.2) and the remains of three in the hanging from Koraro (Fig.iv.3). 3 (Fig.vi.1): Separated from the two previous registers by a long stretch of diamond patterning, this third figural group represents, with some variations, the same mare with her foal between front and rear legs as seen in Qwisa H/1 (Fig.vi.2). 'F', five registers (Fig.11) has five purely geometric registers.

#### Church and State

It is clear that these geographically concentrated cotton hangings are closely interrelated with each other and with their silk counterparts. Most of the images in the figural registers represent ecclesiastical scenes or subjects, or lay figures with hands raised in prayer. It was the inclusion of crowned non-ecclesiastics and armed warriors in the British Museum and Toronto hangings, as well as aspects of the iconography, which led to the conclusion that they represented the royal family and their courtiers participating in a religious ceremony. The silk hanging, AG<sub>2</sub>, provided a contrast to ROM and BM<sub>1</sub> in that the subject of its figural registers is entirely ecclesiastic. Royal and ecclesiastic can thus be singled out as the main themes of the silk hangings, as also those from Tām̄bien made of cotton. The iconography is reasonably consistent in the silk hangings, but that of the cotton ones is often lost or confused, and figures rendered as lay persons in silk are sometimes translated into ecclesiastical ones in cotton (cf. Figs.vii.1 and vii.2).

A particularly close analogy can be drawn between the ROM central panel (Fig.5), BM<sub>1</sub> (Fig.2), and the Hadara panel 'C' (Fig.11). In the two latter examples, the first regis-

ter depicts the enthroned monarch wearing a cap crown in an architectural frame flanked by two angels (Figs.i.1 and i.3). Instead of the standing queen in BM<sub>1</sub> register two, however, the Hadara example (Fig.vii.2) finds its counterpart in ROM/B/3 (Fig.vii.1): an enthroned monarch, perhaps wearing a diadem, seated between two male attendants holding staff-crosses. In Hadara C/2, though, the pectoral triple-cross and hand-cross seem more the attributes of an *abuna* than a king. Furthermore, his male attendants, who also wear pectoral crosses, carry the flywhisk and cased book, which are held only by the queen's female attendants in the silken BM<sub>1</sub>/2. Hadara C/3 (Fig.xii.4), depicting a diminutive lay figure in the company of two crowned ecclesiastics, compares closely to GW<sub>1</sub>/D/1 (Fig.xii.3) and GW<sub>2</sub>/B/1 (Fig.xii.2), and is related to Qwisa F/1 (Fig.xii.5). The designer of the Hadara panel was certainly aware of the figural groupings used in the 'royal' registers of BM<sub>1</sub> and ROM, but disregarded their iconography when casting them predominantly as ecclesiastics. All his standing figures with pectorals or crowns wear baggy trousers, which almost certainly derive from the costume of the lay courtiers and royal guard in BM<sub>1</sub>/2-4 and ROM/B/3-4. In fact, the three figures with pectorals and prayer sticks in Hadara C/4 (Fig.ix.4) are the ecclesiastical counterparts of the ROM and BM warriors. Although some of the Hadara combinations are contradictory, the guardian angels in register one, and the architectural frames in one and two, are sufficiently identifiable as to suggest a possible earlier prototype for the scene in both silk and cotton examples.

A third 'royal' panel, very poorly rendered but closer in the line of descent to BM<sub>1</sub> than Hadara/C, is GW<sub>2</sub>/C (Fig.i.2). The upper of three figural registers is a naive rendition of the first register of BM<sub>1</sub> (Fig.i.1). Two angels, each with

separated from the second by two parallel brown lines (possibly representing steps), while the first is separated from the second by three such lines and the third from the fourth by four, may be an indication that the figures in registers two and three share a common interior space with those in the first register.

<sup>20</sup> F.J. Dölger: *Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit und der Schwarze*, Münster 1918, pp.102-10; G.H. Halsberghe: *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, Leiden 1972, pp.154, 168, 171 and 173-75; H. Usener: *exh. cat. Sol Invictus*, Frankfurt am Main (Rheinisches Museum für Philologie) 1905, pp.465-91.



horizontal wings across stick-like torsos and an inside arm brandishing what is probably a sword, stand protectively beside the enthroned king. The king's head and torso have become more geometric than human in form. The torso, a two-tiered block with three protruding horizontals, appears to have been incorporated with the throne (cf. BM1). The royal head rises on a short neck from the centre of the block and supports a centrally placed cross, doubling for a crown. The legs of the throne are rudimentary but obvious, as is the diamond-patterned textile which hangs between them.

The second register (Fig.ii.3), directly below, is initially difficult to interpret, but when compared with BM1/3 (Fig.ii.1) its distorted content can be read. An oversized head, and a neck attached by a horizontal line (the arm) to a vertical prayer stick on the right, is woven left of centre and above a pair of attendants, each of whom holds a staff-cross in the outer hand. The attendant to the right wears the *šotel*, while that on the left holds what may be a rudimentary flywhisk in his left hand. The large head is topped by a row of eight short verticals, probably representing the points of a diadem. The counterpart in BM1/3 shows the prince between two pairs of courtiers holding staff-crosses; their size is diminished to emphasise their lower social status. There is no ready explanation for why the head in GW2/C/2 is not attached to a body, other than that the weaver apparently neglected to begin the figure when working from bottom to top and then realised that the only part of the most significant individual intended for the scene which could still be fitted into the space available, was the head. Since it was a royal head, it had to dominate the noble attendants of inferior status and thus was rendered as large as possible. It was placed left of centre so that the prayer stick, which the weaver had already begun to weave, would not interfere with the base of the rather elongated neck. A close analogy to this scene occurs in Qwisa J/1 (Fig.ii.4), whose two figures are in turn related to GW1/A/1 (see below and Fig.ii.2). The larger figure in Qwisa J/1 holds a very similar prayer stick in his left hand. The attendant to the left holds the staff-cross, filling the same role as his counterpart in GW1/A/1, and the left-hand attendant in the present register. Had space been available, one might have expected that the right-hand attendants would also have been included in the related registers.

The third and last figural register of this panel, GW2/C/3, shows two pairs of warriors carrying spears in their left hands (Fig.v.2). The left-hand pair also carry shields, represented by rectangles across their backs at shoulder level. The right-hand pair is smaller in size, as are their leather-capped spear blades.<sup>21</sup> These figures represent the royal guard and assume the same role as the spear- and shield-bearers in BM1/5 (Fig.v.1).

GW1/A also contains royal iconography derived from formulae found in BM1. The first of three figural registers represents two males standing in an architectural frame with right hands raised in prayer (GW1/A/1; Fig.ii.2). The size of the figure to the left is enhanced in the space available by being rendered from head to thighs only. His right hand holds

aloft what is probably a book. He is bearded and around his neck is a *matāb*, the silk necklace which distinguishes the Ethiopian layman as a Christian.<sup>22</sup> The eight vertical points placed horizontally on top of his head resemble the diadem identified in GW2/C/2 (Fig.ii.3). This figure traces his origins to that of the prince in BM1/3 (Fig.ii.1). His attributes and characteristics appear variously in the other known tablet-woven renditions of his person. The smaller figure to the right with a staff-cross is his attendant, as represented by the flanking figures in BM1/3. Had space been available, a second attendant would undoubtedly have been placed to the left. The dark panels behind both heads may represent deformed versions of the architectural elements appearing on either side of the prince's head in BM1/3.<sup>23</sup>

The second register in this panel (GW1/A/2), depicting three fusiliers each holding a rifle in the left hand with feet facing to the left (Fig.viii.2), has an almost exact parallel in BM1/6 (Fig.viii.1). They stand in contrast to the spear-bearers of GW2/C/3 (Fig.v.2) and the sword-bearers of ROM/B/4 (Fig.iii.2). Members of the different military ranks are never integrated; it is only in BM1 that three orders are represented, each to its own register.

The third and final figural register in GW1/A contains three individuals with right hands raised in prayer (Fig.viii.2). Each holds in the left hand an inverted Y-shaped object, probably a slingshot (the *māqle*). Their status as warriors is confirmed by their lion's mane headdresses.

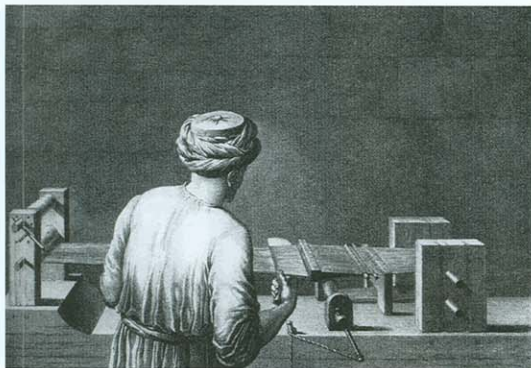
Although the iconographical arrangement differs, GW1/D/1 (Fig.xii.3) corresponds to Hadara C/3 (Fig.xii.4) which, it was suggested, has a royal component in the diminutive figure, flanked by priests bearing censers, who may also be identified as the prince. Here, rather than flanking the smaller figure, the priests stand together to his right. Each holds a censer in the left hand and a diamond-shaped hand-cross in the right. They wear the *aklil* and what appears to be a richly decorated, silk *qamis*. The small figure, who, to judge from the positioning of his feet, faces the priests, holds a candle in his right hand. His shape has degenerated yet further in Hadara C/3, where the hands are missing and a single arm curves in a thin line out of the right shoulder. That this arm is also meant to be holding a candle is confirmed by the same scene in GW2/B/1 (Fig.xii.2), where two crowned ecclesiastics carrying long hand-crosses (comparable in size to processional crosses) and censers parade behind a lay figure. This latter, depicted as a diminutive figure in the other renditions, is in GW2.B.1 equal in size to the two priests. In his left hand, he carries a long-handled staff bearing what may be a crown, and in his right a candle. The scene is defined as much by the two priests wearing the *aklil* and holding elaborate censers as by the presence of the bare-headed, apparently lay figure. This rendition suggests that the two crowned priests holding censers in Qwisa F/1 (Fig.xii.5) represent the same scene minus the lay figure. A final element emphasising the importance of the lay figure in GW2/B/1 is a hand-cross floating above his head, while the square represented by five horizontal lines to the right

<sup>21</sup> It was customary for Ethiopian warriors to carry two spears, and to protect the metal tips with a leather cover. Paired spears and covers are clearly seen in BM1/5.

<sup>22</sup> T. Tamrat: 'The Matab', *Bulletin of the Ethnological Society* 9 (1959), pp.38–43.

<sup>23</sup> In 1999, the head priest explained to Paul and Martha Henze that the larger figure represented Abba Daniel, the founder of Gabriel Wukien (Henze, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.93). This identification seems unlikely, however, as the derivation of the iconog-





12. Tablet weaver ('*ceinturonnier*') preparing a belt. Egypt, c.1800. From *Description de l'Égypte* . . . , Paris 1817 (see note 27).

of the cross may, like the dark rectangles in Hadara/C/3 (Fig.xii.4), be an unintelligible remnant of the holy book which the central figure in ROM/C/1 (Fig.xii.1) holds above his head.<sup>24</sup>

Not surprisingly, because they were all to be suspended in or before the sanctuary of the church to which they were given, figural registers containing ecclesiastics and their paraphernalia are prominent in these hangings. With the exception of those registers depicting two priests with a lay figure (Figs.xii.2, xii.3 and xii.4), the two are not integrated. The most common iconographical element throughout is the cross, particularly the pierced, diamond-shaped processional cross, represented in elongated registers in groups of three to symbolise the Crucifixion. This identity is manifest from the central section of ROM/A/2 (Fig.xi.1), where, as we have seen, the very large central cross between two smaller ones reflects the Crucifixion scene in ROM/C/2 (Fig.3) positioned horizontally across from it. Included in the cross register (ROM/A/2) are censers, several types of hand-crosses, and squares representing the sun and the moon. All these elements occur in the cotton derivatives, although, as we have seen, never together in a single register.

While one can never be sure of the original programme, it would appear that although most hangings represent an integration of Church and State, some are entirely ecclesiastic in their iconographic content. This is the case at Abba Yohanni, where the cross reigns throughout. The silk curtain, AG2 (Fig.6), is similar; diamond-shaped crosses dominate the top two registers of the central panel, while two repetitive rows of priests with pectoral and hand-crosses fill the lower registers. A far wider range of subjects fills the fifteen figural registers of the Qwisa hanging, but at best only one of these (J/1; Fig.ii.4) can be considered to depict royalty, and it is doubtful that the weaver even recognised the original iconography of the piece.

Within this distinction between royal and ecclesiastical, one is struck by the absence in all the cotton hangings of any representation of the queen, who is so overwhelmingly promi-

nent in the second registers of BM1 (Fig.2) and of ROM/B/2 (Fig.5). There is no obvious reason for this lacuna unless, perhaps, the cotton hangings were produced at some point after the death of the influential Queen Menteuab, whose successor queens never achieved her degree of influence within the royal administration. If this interpretation is correct, it is equally likely that the figures who have been identified as King Bäkaffä and Iyassu II in BM1/1 and 3 and ROM/B/3 were no longer identifiable as such by those who designed, wove or saw the cotton versions of the same images. There was always a king, however, and a male heir to the throne, so the cotton versions could have been interpreted by contemporaries as representing the ruler and the prince of the day.

### *Chronology and place of manufacture*

Other differences in the content and arrangement of the figural registers suggest that they were woven at different times. The meaningful layout of BM1 indicates that it is probably the oldest known surviving example of tablet weaving from Ethiopia, followed shortly after by the ROM hanging. Many of the figural elements found in these two pieces reappear in the cotton examples which in all likelihood postdate the reign of Menteuab (d. c.1775). Those elements appearing only in the cotton versions may, of course, derive from silk panels now lost, such as those which were once attached to either side of BM1.

The cotton hangings can be further divided into those that maintain a semblance of the BM/ROM content (Hadara; GW1 and 2) and those in which the images have been taken out of context and are repetitive and/or symmetrical. The latter category, which includes AG2, AY and Qwisa, corresponds to the hangings in which royalty is all but absent. They are decorative rather than historical and probably made towards the end of the period when monumental tablet-woven hangings were produced in the country.

Who wove them, when, and where, remains moot, although oral tradition passed down by the priests and monks in whose churches they are to be found, points to a place of manufacture somewhere in the Aksum/Adwa region of Tigre (Fig.1). In 1995, the monks of Abba Gäräma said that their silk hangings were made by a foreign people known as Seglin or Sehlin working in the village of May Zbi south of Adwa, which is probably to be equated with 'the village near Mount Damo Galila, ten kms south of Adwa' as Annequin was told some thirty years earlier.<sup>25</sup> The monks at Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa claimed that their ten-panel hanging was made by the Seglin on the outskirts of Aksum, located fifteen kilometres west of Adwa. The attribution to the 'Seglin from Adwa' was repeated by a priest at Koraro,<sup>26</sup> but a visit to May Zbi in 2002 revealed nothing. The present concentration of the cotton hangings in the Tämbien region renders plausible a place of manufacture in the Aksum/Adwa neighbourhood, but doubt remains as to whether the silk examples would also

raphy is clear and ecclesiastics appearing elsewhere on the hangings are never represented wearing the *matäb*.

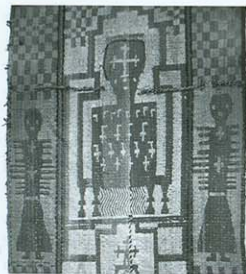
<sup>24</sup> On the liturgical appearance of the Gospels, see E. Fritsch: 'The Liturgical Year of

the Ethiopian Church', *Ethiopian Review of Cultures* 9-10 (2001), pp.34-36.

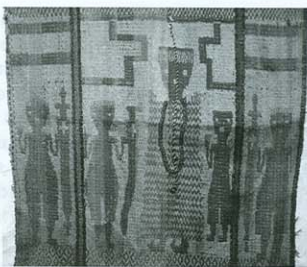
<sup>25</sup> See note 3 and Henze, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.89.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.96.

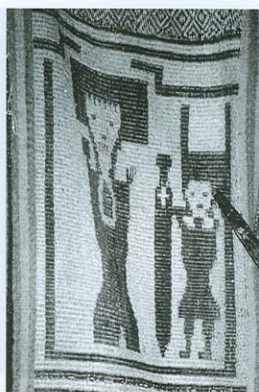




i.1:  
BM1/1



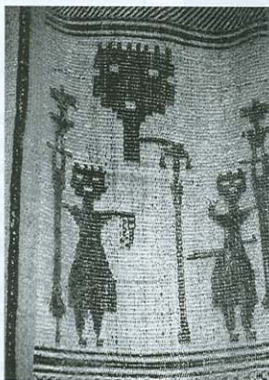
ii.1:  
BM1/3



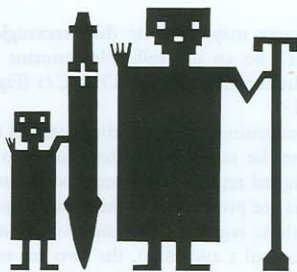
ii.2:  
GW1/  
A/1  
(verso)



i.2:  
GW2/C/1



ii.3:  
GW2/  
C/2



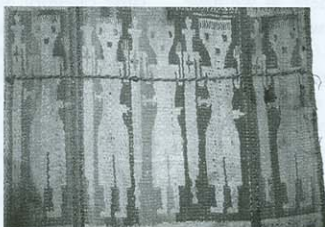
ii.4:  
Qwisa/  
J/1  
(recon-  
struction)

ii: Prince with attendant(s).



i.3:  
Hadara/C/1

i: King between angels.

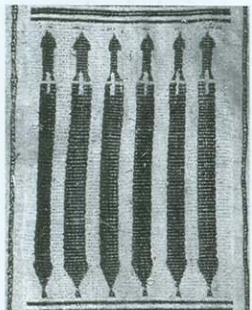


iii.1:  
BM1/4

iii: Sword-bearers.

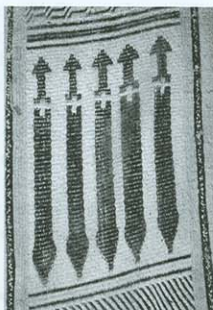


iii.2:  
ROM/  
B/4

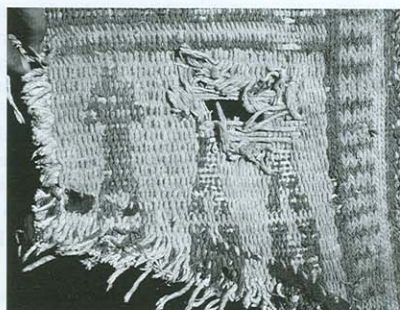


iv.1:  
Hadara/  
E/2

iv: Staff-crosses.



iv.2:  
Qwisa/  
G/1



iv.3:  
Koraro



have been woven there. Silk was a royal commodity and in the eighteenth century when BM1 and ROM are thought to have been woven, the capital was far away to the south-west in Gondar. If the weaving of the hangings can be attributed to a non-Ethiopian people called Seglin/Sehlin, it is certain that they came from a land where tablet weaving was well established. There are two such places within Ethiopia's cultural sphere: Egypt and the Yemen. The use of tablets to weave relatively wide bands in silk, wool and cotton for belts, girdles and animal trappings is documented in the early nineteenth century in Egypt (Fig. 12), where the expertise survived since ancient times.<sup>27</sup> There is something even more compelling about the Yemen, however, since the word *seglin/sehlin* may be linguistically associated with *saglawi* or *sahlawi*, an Arabic term also used in Ethiopia to describe a fabric made either of silk or cotton.<sup>28</sup> *Saglawi/sahlawi* derives in turn from the place name Sahul/Suhul,<sup>29</sup> a centre known historically for its textile manufacture and as one of three places in the Yemen where the shrouds of the Prophet Muhammad are said to have been woven.<sup>30</sup> There is good reason to believe that in Ethiopia the term *seglin/sehlin* designated a non-Ethiopian weaver of *saglawi/sahlawi* cloths coming from within the Ethiopian cultural region, i.e. a Muslim or a Jew rather than a Coptic Christian.<sup>31</sup> In the Yemen, the art of tablet weaving is known to have been practised by the Jews.<sup>32</sup>

Whoever the weavers were, their community might initially have worked in Gondar, but have transferred to the Aksum/Adwa area in search of more secure patronage after Gondar began to decline in the late eighteenth century and possibly even after it was laid waste by Tewodros in 1854. The priests at Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa reported in 2002 that they had received their hanging from Yohannes IV, who ruled northern Ethiopia from his capital at Mäqälä (lower right in Fig. 1) from 1872 to 1889, and that he had offered others to Koraro and Hadara (lower centre in Fig. 1) where, indeed, they are still to be found.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, one source is quoted as having said that the hangings 'were brought to three churches at the same time – to Koraro and to one to the East and one to the West'.<sup>34</sup> While in the view of this writer the hanging from Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa appears stylistically more recent than that from Hadara, the two have a number of figural registers in common, one of which, a row of identical staff-crosses, is also recognisable on the very fragmentary piece from Koraro (Figs. 7 and iv. 3). The row of staff-crosses suggests a link within or between the workshop(s) that produced

them. Other registers common only to Giyorgis Ruba Qwisa and Hadara include the confronting felines (Figs. x.2 and x.3), the mare and foal (Figs. vi.1 and vi.2) and, although incorporated with the processional crosses in Hadara B/1, aquamanillae and chalice(s) (Figs. 9 and xi.2).

All these elements may well have been part of the figural decoration of the Koraro hanging before it was burned. From a chronological viewpoint, they belong to a period when symbols, often of an apparently heraldic nature, were being used for decorative purposes rather than as part of the historical moment commemorated by BM1 and ROM. Such differences in content, and the limited oral historical record, point to a period of manufacture extending for about 150 years, from the second quarter of the eighteenth century possibly to as late as the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Patronage may have remained with royalty, although it is possible that there was a significant gap in time between the weaving of the silk hangings and that of their cotton counterparts found in Tämbien. It is also possible that the use of cotton rather than silk was dictated by the more modest financial means available to the royal patrons in the nineteenth century.

#### Iconographical programme

The weavers of the cotton hangings appear to have been working without access to the royal silken ones, while at the same time using motifs inspired by them. This process could have been achieved simply by working from cartoons or drawings, easily transferable from place to place. If, as has been proposed, the silk hangings were produced in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, and the 'heraldic' Qwisa, Hadara and Koraro examples were distributed by Yohannes IV during his reign, the intervening century and a half would have provided ample time for the original meaning to be lost. Such a phenomenon is common to derivative art. At the same time, it is significant that some scenes recur throughout the entire period, namely the popular representation of the Crucifixion by processional crosses, which would have been appropriate anywhere and at any time, and the representation in which two priests, wearing the *aklil* and associated with elaborate censers, accompany a figure who is never identified as an ecclesiastic.<sup>35</sup> We believe that this scene originated with ROM/C/1 (Fig. xii.1), wherein a priest wearing the *lanqa* and holding the Gospels above his head appears between

<sup>27</sup> Commission d'Égypte: *Description de l'Égypte; ou, recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française (1798–1801)*, Paris 1809–29, under 'ceinturonnier' in appendix to *Arts et Métiers*, II, and pl. XIV, no. 4, in *Planches 2* (section devoted to 'Arts et Métiers', 1817); *Au fil du Nil – Couleurs de l'Égypte Chrétienne*, Paris 2001, p. 39; M. Durand and F. Saragoza: *Égypte, la trame de l'Histoire: Textiles pharaoniques, coptes et islamiques*, Paris 2002, p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> K. Conti Rossini, ed.: *Historia Regis Sarsa Dengel (Malak Sagad)*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptores Aethiopiici, Textus, Series Altera, III, Paris 1907, p. 46, line 24. The term may also be used more generally to designate the burial shroud; see E.A. Wallis Budge, trans.: *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church (Synaxarium)*, Cambridge 1928, III, pp. 840, 869, 873 and 878.

<sup>29</sup> A. de Biberstein Kazimirski: *Dictionnaire Arabe-Français*, Paris 1860, I, p. 1062; W.K. Brzuski: *Zapozyczenia Arabskie w Daunyem i Współczesnym Języku Amharskim*, Warsaw 1974, p. 66, no. 13; *idem*: 'Arabic loanwords in Amharic connected with textiles, leather products and jewelry', *Africana Bulletin* 20 (1974), pp. 63–71, esp. p. 67, no. 19.

<sup>30</sup> J. Baldry: *Textiles in Yemen. Historical references to trade and commerce in textiles in Yemen from antiquity to modern times*, British Museum Occasional Paper no. 27, Dept. of Ethnography (London 1982), p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> They are never referred to as *ferendji*, i.e. 'foreigners'.

<sup>32</sup> A. Klein: 'Tablet Weaving by the Jews of San'a (Yemen)', in J.M. Cordwell and R.A. Schwarz, eds.: *The Fabrics of Culture. The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, The Hague, Paris and New York 1979, pp. 425–39; see also Baldry, *op. cit.* (note 30), pp. 46 and 55. While importation is unlikely, reports from the 1860s document an active trade in luxury textiles imported from the Yemen by merchants from Adwa; *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> Another monk, speaking in the minority, said the donor was Yohannes I, ruler from 1667 to 1682, but such an early date is improbable.

<sup>34</sup> The source is member Gābrä Mäsqäl (Henze, *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 96).

<sup>35</sup> In Qwisa/F/1 the non-ecclesiastic is absent and in ROM/C/1 the priest holding the Gospel above his head wears no crown.



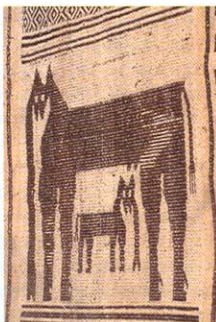


v.1:  
BM1/4



v.2:  
GW2/  
C/3

v: Spear-bearers.

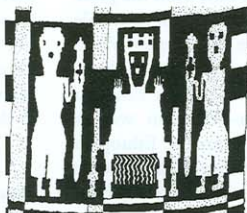


vi.1:  
Hadara/E/3

vi: Mare and foal.



vi.2:  
Qwisa/H/1



vii.1:  
ROM/B/3

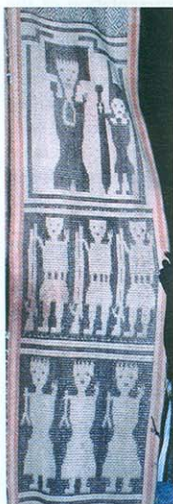
vii: Enthroned prince/bishop between attendants.



vii.2:  
Hadara/C/2



viii.1: BM1/6



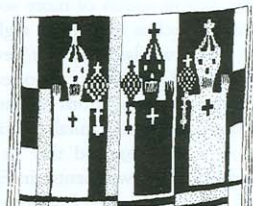
viii: Fusiliers.

viii.2:  
GW1/A/2  
(verso),  
including the 'prince'  
in register 1  
and sling-  
shot bearers  
in register 3



ix.1a:  
ROM/  
B/1

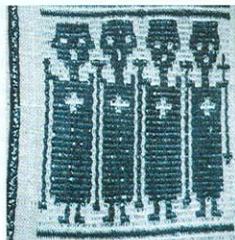
ix: Ecclesiastics.



ix.1b:  
ROM/  
B/1 (recon-  
struction)



ix.2: AG2/B/3-4



ix.3: Qwisa/F/3



ix.4: Hadara/C/4



x: Felines.

x.1: ROM/A/1



x.2: Hadara/E/1



x.3: Qwisa/D/3





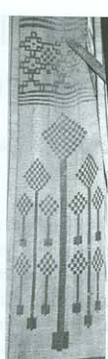
xi.1: ROM/A/2



xi.2: Hadara/B/1

xi.3: Hadara/  
D/1xi.4: Qwisa/  
E/1

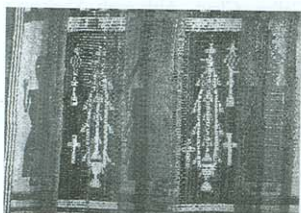
xi.5: GW1/C/1



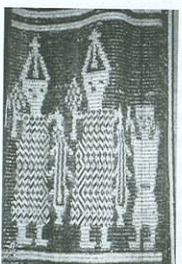
xi.6: AY1/B/3

xi.7:  
AY  
1/B

xi.8: AY2

xii.1:  
ROM/C/1xii: Youth with ecclesiastics  
bearing censers and crosses.xii.2:  
GW2/B/1xi.9:  
AY2  
(detail)

xi: Processional crosses.

xii.3:  
GW1/  
D/1  
(verso)xii.4:  
Hadara/  
C/3xii.5:  
Qwisa/  
F/1

two large censers which in turn are flanked, on the right by another priest wearing *lanqa* and *aklil*, and on the left by a non-ecclesiastic orant. The grouping occurs on five occasions, once in silk and four times in cotton.<sup>36</sup> The next most common surviving scene is that of the 'prince' standing beside one, or between two, attendants bearing staff-crosses. There are three renditions in cotton of this group (Figs.ii.2–ii.4), inspired, we believe, by BM1/3 (Fig.ii.1). Generally speaking, attention appears to be concentrated on this young figure, who may be seen in ROM/B/3 and C/1 (Figs.vii.1 and xii.1) and BM1/3 (Fig.ii.1) participating in a ceremony or sequence of ceremonies. Attended by Church and State, these ceremonies might represent important stages in his life. The

events are best depicted in BM1 and ROM after which, in the cotton derivatives, the inherent meanings are gradually diminished as they are distanced in time and space from the source of the story, which may have been the coming of age and subsequent coronation of Iyyassu II in c.1738. Ethiopian kings were traditionally crowned in Aksum,<sup>37</sup> and it could be that these obviously special tablet-woven hangings were produced periodically to commemorate the coronations of subsequent monarchs or rulers of Tigre. If this were the case, it might explain why the majority are still to be found *in situ* in the region. It might also confirm that the object carried on a staff by the lay figure in GW2/B/1 (Fig.xii.2) is a crown, to be placed on his head as the ceremony unfolds.

<sup>36</sup> For the scene with priests and layman, cf. ROM/C/1; GW1/D/1; GW2/B/1; Hadara/C/3; and Qwisa/F/1.

<sup>37</sup> A. Caquot: 'La royauté sacrée en Ethiopie', *Annales d'Ethiopie* 2 (1957), pp.205–18; C.C. Rossini: 'La regalità sacra in Abissinia e nei regni dell'Africa centrale ed

occidentale', *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 21 (1947/48), pp.12–31 (18–21); R. Pankhurst: 'Coronations', *Encyclopaedia Aethiopia*, ed. S. Uhlig, Wiesbaden 2003, I, pp.802–04.