

**A study sample of the Eritrean art and material culture in the
collections of the National Museum of Eritrea**

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Dedication

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Supervisor's Consent

I have approved this dissertation for final submission.

Supervisor: Professor Ian Calder

Signature: 

Date: 18 APR 06

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Abstract

Eritrean art and material culture has not been accorded its rightful place, neither has it been sufficiently isolated from its Ethiopian counterparts. Like the other reconstruction challenges facing Eritrea, following the 30 years' war for independence, the field of art and culture is in need of reconstruction. This study aimed to contextualize selected Eritrean material culture in terms of social, cultural, historical, art-historical and iconographic values. The selected artefacts have been studied in terms of construction, tactility of materials, iconography and functionality of the objects' form and surface. This dissertation provides a photographic documentation of the study samples.

Results of this study indicate that makers of Eritrean material culture primarily aimed at the functional values of most of the objects instead of the aesthetic values. This is clearly shown on the form of the objects which describe the function. The makers produced the material culture to their own taste, reflecting the culture or religion they represent.

The study samples are taken from the Ethnographic Section of the National Museum of Eritrea (NME). This study investigated museum practices, including challenges and limitations, as well as future plans of the NME.

Information was elicited from knowledgeable individuals, fieldwork data collection, secondary sources and visual analysis of the study sample.

The study recommended that this young institution (NME) needs to be empowered by the Government and solve its problems, so as to play a major role in reconstructing Eritrean cultural identity and preserving cultural heritage. In addition, research centres should be established to work on the process of the documentation and construction of Eritrean art history. Besides training individuals, the research centre should organize national and international conferences, conduct workshops and organize, recognize and encourage artists.

Introduction

Eritrean art and material culture has not been systematically studied or contextualised for the reconstruction of Eritrean art history, mainly because of war and instability. As a result, there is no well known art form that can uniquely represent Eritrean art other than the traditional Byzantine styled religious objects and art works. The problems faced when conducting research on Eritrean art and material culture is the scarcity of scholarly written documents and therefore the lack of deeper knowledge about Eritrean art. The small documents written by foreign visitors and researchers, mainly on pre-historic rock art, archaeological findings and socio-cultural history, are out-dated and difficult to find. However, in 1982, during the liberation struggle, the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), Research Branch (RB), conducted some preliminary research on Eritrean art. After independence some interested local and foreign writers are also contributing articles.

The rich art manifested in the past civilisation was not maintained and Eritrean art could not strive as such towards its development. Some of the internal and external factors that limited the development of Eritrean art that the EPLF-RB (*snetbeb* 1982, 109) and Libsekal (pc. 2003) mentioned include the destruction of art works resulting from civil war and invasion, as well as natural catastrophes, religious restrictions, the unaffordable price of art and art materials after the emergence of art as a source of income, lack of art schools and also colonialism. Chojnacki, in the Royal Asiatic Society (1989:5), noted that there was also a persistent lack of understanding of the aesthetic qualities of Eritrean art and its importance for art history.

Visual art of Eritrea is currently progressing as exhibitions, an art school, media and workshops inspire young artists to flourish, encouraged by the Government's positive move for its development. Documentation and contextualisation of Eritrean art should be carried out before elderly artisans pass away and before the previously produced genuine Eritrean material culture disappears. This study, despite the scarcity of information on Eritrean art and material culture, can at least contribute towards an introduction of the Eritrean art and material culture to African art history.

Methodologically, this research has been handled with the qualitative approach through fieldwork in the NME by providing photographic documentation and physical examination of the sample materials, supported with interviewing knowledgeable informants in the field. In-depth interviews have been conducted with NME staff, regarding museum practices of the NME. Literature surveys and historical analysis have been used in explaining, interpreting and analysing the sample materials in terms of Eritrean historical and socio-cultural context. Tigrinya (Ge'ez) text has been used to

provide the right accent of the vernacular names of objects or places. Where Ethiopian sources have been used, either they imply Eritrean context, directly, or they share the same context, or the Eritrean context was considered and published as Ethiopian as a result of colonialism.

The main focus of this study has been to provide an art historical description of artefacts selected from the National Museum of Eritrea – Ethnographic Section (NME-ES) based on the objects' visual and socio-cultural context. The subject of this dissertation is too vast to be fully covered in this small study. To acquaint readers, the first chapter introduces Eritrea's socio-political background since ancient times until its emergence as a modern state and the impact of its diversified society. A very general outline focuses on Eritrean art and material culture. Eritrea, the newly emerged African state, despite its rich ancient and recent history, including its rich and diversified arts and culture, is not familiar to the world.

General museum practices and the limitations and challenges that the NME is facing as a young institution are central to the context in Chapter Two. This study identifies that the NME has a considerable responsibility in rescuing, maintaining, and excavating historical and archaeological sites, despite the major problems of funding, lack of autonomous administration, lack of declared policy and the unfavourable museum building.

Chapter Three gives an account of the analysis of the study samples. Sampling was non-random, aiming to cover the nine ethnic groups of Eritrea. However, this was not possible, due to the restriction of the availability of representative objects within the Museum as well as on the scarcity of socio-cultural and traditional information related to the objects. There was an imbalance in the exhibition regarding coverage of all the ethnic groups, as the museum's collection activities were interrupted due to the displacement of the institution to other unfavourable premises and due to the start of a new war with Ethiopia in 1998. A requirement for the selection was creating variety in the visual appearance of the samples introducing the variety of use of materials and techniques of construction of the artefacts. The need to cover different social values of the society through the objects was also considered. Samples discussed include, *mesob መሶብ*, *menber መንበር*, *lakaja ላካጃ*, *jile ጃሌ*, *walta ዋልታ*, *re'esi menbere tabot ርኒሲ መንበረ-ታቦት*, *safo ሳፎ*, *mekeda መክዳ* and *mahzel ማሕደል*.

Contextualisation of the selected artefacts is based on the art historical description of each artefact in relation to the object's form, which in most cases follows its function. Construction of the form, tactile qualities of the materials used to construct the form and

symbolic meaning of the form within the particular group are examined. The surface of the artefact is separately discussed in terms of its method of construction, tactility of the media used and iconographic values. Each artefact is portrayed according to how and when the object is used as a utilitarian or non-utilitarian object in its original context in the society. The unchanged tradition of the Eritrean societies is mainly used to describe the objects' specific cultural values. As Spiegel and Boonzaier in Klopper (1992: 5) note, sticking to traditional practices helps build up group identity.

What is reflected through this study is how the fundamental realities of everyday life of Eritrean society prompted the production of art forms designed to fit the function of the objects. In some cases, ornamentation or motifs are applied to the basic design or to the surface to complete and enhance the value of the objects. The continuous relationship between daily life activities and the need to produce materials that support the daily life activities contributed to the development of Eritrean art. During this process the makers of the objects reflected their own taste, driven by customs observed from their specific group.

Chapter Four gives the findings of key points of this study on both the NME and the study samples. This chapter also recommends some ideas that may contribute to the development of the heritage institution, as well as art and material culture.

Chapter One

Background of the historical, socio-cultural, art and material culture of Eritrea

Chapter One highlights the ancient roots and subsequent events in Eritrea throughout the millennia in politics and socio-cultural activities, including the emergence of modern Eritrea, which is largely unknown to the world. This part also highlights the Eritrean arts and the production of material culture.

General background and the emergence of modern Eritrea

Eritrea is located along a 1200 kilometre stretch of the west coast of the Red Sea in northeast Africa, bordered to the north and northwest by the Sudan, to the southeast by Djibouti and to the south by Ethiopia. The region that is today called Eritrea has accommodated an ancient civilisation founded about a thousand years before the birth of Christ. During the 19th C, the country was faced with Turkish, Portuguese and Egyptian colonialism. However, modern Eritrea, as a unified and autonomous cultural and political state emerged with the Italian colonization towards the end of the 19th C. With the Italian defeat in WWII, the country fell under British Military Administration for 11 years. A 30-year armed struggle for independence followed Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea, which resulted in a return to Eritrean sovereignty in 1991, after the defeat of the Ethiopian forces. Eritrea contains a rich cultural diversity, with different ethnic and linguistic groups.

The name 'Eritrea' was given by the Italians for their new colony on January 1, 1890. Erythraea, meaning 'red' in Greek, referred to the Red Sea in the ancient world. Midre-Bahr ምድረ-ባህር (ምድረ-ባሕሪ) – an ancient Ge'ez word meaning, "Land of the Sea" was the most common term for Eritrea before the 19th C (Denison 2003: 19, Kotler du: i-iii) even though there were several names given to this land by the locals, ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Europeans.

Eritrea had trade links with the ancient civilised world. Inscriptions of ancient Egypt and Persia, numismatics and other archaeological discoveries in Arabia, as well as in Eritrea, Ethiopia and the Nile valley, provide evidence for the commercial activity during this period (Greenfield du: 6). The first recorded history comes from Egypt as far back as 3000 B.C. over a long time the Egyptian relations developed in trade, political, cultural and economic activities (Sherman 1980: 4, Hable Sellassie 1972: 21, 24). Indian trade, even though it is less documented, was also one of the ancient links with the region (Pankhurst 1993: 19). The link with the south Arabian kingdoms, particularly with the

kingdom of Saba, has great significance to Eritrea as the Sabaeans migrated to Eritrea since before 1000 B.C. Many place names in Eritrea are replicas of south Arabian place names (Hable Sellassie 1972: 26-27). These south Arabian immigrants introduced some techniques of architecture, irrigation, agriculture, political organization, religion and the art of the Sabaean writing from which Ge'ez ግዕዝ, with its own alphabet, developed and is still in use today (Hable Sellassie 1972: 29, 31, Sherman 1980: 4).

A legend is told about ancient Israel that the queen of Sheba went to Jerusalem to visit King Solomon. During this time Judaism was introduced as one of the pre-Christian religions and it still has some influences on the Orthodox Eritrean Church (Buxton 1970: 34, Pankhurst 1998: 19, Street 1996: 157). The Tigrinya speakers believe that they are descended from the Israelites who migrated to Eritrea with Menelik (son of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon) (Ghebreyesus from Pollera: du 19).

The Hellenistic conquest of Egypt included the occupation of the Eritrean coast, and the highlands, by the Ptolemies for centuries during which the influence of Greek culture, language and religion spread in Eritrea. This is evident on the Aksumite coins and stone inscriptions. The existence of Greek culture and language together with the south Arabian culture contributed greatly to the development of the Aksumite civilisation during the 1st C. A.D (Sherman 1980: 5, Hable Sellassie 1972: 55).

Aksum was ranked as one of the world's greatest empires in the 1st half of the 1st millennium A.D., with its extensive maritime trade through the ancient port of Adulis (Au Adulis and Metera 1974: 2-4), its own coinage, written inscriptions and literature and a distinctive Christian faith which was introduced in the early 4th C (Garlake 2002: 73, Denison 2003: 20, Appleyard 1993: 6). During the Aksumite period, indigenous and developing techniques in agriculture, commerce and politics, largely inspired the establishment of city states such as Yeha, Metera, Qohaito, Aksum, in which ruins still exist (Greenfield du: 4). Towards the end of the 3rd C. A.D. Greek texts and south Arabian religious emblems on Aksumite coins were substituted with Ge'ez texts and later with the Cross, suggesting that the ancient Eritrean culture and civilisation was home-grown (Sherman 1980: 5, Greenfield du: 4).

Following the fall of Aksum after the rise of Islam in the 10th C, the Eritrean lowlands fell under the five kingdoms of Beja, namely Naqis, Baqlin, Bazin, Jarin, and Qata (Sherman 1980: 6, Garlake 2002: 73). The 10th to 13th C. is described as the 'dark ages' of Eritrea, as there was less activity. In the 14th & 15th C there was movement of people from central Ethiopia to the highlands of Eritrea. This influenced the introduction of *enda* እገዳ or

kinship groups in the social system (Sherman 1980: 7). In the 16th C. three foreign powers, the Turks, who remained in the coastal areas for three centuries, the Portuguese and Ahmed Gragn from south Ethiopia existed in Eritrea. Their intervention often overlapped and caused conflict among themselves (Qadi du: 8, Sherman 1980: 8). There was also the emergence of the local leaders, Bahri Negesti ባሕሪ ነገስቲ; or rulers of the sea, who ruled parts of the coast and the Medri Bahri, with their capital at Dbarwa (Greenfield du: 11).

Eritrea's geopolitical position exposed the country to additional colonialisms. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 intensified the strategic significance of the Red Sea coastlines and the Gulf of Aden (Schoenfeld 1904: 1). In 1872 the Egyptians displaced the Turks from Massawa and controlled almost all parts of Eritrea other than the highlands. The Italians started occupying Eritrea in 1869 and finally, on January 1 1890, they declared a new colonial state by unifying the lowlands and highlands that constitute modern Eritrea. Considering Eritrea as a base for further expansion in Africa, the Italians started implementing developmental activities with increased infrastructure and the construction of cities and towns. The Italian colonial period introduced modern Eritrean nationalism, which arose within the indigenous working class (Greenfield du: 12).

The British Military Administration replaced the 51-year-old Italian colonialism in 1941 after the British defeated the Italian troops in Eritrea during WWII (Sherman 1980: 16). At this time the Eritrean people became more politically aware and Eritrean nationalism grew. This led to the establishment of political movements such as the '*Mahber Fiqri Hager*' ግሕብር ፍቅሪ ሃገር in 1942 (Tesfay 2002: 33). Soon Ethiopia started claiming Eritrea for itself and started interfering and sponsoring Eritrean political parties to work for unity with Ethiopia. This led to the development of a very high level of political disagreement. Regardless of the needs of the Eritrean people, the fate of Eritrea fell under the jurisdiction of the United Nations as the great powers could not agree on the fate of Eritrea. On December 2 1950, the general Assembly of the UN declared that "Eritrea should constitute an autonomous unit federated with Ethiopia under the sovereignty of the Ethiopian crown" (Greenfield du: 20). Practically, this resolution gave Ethiopia the opportunity to dominate Eritrea and soon, in 1962, Ethiopia annexed Eritrea as one of her provinces. Neither the UN nor the world community was in a position to consider this issue. Thus the only way left for the Eritrean people to solve the problem was armed struggle.

On September 1 1961, Hamid Idris Awate launched the 30-year armed struggle, which was the longest war of independence in Africa. The struggle was established by the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), which achieved military success over Ethiopia. However,

in 1970, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front (EPLF) emerged from ELF with a different ideology that led to a full-scale civil war which forced the ELF to flee the country in 1982.

The EPLF's objective was to establish a people's democratic state independent of the Ethiopian administrative presence in Eritrea. In working towards this goal it has, in both a military and a political sense, operated in a remarkably self-reliant manner (Sherman 1980: 52). Political analyst Gerard Chaliand, in Sherman (1980: 41), described the EPLF as 'by far the most impressive revolutionary movement produced in Africa in the last two decades'. Haile Selassie's military power and politics was supported by the USA and Israel. During Mengistu's reign this support was substituted at the highest level by the Soviet Union, including the Warsaw Pact countries, Cuba, Libya, south Yemen, Israel and the German Democratic Republic (Sherman 1980: 90-91).

In 1991 The EPLF militarily liberated the whole country and in 1993, through a referendum, Eritrea officially became the newest sovereign African state.

Social history of Eritrea

Eritrea, with a comparatively small population of 3.5 million, possesses a mosaic of races and linguistic groups, which resulted from migrations into and across its territory over generations. Pastoral Hamitic peoples, who migrated from the deserts of the Northern Sudan and occupied the Barka Lowlands and northern Highlands, invaded the earliest Nilotic inhabitants. Another Semitic group which crossed the Red Sea from south Arabia also inhabited the plateau. However, neither the Hamitic nor the Semitic groups are racially pure as they have absorbed so much unknown blood from each other and from different sources (Sahle du: 1-3; Au - Races and Tribes of Eritrea 1944: 1-3).

Modern Eritrea is inhabited by nine ethnic groups, namely Hedareb ኤዳርብ, Tigre ትግረ, Tigrinya ትግርኛ, Saho ሳዖ, Afar ኅሊር, Rashaida ራሻይዳ, Nara ናራ, Kunama ኩናማ and Bilein ቢላን. Each group has its own language and cultural practices (Fegley 1995: XVii). The nine different languages spoken have Nilotic, Hamitic or Semitic origins. Tigre and Tigrinya have sprung from a common root, Ge'ez, which was the *lingua franca* of the Axumites and has remained only in the Coptic liturgy (Kotler du: i-iii). Saho and Afar have Hamitic origins, related to the linguistic family of languages spoken in Somalia, Djibouti and part of Ethiopia. Beja is a language of northern Hamitic type.

Approximately half of Eritrean society is Christian and the other half Muslim, except for a small number of Eritreans who practise traditional African religions (Connell, 2002:46, Sherman 1980: 3). The Tigrinya speaking Highlanders are predominantly

Christians, mostly affiliated to the Orthodox (Coptic) Church. They adopted Christianity at the beginning of 4th C AD, when they developed the Kingdom of Aksum into a considerable power (Sahle du: 3). Currently, there are at least eighteen old Orthodox Monasteries in Eritrea, some of which date back to the 4th c. while others were established between the 14th – 17th C. (Abraham, Eritrea Horizon Jul 2003: 21-28). Various Muslim communities exist in the western lowlands, northern highlands and on the north and south east coast. There are also significant Catholic, Protestant and other Christian minorities (Fegley 1995: XVii, Pool 1997: 6-9).

Eritrea was one of the earliest non-Arabian sites for contact with Islam, as it was introduced in 615 while the prophet Mohamed was still alive. Almost all Eritrean Muslims are Sunnis, which is the largest sect in Islam. Other faiths, mostly practised by the Kunama, encompass their own traditional religion, including worship of the Creator, Anna, and veneration of ancestral heroes (Connell 2002: 47).

The traditional social organization of the Eritrean people can generally be described in two different ways, based on the natural habitat of their respective environments. One is the sedentary agriculturalist population which inhabits the highland plateau and shares a common civilisation, a common language (Tigrinya) and common religion (Christianity). The second organization comprises numerous scattered groups of varying size and origin. They inhabit the arid plains or lowlands and share a common livelihood as nomadic herdsmen, with a common religion, Islam. This difference in livelihood introduced different political and administrative organizations. The Highlanders' administration is based on units of 'districts' or territorial divisions, while the Lowlanders use kinship groups as the unit of organization (ua: Races and tribes of Eritrea 1944: 2). In the highlands, families, *endatat*, gather in villages over which the village chief, *chiqa* ቅዳታ, rules and judges who is elected by his own people or by the administration. A group of elders, *shumagelletat* ሸ.ግገለታት, are elected by the people in a proper meeting, *bayto* ባይቶ, to perform different tasks. *Meslenie* ሞሰለኔ is a chief of districts or several villages and acts as a link between the Government and the people (Association of Eritrean Intellectualists 1949: 7-10).

Eritrean societies followed their own laws of localities, with little interference by Italian and British law. "Eritrean Moslems are governed by Islamic Law, as to family law and succession, and Coptic Christians are similarly governed by their local customary laws" (Russell 1959: 99, Martin 1957: 17).

Overview of Eritrean art and material culture

Eritrean art and material culture has developed as the people of Eritrea made their own traditional daily life objects. In its broader sense, Eritrean material culture is made not 'art for art's sake' but to be used or to be functional. As Francastel, in Vansina (1984: 41), explains African art, works of art are not only symbols but also 'objects in the true sense, necessary to the life of social groups'. Activities of daily life such as farming, fishing, hunting, cooking, entertainment, healing, warfare, birth, marriage, initiation, funerals, dressing and social status require their own distinct objects designed to suit the function (Vansina 1984: 41). Street (*Eritrea Horizons* Vol.2 No 1. 1998: 26) states that Eritrea's craft objects are not manufactured for the tourist market alone; because the same objects with slight difference in materials, design and style are produced in the countryside by the villagers for their own domestic use.

Eritrean material culture includes woodcarvings, pottery, jewellery, beadwork, traditional painting, religious items, basketry, musical instruments and items made from metal, leather and animal horns. These products are available in the markets in every town and city; the two main markets in Asmara are Edaga Lakha ልጃጋ ላኻ and Medebber መደበር.

The material culture

Most household and other objects were produced from wood, as most peasants, with minimal experience of woodwork, practised this craft. However, skilful experts produced highly sophisticated wooden objects (Pankhurst 1992: 229). Most of the local carvers use the pale timber of the olive tree *awlee'e* ላውሊፊ, to produce picture-frames, bowls of different shapes and sizes and small wooden shields with pairs of spears. More functional items include ashtrays, numerous variations on the theme of the traditional wooden hair-comb worn by a number of nationalities, stools with woven seats, T-shaped wooden pillows and local toothbrushes (Connell 2002: 126, Street *Eritrea Horizons* Vol.2 No 1. 1998: 28).

According to Pankhurst (1992: 224-227), in the 19th C weaving was practised and a simple loom was produced to make clothing. Pankhurst further notes that nearly all ordinary people practised tannery, as it needs no special equipment, though professional experts produced a wide range of special goods such as saddles, shields, belts, thongs, bags, pouches, sheaths, sleeping-skins, clothing and parchment. Connell (2002: 125-6) explains that the current growing trade in leather products is sourced from domesticated

animals, as wildlife hunting is not allowed in Eritrea. Traditional leatherwork is mostly decorated with beads and cowrie shells.

The local houses in Eritrea include *hudmo*, *agudo*, *ag'net*, *gebaza* and *mereba'e* (Denison and Paice Eritrea: the Bradt travel guide, 3rd edition 2002: 12). The making of these different traditional houses is a local skill that contributed to the field of art.

Another skill that was mostly practised by women is pottery. All forms of cooking and food containers were produced from earthenware (Pankhurst 1992: 226). Most of the pottery works in Eritrea is fired in traditional basic kilns such as in Keren, a famous pottery site (Mehari 2004: 3). Coffee pots with slender necks, holders for incense sticks and various-sized bowls for food, large plant pots and water and beer containers of different sizes are the items produced for general use (Street 1998: 27, Hecht 1969: 11-14).

Jewellery is manufactured, especially gold, silver and brass works. Gold and silver body ornamentation has a rich history in Eritrea; most Eritrean women receive gifts of gold or silver from their husbands on their wedding day (Connell 2002: 125). Finely-worked earrings, necklaces, bracelets and rings, in precious metals and Orthodox Crosses are produced. With precious metals being either rare, unavailable or unaffordable in the rural areas, the production of jewellery from many varieties of beads, strung together and worn by women around their heads, necks, wrists and ankles, is common. Other gift objects include the small bead covered pots used by new brides to carry a cosmetic called *kuhli ኩሕሊ*, black eyeliner (Street 1998: 28). In each Eritrean ethnic group, women use jewellery, usually of precious metals as well as items used with different hairstyles (Fisher 1987: 271). For example, traditionally, a Tigre woman can be identified by her *grie't ግሪዮት* and *meqeret መቀራት* that she puts on her '*shelila' ሸሊላ* hairstyle, as well as by her *zmem ጸመጾ*, a ring worn in the nose (Weldai 2002). Pankhurst (1992: 223) suggests that blacksmiths, even though they were accused of being sorcerers, produced a variety of metal articles of considerable economic and military importance, such as agricultural tools, swords, daggers and spearheads.

Women, exclusively, carried out basket-making and carpet-weaving and produced valuable articles for holding solid and liquid foods (Pankhurst 1992: 230). According to Street (*Eritrea Horizons* Vol.2 No 1. 1998: 28) Eritrean basketwork differs from its worldwide counterparts in that the baskets are used not only to carry goods but also in the preparation and serving of food. The baskets vary in size and design and in the hues used to decorate them. Some of the basket-makers of Eritrea have a full-time job weaving their wares for sale as food coverings, jewellery boxes, breakfast plates, bread baskets, table

mats, laundry baskets, coarse sieves and wall decorations. Basketworks are widely produced solely for decoration (Connell 2002: 125).

Stringed instruments, flutes, drums, rattles and tambourines are used and produced in various parts of Eritrea. Most interested people make their own musical instruments out of wood, leather, metal and bamboo. Some experts produce highly finished and decorated instruments, including the local sistrum for commercial purposes (EPLF-RB IV-*snetbet* 1982: 78-83).

The traditional local architecture such as *hudmo ሀድጥ*, *agudo ኣጎዶ*, *agnet ኣግነት* and *mereba'e መረባዕ* which is constructed with stones, wood, clay and palm-leaf mats, including interior objects and decorations, also contributes to Eritrean art (Denison and Paice 2002: 12-15).

Traditional art and religious items

The most common paintings, done on skin, parchment or even canvas, are in “storyboard” style and depict religious themes or abstract designs and shapes (Association of Eritrean Intellectualists 1949: 13). Most religious themes used in the paintings portray the historical events surrounding the many annual religious festivals. With the rich history of the Orthodox Christian faith, there are numerous items produced. These include wooden icons, parchment scrolls, leather-bound Bibles with parchment pages, and leather Bible-holders, used to protect the holy books when travelling, strings of the prayer-beads used by priests and different sizes and varieties of Orthodox Crosses. The traditional religious arts and crafts are mainly preserved in different monasteries of Eritrea.

Traditional art served the churches and monasteries in visualising the relationship between man and God, on the basis of the Bible (EPLF-RB IV-*snetbet* 1982: 78). Buxton (1970:136) suggested that the style was derived from the countries of early Christianity where the Eritrean religion came from. Chojnacki (Royal Asiatic Society 1989:5) and Appleyard (1993: 6) add that the Eritrean art absorbed the influences of Islamic, Greek, Syrian and Indian art.

Buxton (1970:136) explains that the earliest works were probably only illuminating Gospel Books and the earliest painting styles incorporated simplified traditional compositions with reduced geometrical schemes and rigid, lifeless, frontal human figures. EPLF- RB (*snetbeb*1982: 21) adds that during 4th-17th C the style of the paintings was devoid of perspective and light and shade, with a central shape on a flat background. However, after the 17th C the style was developed by the introduction of

perspective, light and shade, as well as using landscape as a background, with more varied colours.

Tamrat, in Heldman (1993: 39) points out that monastic schools were producing the artists, *Debteratat ደብተራታት/ ደባትር*, as their educational programmes included more practical work in calligraphy and traditional painting. According to Buxton (1970:136), the schools were a combined product of foreign and indigenous influences. *Debteratat* were then responsible for the production of the paintings after acquiring all the necessary skills.

The RB-EPLF (*snetbeb* 1982: 21) explains that traditional art started to serve the public in the 17th C., with the strong European influence introduced to the country by Portuguese visitors. The non-religious paintings of this period depicted animals, plants, human and other shaped objects. Traditional painting still exists, even though, since Italian colonization, it is dominated by western Modernism. Some contemporary Eritrean artists are working in the traditional style and incorporating it into modern art.

Some traditional paintings were purely functional. Magic scrolls or talismanic art, *ma'ere qumet ግዕዲ-ቅመት*, which resembles Islamic art and was also practised by Moslems, was believed to heal persons suffering from illnesses and evil spirits. Magic scrolls were produced to cure a woman mainly from maternity problems such as sterility, miscarriage and infant and child death, while for a man it was a cure from pains attributed to curses. Scrolls were prepared in parchments specifically prepared from sacrificed sheep or goats with specific colours, for healing purposes. The scroll is made of the same length of the sick person in order to protect the person from head to toe (Mercier 1997: 46, 1979: 14 - 29).

According to Buxton (1970: 159) and Adonai (Huwyet., May 1997, No.11, 52-57), figurative sculpture, well-known to the pre-Aksumite civilisation, did not survive. The Aksumites lost interest in this art-form or, more probably, were influenced by the Biblical restriction against 'graven images'. Adonai (Huwyet Sept 1999, No-16, 13) suggests that Islam, with similar ideology to Christianity, also restricts the production of sculptures. Thus carving or sculpting was not widely practised in Eritrea and was mainly linked to architecture. Sculpture is currently emerging as part of modern art in Eritrea.

Prior to the emergence of religious art with the introduction of Christianity in the 4th C, and Islam in the 7th C, rock art was widely practised in different parts of the country. The rock art, estimated to be 4,000 years old, displays images that are mainly of human and animal figures and depicts hunting activities. The art continued for a long time

without changing its stylistic features (RB-EPLF *snetbeb*1982: 20, Adonai, Huwyet Jul 1992, No.1, 12-13, Drew du: 89-90, E.P.L.F. *Tarikawi Kirsitat ab Iertra*, Graziosi du: 91-97, Teka 2002: 1-26, Man 1952: 78-79).

Contemporary art

Contemporary art was introduced to Eritrea during the Italian colonization (late 19th C). There were also craft schools in Keren, Adi Wegri and Asmara in the 1930s and 40s (Association of Eritrean Intellectualists 1949: 7-10). The emergence of native contemporary artists began during the British Administration (mid-1940s), as art had been taught in schools. The impact of schools on art, exhibitions, exposure to Western art and the training of several citizens in Ethiopia brought considerable development to contemporary art. The artists were influenced by Western styles and most of them were not permanent artists. Moreover, they were using art as a means of income, which caused art works and art materials to be unaffordable to the public (EPLF-RB: *snetbeb* 1982: 21).

According to Connell (2002:124), “more modern styles developed during the liberation struggle, varying from harsh realism to highly symbolic renderings of social and political themes”. Portraiture and landscape art have also become common. Adonai (Haddas Iertra, Sept 30, 2000) states that during the mid-1970s the EPLF had organized an art unit responsible for the production of political, cultural and educational posters, paintings, cartoons and graphic works. In addition, the unit was organizing art training, preparing teaching materials and displaying art works inside and outside Eritrea. According to EPLF – National Guidance Department (1990: 3), the EPLF included art in the educational curriculum and developed a programme on the theme of ‘Art for the Masses’. These activities have pushed the development of art to a considerable level. Contemporary art in Eritrea is developing actively and is slowly emerging into the market, especially after the liberation of the country in 1991 and largely as a result of persistent promotion by the PFDJ and the Government of Eritrea.

Chapter Two

Museum practices of the National Museum of Eritrea

Preserving and promoting the rich historical and cultural heritage of Eritrea is one of the central challenges of reconstruction of this newly emerged state. As an activity of the country's identity reconstruction, Eritrea is facing a difficult task in maintaining its history, culture, art, tradition and social values. After independence (May 1991), the National Museum of Eritrea (NME) was established in January 1992, in Asmara. This was a positive contribution of the Eritrean Government to the renaissance of cultural traits which started during the armed struggle. Chapter two outlines the major practices, including the challenges facing the NME.

NME administration and management

The general management theory is almost applicable to museum management as it shares much in common with other institutions (Woodhead & Stansfield 1994:33). Museum management is characterized by "hierarchy, a division between line management and staff, and a series of precisely defined jobs and relationships" (Fopp 1997: 131). The NME is following similar ways of management, under the directorate of Dr. Yosief Libsekal¹, with his other staff members: Rezene Russom² - administrator, finance and cultural resource manager; Haile Berhe³ – head of public relations and documentation; Yosef Mobae – head of public awareness. The NME also has a secretary and a number of young archaeology graduates from the University of Asmara (UOA), who are serving in different sections of NME and whom the Director is hoping to employ (pc. Libsekal 2004).

The Museum was established and administered by the Italian Government, when the collection was started in 1907 after Roberto Paribeni's systematic excavation of parts of Adulis, the famous ancient Aksumite port near today's Massawa (Duncanson: *Antiquity* 21 (83) 1947: 158-63). The Museum displayed archaeological and ethnographic collections and was known as 'Museo Archeologico di Asmara' (*Istituto Italo-Africano* 1983: 7). When Eritrea fell under Ethiopian administration, the Museum's status declined to a regional level, with the name 'Asmara Museum'. During the Ethiopian regime, the Museum was still administered by the Italian Government until 1984. Later the Museum was administered by the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Sport – Regional Branch, Eritrea, directed by Isaac Yared (Peters 1990: 73). When the NME was first established in

¹ Dr Yoseph Libsekal is the director of the NME, the first Eritrean archaeologist and an archaeology professor at the UOA.

² Rezene Russom is the administrator of the NME and is a lawyer and an anthropologist (MA).

³ Haile Berhe is a former fighter and an artist who was archivist and property manager of the fine art unit within the EPLF. Currently, he is a trained museologist and head of Public Relations and Documentation of the NME (pc Merih Wolday 2005).

1992 by the state of Eritrea, it was administered by the Department of Culture. Later, after the reorganization of the ministry, the NME came under the UOA – Ministry of Education.

Libsekal (pc. 2004) mentions that the only advantage of being under the UOA is the close and rich collaboration with the department of archaeology, which is becoming more profitable in producing young archaeologists who can serve the Museum. According to him the problem is that it is difficult to manage a National Museum solely as an academic institution. Russom (pc. 2004) claims that, even though the decision is up to the Government, he does not see any advantage in being under the UOA while the Museum is capable of being administered autonomously. Russom stated that the UOA cannot financially afford what the NME requires for its overall activities. One of the problems in this situation is the difficulty of accessing funds that come to the UOA on behalf of the Museum. However, the Director is hopeful that the museum will soon be autonomous, or become semi-autonomous under the Ministry of Culture. The NME has already submitted a proposal which the Government is assessing.

Sections of NME

The Museum owns a collection of about 40000 objects from around the country, covering periods from Palaeolithic era, dating one million years ago, to more recent historical periods (ENM 2004). Before the Museum moved into the current premises in 1997, it was at a location in the old palace built by the Italians in the centre of Asmara *Gibbi*, with spacious grounds that allow for expansion and are suitable for visitors to relax in after visiting the Museum (Street 1996: 159). At present, all the valuable varieties of heritage objects are accommodated in an unsuitable small building. This two-storey building, of no more than 30 display rooms and offices, was built in 1932 as an Italian girls' boarding school known as Comboni. In 1997, after some architectural modifications, the building was transformed into a museum.

The Museum contains five sections, including open air museums. The Ethnographic Section displays the material culture of the Eritrean ethnic groups and highlights the diversity of Eritrean social traditions.

The Military Section represents the 30-year armed struggle for liberation. Due to limited space, this open-air display is currently not accessible to the public. In the previous Museum building, however, this section was most favoured by the general public. It included armoured vehicles and military hardware from battles; tanks, trucks, rocket-launchers, big guns and armed boats that were creatively remobilized and

reinvented by the common independence fighters; well preserved photographs, written documents; a variety of rifles of different origin, missiles, mines, bombs, communication equipment, repair and munitions, workshops and medical equipment. All the displayed weapons had been captured from the enemy during the war.

The Archaeological Section contains different artefacts collected from pre-historic and proto-historic sites. Some of the most interesting artefacts include a stone sphinx, stone incense burners and earthen wares.

In the Medieval Period Section objects from medieval Eritrean art, religious paintings, manuscripts, magic scrolls, metal and wooden crosses, Kufic, Greek and Sabaean inscriptions are exhibited.

In the Natural Science Section, different stuffed animals are displayed on the corridor walls as well as dioramas are set in some rooms.

Another section of the Museum comprises the open-air museums of archaeological and historical sites found in different parts of the country, for example, Adulis, Dahlak Kebeer, Qohaito, Metera, Naqfa, Mosques and Monasteries.

According to Libsekal (Netsebraq 8, May 2001: 35), the Museum has opened two laboratories within the museum that operate for comprehensive historical and palaeontological research studies. These laboratories also serve as primary bases for archaeology students from the UOA in their experimental studies.

The role of NME as a national heritage institution

According to Kennedy (in Carbonell 2004: 306), a National Museum should seek those characteristics of the nation's own 'capacious concept of culture and an inclusive definition of nationhood'. Thus the mission of NME is "to collect, preserve, study, interpret and present objects and historical sites of cultural significance while serving as an accessible educational resource for its multi-cultural audience" (NME 2003). Libsekal (pc. 2004) explained that, through this mission, the NME aims to reconstruct Eritrean national identity, social, political and art history, which were marginalized by a series of occupations. The NME plays a role in enhancing the social and political harmony of the diversified Eritrean cultures and linguistic groups through historical, cultural and educational approaches. The Museum is influential in developing nationalism in the younger generation through its representation of the pain and sacrifice paid, and the victories achieved, by the Eritrean people in regaining the country.

As a National Museum, the NME is responsible for preserving and displaying the cultural heritage covering the diversified culture and ethnicity of Eritrea. The museum is working on archaeological exploration, preservation and excavation as its central or primary

role. Alvaro Higuera (www.tiwanakuarcho.net/1_main/saa2001.htm) 14 November 2003) argues that new countries like Eritrea should place archaeology in a secondary role while working on primary historical elements to build their national identity, in the short and mid-term. According to Libsekal (pc. 2004), even though the NME's programme aims to handle all sectors of cultural heritage equally, the institution is obliged to give priority to rescuing the irreplaceable archaeological and historical heritage, as they are exposed to the great danger of destruction due to developmental activities and many other man-made and natural factors. In doing this, the Museum is working hand-in-hand with other institutions such as the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Eritrea is endowed with the highest density of archaeological sites known in the African continent south of the Sahara. This is attracting the interest of some of the world's best archaeologists (Street 1996: 152). Libsekal (Netsebraq 8, May 2001: 37) explains that 30000 to 40000 archaeological sites - almost all of them needing excavation - and historical places are estimated to exist in this relatively small nation. Surveys conducted by the University Of Asmara and the Museum, in collaboration with institutions and universities from the USA, Germany and Italy has shown that the country owns rich archaeological sites from all periods - paleontological, pre-historic, protohistoric, ancient medieval, historical and recent history. Thus the Government of Eritrea and the NME are in a unique position to gain political, historical and economic benefits from this field.

During the Ethiopian colonization, the Ethiopians deliberately undermined Eritrean cultural heritage, so as to suppress the actively progressing Eritrean political and military achievement from the world (Ghebre du: 5). There was not a single nominated site in Eritrea, even the site of Adulis, which is universally known for being the ancient port of the Aksumite kingdom, while Ethiopia has seven sites in the UNESCO heritage list. The Eritrean Government is, however, working to gather records of this independent nation's heritage sites. As a result, Eritrea has five archaeological sites nominated for the World Heritage List and many other sites that are registered in the tentative list (pc. Libsekal 2003).

The new archaeological findings are of global importance, since they seem to change the world's previously held historical facts of the 1st millennium BC about the Horn of Africa and invite correction and revision of the 'taken for granted' theories (Daniel in Samuel shabait.com/articles/publish/article_838.html) 30 November 2003, and IRIN (NAIROBI) expedition.bensenville.lib.il.us/Africa/Eritrea/culture.htm) 18 October 2003). Therefore, the NME and the UOA are responsible for exploring the facts and publishing a complete Eritrean history.

NME museum practices

The NME, as a young institution, is working to standardise its museum practices in order to properly implement its nation-wide mission to preserve and develop Eritrea's cultural, political, historical, social and economic attributes.

Museum policy

According to Anfray and Crewdson (1995: 14-15), the earliest known official proclamation on the preservation of the cultural heritage of Eritrea was formulated during the Italian colonization, on Oct 03 1918 (Decree No. 1589). During the British Administration (1941-52) some British scholars contributed essential writing and research on the history and social life of Eritrea, but no archaeological works were done. The Federal Government (1952-62) has left no record on the subject. However, the Imperial Government commissioned the archaeological excavations of Metera and Adulis after the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962, even though the recovered objects were not found in Eritrea. In October 1989, the Ethiopian Government, under Mengistu, issued a comprehensive proclamation on exploration, excavations, preservation, and presentation of cultural heritage. According to Russom (pc. 2004), none of these documents were found in the Museum.

In 1995 (after the independence of Eritrea), a draft legislation regarding cultural heritage was prepared by Francis Anfray and Richard Crewdson, UNESCO representatives, and the first workshop was organized by the Eritrean Department of Culture, to discuss the legislation. At the workshop, delegates from various ministries, law enforcement agents, the UOA, the NME, the State Archives, the Churches and Muslim community, together with other parties and UNESCO representatives, participated. Anfray prepared request and licence forms for authorization of archaeological excavations or research fieldwork of a similar nature. This contains 26 regulations. However, the NME staff (pc. 2004) announced that Eritrea had not officially published the necessary laws to preserve its cultural heritage and a declaration of the legislation is not expected in the near future, as the country's main focus falls on the reconstruction of a war-ruined economy caused by the latest border dispute with Ethiopia that started in 1998. Berhe (pc.2004) suggests that one of the reasons for the delay was the change of administration from the Ministry of Culture to UOA. Russom (pc. 2004) adds that the draft needs some amendment and when it is completed it will be submitted to the Government for approval.

Even though the NME follows its own internal basic policies to run the Museum's activities, the institution needs to formulate a standard museum policy statement to

achieve its overall declared goals, which are not included in the draft legislation, as the latter focuses mainly on archaeological conservation. Libsekal (pc. 2003) suggested that, even though it is difficult to implement unpublished heritage legislation, the NME uses the draft policy as a guideline for artefact management and the control of foreign researchers.

The mission statement in museum practice is a primary step that, according to Edson and Dean (1996: 28-29), describes why the institution exists, what its functions are and what the scope of its activities should be. The NME has a clear mission statement, but Edson and Dean stress that a museum must establish policies to implement the mission statement and the policies are executed using procedures which guide the daily operation of the museum.

The NME, in designing its policy, should be conscious of the point that Belcher (1996: 11-13) made; namely that preparing the policy statement requires an awareness of any constraints, including legal and political factors that affect the function of the policy statement. It should also consider whether it encourages museums, educational institutions, donors and lenders of items in the collection process. The policy needs to be prepared at the highest level or by a group of senior staff, even though contributions and comments are collected from various levels.

The policy statement of a museum depends on the situation and aspirations of that particular museum. It should also be flexible and open for periodic review in order to meet the demands of changing circumstances. The policy statement should include 'a general statement of intent, a list of general aims and objectives which define the role of the organization', and specific statements related to the museum's practice such as documentation, acquisition, collection, research communication, education and conservation (Belcher 1996: 13).

Collection

According to Edson and Dean (1996:30-31), collection or acquisition is the process of acquiring objects for the museum through donation, fieldwork or research, purchase, or transfer from another institution. Museums collect their works actively and passively. A museum can work alongside an association or society that actively gathers works as well as passively accept donated works. In collecting actively, which often requires local, state or national permits, the museum either gathers the objects from site or field, purchases them, or exchanges them with other institutions, based on mutual agreements. In passive collections the museum receives donations, bequests and loaned objects (Tietz 1994: 7,

32-34). Berhe (pc. 2003) explains that the NME acquires its collection from donation, as well as from the field, which he calls the system of Random Collection. The NME is limited in pursuing further collections due to the absence of legal policy, funding and spacious storerooms and exhibition premises.

Documentation

Museums follow procedures known as the 'Museum Documentation System (MDS)' to manage information concerning their collections and their curatorial functions. The MDS helps to facilitate and locate items, manage internal movements and external loans, apply insurance procedures, undertake audit and stock checks, aid in the preparation of publications and lectures, provide sources for research, assist the development of displays and exhibitions and provide for long-term storage and access to data (Africa 2009 April 2001: 14, Light 1986: 1).

Collections of the NME lack proper documentation. The artefacts collected by the Italians had been accessioned or documented in part, but this was lost during the Ethiopian colonization. Some of the artefacts were taken to Addis Ababa (pc. Berhe 2003, Haile 2003: 22). The NME was started by ex-combatant artists with no formal training in museology (Street 1996: 159, Libsekal - Netsebraq 8, May 2001: 34), which caused the collections in the early 1990s to be informally documented or to have incomplete records. For the later collections, however, the NME followed the MDS.

Berhe (pc. 2003) reported that the NME is now manually documenting its collections, using tables, cards, detailed catalogues and photographs. According to him, a large record book is classified into Form-1 and Form-2, for documenting immovable and movable artefacts, respectively. The record also includes different forms for regulations for foreign researchers, for artefacts that are sent abroad for study, for donated artefacts, and for field recovered objects which are documented as 'raw data' and attached with photographs.

Weldai⁴ (pc. 2005) explained that the NME was attempting to manually complete an inventory of the whole collection, which was not an easy task. Thus the staff decided to introduce a computer database system and organized a workshop in April 2003, inviting an expert in the field. However, the system was not implemented due to financial constraints. Berhe (pc. 2003) described additional limitations concerning computerization due to incomplete records or lost-documents related to the collection. These need trained personnel and enormous effort to research the detailed information of each object.

⁴ Merih Weldai is an archaeology graduate from the UOA and was working at the NME as a graduate assistant before she left for the US to pursue graduate studies.

Even though there were no personnel trained in museology in the NME, Weldai (pc. 2005) said that some museum study courses were given by the Department of Archaeology at the UOA, which enabled assistant graduates to work in the NME. Weldai hopes that Haile Berhe, who recently trained in Japan to be a museologist, will introduce some newer standard systems for the documentation of the NME collections.

Preservation

As every object in the museum is unique and irreplaceable, museums give attention to the true nature of an object preserved through their conservation systems. According to ICOM in (Keene 1996: 12), the process of conservation includes technical examination, preservation and restoration of cultural property. Museums should keep the balance between their collections which need to be preserved and cared for, while they also have to be displayed and used.

Conservation should be carried out with the use of standards which are particular specifications to be followed. Keene (1996: 13-14) points out that the process of conservation can be monitored and the results of expert work and knowledge can be easily communicated through the use of standards, despite some limitations. If museums do not use standards, they must draw up policies for setting parameters to conserve, display or create a storage environment for each object.

Museum conservation not only concerns monitoring the environment with relation to temperature, humidity and light, but also aspects of the environment that can be assessed only by visual judgment. These may include adequacy of space in stores, conditions of the building, including cleanliness, satisfactory organizational procedures and adequate enclosure or support for objects. Moreover, it is useful to take an overview of preservation in the museum, both for the displays and storage, from time to time (Keene 1996: 14).

The NME is not applying proper scientific conservation methods, due to a limited budget and a lack of trained personnel. The institution makes only visual inspections of both the displayed and stored objects. Fortunately, the objects are naturally conserved because they are not subjected to extreme high or low relative humidity as a result of Asmara's dry highland air and very limited weather fluctuations (pc. Libsekal 2004). Currently the NME does not have a separate section that audits the conservation of objects, but every member of the museum is responsible for the preservation of each artefact (pc. Russom 2004).

Audiences of the NME

Audiences of the NME are mainly students and tourists and a very limited number of residents of Asmara. The main contribution of the NME at present is its accessibility to different levels of students, through the link it has with schools. Students, organized in groups, visit and study the exhibitions, including the historical sites (pc. Russom 2004). Moba'e (pc. 2004) recommended that heritage awareness should be incorporated in the curriculum of the education programme and should have its own department. According to him, since the NME did not have a section for public awareness, and due to a shortage of personnel, the institution could not serve the public properly.

The educational role of museums that operate through exhibitions, displays, events and workshops is now widely understood to go beyond the limited provision for school children and adult tour groups. This broader scope for museum education encourages museums to bear a more comprehensive responsibility. This is because social questions need to be critically considered, as focusing on the learning process alone is not sufficient. Museums are now developing a critical pedagogy that articulates 'the relationship between museums as cultural organizations and museums as sites for learning'. The museum as a cultural institution plays a role in expanding the knowledge of the social and cultural values, on top of their educational strategies (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 4, 22).

NME future plans

Future plans of the NME are highly dependent on the funding the institution expects to receive. One of the indispensable plans of the NME is to identify the best location and build proper National Museum premises that can accommodate different museum activities. According to Libsekal (pc. 2004), the institution's plan, besides a well-organized permanent exhibition, is to have enough halls for temporary exhibitions, to encourage contemporary arts. The NME also intends to open a more comprehensive library and reading halls for the public and researchers, as well as shops to display and sell craftworks to the market.

The current and immediate future plans of NME include expanding its heritage exhibitions throughout the country, by opening regional museums. This will help to reach the public and enrich their awareness of the cultural heritage. Libsekal (pc. 2004, 2001: 34) disclosed that the NME will open a Regional Museum at Naqfa ናቕፋ, a fortress of the EPLF, that represents the historically very valuable 30-year (1961-1991) Eritrean armed struggle for independence. The underground hospitals, schools, factories, offices, garages and entertainment halls, which were the result of the hard work of the independence

fighters, will serve as museum premises. The exhibition will include all works of creativity, including modification of bombs, big guns, missiles, and rocket-launchers; valuable recycled materials made from bomb shells; all the daily life objects such as shoes, dresses, etc; models of the major successful war strategies; documents, letters, art works, literature and all objects related to the armed struggle.

Other Regional Museums will be opened at Keren ከረንጎ, Barentu ባረንጎቲ, Sen'afē ሰንፍጅ and Massawa ባጽፊ. In Keren there will be a Cultural Museum, as the town is well known for its multi-cultural nature, as is clearly seen in the material culture, artistic and handicraft products such as cultural dress, pottery, grass works and beadwork, which represent different cultural groups. The Barentu Regional Museum will be a pre-historic museum, since the region is rich in pre-historic sites. Sen'afē Regional Museum will represent the heritage sites of the Southern Region, including the famous complex sites of Qohaito ቆሓይቶ and Metera መጠራ. In the port-city of Massawa, different museums will be opened, representing the heritage of the Northern Red Sea Region. Artefacts such as old port objects from the sea, Dahlak and Adulis, and objects associated with oppression and crimes of the Ethiopian regimes on Eritreans, will be exhibited.

One Regional Museum in Massawa is already open, with four sections having better display halls than NME. The Director of the museum, Ghebreyesus⁵ (pc. 2003), explained that the museum is administered under the Northern Red Sea Zone. Being under the authority of the zone, the regional museum is experiencing similar problems as NME.

Libsekal added that when the NME is capable of unearthing its thousands of historical sites, there will be many open air museums, including Embaderho, Maitemenai, Sembel and Mendefera.

The NME's financial problems, non-autonomous administration and lack of legal policies are key problems prohibiting progress of the institution regarding its current and future plans. The collection is poorly documented, especially due to a lack of documentation during the initial years of the Museum. This was mainly because of the absence of proper museological management, which continues to be a problem in auditing the objects for different activities. Despite all these limitations, the NME is working hard to become a true reflection of the country's cultural identity, while contributing to and fostering an education programme for young citizens.

⁵ Yohannes Ghebreyesus is the Director of the Regional Museum of Massawa and he is one of the UAO archaeology graduates.

Chapter Three

Illustrated catalogue of selected works

The sample artefacts discussed in Chapter Three are all from the Ethnographic Section of the NME. The Ethnographic Section opened in 1992 in the previous premises, with adequate showrooms in which the lifestyle of the nine Eritrean ethnic groups was displayed. When the NME moved into its current building, this section's display was restricted to two rooms, with a limited number of objects. Weldai (pc. 2004) explained that cultural artefacts of this section are selected for display based on the representative value of the objects for the identity of a given group, cultural value or symbolic meaning of the objects with respect to the group it is representing and the aesthetic value of the objects.

A selection of these study samples focused on the coverage of different Eritrean ethnic groups. However, it was not possible to include some of the ethnic groups due to a shortage of information, as well as the non-availability of representative objects in the ethnographic section. Some of the ethnic groups, such as the Saho and Tigrinya, are well represented, while others are not. According to Weldai (pc. 2004), this is because in 1993-1994 the Museum started its first campaign to collect artefacts from the Southern Zone, inhabited by the Saho and Tigrinya peoples. The campaign was interrupted before the Museum reached the other regions of the country due to the change of premises in 1997, as well as the new war with Ethiopia, which started early in 1998. Some headrests are peculiar to more than one ethnic group.

The selection also focused on the social and cultural value of the objects in reflecting the traditional customs of Eritrean society, such as eating and drinking habits, social hierarchy, warfare and religion. Materials and techniques used were important factors for selection, as the objects should display wood carving, basketry, metal and leather works. These study samples represent only some of the products of the Eritrean arts and crafts displayed in the museum.

An attempt has been made to approach these study samples in terms of their historical, social, cultural and iconographic dimensions, in addition to their art historical descriptive analysis for both the form and surface of each object.

***Mahzel* ጣጎሀል, baby carrier**

Mahzel (Fig. 1) is a sheet of hide, 65 x 47 cm, used for carrying a child on the back while the mother is walking or standing. *Mahzel* is a flat leather piece made from goat or sheep

skin, without modifying the animal's original shape – so that the front limb strips rest on the shoulders and chest to support the main wide rectangular part of the leather that holds the child.

According to Ghebreyesus⁶ (pc: 2005), the use of *mahzel* is an ancient practice that probably began when people learned how to use animal skins for different purposes, including clothing. He recounted that Herodotus mentions that Africans were wearing leather skirts (Tigrinya: *sherara* ሻራራ), a style which the Greeks borrowed and made for their goddess. Pankhurst (1992: 72) explains that during the Middle Ages poor women wore hides or skins with shawls of sheep- or goatskin. In Eritrea the use of leather skirts was commonplace until colonization by the Italians in the late 19th C, even though cotton clothes were common several centuries earlier. According to Gillow (2003: 157), there are 1st C records of cotton being imported via the Red Sea. Ghebreyesus said that when he was a small boy he saw his sister wearing *sherara*, as well as men wearing *dino* leather capes. *Mahzel* can be compared with various forms of leather clothing utilized for centuries in Eritrea.

The form of *mahzel* is natural and results from the process of flaying an animal. After removing the head of the goat or sheep, the hind legs are cut at the limbs, from which the carcass is suspended on a tree branch or on a wall hook. The skin is pulled off carefully by tearing it from the chest, starting from the hind legs and working down to the neck. It is then dried in the sun by pegging the fur facing the ground; in the process, the skin is stretched. Salt is spread all over the fleshy surface to protect the skin from micro-organisms, as well as to facilitate drying. The skin is kept dry and stored flat for a long time; according to Pankhurst (1992: 228). To make the skin softer it is spread with clotted milk and linseed flour and allowed to soak overnight. Then the skin is folded with the fur outside and trampled on by the feet for several mornings until it gets softer. With every treatment the skin is covered with fresh grass and pressed with stones to prevent it from drying. After several days of this process the fur is removed easily and is ready for use.

Once the skin is processed, *mahzel* requires only simple modifications and the addition of materials such as leather or cloth strips or ropes stitched to the front arms so as to make them longer for tying purposes. In use as a support, the skin's front legs are very functional, as they hold an infant securely and prevent it from falling out. The neck part of the skin is cut off, since it is not functional.

Mahzel is made from leather only - besides the final step that involves the addition of cowrie shells and glass beads to the surface, which is now devoid of hair. As a result of

⁶ Dr Abba Isaak Ghebreyesus is one of the prominent Eritrean writers – with an honorary doctorate - who continues to contribute to the knowledge of Eritrean history and culture.

use, the surface of this museum example has become softer in the middle. The surface is coated with red dye processed from plants and shows lighter and darker contrasts.

As an item of material culture in the Tigrinya group, *mahzel* symbolises motherhood and nurturing (Fig. 2 and 3). Hence it is probably the single most important object to represent the strong bond between a mother and her child. The role of the mother in nurturing her child is highly respected and it is often mentioned that the 'Eritrean mother carries her child in her womb and later on her back'. In this case, Sahle⁷ (2003: 23) describes a foreigner who remarked that, '[he had] never seen a people with so much attachment to their mothers as the Eritreans'. Commenting further, Sahle (2003: 23-24) mentions the protective role developed between the child and the mother, to the extent that she is considered 'a shield and a shelter against the father's arbitrary rule and his ruthless methods of punishment'. The mother always offers the child affectionate words such as 'consolation of my eye', 'dripping honey', 'may my soul be a sacrifice to you', that foster the mother-child relationship.

The bond between the mother and her offspring has become a national icon, especially witnessed during the armed struggle for independence; Sahle (2003: 31) describes the Eritrean mother as 'compassionate and fierce at the same time'. The Eritrean mother, besides her love, does not accept the defeat of her son, considering that he is a hero who should 'either come back with his shield or on it'. The mother's role in the 30-year struggle, the steadfastness she commanded and the bravery she had in sending her son or daughter to fight and accepting the bitter news about their deaths was highly respected. For a mother, the family and the country are the two most sacred things in life. According to Ghebreyesus (2005), the significance of *mahzel* is also that when an Eritrean mother carries her baby properly using *mahzel*, it is an indication of the good organization and management of her work as well as of the care she offers her child.

This particular *mahzel* typically includes rows of cowrie shells and glass beads. Following the natural outlines of the animal's skin, two vertical rows are placed on the left and right edges of *mahzel*, with a single line of cowrie shells in which each cowrie shell is separated by a blue-black coloured bead. While the vertical row placed at the centre is double lined, that one line incorporates blue-black beads and the second line includes light-blue beads in between each cowrie shell. Two horizontal rows are put on the top and bottom edges so that the bottom one is a single row of cowrie shells separated by red beads. The top row is a double line of cowrie shells mixed with red, blue and blue-black

⁷ Amanuel Sahle is an Eritrean columnist and language teacher.

beads and extends to the right and left front arms. The backs of the cowries are often ground down so that they are easier to sew on to the hide and will lie flat.

A group of white, blue and blue-black fringes of beads is on the top right and left corners as well as on the bottom middle part; suspended on the bottom right and left corners, of this *mahzel* are clusters of red and white beads. On each of the hind legs of the skin are groups of four cowrie shells that each forms a cross.

The use of the cowrie shell crosses may be iconic indicators that signify Christian beliefs. It is believed that the cross protects people from the evil eye. Thus the mother has to carry the sign of the cross to feel secure from any harm that may come to her child and as a sign that *Medhanie Alem መድኃኔ አለም* (Redeemer of the World) would protect him or her.

Ghebreyesus (pc: 2005) explains that cowrie shells have been used by seers as a material to predict the future and to explain mysteries; however, they do not have any link with this particular object or other leather works decorated with cowrie shells, such as *sherara*. Ghebreyesus argues that the importance of the cowrie shells and the colour arrangements of the beads applied on the surface of *mahzel* is for decoration, rather than bearing specific meanings in society. However, there could be a meaning linked to cowrie shells because of their long history in world cultures and social values.

In ancient times, the cowrie served as currency and is still in use in some parts of the world, such as Nigeria. The cowrie has become one of the symbols of the African continent. In sacred stories of the Yoruba, for example, the cowrie speaks through divination and if someone is attracted to cowries it could mean that he or she is the son or daughter of a Yoruba ocean spirit (<<http://www.ifama.com/page7.html>> 27 June 2005).

According to Gillow (2003: 168), the use of cowrie shells is common in the Eritrean and Ethiopian highlands and the desert plains of Somalia and northern Kenya and denotes fertility as its shape suggests a woman's genital organ and also denotes wealth, since it has been used as currency. Thus, traditionally, cowries and beads may at least represent productivity, wealth and status.

Mahzel is still a utilitarian object in Eritrea today. As *mahzel* is such a durable material, it can be passed from mother to daughter. A mother should possess one before giving birth to her child. According to Ghebreyesus, a husband very often gives his wife a *mahzel* as one of his wedding presents.

Simple *mahzelat* are traditionally prepared at home, but they can be purchased from the market as a means of income to some experts who can decorate and make *mahzelat* beautifully. Ghebreyesus (pc. 2005) explained that, traditionally, women who

are experts at making *mahzel* received payment in the form of cereals as a primary medium of trade exchange, or the makers were offering them to their friends as gifts.

Mahzel is used whenever there is a need to carry a child, at home, when working or during travel. First the baby is strapped onto the mother's back with a piece of cloth, *gizguz* ግዝጉዝ or *sarso* ሳርሶ, then *mahzel* is wrapped around the bundled baby; skill is needed to maintain balance. *Gizguz* or *sarso* is used to insulate the child from the leather, as well as to keep the *mahzel* clean in case the child urinates (pc. Ghebreyesus 2005). The front legs of the *mahzel* are put over the shoulders, crossed diagonally to the back via the waist and recrossed to the front before tying. The legs of the baby encircle the mother's waist; the infant's arms may be kept inside or outside *mahzel*, as preferred.

Since *mahzel* leaves the mother's hands free, Ghebreyesus said that mothers can engage in a wide range of activities when carrying the baby, including playing the hand-drum (Tigrinya: *kebero* ከቡሮ), which requires very vigorous body movements in *guayla* ጓይላ traditional dancing.

***Walta* ዋልታ, shield**

The shield *walta* is an object used in combat common among the Tigre and Tigrinya speaking groups. Generally, shields were important objects, as war and hunting became highly esteemed activities in Eritrea. During the 18th and the 19th C decorated shields made from elephant's hide began to be materials of distinction belonging to noblemen and renowned heroes. This particular museum example (Fig. 4) belongs to an unknown officer and has a diameter of 67cm.

The making of *walta* out of animal hide requires skill to make it strong, with a permanent form. Spring (1993: 100) explains that the construction of *walta* begins by putting untreated elephant's hide over a conical wooden mould placed firmly in the ground. The hide, which is tightly stretched to the ground with the help of pegs, is allowed to dry. Then for several days coats of oil or butter are applied to swell the hide. In between each application the hide is beaten with a wooden hammer to make it firm and to maintain its conical shape.

This museum example has a central conical form enclosed by a circular semi-tubular form. The rim is made by rolling the hide, which when it dries, becomes very strong, protecting the shield from tearing and keeping the shield rigid.

Embossed designs and silver embellishments are applied before the hide is completely dry. When the shield is removed from its mould, a handle made of twisted strips of hide is attached across the central reverse side.

This decorated shield is a traditional emblem of rank and dignity conferred to *ra'esitat ራእሳታት*, chiefs or renowned warriors and hunters (<<http://www.flight-toys.com/artifacts/tb01.html>> 06 May 2005). Heroes such as those who have killed the enemy or lion or tiger killers are highly honoured in society and a silver or gold decorated shield, most often with a lion's mane pendant (fig. 5), is offered to commemorate their bravery. A finely made, perfect round shield, with its embellishments, implies the boldness and readiness of the warrior on the battlefield (Spring 1993: 99).

During the struggle for independence, Eritrean society developed a deeper sense of nationalism, which was prioritized when a sense of identity was being cultivated in Eritrea. Symbolised in the shield, the ideology of war encouraged the ultimate personal sacrifice: a soldier's life was to be given in the struggle for Eritrean national identity (Fig. 9). The shield has an equivalent meaning as the candle which is lit in every Eritrean house and throughout the whole country in the avenues of villages, towns and cities on June 20, to commemorate the fallen heroes who sacrificed their lives for their country. In the same way that the candle melts down to provide light for others, the shield also faces the sharpness of spears, swords, arrows and daggers on behalf of the soldier.

In contemporary Eritrean craftsmanship, models of a small shield attached to a couple of crossed spears made out of wood, metal and porcupine quills represent the bravery and warrior traditions of the people of Eritrea and are common gifts to important guests such as foreign officials. Gold and silver earrings especially made for wedding gifts represent the form of a circular cone-shaped shield.

In Eritrean society, war was a common event, as there was conflict linked with land, territories and self defence since ancient times (Denison 2003: 18). Pankhurst (1992: 13) notes that during the medieval period, war was a frequent occurrence, leading to the mobilization of vast numbers of soldiers. The war and military life encouraged the production of weapons such as this museum example of a shield. Almeida, in Pankhurst (1992: 16), says that during medieval times shields were firm and strong and produced from buffalo hides. The shields were carried by the infantry and cavalry. Silver and gold decorated shields such as this museum example, were common especially during the 18th and 19th C (Girma in Mack 2000: 39). Symbols of bravery which usually complement this decorated shield were the cape *dino ዲኖ*, the spear *kuinat ኩናት*, the sword *sief ሰጅፍ (ሰይፍ)* or *guradie ጉራዲ*, and the head ornament *gamma ጋማ* (Fig. 8) (pc: Ghebreyesus 2005).

Some Eritrean traditional paintings depict saints and noblemen in their military attire (Ramos and Boavida 2004: 76). Saint George, for instance, always wears a ceremonial dress and carries a ceremonial shield (Girma in Mack 2000: 40). Details of a

larger traditional painting (Fig. 7) clearly show Dejazmach Hailu, Governor of Hamasien (central region of Eritrea), who held power during the 1850s and 1860s, with his shield and spear carried by his attendants standing behind him (Spring 1993: plate 22). Silver embellishments and a lion's mane pendant on the shield can be seen in the painting as an indication of Hailu's status and bravery.

The Eritrean and the Abyssinian highlands region has particular standing and an elevated position in the military hierarchy. According to Spring (1993: 96), the highest power belonged to the *ngus ንጉሰ* king, then *ra'esi ራእሲ*, the governor of the province and the general in the army. The next level belonged to *lukumukas ሉቁሙቃስ*, equerry, *dejasmach ደጃዝማች (ደጊያት)*, door ruler, general, *fitaurari ፊታውራሪ*, commander of the advanced guard, brigadier-general, *bejirondi በጅሮንዲ*, royal transport and engineer officers, *qenyasmach ቀኛዝማች*, ruler of the right wing, *grasmach ግራዝማች*, ruler of the left wing, *balambaras ባላምባራስ*, head lord of a fort or fortress commander, *haleqha shih ሓለቻ ሸሐ*, captain of one thousand, and *haleqha mi'eti ሓለቻ ሚእተ*, captain of five hundred.

The surface of the shield is highly decorated, using special hammers and other tools. Finely pressed circular motifs that run on the semi-tubular structure which follows the base of the cone are applied to the external surface before the hide completely dries out. Most of the process of attaching the silver to the surface, and especially making holes for the nails, is accomplished when the shield is still tightly held on its mould.

A silver bowl-like structure is attached to the tip of the cone with nails that also serve as decoration. Two small hemispheres of silver are placed above the bowl-like structure and two others below it, attached across the centre. This is typical decoration for these ceremonial shields. A belt with highly-detailed silver filigree skirts the base of the conical structure. A row of numerous silver strips are attached from the base of the cone to the back side of the shield, across the semi-tubular form and the rim. Three crosses are attached to the surface of the cone, one on the top and two others across the middle, making the sign of a triangle. All the silver embellishments are attached with nails that have round heads.

The silver loses its shine with age and produces a weak contrast against the dark brown elephant's hide. The numerous round-headed nails of silver create a shiny contrast against the dull and dark surface of the hide.

The decorative silverwork on the surface of the shield signifies the distinction of the owner of the shield. The silver, like gold, is a material indication of wealth and high rank in Eritrean society. Shields without silver decoration belong to the ordinary warriors. Shields used as marks of distinction of governors *ra'esitat* were covered in velvet and

decorated with silver. Even gold was used during the end of the 19th C. *Ra'esitat* usually offer their chiefs a silver-decorated shield (Spring 1993: 100). Parkyns, in Spring (1993: 99) notes that brass embellishment was common, even though it was used to hide a bad animal skin. Warriors usually prefer not to cover the intrinsic beauty of a good skin shield. Suspending a wide strip of lion's mane on the central part of the shield was also a common way of acknowledging bravery.

The three Crosses suggest the Trinity, which is mentioned in every traditional Eritrean activity. The Cross is an emblem of victory. The Eritrean Coptic Christians believe that the Cross (Christ) wins wars. This belief, which continued until recent time, has some ancient roots, as can be noticed in the 4th C Greek inscription of King of Aksum Ezana, which describes that '...For He has... given me great victory through His own Son in whom I have believed... in the faith of Christ and His will and in the power of Christ, for He has guided me... I have come out to fight...' (Hable Sellassie 1972: 103, Mara 1972: 13). Another inscription in Sabaean characters, but Ge'ez text, with a sign of Cross concerns the Aksumite king, Caleb, in the early 6th C. The inscription begins with a verse from the Bible, Psalms 24: 8; 'እግዚአብሔር ሆኖል ወጽኑል፣ እግዚአብሔር ሆኖል (Cross) በውሰተ ፀብፅ The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle' (Hable Sellassie 1972: 1124). The inscription continues with Caleb's praising God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, for giving him a powerful and stable empire.

This belief of winning war in the name of the Cross is also based on the legend of Constantine. According to Berhe (Sahle in Beautiful Eritrea 2004: 24), Benson (1976: 31) and Hable Sellassie (1972: 108), before the conversion of Constantine to Christianity, and during his fight with a rival king, he saw a sign of the Cross in the sky, with writing '*in hoc signo vinces*', meaning 'in this sign you will win'. Constantine won the war and made Christianity an official religion in his Roman Empire. Constantine and his mother, Eleni (Helena), then decided to search for Christ's true Cross. On September 27, the Eritrean Orthodox Church celebrates the discovery of the Cross, by burning bonfires and torches and with dancing and chanting.

Silver has been a precious metal in the Eritrean region since ancient times. Gold and silver were traded with Egypt 3500 years ago. During 1-6th C AD the Axumites minted coins out of gold, silver and copper, for commercial purposes. To the present day, silver is highly valued in Eritrean society.

Shields usually have a loop to grasp with one hand during combat; otherwise the shields are carried on the shoulders by putting the arm through the looped handle. The shields reserved for noblemen, such as this museum example, were carried on a mule

covered with a red cloth, when on the march. However, the shield is carried by a servant standing behind the master when he is having important discussions (Fig. 6) (Girma in Mack 2003: 40, Spring 1993: 99-100).

***Jile' ጃላ*, Danakil sword,**

This Danakil sword *jilè* (Fig. 19) is 73cm long, including its leather sheath. It is used for slashing the enemy during hand-to-hand combat and is a man's attire that represents identity of the group in Afar society. The sword's short, broad and curved shape makes it comfortable for carrying on the front waist.

This sword's vernacular name in the NME is given in Tigrinya as *sief* ሰፍ, while in the Afar groups the sword is known as *jilè*. Any specific information regarding this sword, such as the date of production, the maker of the object within the Afar peoples and the specific place of production within Dankalia, are not recorded in the NME.

The province where the Afar people, who have Hamitic origins, live was previously known as Dankalia, which is currently called Southern Red Sea Zone, *Zoba debubawi keyh bahri*. In the northern part of this province the Asaemara (the reds) live and in the southern part the Adaemara (the whites) (Pool 1997: 9).

Iron working has been practised in Eritrea since the 1st millennium. It was introduced by the south Arabian settlers (Phillipson 1988: 159, Habte Selassie 1969: 36). According to Pankhurst (1992: 222-223), in many parts of the country blacksmiths are responsible for the production of iron articles of economic and military importance - including this museum example - despite what society regards as their unwelcomed skill and profession. Blacksmiths were treated as evil and disgraceful or as sorcerers, *budatat* ቡዳታት, and were feared because of the old belief that blacksmiths possessed supernatural powers, which in the night enabled them to turn themselves into hyenas or other beasts, capable of preying on human flesh. Almost all illnesses were suspected to come from blacksmiths. EPLF- RB (II *newsbo* 1982: 72) states that traditional Eritrean societies (Saho, for example, as mentioned here) do not intermarry with blacksmiths.

The processing of metal works can be observed from the blacksmiths who produce different metallic objects in Medebber, which is a very popular part of Asmara, and which accommodates different small craft workshops. In the first stage iron ore is heated to glowing in a large charcoal fire by blowing it with several bellows made from sheep or goat skin; each man works with two bellows, one in each hand. When the metal is red-hot, a strong thong is used to put it on a rock or an anvil and two or three men strike it with

metal hammers. After repeating the process several times, the ore is ready for use. A piece of metal large enough to make the blade of the sword is taken, heated and beaten into the desired shape. The blade is smoothed with a file and heated again to be tempered in water. Finally the edges of the blade are sharpened on a stone or a file. One side of the double-edged blade is almost straight, while the other side has a pronounced curve (Fig. 20). Spring (1993: 104) states that nowadays the Afar make their blades mostly from scrap salvaged from car wrecks.

The other end of the blade is pointed and fitted into a well-carved wooden hilt, with its mid-section bound with decorated leather. The sheath and the belt that help hang the sword horizontally at the waist are made from camel's hide. Decorated brass with a spherical end covers part of the sheath around its pointed tip. The dark-brown wooden hilt, the brass and the leather strips create an interesting contrast against the yellow ochre camel's hide.

The sheath that is made of camel's hide signifies wealth and great esteem in the Afar groups. The livelihood of these nomadic people depends on animal husbandry. Even though the number of goats, sheep and cattle indicate wealth, owning a camel earns one much dignity. Thus, a single camel equals fifty to sixty goats. On special occasions camels are a source of meat and milk, but camels play a primary role as pack animals, providing rapid mobility when the nomadic Afar want to move (Beckwith and Fisher 1990: 78).

The leather thong hanging from the sheath symbolises the bravery and dignity of a man for his achievements against his enemy (Fig. 22). The curved shape of the sword may represent the crescent, which is an emblem of Islam. For the Afar people, Islam is of great importance (Singer & Wood 1978: 24), even though Beckwith and Fisher (1990: 79-80) say that 'Islam sits but lightly upon them', as they retain the traditional cult of the Sky-God in addition to that of orthodox Islam.

Spring (1993: 104) points out that the *jile'* carried by the Afar people, who live in Eritrea, Djibouti and Ethiopia; the Yemeni-style dagger *kaskara* which is worn by the Hadendoa people who live in western Eritrea and in adjacent areas of the Sudan; the Somali's *belawa* and the *qujo* of the Kaffa, Arussi, southern Galla and adjacent peoples of southern Ethiopia, are distinctive elements of adult male attire in the Horn of Africa. According to him, the *janbiyya* of the Middle East and the Maghrib countries of North Africa share common characteristics with these short swords and daggers of the Horn. However, in the Horn of Africa they perform a utilitarian function rather than a ceremonial one.

According to Meyer (1995: 122), general armaments can be classified as offensive and defensive. Offensive arms can be divided into four categories: hand weapons such as swords, daggers, knives; projectiles, including bows and arrows, and throwing knives; thrusting weapons, including shafts tipped with metal points, like spears, pikes and axes; and shock weapons such as war clubs and maces. The defensive arms include all kinds of shields and body armour. This museum example *jilè* is an offensive weapon that the Afar men always carry to attack an enemy to gain prestige.

Dankalia with its Danakil or Dallol depression (130 metres below sea level) is a very inhospitable area as it is one of the lowest and hottest places on earth, with temperatures exceeding 50^o C in the sun (<<http://home.planet.nl/~hans.mebrat/eritrea-dankalia.htm>> 15 November 2004). The nomadic Afar inhabited this area, which was traditionally feared by their neighbours. These warrior people's culture used to be bound with 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' statute and, as Singer & Wood (1978: 22) state, the Afar are as tough and hostile as their harsh environment. Afar males, from earliest childhood, are indoctrinated with extreme violence and are convinced that 'it is better to die than to live without killing' (Beckwith & Fisher 1990: 77-79, Buxton 1970: 30).

According to tradition, an Afar man cannot marry a woman until he shows her proof of his manhood by carrying out a successful murder. A man who kills one man entitles him to wear a comb or feather in the hair. A warrior, who kills two, splits his ear to symbolise his trophy, but a man who kills ten wears a special bracelet. The leather thongs that hung from the sheaths of their swords also indicated the number of men they had killed. Even though the original cultural insistence on killing is not common now, 'toughness, bravery and independence are still standards by which a man is measured' (Beckwith & Fisher 1990: 79, Singer & Wood 1978: 22).

The surface of the brass that covers the narrower part of the sheath is decorated with filigree work. Strips of leather decorated with silver and brass are added to the surface of the sheath. The sides of the mouth of the sheath are embellished with a row of circles of silver. The wooden hilt is decorated with leather, onto which silver motifs are applied. The sides of the pommel are decorated with dots and circles of silver and brass. In most cases, as is seen in Fig. 21, the wooden hilt is covered with an aluminium sheet. A hollow piece of brass in the form of an inverted cone is put into the pommel.

The surface of the *jilè*, including its sheath, displays contrasts of dark and light, dull and shiny, as well as the hard and soft look resulting from the use of different materials such as metals, hide and wood. The silver and brass embellishments on the surface of the sheath and the hilt signify status and seniority.

Jile is manufactured primarily for offensive purposes. This object is an important weapon for an Afar man, as his traditional prestige comes from killing enemies. The Afar man must strike and slay his enemy to be considered a real man. This sword is a utilitarian object, serving as a knife for the different activities of daily life of the nomadic Afar man. *Jile* is also the attire of an Afar man that has to be worn at the waist at all times, giving him the identity and appearance of a typical Afar male (Fig. 22) (Singer & Wood 1978: 20).

Member መንበር, traditional chair

Member, the traditional chair (Fig. 34-a and b), is a product of wood carving by traditional carvers. The form of this kind of chair is designed to provide a comfortable seat for elders, in that the left and right armrests function as holders of drinking objects *finjal* ቍንጃል, a small coffee cup, and *wancha* ዋንጫ, a local beer mug. This Museum example is 86.7cm high, 58cm long and 56cm wide and was collected by the staff of the NME in 1993. However, the Museum's information about this object does not provide the specific place of collection, owner or carver and date of production of the object.

As Pankhurst (1992: 229) states, the peasants in the villages are responsible for the production of most of the household articles, with only minimal experience of woodworking, using simple tools such as axes and hatchets. Street (Eritrea Horizons Vol. 2 No 1, 1999: 26) mentions that craft objects are made by the people for their own domestic use, rather than for commercial purposes. However, some of the wooden products such as this chair were produced by skilled and specialized craftsmen and the design and motifs show a considerable level of sophistication.

Usually, woodworking is a collaborative effort, in that if the father is a carver; his sons share some of the work of their father which, in turn, helps the sons to acquire the skill. For example, besides his metal works, architecture and construction activities and farming tasks, the present author's grandfather, Ghebrehiwot, was carving wooden objects such as this traditional chair. His son, Solomon, who studied civil engineering, helped him with the plans, the measurements and the motifs (pc. Ghebrehiwot 2005). Some carvers also employ workers.⁸

Pankhurst (1992: 229) explains that an adze is used to cut thick plain boards from pieces of wood, after the trees are split with wedges. Traditional carpenters had only the basic equipment. A few of the best equipped carpenters in towns used a number of imported tools,

⁸ Woodworking was solely male's work; nowadays women are participating in this field, mainly as a result of the training given to selected women by the Eritrean government, PFDJ, National Women's Association and some NGOs.

including adzes, chisels and saws for cutting, gimlets and wimbles for drilling holes and the compass and the carpenter's line for making accurate measurements.

After preparing the boards and setting the measurements, all parts of the object are joined by mortise and tenon, a technique that uses male-female attachments by drilling holes in the planks. Before the parts are permanently assembled, all the carved motifs and decorations are finished. Finally, the seat is made by webbing strips of cattle hide. The wood used for the construction of this chair is known as *Meqi'e መቼቦ*, *Balanites aegyptica* (pc. Weldai 2005).

This chair has slightly curved back posts and, in between them, a flat wide board is fitted to form the backrest, which is slightly curved backwards to make it comfortable. Both the right and left back posts have diamond finials. The armrest is attached to the back post and is supported by the arm stump, which is a continuation of the front leg. The four legs below the seat are the same size, height and design, bearing three knobs separated by conical forms carved from a piece of wood, circular in cross-section. The seat is webbed by strips of cow hide, reinforcing the seat rails of the wooden structure.

The arm stumps are unique, but typical of this kind of chair. The top of the right arm stump is a small bowl-like structure for holding a coffee cup *finjal*. The top of the left arm stump is a cylindrical, hollow structure with a large opening, which is drilled to hold *wancha*, a conical metallic container for serving the local beer *suwa ሱዋ*. These right and left arm stumps have different forms. The right arm stump has a rectangular solid form, while the left one has a cylindrical hollow structure with arched windows or doors and is situated on top of a rectangular base. These rectangular and circular forms suggest the forms of church architecture common in Eritrea. The literature in the EPLF – RB (IV *snetbeb* 1981: 93-94) generally classifies Eritrean church architectural designs into semicircular, circular and rectangular. The semicircular and rectangular styles were of Sabeian and Aksumite origins, while the origin of the circular one remains unknown. It is now a dominant style and was introduced into Eritrea in the 16th C (Fig.40).

Perhaps the left arm stump's cylinder has a larger appearance compared to the right rectangular one. Ghebrehiwot, an architect and a carver introduced the aspects of church architecture in his chair construction which is typical of this kind of chair.

The two *finjal* and *wancha* holders in the right and left front armrests have a practical and symbolic meaning. They symbolise the respect offered to elders, parents, grandparents and priests, as they make them feel comfortable and relaxed when they are served with drinks. Respecting the elders is particularly emphasized in this ethnic group, as their culture absorbed Biblical influences in which social hierarchy is very important.

The root of this hierarchy emerges from one of the Ten Commandments: ‘Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’ (Exodus 20: 12). There is a traditional coffee-drinking habit in Eritrea in that families and their friends meet after work or over the holidays and talk for a long period. The Eritrean coffee ceremony has its own rituals (Warner 1991: 9). During coffee time, especially in the villages where tradition persists, chairs like this museum example are reserved only for elders (Fig. 36-a and b). Whenever it is available, *suwa*, a popular local beer, is served to the elders. Drinking *suwa* was practised in Eritrea since ancient times. This is mentioned in the Ge’ez inscription at Anza: at the beginning of the 4th C an Aksumite king served his people with bread and beer in large quantities, saying that ‘...ሥዊህ አሰየ ዘጫ ጽሕባተ መሀብስተ አሰየ ዘጫጫ ...donated 520 jars of beer and bread he gave to 20620’ (Hable Sellassie 1972: 89-90).

The decorations on this chair are based on religious symbolic motifs. The elaborate geometrical carving is a representation of the architecture of churches and therefore symbolises a spiritual dimension. The architectural carving on this object represents the historical craft of rock carving, which was a common technique in the Sabaeen and Aksumite civilisations. More clearly, it recalls the rock carving profession that emerged in the Lalibela Churches during the 13th C. The two registers of arches carved on the backrest and a single register of arches in each of the armrests are very similar to the arches of the old Coptic Churches, for example, the St Mary Church from the medieval period at Senafe (Fig. 35-a and c), a typical church window of the Enda Iyesus at Durko Emnihaili (Fig. 35-b), the Church of Immanuel in Lalibela (Fig. 35-d), the Church of the Redeemer in Lalibela (Fig. 35-e) and the Church of Mary in Lalibela.

Early architecture in Eritrea dates back to the 1st Millennium BC. It was found in places such as Adulis, where Sabaeen styles are displayed. Since the 1st C AD Aksumite styles dominated the region with visible evidence in places such as Metera, Qohaito, Adulis and Aksum. Buxton (1972: 92, 97) points out that there is no evidence of arches, vaults or domes in the ‘indented’ facades of Aksumite buildings like the ones in Metera and Aksum. The introduction of arched forms began later, with the introduction of Christianity and probably with influence from Byzantium.

Old Church architecture has absorbed influences from Aksumite styles, but the introduction of arched windows that substituted the Aksumite trabeation was clearly visible in the 13th C rock-cut churches in Lalibela (Garlake 2002: 90), even though they reflect the mixing of different cultural influences shown in the windows displaying Greek, Roman and Byzantine elements, including motifs from Persia, Central Asia and China (Davidson 1967:

134). The arches applied to this chair are specifically similar to the Romanesque blind arches on the freeze of the Church of the Redeemer, Lalibela.

Each register of the chair contains four arches; according to Mercier (1979: 42) the number four represents the four evangelists. Mercier also explains, in describing the architecture of a church, that the 'foundation symbolises the Father, the roof symbolises the Son, the ornament on the peak symbolises the Holy Spirit, and the roof thatching symbolises the faithful' (1979: 44).

The finial of both the back posts that support the backrest is carved into a diamond-shaped structure. This form appears in processional metal Crosses, as well as wooden hand-held Crosses. Putting the Crosses on the uppermost part of the chair also represents Church symbols. Owusu (2000: 271) pointed out that in every Eritrean Orthodox Church a gold-plated Crucifix is placed on the outside peak of the Church. The Cross, in Eritrean society, is an object of particular veneration. Wooden Crosses are symbolised as the Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden (Roberts and Roberts 1997: 130). 'Christ's body is never depicted, not only out of respect, as in early religious art, but because it is the Cross itself that is being invoked' (Mercier 1979: 42).

The plain wooden surface is decorated with engraved chevrons, forming small crosses throughout the entire object. The holes and joints, the engravings and the leather give the surface tactile value. In some parts, the surface is darkened by coating it with butter and exposing it to heat (to increase absorbance) and smoke. There is no addition of other media on the surface of the chair, except for the woven leather strips forming the seat and the twisted leather strips stretched between the finials of the back uprights.

As an example of the significance of the Cross in Eritrean society, September 27 is a public holiday in Eritrea, celebrated with religious dancing, chanting, procession and wood burning. Every priest carries a Cross that he produces whenever necessary. The faithful will first touch the Cross with their forehead and then kiss it. Many Eritrean Christians wear small Cross necklaces and some people even tattoo the Cross on their skin (Fig. 48) (Buxton 1970: 169, Mercier 1979: 42).

The significance of this object is that, besides being a visual symbol of the local Eritrean crafts, it carries powerful religious symbols that reflect how religion was implanted in the culture. It signifies that the long-practised Coptic Christianity in Eritrean society is not only a religion but is also inculcated into Eritrean culture. Moreover, beyond its importance as a useful household item, this chair, with its design manifests the respect and care offered to elders. The object shows that it can be produced economically with minimal cost and experience and every Eritrean villager can afford to make simple chairs by minimizing the

elaborate decorations. The durability, heavy weight, design and religious motifs, with the more cultural and traditional look, are distinguishing features of this handmade chair, compared to contemporary products, which are lighter, less decorated and machine-tooled.

Common among the Tigrinya-speaking Eritrean people, this traditional chair *member* is produced for daily use in the typical traditional house *hudmo* ህድግዎ. *Member* serves as a seat when people meet in the house for the coffee ceremony, *suwa* drinking and other social occasions. Old people, especially priests, are given preference to use the chairs at any gathering. These chairs are also found in churches and monasteries.⁹

***Re'esi menbere tabot* ርእሲ መንበረ ታቦት, Ark of the Covenant's head**

Each Orthodox Church has a sacred Ark containing the Tablet of scriptural law; this wooden coffer *menbere tabot* or tabernacle is placed in the church's most sacred place, called the Holy of Holies. The coffer's head *re'esi menbere tabot*, a part of the coffer *menbere tabot*, is a separate, highly-decorated tabernacle-like form which stands on the Ark (coffer). The National Museum's example of a *re'esi menbere tabot* (Fig. 37-a, b, c and d) is 52cm high, 19cm wide and 15cm long.

Used during prayers, the *re'esi menbere tabot* has small carved panels which are opened to show icons of, for example, the crucifixion, resurrection and St Mary, painted on their interior.

Re'esi menberē tabot is a monoxylous object, carved out of a single thick piece of wood; it usually has a round base, an octagonal form and panels of figurative imagery. In elevation, this model of a tabernacle consists of three main elements, a blind cross vault, an altar and a crown-like canopy.

The cross vault is erected on a circular stylobate (stereobate), having three elevated steps. This cross vault has four main faces of blind arched panels (doors) and four minor rectangular faces, each in between the main ones, making an octagonal form. The three steps lead to each of the four blind arched doors. An arched wooden door is attached to each arched doorframe, with metal wire hinges that allow it to open.

An altar (a table-like form) roofs the blind cross vault, so that its four legs rest on the four minor faces of the octagonal form. A hollow space is created above the blind cross vault as the legs elevate the altar. Each leg is carved into three round frames,

⁹ In towns and cities these traditional chairs are used in restaurants that serve traditional food to denote the typical Eritrean culture. Some people in the cities own these chairs which were received from parents as gift or to perpetuate the old culture.

stacked one above the other so that the lowest contains a Cross. The platform of the altar has an indented edge.

The crown-like cubical canopy rests on the altar; a cubical wall with a kind of zigzag edge enfolds a cubical form that has a pavilion roof (pyramidal roof). The necking of the roof carries two circles, in between which a Latin cross stands; all edges of the arms of the Cross have three pointed endings.

Wood and wire are the only materials used to construct the tabernacle. The engravings of different forms throughout the whole object and the addition of door panels give the artefact an aesthetic value.

The Cross on top of the object, as an icon of Christianity, is a finial of every Eritrean Orthodox Church. As mentioned earlier, most Christians in Eritrean society carry the Cross as a necklace and some women even tattoo it on their face, neck and chest (Fig. 48). Babies born on the holiday of Holy Cross *qđus mesqel ቅዱስ መስቀል*, on September 27, are given names linked with the Cross, e.g. Welettemesqel, Ghebremesqel and Mesqela. This reverence to the Cross emerges from the notion that the Cross is capable of protecting, healing and winning over different problems. Moreover, Christian groups say that the Cross is a sign of love. As one Eritrean monk (name not available: 2002) explained, the Cross on the Church signifies the strength and tolerance of the Church as it always faces temptation.

The four doors of the coffer symbolise the four directions of the Earth: north, south, west and east. Prayer (Mass) *tselotē burakie እግተ ቡራኪ* is performed from four directions by the priests and the faithful facing in four directions (pc: Berhe¹⁰: 2005). The opening of the doors during Mass symbolises communication with God through the holy *tabot ታቦት*.

The crown symbolises the heavenly kingdom or royalty (Ferguson 1973: 166) and the four legs of the altar are the four disciples or the Gospel *wengiel ወንጌል*. The three round frames on the leg of the altar suggest that the one on the top is the Father, the one in the middle is the Holy Spirit and the one at the bottom, with the Cross in it, is Christ, who came to the world to save sinners.

The emergence of *tabot* in Eritrea in the 10th C BC is linked to the legendary history of the Queen of Sheba, who visited King Solomon and with whom she conceived a son named Menelik I. When Menelik grew up, he went to Jerusalem to visit his father, and upon his return with the firstborns of Israel, the real Ark of the Covenant *tabot* was stolen from the temple and brought to Aksum. A similar legend is told in south Arabia, whence

¹⁰ Merigieta (Cantor) Yitbarek Berhe is Head Public Relations and Advisor at the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea.

its people migrated to Eritrea during the 1st millennium BC. There are some place names in Eritrea linked to this legend, such as Anseba and Maibela, and it is said that Menelik was born at Tsaèda Kristian, near Asmara. The Tigrinya groups say that they originated from the six houses of Israel (Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Ruben, Joseph and Simon), who migrated to Eritrea with Menelik (Ghebreyesus trans. from Pollera: nd 19, Hable Sellassie 1972: 38-44). Judaism was practised in Eritrea, as it was introduced by the Queen of Sheba (Street 1996: 157). Some Judaic elements can still be traced in the Eritrean Orthodox Church, e.g. observance of Sabbath, prohibition of eating certain animals' flesh and the presence of the Ark in every Church and its procession with dancing and chanting on different occasions (I Kings 10: 1-10, Pankhurst 1998: 19; Buxton 1970: 32-34).

According to Ullendorff, in Hable Sellassie (1972: 40), the name *tabot* is probably taken from Jewish Palestinian *tebuta*, which is derived from the Hebrew *tebah*. A *tabot* is the most sacred object in the Eritrean Orthodox Church. According to Beckwith and Fisher (1990: 17-17, 37), its reverence is based on the view that the real Ark of the Covenant was brought from Jerusalem to Aksum; *tabot* in a Church represents the original Tablets of Law. Holy *tabotat* are taken from their respective Churches and carried in procession to holy waters (Yordanos), once a year, to celebrate Epiphany *timqet ጥምቀት*. The baptism of Christ by Saint John is the most important holiday in the Orthodox Church. During the procession 'the *tabotat* are wrapped in silk brocade and carried on the heads of the priests, sheltered by velvet umbrellas representing the celestial spheres' (Beckwith and Fisher 1990: 37).

Berhe (pc: 2005) explained that *tabot* as a sacred object is greatly respected and that once *tabot* - made out of a special durable wood - is blessed with *qb'a qdus ቅዱስ ቅዱስ* - *meron ሜሮን* (holy oil) it can only be touched by priests. *Tabot* is placed in *menbere tabot*, a special coffer in a separate part of the Church. Pankhurst (1992: 37) states that the Church is highly revered and that even hurried people do not pass a Church without stopping, facing the Church and making the sign of the Cross on their faces. People enter a Church with great reverence. They take off their shoes and should behave with purity and great attention. Women should cover their heads and stand in the western side of the Church while men should uncover their heads and stand in the northern part.

Eritrean Orthodox Churches, whether they are circular or rectangular, have three sections: *qdist ቅድስት* is the place for the faithful where they receive communion; *qnie mahlet ቅኔ ማህሌት* is the place where the *debteratat ደብተራታት (ደባትር)* sing; and *qdiste qdusan ቅድስተ ቅዱሳን* or *meqdes መቅደስ* - Holy of Holies - is the place where the holy

tabot is placed and is restricted only to the priests (Fig. 40) (EPLF = RB: snetbeb 1982: 93, Beckwith and Fisher 1990: 52, Pankhurst 1992: 37-38).

Re'esi menbere tabot (the altar-chest's head or the coffer's head) is the upper part of the coffer and holds the tablets *tabot*. Berhe (pc. 2005) explained that the coffer's head does not have a specific function in a Church context; it is considered a component of the coffer. However, this artefact has some symbolic value outside the Church in that monks and the faithful (especially celibates) use this as an icon during prayer. It represents the real coffer containing the Tablets of the Law. Like the coffer, the coffer's head has four doors which are opened during prayer.

The coffer's head is commissioned by the Church and is made by skilful artists. The aesthetic value of the coffer and the coffer's head depends on the capacity of the Church to afford the cost of elaborate work. Not all coffers include the coffer's head. For example the coffer shown in Fig. 39 has no head. Whilst the whole form is an essential part of the Orthodox Church, it is not found in Catholic and Protestant Churches in Eritrea (pc. Berhe 2005).

Besides the application of colourful paintings and darkening of the wooden surface with smoke and butter or fat, the motifs on the entire surface of the object are carved and engraved relief. Twelve Eritrean priests' hand-held Crosses with similar shape and size, are carved on the faces of the octagonal form; two crosses are on each of the four outside door panels and one cross is on each of the four minor faces of the octagonal form. The rest of the door surface is decorated with chevrons. Over each of the arched doorframes is an ornamental frame with a scrolled cross-section.

The major elements of the hand-held crosses are an equal-arm-cross, a long oval handle, a rectangular slab containing the intersection of two engraved oval shapes and a smaller oblique cross. All of these shapes sit one over the other, from top to bottom.

The outer surface of the four sides of the rectangular crown (canopy) is decorated with engraved carved lines which follow the zigzag edge. Each face of the cube, with pyramidal roof enclosed by the rectangular crown, is decorated with two squares, each displaying a crossing of two intertwined ovals. The surface of the uppermost cross sitting on the canopy's pavilion (pyramidal) roof is also engraved to form an inner Cross. Finally, the whole surface of the object was lightly smoked; close inspection shows that some recessed areas are not darkened.

Another interesting part of the surface of this artefact is the paintings applied to the inner panels of the doors and the blind door-recesses (the outsides of the doors are engraved but not painted). Usually gesso is lightly applied to the wooden surfaces, such as

with this museum example, as primer prior to the Byzantine-style figurative tempera paintings (Roberts and Roberts 1997: 136). One of the four sides of the coffer's head shows aspects of the life of Christ, such as his healing (probably) on the main face, his preaching and his nomination of disciples on the inside door panel (Fig. 37-d). The pictorial imagery is paired on either side of the *re'esi menbere tabot*; each doorway uses juxtaposed imagery. For example, in Fig. 37-c, the opposite side of the coffer's head shows the crucifixion on the arched door-recess and a scene of the resurrection on the inside of the door panel.

The other side of this artefact, on its arched blind entry, depicts Mary and her child, Jesus, on a mule escaping to Egypt and later to Eritrea, while the one at the door shows an Aksumite king, Bazien, and his army visiting St Mary and her child, Jesus, at Debre Sina (Fig. 37-a). The opposite side on the arched blind entry portrays St. Mary and her son, Jesus, and on the door is St George and the dragon (Fig. 37-b).

The intensive engraving on the surface of this artefact casts shadows, giving it a pronounced texture. The heavily smoked areas, the lightly smoked areas and the non-smoked recessed areas create interesting contrasts and emphasize the motifs. The full-coloured paintings contrasted with the wooden surface, produce an appealing visual effect.

Hand-held Crosses are well visualized on the surface of this artefact. Besides the meaning they convey, explained earlier, in Eritrean Christian societies they serve the priests *kahnat ካህናት* as their identification symbols. Every Eritrean Orthodox priest carries a Cross at all times and holds it with respect, covering it with a piece of cloth so that when the priest meets people, he displays his Cross to be kissed. When the doors of this coffer's head are kept closed, the artefact displays twelve hand-held crosses standing for the twelve disciples of Jesus who were servants of the Gospel. This idea invokes the relationship between the Church and the priests as servants of God's house or as the only ones who stand in front of the Ark to link God and the faithful. The number twelve may also suggest the twelve months of a year, indicating the dedication of priests, monks and celibates to serve God at all times.

According to Owusu (2000: 267), wooden crosses represent the belief that the cross of Christ was cut from the tree of life. The square slab under the handle of the Cross suggests the Ark; it also indicates the grave of Adam and the handle shows the resurrection of Christ from the grave.

The orientation of the paintings, with the Cross uppermost, has meaning. Jesus' images are arranged to the front view of the Cross, suggesting His crucifixion, while St Mary's images are arranged to the profile of the Cross.

The painting showing Mary and her child, Jesus, travelling to Egypt has some importance to Eritrea. According to Abraham (2003: 22-23), mentioning chronicles of the Eritrean Orthodox Church, St Mary and her son, accompanied by Joseph and Salome, escaped into Egypt to avoid king Herod's persecution. After a few days they moved southwards into Eritrea and stayed for forty days at a place called Debre Sina. At this time, God commanded an Aksumite king, Bazien, in a dream, to visit the place. Bazien visited Debre Sina with his army and found Mary and Jesus; he thanked God and bowed and lit torches and arranged a great feast. He suggested that the place be regarded as holy. Later in 338 AD, Abune Selama Kesatie Berhan preached in the area and converted people, including Aksumite kings to Christianity. In 481 AD Father Yohani brought the Ark from Jerusalem and founded the monastery of Debre Sina. Up to the present time Debre Sina is remembered twice a year in Eritrea by the Orthodox Church.

The coffer's head is a sacred object, like the coffer. The coffer's head is a functional object for the celibates who worship God outside Churches in the mountains. They use the object as a coffer and pray in front of it, opening its doors. Inside a Church this object is not functional, other than being a part of the coffer. The coffer *Menbere tabot* and the Scriptural Tablet *tabot* are functional objects which serve in blessing the Holy Communion. The coffer's head is used whenever celibates are praying. In Churches the coffer is used whenever there is Mass, such as every Sunday morning, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Epiphany and during fasting.

***Mekeda*, መከዳ, headrest**

This headrest *mekeda* መከዳ (Fig. 13) is used in different Eritrean ethnic groups, such as the Saho, Bilein, Tigre, Afar, Hidareb, Nara and Kunama. *Mekeda* is the name given to this object by the Museum. However, it has different names in different groups. The leather headrest *mekeda* is known as *berkuma ቦርኩማ* in Saho (pc. Osman Adem, Hayat Abubeker & Saleh Idris, 2005); *wldiwldora ወልደወልደራ* in Bilein (pc. Abdu Mohamed 2005); *wesidet ወሲደት* in Tigre (pc. Asha Osman 2005); *barkuma* in Afar (pc. Mohammed Idris 2005); *tonbas ተንባስ* in Hidareb (pc. Bekit Saleh 2005) and *ankoyta* in Kunama (pc. Satina Debesay & Martha Ghebru 2005). The above informants are all from the 'Voice of the Masses' radio, broadcasting in their respective languages.

Some groups use different names for the wooden headrests: *dukur ዱኩር* (Bilein), *mètèr'as መተርእስ* (Tigre, Afar, Hidareb), *dawliena ዳውሊና* (Saho). The Hidareb call the wooden headrest with only one leg *tlagaday ተላጋዳይ* and it is used by the shepherds away from home in the fields.

These leather and wooden headrests are daily life objects with cultural values and are used during sleeping. The headrest, which is decorated with cowrie shells, is made of leather and is filled with grass. It has an elongated rectangular form, 50cm long (110cm including fringes) and 24cm wide, that allows the head to rest suitably. When it is filled with grass, the height is sufficient to support the head. The T-shaped wooden headrests are very common, especially amongst itinerant people such as shepherds; their light weight and smaller size make them portable.

Mekeda, the leather headrests, including their decorations and embellishments, are made by women, while the wooden headrests are made by men. Headrests as daily life objects are prepared at home; they can also be purchased in the market.

Mekeda is constructed using a sheet of cow's hide, dry grass, beads and cowrie shells. To begin making *mekeda*, the leather is folded, keeping the right face inside, and both edges are stitched together with a thin leather thong, using a special awl. Then it is reversed right side up, forming a cylinder; inverting keeps the stitched edges hidden. One end of the cylinder is sewn. The second end is left open in order to fill the cylinder with dry grass. After filling the cylinder with grass, its second opening is stitched; at this stage the main form of the headrest is completed. The rectangular flattish form of this headrest, the softness of the grass and the leather allow the head to rest comfortably.

The next step is decorating the headrest with leather fringes, which are easily made by cutting a long sheet of leather into fine strips, keeping one edge uncut in order to hold them together. The fringes are usually stitched to both the right and left ends of the headrest. In some of the fringes a group of three cowrie shells are inserted, separated from each other with red beads. The fringes are plaited to each other to prevent the beads and cowrie shells from falling out. At the stitching line, on both sides of the headrest, is a double row of cowrie shells and in-between the cowrie shells is a red bead.

The wooden headrests (Fig. 32 and 33) are monoxylous - carved from a single block of wood. They usually have a conical base, with a concave head support. The headrests for females have a smaller size, compared to the males'. Some of the male wooden headrests have V-shaped forms, with a concave top and a knobbed base.

The ruffled leather fringes, the shiny cowrie shells, the beads and the rectangular form of the pillow create an interesting visual effect, in terms of texture and form.

In some areas of Africa the use of headrests goes beyond utilitarian purposes. For example, Meyer (1995: 20) mentions that headrests are believed to be related to occult forces associated with sleep and dreams. Headrests became personal and indispensable objects, such as in the Dogon society in Mali, where 'the head of a village's spiritual

leader should never touch the ground, lest disaster strike'. The Zulu headrests in South Africa are also believed to invoke sleep and dreams, through which the *amadlozi* intermediaries transfer to people the knowledge they gained from the Lord of the Sky (Leeb-du Toit 2002). Even though more detailed research is necessary, headrests convey meaning in some Eritrean societies as well.

Most of the interviewees from different ethnic groups said that there is no specific meaning to this headrest, other than a gift presented to the bride and groom on their wedding day. For example, a Tigre mother prepares many artefacts for the bride, including two headrests – a leather headrest and a wooden headrest – for the bridegroom (EPLF- RB II *Mewsbo* 1982: 13). The Kunama do not present headrests to the bride and bridegroom. However, Osman, Hayat and Saleh (pc: 2005) revealed the meaning given to the *berkuma* headrest in the Saho communities. In Saho, only one *berkuma* is presented as a wedding gift to the bride and bridegroom from the bride's mother, or from both of the bride's parents. Thus the single *berkuma* symbolises the bride and bridegroom's unity, or just that both the bride and bridegroom are one.

Abdu (pc. 2005) gave a different meaning to the headrest *wldiwldora*. In the Bilein group the headrest is filled with sorghum and given to the bride by her parents. The bride then takes the *wldiwldora* with her to the bridegroom's home and half of the sorghum contained in the headrest is cooked and served to the bridegroom's close friends. The meaning of the headrest filled with sorghum is to wish the bride to be productive and to have as many children as she can. Abdu did not tell why the cooked sorghum is served only to the bridegroom's friends. In Bilein the bridegroom receives *dukur*, a wooden headrest, on his wedding day from his best man, usually made by the latter. The exact meaning of the *dukur* offered by the best man needs to be explored.

The rectangular upper face of the headrest is bordered with motifs drawn on its surface. The right and left sides of the surface are decorated with thick zigzag lines that run in between two thinner parallel lines. Parallel inclined lines close to each other rest on a long horizontal line on both of the longer sides of the headrest. The motifs are drawn with a special black ink prepared from milk and soot. This ink is permanent. The right and left edges of the headrest are embellished with cowrie shells and beads.

The white cowrie shells create a strong contrast with the reddish brown leather. The permanent black ink applied to the surface produces a darker part compared to the central part of the headrest, which has the natural colour of the leather.

All the interviewees commented that the motifs applied to this headrest bear no meaning, or do not symbolise anything other than simply decorations. Further research is

needed to capture the meaning of the zigzag and inclined parallel lines that border the form of the headrest. The zigzag motifs often appear in Eritrean basketry vessels. The cowrie shells convey the meaning of fertility.

This object is used during sleeping, to support the head in the correct position. The wooden headrests support the head at the same height as the shoulders, when the person is sleeping sideways. All the informants from different ethnic groups suggested that the headrest is used during sleeping in order to keep the hair clean when it is wet with *ikhay* ልኻይ (a milk product paste used for hair treatment) and to keep their bedsheets clean. This shows some similarity with the Karamojong men in Uganda, who carry headrests as indispensable objects for their sleep, to keep their hair's complex structures for several months. Wet clay is used to achieve this effect (Meyer 1995: 20).

The wooden T-shaped headrests (Fig. 32 and 33) are made to protect the head from potential snake, scorpion or spider bites (Street 1998: 28). Shepherds and some nomads use these headrests very commonly, as they sleep exposed to an open environment.

A piece of cloth is usually used to cover the leather headrests, to protect them from dirt. The piece of cloth may help to reduce extreme cold or heat radiating from the leather. The wooden headrests also need a piece of cloth on top of them to cover the hard edges, so that the head may rest comfortably.

In all the ethnic groups the man's position is on the right side. When the headrests are used between couples, the man's headrest is placed on the right side and the woman's on the left side. For instance, according to Singer and Wood (1978: 24), an Afar man must lie on his right side and may only touch his wife with his left hand. His wife lies on the left side of the bed on her left side and is allowed to touch her husband with her right hand. In Islam the left hand is used for sanitary purposes and the right hand should be clean for food, for accepting a present and for shaking hands. The Kunama also bury their dead with men to the right and women to the left (< http://eri24.com/Article_324.htm> 04 march 2005).

***Metsmoqhi dagga* መጽመቕ ዳጋ, *dagga* strainer**

Metsmoqhi dagga, *dagga* strainer (Fig. 49) is a basketry object used to filter Kunama's local beer. This museum example is 30cm high, and 15.5cm in diameter. Its conical shape suggests its function. The name given to this artefact by the Museum is *Metsmoqi dagga* (Tigrinya) or *daga* filtering material. However, according to Satina and Martha (pc: 2005),

Kunama call this object *lakaja* ላካጃ and *dagga* is the informal name for their local beer *aifa* ኣይፋ. *Lakaja* is usually constructed at home by older women.

The Kunama groups, who are offshoots of the Nilotic peoples, inhabit the area between the Gash and Setit rivers in western Eritrea. The Kunama are well-known for their basketry work. In Kunama, leather objects are not very common, but basketry works are produced with specialized skill. Besides the good usage of the calabash, which grows well in their region, the Kunama produce a wide range of household basketry objects, used for serving, processing and holding solid and liquid foods.

The conical base of the *lakaja* is made to fit different sizes of jugs with different mouth sizes. The elongated tip of the base helps direct the filtered beer straight into the jug. The *lakaja*'s mouth allows enough mash of malt to be put into it, as well as putting a hand in to strain the malt. The *lakaja*'s mouth is reinforced with three thickly coiled rims, to keep the object firm and strong during use.

Before starting constructing the *lakaja*, the dry dum palm (*Hyphaene nodularis*) is cut into the desired width and is soaked in water to retain its flexibility. Construction tools such as an awl, *mesfe* መስፈ, or a sharp bone, a knife and scissors are also prepared.

The technique applied to construct the *lakaja* includes the interlacing of two elements known as the stakes (warp), which are rigid and passive, and the strands or weavers (weft), which pass over and under the stakes (Sentance 2001: 72, LaFerla 1999: 10). According to Mowat (1992: 4), this kind of construction is called chequer weaving or plaiting, in that the warp and the weft have the same width, producing a pattern of squares or checks.

Construction begins by plaiting two groups of palm strips at the middle. The plaited mid-section is then bent into two and, about 5cm from the bending point, all the strips are tied up together and the weaving starts. The leaves are divided into thinner strips, forming the vertically standing warps or stakes, and a horizontal strip, the weft or strand, is woven against it. From the base of the tip a conical form is constructed and this is followed by a cylinder.

The next step is to complete the weaving by making three strong rims which are a very important part of the *lakaja*. They protect it from wear and tear, as well as give it rigidity and strength when pressure is applied by the hand during filtering. The rims are constructed a little bit lower than the last row of weaving. LaFerla (1999: 13) calls the last row of weaving a false rim. Two of the rims are constructed on the outer side, by stitching bundles of thin palm strips. The stakes are bent outwards over the second rim and the last

and strongest rim is stitched over the bent stakes. The stakes flanked in between the second and the third rims are visible in Fig. 49.

Even though the *lakaja* is constructed only with palm leaves, the different techniques of construction used, give the object a smooth and a rough appearance. The bent plaited bundle of palm strips forming the pointed tip is hard, with sharp edges, compared to the woven thin walls of the round body. The coiled rims give the object a rigid appearance, with a different texture.

Satina and Martha (pc: 2005) state that there is no meaning or symbolism in connection with the *lakaja* among the Kunama group, but they point out that *lakaja* is made only by old women and not by the young ones. The makers' age might have significance and importance. The *lakaja* seems to have the shape of a woman's breast, which can be a symbol of a mother's kindness to her children or to the family.

Lakaja and *aifa* may carry meaning linked to an activity practised during a Kunama marriage ceremony. This needs investigation. According to a source by an unknown author and date (the Kunama and their marriage ceremony - ERDC), a small gourd of *aifa* is poured on a granite stone, which is hit by an adze to get slivers of stone out of it. The slivers of stone are used to open the belly of a white goat that is killed in order to get rid of the evil eye and to call upon good health for the bride. These activities take place in the bride's family house by the two middlemen, *keleta* ቀለታ, who facilitate the marriage process and the wedding ceremony. Aida (http://eri24.com/Article_324.htm 04 March 2005) suggests that a special grave is prepared for a child who dies in its early years and 'at the "Andina-feast", durra beer is sprayed into the air for the dead children's spirits'.

The surface of *lakaja* displays a geometric arrangement of squares, which result from the horizontal and vertical interlacing of the stakes and the strands. No motifs or embellishments are added to the surface. Aida (http://eri24.com/Article_324.htm 04 March 2005) explains that the Kunama do not worship icons. Their religious concept is Shamanism or spirit worship. Maybe it is for this reason that the surface of the *lakaja* is devoid of any iconographic motif.

When filtering beer, the malt, which is the last product in the process of brewing *aifa*, is placed inside the *lakaja* that usually sits on an opening of a jug or similar container. Holding the *lakaja*'s rim with one hand, the malt is pressed with the other hand to force the wort (liquid part of the malt) into the container.

Satina and Martha explain that the Kunama beer-making process includes preparing sorghum dough fermented for three days and cooking it lightly on a metal or

large ceramic oven *angala* አንጋላ. When the cooked product is cooled down, it is mixed with dry sorghum sprouts and is kept in a ceramic pot. The next day the same amount of unfermented dough is lightly cooked and dry sorghum sprouts are added and mixed with the prepared product. The whole mixture gives a mash of malt which, after one day, is ready to be filtered and served.

The reason why *lakaja* is small is that the Kunama people do not filter their beer all at a time; instead they filter only the volume needed for the time being. The rest of the malt is kept in the pot. Unlike *lakaja*, the Tigrinya's beer strainer *mokhba'eti* መኾባዕቲ has a large conical container that allows the malt to be pressed with two hands to extract the liquid through a small meshed opening. The Tigrinya groups filter their beer *suwa* all at once.

The Kunama usually enjoy *aifa* in different feasts and holidays, as well as every time the people are able to produce it. Therefore *lakaja* is used as a utilitarian and very important object in the *aifa* brewing process.

***Mesob* መሶብ, traditional food tray and table**

Mesob (Fig. 44) is an *injera*-holding object made from palm leaves. It is used for storing *injeratat* አንጂራታት, which are circular pancake breads. *Mesob* has a circular form designed to fit the *injera*. *Mesob* also serves as a table when having *maadi* መአዲ, a meal. Its height is suitable for having a meal while sitting. *Mesob*'s circular form accommodates all the family members, who sit around it and share the food. Tigrinya families eat together, from one *mesob* or *maadi* (Fig. 45).

The skill and practice of indigenous culture are more important than the materials and tools used in basketry. These materials and tools are not expensive. Sudduth (1999: 13) stresses that 'the hands of a basket maker are the most important tools'. To construct *mesob*, dry palm leaves, soaked palm leaves and red and purple dyed palm leaves, cattle-hide, and water are needed. A very simple tool such as *mesfe'* መስፈ, an awl, a bucket and a knife, are used.

Another important factor in basketry is the technique used for construction. 'Basketry is one of the few craft mediums that is identifiable by the technique and not by the material. The common bond is that the object - whether functional or sculptural - is woven, plaited, twined, ribbed or coiled' (Sudduth 1999: 120).

Mesob is constructed using a coiling technique; this involves building up a spiral from the centre. Mowat (1992: 9) and Sudduth (1999: 121) describe the two components of coiling: the foundation or core, which is the hard material such as a bundle of grass, and

the external material, that is the palm leaves, which is softer and used to wrap the foundation and stitch the coils together.

Mesob was one of the different styles of baskets with sophisticated motifs made by Saba Kahsai, the present author's sister, who is a self-taught basket-maker. She was inspired by Abrehet, her mother, and Awetash, her grandmother. According to Saba (pc: 2004), to begin making *mesob*, dyed and non-dyed palm leaves are soaked in water, after their hard edges are removed. The hard edges of the leaves are kept to be used for the core or foundation *dirqi* ድርቂ.

Coiling begins by wrapping and stitching the foundation. In this Museum example, the design gravitates to the right direction, showing that the maker was right handed. *Mesfe'*, an awl, is used to pierce the foundation, so that the sewing material *lakha* ላክላ can pass through it. The wide palm leaves are split into thinner strips, using an awl. *Mesob* is built by completely covering the foundation with the sewing strip, which Mowat (1992: 9) calls the technique of closed coiling.

A flat disk, about 40cm in diameter, is constructed. The foundation is split into two and one of them changes its direction downwards, to form the conical stand. This constitutes more than half the size of the whole object. The broad base of the stand gives the object stability and balance, especially when it is filled with *injera*. After two or three coils, the other foundation is turned upwards and the *injera* holding tray is formed. The lid is then constructed, starting from its handle, which is a cylinder with a conical top. The opening at the base of the handle is covered by stitching a small coiled disc. Starting from the base of the handle, a conical form is built until it fits the large opening of the upper part of the *mosob*. After completion of the construction, the rims (last coils) are wrapped with cattle-hide, for decoration and for protection purposes. In order for the lid to fit tightly, three coils are made inside the rim of the lid, at right angles to the ground. Several leather strips are stitched at the base of the handle, as well as on the tray, to be knotted during transport.

Mesob, like *member*, may represent Eritrean Church architecture. The *injera* holding tray is the circular walls of the Church, the lid is the conical roof or spire and the handle, which has almost a diamond shape that represents the Cross, is the finial of the church. The stand which has a broader base and a narrower top may symbolise a mountain on which a Church is built. This reflects the fact that all Eritrean Churches and Monasteries are built on the highest mountain, or at least at the highest point in the terrain, both for security reasons and to gain respect by towering above the village. The Church should be visible to all people, so as they can see it and remember their Creator in their

daily life. When people pass by or face the Church, even from a distance, they should stop walking, face the Church and - with their right hand – make the sign of the Cross from forehead to chest and from the left to the right shoulders, saying 'In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - One God Amen' *Besme Ab weWeld weMenfes Qudus Ahadu Amlak Amien.*

Representing the Church on a food tray may imply that the people respect the food and believe that God provides and blesses the food. It can also imply that the Church is a place where all positive values are taught; it is in the meal where the people eat from one dish, sharing love and unity and respecting God and each other, as well as the food.

Mesob has a feminine profile when the whole shape of the object is considered, i.e. a woman with a skirt. This shows the generosity of Eritrean mother, as she is the one who prepares and serves her family members. Everyone is dependent on her regarding food and the kitchen. The man has nothing to do with these activities.

The smooth nature of palm leaves, when closely stitched, produces a smooth surface mixed with a sense of roughness resulting from stitching, piercing and coiling. No surface embellishments are added to produce visual interest or to change the appearance of the *mesob*, once it is complete. The surface has a uniform texture throughout all the parts, except the leather wrapped rims and strips of leather for fastening. However, due to the direction of piercing, the outside surface has a slightly smoother quality and different appearance from the inside surface.

The motifs are an integral part of the entire construction of the object. The motifs and decorations are made by using coloured palm leaves applied to each coil. The lid bears lines that make diamond shapes, triangles and the shape of the whole *mosob*. The *injera*-holding tray bears triangles facing upwards and downwards, with a colour pattern of plain, red and purple. The stand is decorated with bigger diamond shapes and irregular colour arrangements. The negative shapes are filled with red and purple, or they are left plain.

The negative shapes of the diamond form an Orthodox Cross. The importance of putting the Cross on *mesob* as a food serving object is that the Cross is always signed on the face before and after having meals, so as to bless the food in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is common for women to make the sign of the Cross and mention the Trinity whenever they open the *mosob*. Women draw a Cross with their fingers on the flour, to bless it, before they start baking bread.

The four corners of the diamond may suggest the position in the Church, where men stand at the north facing south, women stand at the south facing north and the priests *kahnat ካህናት* enter the Church from the western gate and face the east.

The triangles symbolise the Holy Trinity (Ferguson 1973: 153) and the triangles facing upwards and downwards indicate the relationship between God and man. According to the Bible, man has God's image: 'God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" ...' (Genesis 1: 26). Therefore, the triangle denotes the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - and as man has God's image, it is symbolised by a triangle, having soul, mind and body.

These geometric rectangular and triangular motifs often appear in the unique Eritrean women's cultural dress *zuria ቡርያ* or *tilfi ተልፊ* (Fig. 47-a). The way the motif is placed in *zuria* (not as in Fig. 47-a) is very similar to the way it is applied to the lower part of the *mesob*. It can be said that these motifs are more feminine, as both *zuria* and *mesob* belong solely to women.

The origin of these motifs could be the linear geometric decoration applied to the religious manuscripts, called *hareg ዓረግ*, a Ge'ez word. Zanotti-Eman, in Heldman (1993:63), mentions that this type of illumination, which is made of bands of coloured lines interlaced in a geometrical pattern and used to frame the Eritrean manuscripts, was introduced into Eritrea in the 14th C. Illuminations were applied to religious manuscripts, especially to the Book of Psalms *dawit*, which in Eritrean Orthodox is the name given to the whole Bible. There is similarity between *mesob*'s motifs and some of the variety of *hareg* illuminations (Fig. 47-b, c, d, e).

Mesob is used for serving and storing several *injeratat*, one above the other, and is covered with a lid. When food is served in a *mesob* it serves not only as a tray or dish but also as a table. Family members sit in a circle around the *mesob* and eat their meal from one *mesob*. *Injeratat* are put in the tray and different curries *tsebhi ታቲታ*, are poured over the *injera*. The meal is eaten by taking bites of pieces of *injera* and *tsebhi*, using the hands.

The traditional eating custom, *maadi*, in the Tigrinya group is that all members of the family should have their meal together from one *mesob* (Fig. 45), which can serve up to eight people. Children are served separately if there are guests in the *maadi*. Before the food is served, caps and veils should be removed from the head and all should wash their hands. Washing hands follows an age hierarchy, starting from the eldest, regardless of gender. When the *mesob* arrives with *injera* and *tsebhi* is ready in *tsahli ታሕሊ*, the eldest male prays and breaks a piece of *injera* and passes it to the others to share. Then *tsebhi* is

poured over the *injera* and they start eating, using the right hand only. When they finish eating they pray and cover the *mosob* and take it away (EPLF- RB *amegagba* 1981: 21, Street Eritrea Horizon 1996: 46).

Blessing the food *maadi* originated from the Bible, which says that ‘while they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples...’ (Matthew 26: 26).

Only women may move during *maadi*, since they are the ones who serve the members, but men should sit until *maadi* is completely finished, even if they are replete. This is meant to respect the food, as well as the people who have not finished eating. Drinking water while eating is not encouraged, to be polite to the thirsty. Spitting and other bad behaviour is not allowed in *maadi* as it may spoil the appetites of the others (EPLF- RB *amegagba* 1981: 21).

Mesob is a unique Eritrean material culture as an art form, as well as on its social values. *Mesob*’s popularity and uniqueness may be evident in the use of its shape in different designs. For example, the façade of the Hotel Intercontinental Asmara, in Asmara, displays the shape of *mesob* (Fig. 46).

Meqherebi maadi መቐረቢ, መኣዲ (safo) food tray

The food tray in the Museum collection is a food utensil and is specially designed to serve *injera* ኣገጅራ, as its circular form fits the size and shape of this staple food. Unlike *mesob* (the taller form of serving utensil) this object has a short stand, which is more suitable for placing on the table – or for people sitting on floor-mats whilst eating their meal.

The museum records do not give this artefact’s vernacular name in Saho; instead the documentation has used the Tigrinya name *meqherebi maadi*. Abdella¹¹ (pc. 2005) explained that the Assaorta call this form of food tray *safo* ሳፎ – whether it is basketry or a wooden object.

This museum example (Fig. 25-a and b) is monoxylous - carved from a single large wood stem, known in Tigrinya as *awhi* ኣውሒ, (*Cordia fricana*) (pc. Weldai 2005) and has a diameter of 53cm and a height of 11cm.

The carving process is interesting. Initially a short cylinder of wood is cut from a thick trunk using an adze. After roughing-out, the short-ends and side surfaces of the solid cylinder are smoothed and a circular mark is engraved carefully by hand on the wall of the cylinder as a guide –to divide the form into two components. To form the food receptacle itself, a space about half of the height of the cylinder is needed; the rest eventually forms

¹¹ Mohammed Abdella is an Assaorta-speaking Eritrean currently studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg.

part of the base. Then, following the circular mark, the outside form of the receptacle is carved out using a chisel; the walls slope inwards slightly towards the base. With a smaller diameter than the lip, the base of the *safó* is 37cm; angled inwards from the foot of the vessel. After carefully marking the circumference, the walls are carved by hand to the same thickness, hollowing out the food holder and its foot. The floor of the receptacle is flat and the lip of the vessel has a flat, oblique profile.

On the outside of the receptacle, a small handle is left, in which a hole is carved for an added leather thong; in storage the *safó* hangs on a wall. The form is completed and finally refined by smoothing the surface using fine carving tools; when scraped, the filing is not evident.

The form of this wooden food tray is a direct copy of the food serving basket tray, *sef'ee*, which is made from palm leaves, using the coil-and-stitch method. *Sef'ee* has the same form, size and functions as *safó* and is made by women. But *safó* is made by men, as are all wooden objects. It is interesting to observe similar gender divisions associated with wooden and woven materials in many parts of Africa.

The wooden form has the same tactile quality throughout the whole object. After the process of construction, the object is coated with butter and is exposed to heat and smoke to darken its surface and to provide extra strength (pc. Abdella 2005), by reducing the porosity of the wood.

Saho, a Cushitic-speaking people, live on the eastern edge of the central highlands and in the foothills of the former Akele Guzai province in Zoba Debub. Saho are pastoralists and settled agriculturalists. The main groups are the Assaorta, the Hazu and the Miniferi (Pool 1997: 9).

Saho are predominantly Moslems; however, a few sections of the Miniferi group who live as sedentary agriculturalists on Mount Soira are Christians. Miniferi were Coptic Christians before they adopted Islam, only a few generations ago (Au 1947: 62). Debrimela is a small group with two branches, the Alades who are Moslems, speaking Saho, and Labalhe, who are Coptic Christians and are bilingual in Saho and Tigrinya. These groups are nomads and settled agriculturalists, respectively. Debrimela is the name given to the people of the monastery of Mary. The Irob, who speak Saho and live mainly in Ethiopia, are Roman Catholics. Even in some Saho groups, such as Tor'a and Hazu have Ge'ez or Tigre elements in their origin, as groups intermarried (Ghebreyesus translation from Pollera –du: 277). Abdella (pc. 2004) also suggested that the Assaorta – the largest group in Saho – includes Christian groups as well.

Eritrea has a very complex historical background, but the use of a Cross as a motif suggests that the *safo* was made by the Christian groups of Saho-speaking people. The NME does not have detailed information about the object and where and when the object was made, other than that this object comes from the Saho people. Although speculative, it is likely to have been made by the Coptic Christian people in the Miniferi or Debrimela groups.

Allusions to Christianity are shown vividly on this particular piece, as a large Cross is engraved on the inner well of the foot. Depending on how it is viewed, its shape may be read arbitrarily as either a Coptic or a Greek cross; however when hung on a wall by its thong, the *safo* is properly orientated and has the Greek cross facing the viewer.

The motifs on this object are engraved, with parallel and cross striations. Hence the *safo* bears both smooth and rough surfaces. The inside part of the tray (food holder) is the only part without engraving and is made very smooth – a functional issue to make cleaning easier after use.

The outside walls of the vessel are decoratively engraved with vertical linear motifs in groups of three and four; two engraved horizontal lines form the boundaries of this band at the rim and base of the tray. The underside of the tray is decorated with two rows/bands of triangles. A group of four lines (sometimes three) forms a zigzag pattern on the inside and the outside surfaces of the tray's stand.

The well of the stand is embellished with a large Cross stretched up to the edges of the circle. Within each arm of the Cross, parallel lines are engraved. At the intersection a square motif anchors the middle. The 'negative shapes' around the Cross are finely crosshatched. This motif would be highly visible when the *safo* is hung on a wall-peg for storage, as pointed out before.

Even though wood, only, is used, the intensively engraved motifs of this object give its tactile surface contrasts of smooth and rough, light and dark, as well as matt and shiny properties.

As small groups in Saho are Coptic Christians, the Cross is an important icon, as it is for the Tigrinya-speaking Christian peoples. The Cross on the surface of the *safo*, in this context on a food tray, invokes God's blessing on the food.

Based on the significance of the Cross as an iconic motif, and on the linear geometric decorations of this object, it is identified with the Christian groups inside Saho - especially the Miniferi. However, the large Cross on the back of the food tray is significantly different, both in size and shape, when compared to the Cross used on the basketry objects of the Tigrinya (such as the *sefitat*, *mesobat*). The rest of the motifs on

the *safo* are the same as those used on vessels or their lids, such as *mesob*, *gibabo*, *mebl'iqursi*, *sef'i* or *mekombia*.

Safo functions as a food serving material, similar to *mesob*. The form of the *safo* is quite similar to that of *mesob* except that, unlike *mesob*, it does not have a lid; its base or stand is very short in comparison. This vessel is designed to fit to serve *injera* and, as it has a round structure, it is suitable for people to sit around and share the food equally.

In Saho, ways of eating varies with the settled or nomadic way of living. Nomadic Saho people are dependent on their herds and their food is mainly milk and milk products, as well as sorghum porridge. The agriculturalist-settled Saho base their food on agricultural products such as *injera*, *hanza*, *qicha*, *tandur*, *burkuta* and *ga'at*, with different kinds of curries. Their eating style is similar to that of Tigrinya (EPLF-RB *amegagba* 1981: 22-23). The usual eating custom in Saho is that all members of the family share food from one food tray.

In times long past, a husband and wife would eat together only before they had children; after that the woman ritually avoids sharing food. According to Abdella (pc. 2005), in Assaorta children share their meal with their parents, except when there are guests, they are required to share with their mother. The guest shares with the father of the family. Washing hands is the task of children and starts with the guest. In the absence of guests, the father starts. If the guest is a woman she is served food with the mother. However, these customs are modified if the guests are very close family friends or relatives.

The custom of having a meal starts by the washing of hands; afterwards *injera* is served on the food tray and curries are poured over the *injera*. Then the diners start eating, after saying *Bismillah* if they are Moslems and *Besme'ab* if they are Christians. Both mean 'in the Name of God'. When eating is finished, *Alhamdulillah* or *temesgen Fetari* is pronounced and the diners wash their hands after the food tray is removed from their circle. Moving or standing and spitting while having a meal is prohibited (EPLF-RB *amegagba* 1981: 22-23). Abdella (pc. 2005) added that among the Moslem Assaortas teenagers and elders must say the prayer (*du'a*), which in Arabic, is '*Allahuma barik lana fi ma razagtana wa anta kheir alrazigeen*', before starting to eat.

Safo is involved in everyday life when lunch and supper (breakfast is more casual). This museum piece is made of wood and is intricately decorated, suggesting that it is used on special occasions - such as marriage and public holidays. A plainer wooden food tray (Tigrinya: *sef'i*) is used for everyday use and more usually a palm-leaf basket of the same size and form and with the same motifs.

Chapter Four

Conclusion and Recommendation

The contents of Chapter Four are drawn from the study, which has been conducted on the NME and selected artefacts. The aim of the two sections below is to sum up the important subjects discussed in the study and to recommend ways of improvement and progress for both the heritage institution and the arts.

Conclusion

One of the aims of this dissertation was to study, contextualise and document selected artefacts in terms of art historical, historical, social and cultural themes. The findings of this study enable one to conclude that the style and form of these objects were highly influenced by their function in the Eritrean people's traditional daily lives, as most of the study samples were produced to be utilitarian, rather than to be sculptural art forms. The styles shown in the sample artefacts are not learned from academic theory or knowledge, but from an indigenous imagination, driven by the culture, history and religion of a specific group.

The practice of religious tradition by Eritrean society was deeply rooted in their culture. Its influence in their art was very strong. This was reflected, for example, in the material culture of the Tigrinya speakers, which frequently display religious motifs, such as the Cross, to enhance religious themes. In some of the artefacts, such as *walta* the shield, ornamentation was used not primarily for decoration, but to describe status, bravery and wealth, within a specific group.

The study concludes that the artefacts can be considered models of Eritrean art and material culture, not only because they were produced by Eritreans, but because they were designed to fit the traditional Eritrean way of life. They truly reflect Eritrean culture. It is important to understand that adhering to the knowledge of traditional customs and cultures of Eritrean society played an important part in coming to this conclusion.

Another aim of this study was to draw attention to the fact that the National Museum of Eritrea is currently not able to perform its basic museum activities because of at least three major problems. Firstly, the museum suffers from an extraordinary budget shortage, to the extent that it cannot even fulfil its basic needs such as collection, documentation and exhibition. Secondly, the museum does not have formal legislation that enables it to preserve, excavate and collect the cultural heritage of the country, as well as to manage its correct museum functions. Thirdly, a lack of physical facilities, such as

proper museum building, limits displaying of important objects. This, in turn, discourages the Museum from extending its collection.

The unpublished draft legislation focuses mainly on managing and promoting archaeological conservation. Based on this study, the conclusion can be drawn that the NME does not yet possess the standard museum policy to implement its mission statement and to run its museum practices.

The thesis has shown that the Museum is currently engaged in archaeological conservation, as the country is rich in archaeological sites. The Museum gives more weight to this field than to contemporary and ethnographic collections, as the archaeological sites are irreplaceable once they are damaged by development.

The Museum has not had trained museologists since its opening, other than the young archaeology and anthropology graduates working in the Museum over the last three years. As a result, the Museum is facing problems in managing the collection, especially in providing museological description and cataloguing. Recently, however, one of the staff has studied museology in Japan.

The NME, despite all the limitations, is working hard to become a centre of heritage and a true reflection of the Eritrean identity.

Recommendation

It is now pressing to make major steps in documenting Eritrean art and preserving and retrieving genuine traditional artistic skills which are declining or being irrevocably lost or are being modified or affected by modern western influences. In order to facilitate this process, a research centre for arts and crafts should be established and research projects initiated to document the traditional ways of making art or producing material culture. The production of utilitarian objects plays a major role in the development of Eritrean art and material culture. The threat to this traditional culture is the enormous machine-tooled production of utilitarian objects, which brutally sterile and reduces the need for hand-made traditional objects. Before the traditional makers of the artefacts pass away, and before the traditionally produced artefacts vanish as a result of carelessness and ignorance, or are sold to tourists, the objects need to be documented and contextualised by a research centre. Waiting for individuals to conduct research in this field will not solve the problem. Instead, a fully funded institution, well-equipped with materials and human resources is needed to take on this huge project.

As Eritrea has a very limited number of trained citizens who can academically document and contextualise Eritrean art, a research centre should encourage and invite

international researchers in the field to conduct research projects on Eritrean art, at least in the initial stages. International conferences should be organized on a regular basis. These may have several advantages; firstly it may enhance the reconstruction of Eritrean art history, in comparison with African and international art history. Secondly, Eritrean art history could be precipitated in a short time, as the researchers would be well experienced. Thirdly, the native researchers and writers would have gained knowledge and experience from the international researchers. This would enable and encourage them to conduct systematic research, independently. Fourthly, it could facilitate the introduction of Eritrean art to the world community.

A research centre should fund training and workshops on art history, in order to empower local researchers. Workshops and exhibitions should be organized to encourage local artists, artisans and crafters. In Asmara, Medebber should be developed into an arts and crafts centre, in which a tremendous amount of creativity can be manifested. An annual art festival should be organized to encourage artists and to familiarize the public with Eritrean art.

To work properly as a national heritage institution, the NME should be provided with three basic requirements. The first is that the Museum should be given a greater amount of funding, to run its general museum activities. The second need is proper, spacious premises to accommodate most of its collections. This will encourage the Museum to add to its collections from regions throughout the country in the interests of comprehensiveness. The third is that the Museum should be supported by proclaimed legislation, in order to manage the preservation of heritage sites, objects, buildings and social and cultural activities. The current draft legislation should be amended, so that official policies for the handling of ethnographic and cultural heritage, as well as policies for the Museum's internal management, can be drawn up and included.

Cataloguing the collections should be digitized. This is difficult, as the ethnographic collections are without detailed information. The Museum should make an effort to introduce standard digital MDS, supported with photographic documentation for its existing collections, before the institution is overwhelmed with new collections in the future. To perform this task, the Museum should train museologists.

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Wood, glass beads and cowrie shells, 19 cm (max H), 23 cm (max L) - (Fig 32-a, for

bridegroom). Wood, 16 cm (max H), 17.5 cm (max L) - (Fig 32-b, for bride).
Collection: Massawa Regional Museum - Cultural Section.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

Fig. 33-a and b. au. *Mekeda (meter'as, meter'asin), headrest. du.*
Saho, Nara, Kunama, Tigre, Bilen, Afar: Lawlands.
Wood, 23 cm (max H), 15 cm (max L) - (Fig 33-a, for women).
Wood, 28 cm (max H), 17 cm (max L) - (Fig 33-b, for men).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 34-a and b. au. *Menber, traditional chair. du.*
Tigrinya: Maekel and Debub.
Wood and leather, 86.7cm (H), 58cm (L), 56cm (W.)
Collection: ENM - E.S.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003 (Fig 34-a), Merih Weldai, 2004 (Fig 34-b).

Fig. 35-a. Exterior wooden door of an old Church (medieval period) at Senafe.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

Fig. 35-b. Windows of Enda-Iyesus Church at Durko, Emnihaili.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

Fig. 35-c. Interior wooden doors of an old Church (medieval period) at Senafe.
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Fig. 35-d. Detail from Windows in the (rock-cut) Church of Immanuel, Lalibela.
Photograph: M. Heldman 1993. (Source: Heldman 1993: Fig. 17).

Fig. 35-e. Detail from (rock-cut) Church of the Redeemer, Lalibela.
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Fig. 35-a, b, c, d and e. Examples of Church registers of windows, windows and doors, which are similarly carved in the *menber, traditional chair*, representing religious architectural themes.

Fig. 36-a. Ato Tewelde Ghebremesqel, Segeneyti, an ex-member of the 1940s political party, *mahber fiqri hager*. Photograph: EPLF, Department of News, June 1991. (Source: ERDC).

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Wood, gesso, tempera and metal, 52cm (H), 15 cm (L), 19 cm (W).
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Fig. 38-a, b, c. au. Examples of the *Altar tablets tabotat* - consecrated tablets which are the essential element of an Orthodox Church.

Fig. 39-a and b. au. *Menbere Tabot, Coffin*. 13th C. This *menbere tabot* does not have four door panels which are opened during prayer.
(Source: Heldman: 1993: Cat. 61. Photograph: Malcolm Varon).

Fig. 40. Rectangular and circular church plans showing the Holy of Holies marked with black square where the altar tablet *tabot* is placed.
(Source: Buxton 1970: fig. 29).

Fig. 41. au. *Images of Trinity and St Mary with her beloved Son Jesus*. Medieval period. Tigrinya, Tigre, Kunama: Maekel, Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Gash-Barka and Debub. Registers of triptich panel painting. Wood, gesso, tempera and metal, 59cm (H), 20 cm (L).
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Fig. 44. au. *Mesob, injera holder (tray) and table*. du. Tigrinya: Maekel, Anseba and Debub. Palm tree leaves and cattle-hide, 63 cm (H), 48 cm (base D), 48 cm (mouth D).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 45. *Maadi, Eritrean meal*. du. An Eritrean Highland family eating together using mesob as a table and food tray or dish. (Source: Buxton 1970: plate 9).

Fig. 46. The five-star Hotel Intercontinental Asmara has a unique architectural design including a glass-fronted atrium with the form of mesob. The use of mesob facade in this modern architecture indicates the uniqueness of mesob as an Eritrean material culture. (Source: shabait.com, 2005).

Fig. 47-a. Detail from the rayon and lurex embroidered *zuria* or *tilfi*.
(Source: Mack 2000: Fig. 43).

Fig. 47-b. *Psalter and Acts of St George*.
(Source: Heldman 1993: Fig. 4v and 5v).

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Fig. 47-d. *St Luke*.

(Source: Heldman 1993: Cat 108, f. 100v).

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Fig. 47- a, b, c, d and e. Details of examples of the linear decorations of religious manuscripts which the art mainly emerged in Eritrea during the medieval period. These book illuminations may be an origin for the motifs applied to this particular mesob and many basketry works as well as to the cultural women's dress *zuria* and *tilfi*.

Fig. 48. A picture showing a tattooed cross on Tsehaytu Beraki's forehead, a popular 1960s Eritrean singer.

(Source: asmarino.com, 2005)

Fig. 49. au. *Mtsmoqhi daggaLakaja (aifa), beer strainer*. du.

Kunama: Gash Barka.

Palm tree leaves, 28 cm (H), 15.5 cm (D).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 50. au. *Kurro, milking pot*. du.

Kunama, Nara, Tigre, Tigrinya, Hedareb, Bilen: In all Zones.

Palm tree leaves and leather 17 cm (H), 13 cm (mouth D).

Collection: NME - Storeroom. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 51-a and b. au. *Dino, ceremonial dress* (fabric *dino* which substituted the lion-skin *dino* used to represent bravery and rank. Nowadays these fabric ceremonial dresses are used in festivals and weddings as a traditional attire), du.

Tigrinya: Highlands.

Velvet, embroidering materials, silver, copper and decorating filigrees, 106 cm (L)

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

Fig. 52-a and b. au. *Kdan Rashaida, Rashaida woman's cloth*. du.

Rashaida: Northern Red Sea.

Synthetic fabric, 152 cm (L).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 53. au. *Fersha sgsug, wall mat*. du.

Rashaida: Northern Red Sea.

Glass beads, cowrie shells, fabric and palm leaves mat, 80 cm (L), 62 cm (W).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 54. au. *Fersha sgsug, wall mat*. du.

Rashaida: Northern Red Sea.

Cowrie shells, fabric and palm leaves mat, 68 cm (L), 31 cm (W).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.

Fig. 55-a and b. Souvenir markets in Asmara displaying different material culture.

Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

Fig. 56. A Tigre' man making his own wooden boat to earn his living from fishing. Art forms produced to facilitate daily life activities contribute to the development of Eritrean art and material culture.

Asmara: Francescana Printing Press. (Source: Ministry of Tourism, Eritrea).

Illustrations



Fig. 1. au. *Mahzel*, baby carrier, du Tigrinya: Dehub, Maekel and Anseba. Goat-skin, red plant-dye, beads and cowrie shells, 65 x 47cm. Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 2. Asmara - *Tipo abissino* (a typical Tigrinya mother carrying her baby with *mahzel*, baby carrier). Photograph: Nicotra, F, 1897. (Source: *L'Africa dall'immaginario alle immagini*. F.36)



Fig. 3. Tesfai Ghebremichael, *Mother and Child*, (portraying *mahzel*, baby carrier as the most important object in representing mother's care to her child), 1980s. Oil on canvas, 67 x 43 cm.

Collection: ENM. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 4. au. *Walta*, ceremonial shield, du. Tigrinya and Tigre: Maekel, Anseba and Debub. Elephant-hide and silver, 67 cm (D).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 5. au. *Ceremonial shield*, (decorated *walta ceremonial shield* with a lion's mane pendant that describes rank and bravery), 19th C. Ethiopia.

Skin, glass, silk, velvet, silver, gilt, 32 cm (D).
Ethno 1868, 10-1.1. (Source: Mack 2000: 39).



Fig. 6. *Otumlo - Balambaras Kafel*, (a traditional Tigrinya chief backed by his *walta* shield bearer. His shield includes a lion's mane pendant showing Kafel's bravery and status).
Photograph: Nicotra, F. du. (Source: *L'Africa dall'immaginario alle immagini*. F.30).



Fig. 7. au. Dejazmach Hailu (central figure), Governor of Hamasien in the Asmara Region (1850s and 60s), (detail of panels from a larger traditional painting showing Hailu's attendants carrying his shield with lion's mane pendant). 19th C. 108 x 36cm. (Source: Spring 1993: plate 22).



Fig. 8. au. The tribal leader Bahta Hagos, who led an uprising against the Italians in 1894, (Dejazmach (Degiat) Bahta is mounted with his military attire including *walta* the Eritrean conical shield). (Source: Denison 2003: 27).



Fig. 9. Michael Adonai, *Solace* (*walta*, the Eritrean shield implying here as a symbol of fortitude and martyrdom), 2001. Acrylic, 122 x 76 cm. (source: Michael Adonai, Eritrean artist, exhibition catalogue 2001).



Fig. 10. au. *Kuadda*, water freezer, du
Tigrinya: Dehub, Mackel, Anseba and some Lowland areas.
Cattle-horn, cattle-skin and wood, 56cm (L) 10cm (D).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 11. au. *Negarit*, war alarm drum, du.
All Eritrean ethnic groups.
Cattle-hide and wood, 33 cm (D), 32 cm (H).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 12. au. *Sa'eni sebeiti*, woman's shoes, du.
Most Eritrean ethnic groups.
Cattle-hide and metal.
Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 13. au. *Mekeda* (*meter'as, meter'asin*), headrest. du Saho, Tigre, Bilen, Afar: Lawlands. Cattle-hide, straw, glass beads, cowrie shells and black dye, 50 cm (L), 110 cm (L- including fringes), 24 cm (W). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 14. au. *Meter'as mer'awti*, bride and bridegroom's pillow. du Saho and Afar: Northern and Southern Red Sea and South Regions. Cattle-hide, straw, glass beads and cowrie shells, 50 cm (L), 23 cm (W). Collection: Massawa Regional Museum - Cultural Section. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 15. au. *Mekeda* (*meter'as, meter'asin*), headrest. du Saho, Tigre, Bilen, Afar: Lawlands. Cattle-hide, straw, glass beads and cowrie shells, 59 cm (L), 29 cm (W). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 16. au. *Dino*, ceremonial dress, du Tigrinya: mækel and Debub. Cattle-hide, fabric, decorating fringes and copper, 103 cm (H), 90 cm (W). Collection: ENM - Storeroom. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 17. au. *Begena, church lyre, du*.
Tigrinya : Highlands.
cattle-hide, muscle thongs and metal, 113 cm (H), 48 cm (L), 20 cm (W).
Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 18. au. *Abriqh, water container, du*.
Saho: Northern and Southern Red Sea and South Regions.
Cattle-skin and wood, 51cm (H), 35cm (L), 25cm (W).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 19. au. *Sief Afar (jile)*, *Danakil sword*, du.
Afar: Southern Red Sea.
Camel-hide, wood, iron, aluminium and silver, 73cm (L).
Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 20. au. *Jile, knife*. (a picture showing the blade and sheath of *jile*). du. 54 cm (L). (Source: Spring 1993: F 103).



Fig. 21. au. *Sief Afar (jile)*, Danakil sword, du. Afar: Southern Red Sea. Camel-hide, wood, iron, aluminium and silver, 73cm (L). Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Welda, 2004.



Fig. 22. Afar men (*jile*, the Danakil sword is worn as a man's attire. The leather thong attached to the sword's sheath shows the man's bravery and prestige). du. (Source: Singer and Wood 1978: 21).



a. Top view



b. side view

Fig. 23-a and b. au. *Meqhemeti fenajl*, coffee cups tray. du. Unknown provenance. Wood and leather, 33 cm (D), 31.5 cm (H). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 24. au. *Mekhtefi sga*, meat chopping tray. du. Tigrinya and Saho. Highlands. Wood (olive tree), 40 cm (D). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 25-a. Top and side view.



Fig. 25-b. Bottom view.

Fig. 25-a and b. au. *Meqherebi maadi (safo)*, food tray. du Saho: Debub, Wood, 53 cm (D), 11 cm (H).

Collection: ENM - E.S.

Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003 (Fig. 25-a), Merih Weldai (Fig. 25-b).



Fig. 26-a. Top and side view.



Fig. 26-b. Bottom view.

Fig. 26-a and b. au. *Meqherebi gaat*, porrige tray. du
Saho: Dehub, Wood, 40 cm (D), 21 cm (H).
Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 27. au. *Gebeta*, traditional gaming material - for two people. du. Tigrinya (mainly) and Saho: Highlands. Wood, 32.5 cm (L), 17cm (W), 4 cm (H). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 28. au. *Gebeta*, traditional gaming material - for four people. du. Tigrinya (mainly) and Saho: Highlands. Wood, 102 cm (L), 14cm (W), 7 cm (H). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 29. *Il giuoco abissino*, (Tigrinya boys playing *gebeta* the traditional game). 1890s. Photograph: Gentile, ten. [R.]. (Source: *L'Africa dall'immaginario alle immagini*. F. 54).



Fig. 30. au. *Mebekoria*, wooden incense burner (ash is used to protect the wood from burning). du.

All ethnic groups. 18 cm (H), 14 cm (D).

Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 31. au. *Sa'eni seb'ay*, man's shoes. du.

Lawlands. Wood and raphia, 24 cm (L), 10 cm (H), 9.8 cm (W).

Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 32-a.



Fig. 32-b.

Fig. 32-a and b. au. *Meter'as mer'awti*, bride and bridegroom's wooden headrest. du. Saho and Afar: Northern and Southern Red Sea and South Regions. Wood, glass beads and cowrie shells, 19 cm (max H), 23 cm (max L) - (Fig 32-a, for bridegroom). Wood, 16 cm (max H), 17.5 cm (max L) - (Fig 32-b, for bride). Collection: Massawa Regional Museum - Cultural Section. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 33-a.

Fig. 33-b.

Fig. 33-a and b. au. *Mekeda (meter'as, meter'asin)*, headrest. du. Saho, Nara, Kunama, Tigre, Bilen, Afar: Lawlands. Wood, 23 cm (max H), 15 cm (max L) - (Fig 33-a, for women). Wood, 28 cm (max H), 17 cm (max L) - (Fig 33-b, for men). Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 34-a. Side view.



Fig. 34-b. Front view.

Fig. 34-a and b. au. *Menber, traditional chair. du.*

Tigrinya: Maekel and Debub.

Wood and leather, 86.7cm (H), 58cm (L), 56cm (W.)

Collection: ENM - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003 (Fig 34-a), Merih Weldai, 2004 (Fig 34-b).



Fig. 35-a. Exterior wooden door of an old St Mary Church at Senafe.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

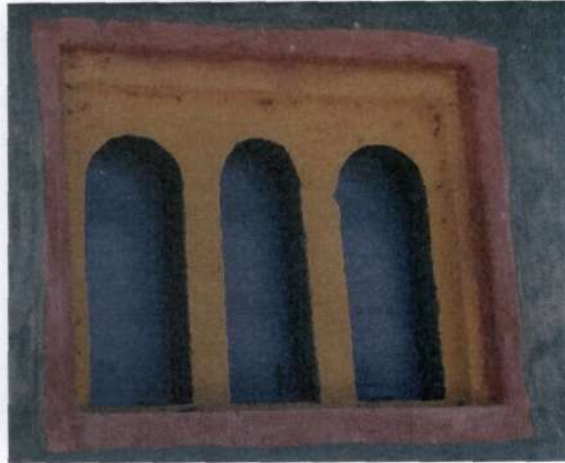


Fig. 35-b. Windows of Enda-Iyesus Church at Durko, Emni-haili. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 35-c. Interior wooden doors of an old Church (medieval period) at Senafe.
Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

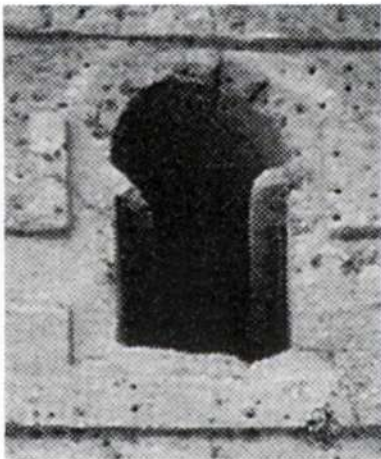


Fig. 35-d. Detail from *Windows in the (rock-cut) Church of Immanuel, Lalibela*. Photograph: M. Heldman 1993. (Source: Heldman 1993: Fig. 17).

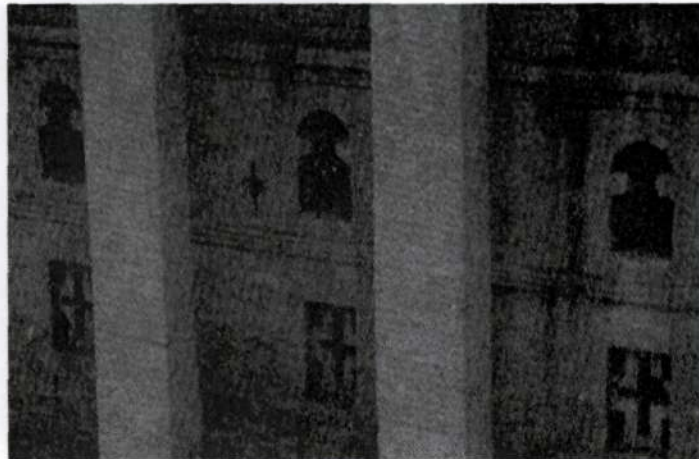


Fig. 35-e. Detail from (rock-cut) *Church of the Redeemer, Lalibela*. Photograph: M. Heldman 1993. (Source: Heldman 1993: Fig. 14).

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Fig. 37-a.



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Fig. 37-c.



Fig. 37-d.

Fig. 37-a, b, c, and d. au. *Re'esi menbere tabot*, Head of the Ark of the Covenant. (coffer's head).

Medieval period. Tigrinya: Maekel, part of Semienawi Keih Bahri and Debub. Wood, gesso, tempera and metal, 52cm (H), 15 cm (L), 19 cm (W).

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Fig. 38-a.
(Source: Heldman 1993: Fig. 33)



Fig. 38-b. 9.5 x 11 x 4 cm
(Source: Buxton 1970: plate 100)



Fig. 38-c.
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Fig. 38-a, b, c. au. Examples of the Altar tablets *tabotat* - consecrated tablets which are the essential element of an Orthodox Church.



Fig. 39-a. Back view.



Fig. 39-b. Front view.

Fig. 39-a and b. au. *Menbere Tabot*, *Coffer*. 13th C. This *menbere tabot* does not have four door panels which are opened during prayer.
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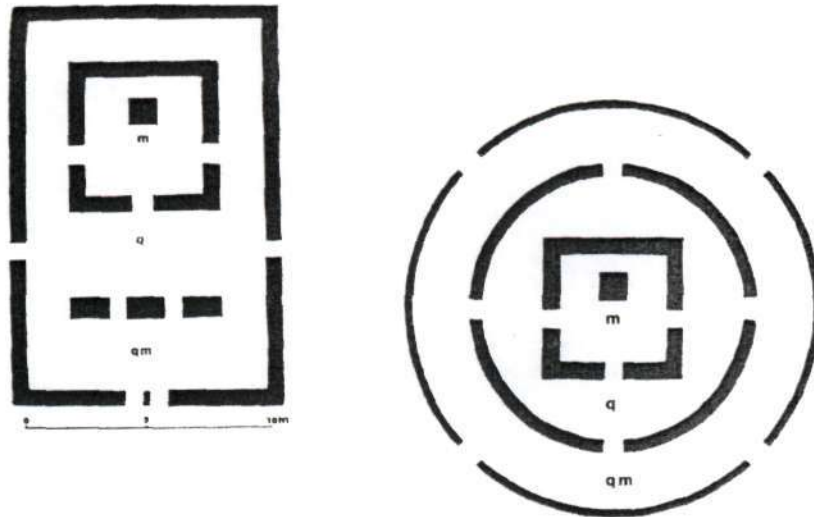


Fig. 29 Types of modern rectangular and circular church plans with isolated sanctuary.
m = maqdas, (Holy of Holies) ; q = qiddist ; qm = Qene mehlet

Fig. 40. Rectangular and circular church plans showing the Holy of Holies marked with black square where the altar tablet, *tabot* is placed.
 (Source: Buxton 1970: fig. 29).



Fig. 41. au. *Images of Trinity and St Mary with her beloved Son Jesus.*
 Medieval period. Tigrinya, Tigre, Kunama: Maekel, Northern Red Sea, Anseba,
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 Wood, gesso, tempera and metal, 59cm (H), 20 cm (L).
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Fig. 42. au. *Image of Trinity*. Medieval period.
Tigrinya, Tigre, Kunama: Maekel, Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Gash-Barka and Debub.
Triptych panel painting. Wood, gesso, tempera and metal.
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Fig. 43. au. *Image of St Mary with her beloved Son Jesus and St George*. Medieval period.
Tigrinya, Tigre, Kunama: Maekel, Northern Red Sea, Anseba, Gash-Barka and Debub.
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Kunama, Nara, Tigre, Tigrinya, Hedareb, Bilen: all Zones.
Palm tree leaves and leather 17 cm (H), 13 cm (mouth D).
Collection: NME - Storeroom. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 51-a.



Fig. 51-b.

Fig. 51-a and b. au. *Dino*, ceremonial dress (fabric-*dino* which substituted the lion-skin-*dino* used to represent bravery and rank. Nowadays these fabric ceremonial dresses are used in festivals and weddings as a traditional attire), du.

Tigrinya: Highlands.

Velvet, embroidering materials, silver, copper and decorating filigrees, 106 cm (L)

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.



Fig. 52-a. Front view.



Fig. 52-b. Back view.

Fig. 49-a and b. au. *Kdan Rashaida*, *Rashaida woman's cloth*. du.

Rashaida: Northern Red Sea.

Synthetic fabric, 152 cm (L).

Collection: NME - E.S. Photograph: Merih Weldai, 2004.



Fig. 53. au. *Fersha sgsug*, wall mat. du.

Rashaida: Northern Red Sea.

Glass beads, cowrie shells, fabric and palm leaves mat, 80 cm (L), 62 cm (W).

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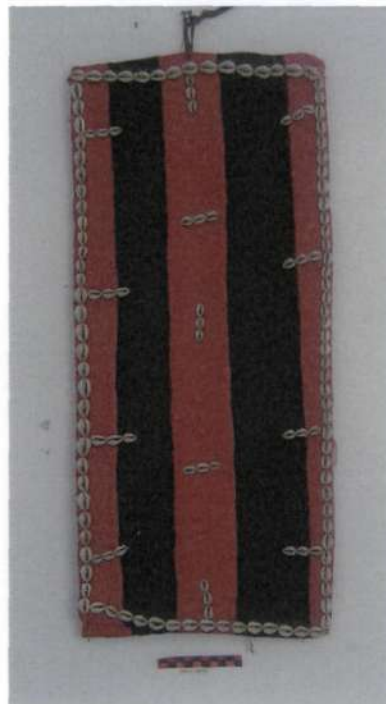


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Cowrie shells, fabric and palm leaves mat, 68 cm (L), 31 cm (W).

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Fig. 55-a.



Fig. 55-b.

Fig. 55-a and b. Souvenir markets in Asmara displaying different items of material culture. Photograph: Petros Ghebrehiwot, 2003.

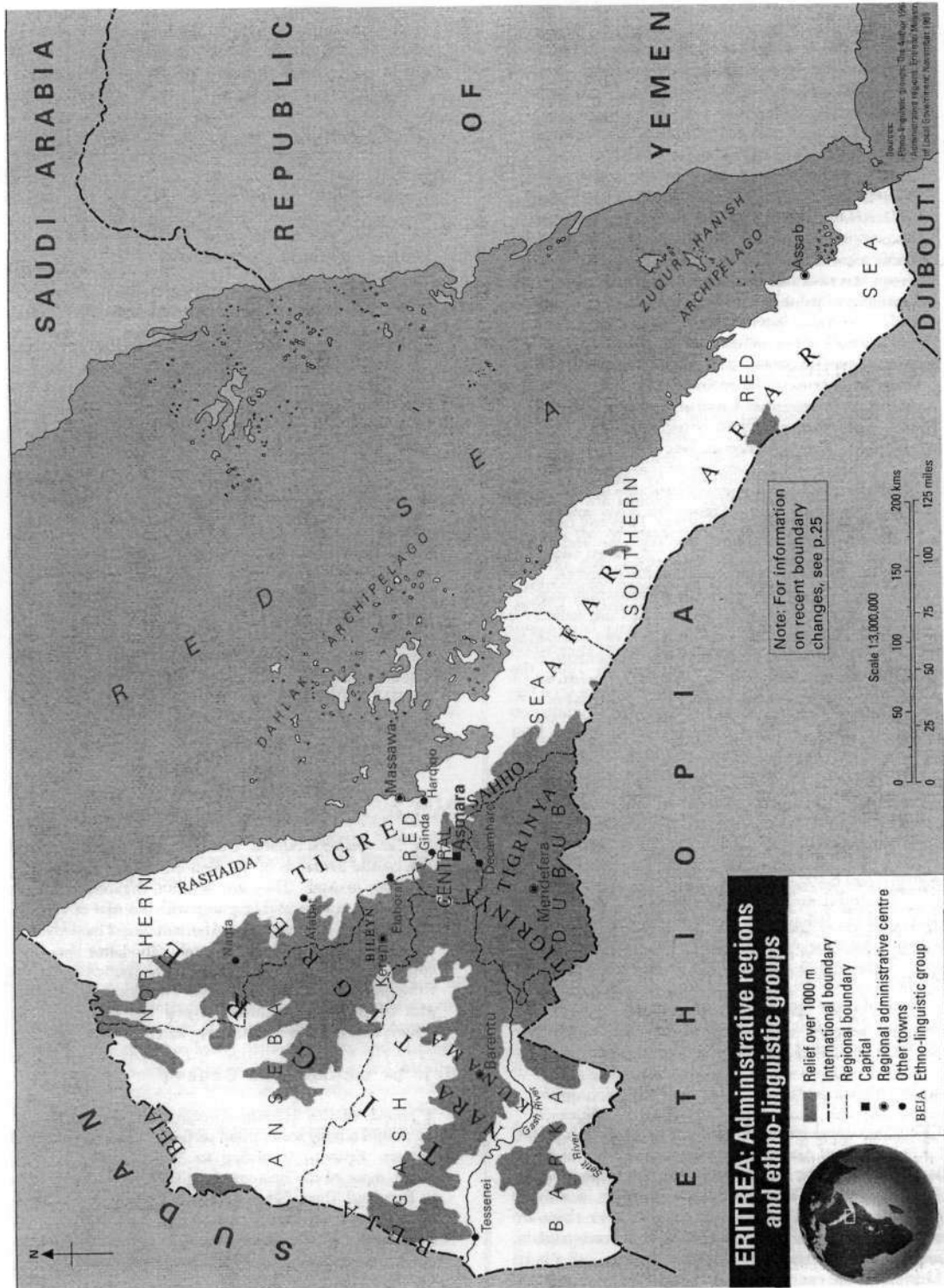


Fig. 56. A Tigre' man making his own wooden boat to earn his living from fishing. Art forms produced to facilitate daily life activities contribute to the development of Eritrean art and material culture. Asmara: Franciscana Printing Press. (Source: Ministry of Tourism, Eritrea).

Appendices

Appendix 1

Map of Eritrea.



Map of Eritrea.
(Source: Pool 1997: 7).

Appendix 2

A letter to Dr. Yosief Libsekal, Director NME

Date 22 December 2003

To: Dr Yosief Libsekal
Director, National Museum of Eritrea
Asmara, Eritrea

Ref: Information about the National Museum of Eritrea and its collections

Dear Dr Yosief,
Accept my deep salutation and best wishes.

As you already know, the proposal for my research was to approach the East African collections in the Natal Museum - South Africa - in terms of Eritrean art and culture. However, as the East African collections in the Natal Museum are few in number with limited or insufficient information, it is difficult to analyse them in terms of Eritrean art and culture. Therefore, my previous proposal, which was entitled '*A study sample of the Eritrean art and material culture in the Natal Museum collections*', has been changed into '*A study sample of the Eritrean art and material culture in the collections of the National Museum of Eritrea*'.

I believe that my research, though at master's level, may contribute a small share in documenting our Museum and its collections. In addition, it might help in introducing the Eritrean National Museum to the University Of Natal, interested individuals and some heritage institutions of South Africa. But mostly it may provide an initial step towards the documentation of Eritrean art on the basis of scholarly studies on which nothing is done yet in Eritrea.

Therefore, in order to meet the targets mentioned above, I have to get enough data on the Eritrean National Museum and its selected artefacts. Last year, the data I have collected from Eritrea in the form of interviews, photographs and written documents are still valuable materials of my research. However, the shift in title has obviously created some gaps within my data. This is because the data have been collected, having in mind that to making sure whether the East African artefacts in the Natal Museum belong to Eritrea or not. Thus, the photographs I have taken as well as the literature I have collected were supposed to be used for comparative purposes. In addition, the data were very vast in order to cover all disciplines of art, as I had no clear understanding of what type of East African objects were collected in the storeroom of the Natal Museum.

By far, I could say that because of change of the research title, because of the overload I had in trying to cover every aspect of the Eritrea art and culture which led to the lack of my specific focus on the Ethnographic section, because of my limited knowledge in museology, and because of the frustration and desperation I had that resulted from EHRD's funding problems and failure to provide me with the basic fine art research equipment, I am forced to look for additional data information to fill the gaps.

The new proposal is concerned all about Eritrean National Museum and its collections in general, and on the selected items of the ethnographic section in particular, as this section holds the material culture produced by the Eritrean peoples. In addition to the art historical and stylistic analysis of the study sample, the study will assess how the Eritrean peoples contribute to the development of Eritrean art as an identity when they make their own daily life objects.

My sampling procedure was purposive rather than random. Thus I purposely have selected my study samples to represent the nine Eritrean ethnic groups. However, the photographs that I have

taken represent Tigrinya, Saho, Afar, Kunama and Rashaida only. Therefore, I will need additional study samples from Nara, Tigre, Hidareb and Bilen. If there is no displayed object of these ethnic groups, I will need to have an explanation of why they are not displayed to the public.

On the basis of the new proposal and as a normal research process, the additional information, which I am looking for may account are the following dimensions:

1. Information about the National Museum of Eritrea regarding the following general activities:
 - Its background, the draft legislation, new projects and expansion (opening regional museums), funding, training, relationships, administration, financial management, educational role, cultural or may be political role, audience and etc.
 - General info about acquisition or collecting systems, cataloguing or documenting systems and conservation systems
 - General info about each section – Archaeological, Natural sciences, and Military
2. Information about selected artefacts or material culture from the Ethnographic section for study and publication
 - Detailed info about the Ethnographic Section concerning its background, collecting and documenting systems of the collections
 - Documentation and physical examination of selected artefacts (for those of which I am sending their images)
 - Documentation, physical examination as well as photographing of selected additional artefacts to represent the ethnic groups of Nara, Tigre, Hidareb and Bilen.

The information that will be provided by the Eritrean National Museum (from documents and interviews with the Director and staff members), which is related to the museum activities mentioned above, will serve as a major source of primary data and will be acknowledged and cited properly.

Dear Dr Yosief, would you please, allow me to carry on a further data collection procedure in the National Museum of Eritrea in order to complete my Masters dissertation? I regret for I am not able to visit Eritrean National Museum in person because of my financial short comes. There fore, I will assign a person to facilitate the collection of data in charge of me. She/ he will gather the information from your institution based on the guiding questions I am sending. I believe that on top of your intensive work, you will offer the person your guidance, cooperation and help as usual.

Attached are details of the information I needed and photographs of the study sample selected for publication.

I highly appreciate your cooperation, encouragement and help.
Thank you,

Regards,

Petros Kahsai

Appendix 3

Semi-structured interview questions sent to NME regarding the overall NME activities and its collections

22 December 2003

Dears NME staff,

The following questions will help to assess the major activities of the National Museum of Eritrea. The information collected via these questions or ideas will be very useful in setting the overall image of the National Museum of Eritrea in my dissertation for the Master of Arts in fine art. Thus, in order to constitute a good background of our Museum, it is my hope that every body will contribute his/ her share in empowering the information. As we all know only very little is done in documenting our Museum, which is representative of our identity, our culture and history. The Eritrean art especially is also completely out of picture of the African and International art history.

According to the following details data may be collected by:

1. Photocopying written documents from archives of the museum
(I already have copy of the draft legislation)
2. Photocopying articles and interviews from magazines and news papers
(I already have copy of Dr Yosief's interview with Netsebraq - May 2001, and J. Street's article, 1996- Eritrean Studies Review)
3. Interviewing the Director and staff members of the Museum

For any copy of literature or any source of data, the following details should be described

- If it is from book:
 - Author's name
 - Title of the book
 - Place and date of publication
 - Publisher's name and date
 - Page number
- If it is from magazines and/ or newspapers:
 - Title of magazine or newspaper
 - Number of the magazine or newspaper
 - Date of publication
 - Author's name
- If it is an interview:
 - Name of the interviewee and his/ her position
 - Date of conducting of the interview
- If it is an original or unpublished source of info (e.g. from the archives of the Museum):
 - Any code should be given by the Museum for citation purposes
 - Date and page number

I do not mind whether the information is in English or in Tigrinya. However, photocopies should be legible and interviews - both questions and answers - should be clearly recorded. Questions should be properly structured and planned prior to interviewing.

1. About the National Museum of Eritrea:

1.1. Prospects on the 1995 draft legislation

- 1.1.1. Is the draft legislation published and/or officially declared?
- 1.1.2. Why is it late? Is there any hope to be published in the near future?
- 1.1.3. If it is not published how is the Museum managing its activities?

1.2. Former heritage legislations

- 1.2.1. Is there any written document about Italian and Ethiopian heritage legislation? If any I will need a copy of it. Prof Anfray has mentioned a bit on the Italian and Ethiopian former legislations.

1.3. Eritrean National Constitution

- 1.3.1. Does the Eritrean National Constitution mention any thing on heritage issues? If any can I get a copy of it?
- 1.3.2. Did the Museum participate in drafting the constitution regarding heritage issues? If yes, how?

1.4. Policy of the Museum. (Rules that guide the activity of the museum such as collecting, documenting, preserving, etc.). This is because the draft legislation mainly focuses on exploration and excavation of archaeological sites. The museums internal rules guiding its management (or management and preservation of the excavated material) are not included in the draft legislation.

- 1.4.1. What are the rules of the Museum? The Museum has internal management rules at least on how to collect, document and how to manage collections. Can I get a copy of any written document about the rules or policies of the museum?
- 1.4.2. Were the Museum's rules constituted on the basis of the international standard of museum policies? If not is there any plan to standardize the rules?

1.5. Progress of the museum

- 1.5.1. How is the program of opening of regional museums going? (Dr Yoseph mentioned this program in his interview with Netsebraq 2001)
- 1.5.2. Is the Museum getting Fund?
- 1.5.3. How is the training program going on?
- 1.5.4. How is the relationship with national and international institutions?
- 1.5.5. What is the hope to having a proper museum building?
- 1.5.6. Is there any plan to open its own library?

1.6. Administration of the Museum

- 1.6.1. What is the purpose of being administered by the University of Asmara?
- 1.6.2. What are the advantages and disadvantages (if any) of being administered by the University of Asmara?
- 1.6.3. Why the museum is cannot act as an autonomous heritage institution?
- 1.6.4. How is administration hierarchy within the Museum?
- 1.6.5. What are the departments within the museum? E.g. Documentation, Public relations, laboratories... And who is in charge of each department?
- 1.6.6. List of staff members and their positions?

1.7. Budget and financial management

- 1.7.1. What is the annual budget or any information on budget allocation? (If possible)
- 1.7.2. Budget shortage is one of the major problems of the museum. What solutions are planned to challenge the problem?
- 1.7.3. Was there any attempt to generate own income?

1.8. General information on the following points regarding foundation, collection, selection, arrangement of objects, number of objects, etc.

- 18.1. Archaeological section

- 18.2. Natural science section
- 18.3. Military section
- 1.9. Role of the museum in the Eritrean society in terms of the following aspects
 - 1.9.1. Educational
 - 1.9.2. Cultural
 - 1.9.3. Political
 - 1.9.4. Economic developments
- 1.10. Audience of the NME
 - 1.10.1. Which group is frequently visiting the Museum? Students? Tourists? Educated people? Rich people? Poor people? Etc. And why?
 - 1.10.2. Can I get copies of visitors' statistics per annum or per month?
 - 1.10.3. Which section of the Museum is most liked or enjoyed by the audience? Why?
- 1.11. Eritrean Festival
 - 1.11.1. Does the Museum participate in the annual Eritrean Festival?
 - 1.11.2. What is mainly displayed to the public in the festival? (Archaeological? Ethnography? ...)
 - 1.11.3. How effective is it in terms of public awareness?
- 1.12. Contemporary art and culture
 - 1.12.1. What plans do you have to exhibit the contemporary art and culture? (Current products of paintings, sculptures, crafts, dresses, and culture like the coffee ceremony).
- 1.13. Archaeological excavation and exploration
 - 1.13.1. Why is the museum more responsible for archaeological excavation than ethnography and/ or contemporary art and culture?
 - 1.13.2. Archaeological excavation requires huge budget. How is the Museum managing this while facing very limited budget?
- 1.14. Conservation/ preservation
 - 1.14.1. What methods does the museum use to protect the museum objects from damage or degradation?
 - 1.14.2. Is there responsible body within the Museum for auditing if the objects are in good condition?
 - 1.14.3. Are the objects in the storerooms also considered in terms of conservation?

2. About the Ethnographic Section

- 2.1. History of its foundation
- 2.2. History of collecting of the artefacts?
- 2.3. What percentage of this section's collections is displayed?
- 2.4. In what basis are the objects selected for display?
- 2.5. Is there a selecting committee? If yes, who are members of the committee? If not, who is in charge of selecting artefacts for display?
- 2.6. Are all the ethnic groups represented? Why are Tigrinya, Afar, and Saho's displayed objects higher in number? Is it on the basis of demographic proportions?
- 2.7. What plans do you have for its future development?

3. About the study samples (About the images I am sending)

- 3.1. History of collection of every object photographed or selected for study
 - 3.1.1. If it was collected actively:
 - a. Who collected it?
 - b. When was it collected?
 - c. Where was it collected?
 - d. Who was the owner of the Object?

- 3.1.2. If it was collected passively:
 - a. Who donated it? (It could also be a gift or bequest)
 - b. When was it donated?
 - c. Who accepted it?
 - d. Who was the owner of the Object?

3.2. Documentation of the object in the ENM

- 3.2.1. What is its catalogue number? (Record of the object in the museum).
- 3.2.2. What is its card number? (Card number may or may not be the same as catalogue number).
- 3.2.3. Copy of a card or any table of record (to be published as an example)
- 3.2.4. Copy of any thing written about the object.

4. About additional study samples

Additional study samples are needed to represent Hidareb, Tigre, Nara, Bilen and may be Rashaida, as I will have to account all the national ethnic groups.

3.1. Sampling of the objects

- 3.1.1. Objects should represent Hidareb, Tigre, Nara and Bilen. Please, select if there is any Rashaidian object other than the "Rashaida's cloth" (Refer to the pictures I sent).
- 3.1.2. Objects should be selected from the Ethnographic section, as they have to be cultural materials. If they are not displayed in the Ethnographic section, they should be checked in the storeroom.
- 3.1.3. The study samples (cultural objects) could be of wood curving, grass weaving, beadwork, metal work, cloth or dress, jewellery, leatherwork, etc.
- 3.1.4. Each object's information should be recorded in the given table

3.2. Processing of the data collection of selected objects

- 3.2.1. Objects should be photographed (may be more than one time to produce different views depending its structure)
- 3.2.2. Objects should be measured in centimetres. L, W, H, D depending on the structure
- 3.2.3. Objects' cataloguing details (museum document of each object) should be recorded
- 3.2.4. Each object's information should be recorded in the given table

3.3. If objects representing the ethnic groups mentioned above are not available in the Museum, a clear reason should be stated why the object is missing.

Appendix 4

A table sent to the NME for cataloguing selected artefacts from the Ethnographic Section. This table was drafted based on the Natal Museum's acquisition card.

Object Description		
1	Vernacular name	
2	English name	
3	Cultural affinity	
4	Provenance	
5	Raw material	
6	Dimension (cm)	
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to notify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by _____ Date of collection _____ Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	

Eritrean National Museum **E1-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ሳፊ
2	English name	Shield
3	Cultural affinity	Arar
4	Provenance	Hand made
5	Raw material	Side (Palm), wood, metal (Cotton cotton)
6	Dimension (cm)	Length 7cm
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	Store
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1992 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	The shield is made of palm leaves and is used for protection against arrows and spears. It is made of palm leaves and is used for protection against arrows and spears.

OBJECT DESCRIPTION

Vernacular name	ሳፊ
English name	Shield
Cultural affinity	Arar
Provenance	Hand made
Raw material	Side (Palm), wood, metal (Cotton cotton)
Dimension (cm)	7cm
Catalogue no.	
Card no.	
Location	Store
Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1992 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
Remark	Hand made shield used for protection against arrows and spears.

Eritrean National Museum **F1-b**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ቆራን ላይታ
2	English name	coffee cups tray
3	Cultural affinity	Arar
4	Provenance	Hand made
5	Raw material	wooden, with metal
6	Dimension (cm)	max. dia. 15cm, height 2.5cm
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ethnographic section
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1995 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	Hand made coffee cups tray used for serving coffee.

Eritrean National Museum **B2-b**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ቆራን ላይታ
2	English name	house wall mat
3	Cultural affinity	Arar
4	Provenance	Hand made
5	Raw material	wooden, with metal
6	Dimension (cm)	30cm height, 60cm width
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ethnographic section
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1995 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	Hand made house wall mat used for decoration.

Eritrean National Museum **D2-b**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ቆራን ላይታ
2	English name	Arar
3	Cultural affinity	Arar
4	Provenance	Hand made
5	Raw material	wooden, with metal
6	Dimension (cm)	Hand made
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ethnographic section
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1995 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	Hand made Arar used for decoration.

Eritrean National Museum **D1-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ቆራን ላይታ
2	English name	Arar
3	Cultural affinity	Arar
4	Provenance	Hand made
5	Raw material	wooden, with metal
6	Dimension (cm)	Hand made
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ethnographic section
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ (It is also better to specify that the object is a gift or bequest) Collected from _____ Collected by NME staff Date of collection 1995 Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	Hand made Arar used for decoration.

Eritrean National Museum **F6-b**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ዕድጋብ
2	English name	wooden chair
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by <u>AMC staff</u> Date of collection <u>1995</u> Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

Eritrean National Museum **G1-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
2	English name	wooden chair
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by _____ Date of collection _____ Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

Eritrean National Museum **C2-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ዕድጋብ
2	English name	INTRA HOLDER
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by _____ Date of collection _____ Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

Eritrean National Museum **F3-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ዕድጋብ
2	English name	WOOD TRAY
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by <u>AMC staff</u> Date of collection <u>1995</u> Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

0977 390
ዕድጋብ = Cordia africana - an scientific name
የዕድጋብ = ficus sycamorus I do not know the common name

Eritrean National Museum **F2-a**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ዕድጋብ
2	English name	WOOD CHOPPING TRAY
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by <u>AMC staff</u> Date of collection <u>1995</u> Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

Eritrean National Museum **D3-b**

Object Description

1	Vernacular name	ዕድጋብ
2	English name	WOOD CONTAINER
3	Cultural affinity	ታሪካዊ
4	Provenance	ዛገራ
5	Raw material	የዛገራ ግጥም ግጥም
6	Dimension (cm)	የላይኛው ግንባር 56 ም. ርዕሰ ግንባር 58 ም.
7	Catalogue number	
8	Card number	
9	Location	ፊደራል ክፍለ-መንግሥት
10	Source	Donated by _____ Accepted by _____ Date of donation _____ <small>(It is also better to specify what the object is a gift or loan)</small> Collected from _____ Collected by <u>AMC staff</u> Date of collection <u>1995</u> Purchased from _____ Purchased by _____ Date of purchase _____ Loaned from _____ Date of loan _____ Duration of loan _____
11	Remark	ይህን ዕድጋብ ግንባር

Appendix 6

Semi-structured and non-structured interviews with the NME staff

Interview with Dr. Yosief Libsekal

Director NME

Interviewer: Petros Ghebrehiwot

February 07 2003, Asmara

Q. Does the National Museum of Eritrea have policy?

A. We have internal policy. I can mention some examples, such as an individual is not allowed to borrow artefacts from the Museum, it is not allowed to offer Museum's artefacts to an individual; if an artefact is presented to the Museum, the donor and recipient must sign an agreement. When the donor dies members of his or her family are not allowed to return the artefact back; when an artefact is found and the owners would like to keep it with them, the Museum is responsible to follow up the conditions of the artefact. Later the Museum convinces the owners to bring the artefact to the Museum.

The policy for our cultural heritage, which was written in 1995, is in draft form. In doing the draft we had participants from different Ministries, institutions, UNESCO, and Paris. We use the policy as a guideline for artefact management and handling foreign researchers. But it is difficult to use a policy, which is not declared or published. But we have vision for the future. At present our people are cooperating with us in collecting artefacts. We don't have any law to collect artefacts from the people as if the artefacts are government properties, but we convince the people to preserve the materials in the museum. We will have difficulties in our management if the policy is not declared within short period of time.

Q. Do you have relations with international institutions?

A. Eritrea has signed an agreement with UNESCO last year (2002). So we have relationships with UNESCO, ICOM, ICOMOS and some African museums. We usually participate in their seminars and we are trying to strengthen our ties.

Q. Do you have heritage records in UNESCO?

A. In Addis Ababa's 1996 workshop I mentioned 5 sites with their full description. UNESCO accepted the sites; however, as we didn't have declared law of cultural heritage and we didn't sign the treaty, the recording of these sites was not done. But still we have tentative records of several sites including Mosques and churches.

Q. How is financial situation and how will you resolve the problem of building?

A. Our biggest problem is financial shortage. Before 1995, when the Department of Culture was together with the Ministry of Information, we had our own budget and the museum was in progress. After it became under the administration of the University Of Asmara, we never get the annually allocated budget for us. However, we sometimes get small funds from UNESCO and some institutions and universities to conduct projects like Qohaito's three years' survey. Before two years the government borrowed \$ five million US from World Bank and we'll share some of the money. We had a plan to build a new museum but we still have difficulties. Any way, if we get large building we'll start using the budget. We are struggling to develop an autonomous National Museum with autonomous financial management. We've already got permission from the university, and we hope to resolve the financial problem.

Q. Could you, please, tell me if you have any achievement in having trained human personnel?

A. From 1992 to 1997 I was the only archaeologist in Eritrea. After 1997 we have got about 30 graduates and two masters degree holders. At present we have also sent five masters and PhD scholars. In addition about 50 undergraduate scholars are studying at the University Of Asmara. So our human resource is in better condition now. It is better for historical and cultural heritage to be handled by citizens, and we are hopeful in achieving this.

Q. As an archaeologist what can you tell me about Eritrea's rich archaeological history?
A. Eritrea possesses the largest number of historical sites and historical findings from African countries below Sahara. But this was not known in the world because of colonialism and war. This was neglected and was considered as if Ethiopians had it. Even the biggest sites like Qohaito were not known. In age wise, no one knew that 75-80 per cent of our sites belong to Pre-Axumite civilization. This was clearly witnessed by the excavations of Embaderho and Sembel. As Eritrea had been in war and still engaged in another war, obviously the priorities were given to the other areas. When this situation finished we'll have a lot of work to do. About 98 percent of our archaeological sites are not excavated. We need to excavate all these and reveal the mystery. However, archaeologically, Eritrea is one of the richest African countries (next to Egypt).

Q. As I have seen the ancient sites and ancient artefacts, I don't think the ancient art is inherited today. What could be the reason?

A. It is a complicated case. The ancient civilization was very developed. Those about 40,000 archaeological sites date from one million years to 1988 AD. The recent ones are the trenches of Nakfa, which were made during the 30-years of armed struggle for independence. Tekhondae, Minah and Qohaito were known as modern cities or towns. But in 1998's survey we found 47 new sites in between Tekhondae and Minah, which were unknown. The Adulans had trade lines that stretched from Adulis to Axum. Within this line many cities and towns were also mushroomed.

How ever these civilizations faded gradually because of some possible reasons:

1. Migration of peoples that was resulted from climatic changes
2. Influences from political changes around the Red Sea, and even Mediterranean and Indian Oceans. For example, the rise of Islam in the Red Sea area, which introduced major changes.
3. Natural catastrophes such as volcanic irruption and earthquakes. For example, in 742 AD there were Rift valley's earthquakes, in which, cities such as Alexandria, cities of Syria and Israel found on the seashore were destroyed. Destruction of Adulis may be linked to natural catastrophe.
4. Internal wars or civil wars were happening continuously. We can mention the rise of Kingdoms of Beja, which brought a lot of changes.

Any way, we'll need a lot of researches. For instance, we'll need a volcanologist and a geologist who can research how Adulis was shattered. In Qohaito we can observe a hint of burning that can suggest violent destruction. Was it civil war, religious war or external invasion? We need a very intensive research. So the civilization was disappeared because of many reasons.

Q. What do you think of the possibilities for East African or may be Eritrean artefacts to be collected in the Natal Museum, South Africa?

A. It is important to know what kind of artefacts they are. It was better if we could know whether they are or archaeological. If they are ethnographic, the 19th Century English adventurers in our region could take them. We can mention the Napier Expedition, for instance. It could be difficult also to identify the objects as Eritrean artefacts, because every thing was known as Abyssinian or Ethiopian. But I am wondering how they were collected there, any way, it could be possible. And we can say some thing about them when we get their photographs and some information.

Interview with Haile Berhe

Head of Documentation and Public Relations NME

Interviewer: Petros Ghebrehiwot

February 08 2003, Asmara

Q. Could you, please, tell me background of the Eritrean National Museum?

A. Before independence we didn't have a museum. Because of continuous colonialism our culture and history were ignored. After independence one of the priorities given by the Eritrean government was to open a museum. As a result we officially opened a National Museum in 1992.

Our Museum comprises four sections:

1. Archaeological museum that displays our ancient history
2. Ethnographic museum which represents our nine ethnic groups

3. Military museum that preserves the rich history of the 30 years armed struggle for independence, which is the longest in Africa, and
4. Museum of the natural sciences that is supposed to help students and researchers.

We also have historical sites. Eritrea has got a very rich history. We have 30-40 thousand archaeological sites. But almost all of them are not excavated. During the regime of Haile Sellassie, 1969, a French man Anfrey excavated Adulis and Metera. However, the artefacts collected from the excavated sites were taken to Addis Ababa.

We have objects collected during the Italian period and during independence. And we have preserved artefacts dated 400 BC collected from the excavated sites of Embaderho, Sembel and Maitemenai after independence.

Our documentation service provides the necessary documentation system for our collections. When we collect artefacts from the field, we call the process random collection and we have a record for it. We also have records for donated artefacts. And if we are informed that an artefact is found in somewhere, we visit the site personally and we study and record the situation.

Q. Did we have any kind of museum before the opening of the National Museum?

A. Italians collected some of our collections and they had documents. During the regime of Haile Sellassie the so-called regional museum opened and these collections were serving the museum. However, the documents and even the artefacts were lost and some of them were taken to Addis Ababa as the Ethiopians were using the artefacts as their own properties.

Q. Do you have policy that manages and administers the National Museum?

A. We've counted more than ten years since the opening of the museum. We are improving our systems from time to time. We are organising the information we have, and we are developing our rules.

When we say documentation, we mean by a proper system of records of all our information and documents. Internationally, there are two kinds of documentation systems, the manual documentation system and computerized documentation system. And we use the manual documentation system. So we record our information data using tables, catalogues and cards, which are worked out manually. For example, if we want to keep a sculpture as an artefact, we need to record its history, origin, material made, how it is made, aesthetic values and other information. But our plan is to introduce computerization.

Q. So do you mean that you have records of all the artefacts?

A. We can't say that we have a complete document of our artefacts, but we are in the process to do it. Of course, our project gets interrupted because of several reasons, but we have general understanding of the process.

We classify our artefacts into two parts, immovable and movable. And we have forms to record the artefacts based on this classification. Form-1 is used to record the immovable artefacts such as monuments, and Form-2 is a form used to document all the movable artefacts. In addition to these, we have a form that documents the artefacts that are sent abroad for study. We also have a form that controls and records foreigner who wants to conduct research on our sites. We have another document for donated artefacts. Generally we have a big recording book and you find what you want following different types of forms. Some documents are kept in catalogue cards and others are in photograph form kept in albums. The "raw data" that are obtained from fields are also documented in their own form. The raw data is attached with photograph. For example, the artefacts found in the excavation of Maitemenai in 1997 were recorded as raw data. We've documented the measurements the artefacts, the layer and depth of the ground where the artefacts were found, and many others that can help recognise their age.

You never move an artefact from its original place before you record all its information. Other wise it remains without information. So you have to record every thing before you move the artefact for preservation. And the documentation system helps us to carry out this task.

Q. This institution is giving service as a National Museum, but why is it doesn't have a formal policy?

A. We have internal working systems. For example, we have rules that control and limit the movement of artefacts from place to place. However, we have drafted our formal policies and we are expecting to publish it.

Q. Compared to other museums how do you measure the Eritrean National Museum's standard and development? And what obstacles do you face for its development?

A. We are handling our documentation system manually. And we don't have complete records of our artefacts, as the previous documents were lost and stolen by colonizers. So we need to conduct studies and researches anew to complete our documentation system. Moreover, to start computerization we have to have complete data and we are struggling to reach up to these level.

We have scarcity of trained staff. Generally, as our museum is very young we can't compare it with the other old museums that do not have economic problems. But some old museums have also similar management or working systems to ours.

Our problem is obvious. We have been in war and still we are not away from it. Therefore, it is expected that the priorities and the focus fall on the issues of health, education and so on. But we have a very bright future, as we already have rich cultural heritage.

Q. What can you tell me about the museum's administration and fund?

A. The museum works under the administration of the University Of Asmara. I can't say that we get much financial support from outside. But in the future we are hopeful to get funding as we are strengthening our ties with different museums and NGOs.

Currently, we have relationships with some African museums focusing on the exchange of experiences. For example, we have contacts with the National Museum of Kenya, UNESCO, PMDA, ICOM, and Africa 2009. We don't get financial support or fund from these institutions but they help us by providing training programs and exchange of experiences.

Q. How is the awareness and participation of the public concerning the museum or cultural heritage?

A. Participation and awareness of the people is quite important in preserving our heritage materials. It requires enormous agitation and campaigns.

We try to educate the people inhabited around the historical sites. We educate them the importance of heritage materials and how the people should proud of them as they are identity and history of the Eritrean people, so as to protect and care for them. We can't say we have covered every thing but we try it with our limited capacity.

We appreciate participation of our people. Whenever they find artefacts they bring them to us and we record how, when, where and who found them. We also visit the place and study whether it is an artefact or not. For example, an Eritrean mother from Maitemenai found artefacts when she was digging a well in her compound. She informed us and we handled the process. The artefacts were 2400 years old. Electricity workers also informed us as they found artefacts in Embaderho when they were digging holes for pole. Therefore, participation of our people is enriching our museum collections. We would like to aware the community through the mass media but we have financial limitations.

Q. How do you resolve your financial problems? For example, you may need to buy artefacts.

A. We enrich our collections through donation; otherwise we don't have money to buy artefacts. We are facing shortages of different facilities. For instance, to rescue our vast archaeological sites, we will need adequate transportation facilities. For the time being we are covering our shortages by cooperating with the people. We haven't published our excavation policy. But when we start our excavating our sites we are going to enrich our museum collections. Moreover, we will open regional museums in different places closer to the excavated sites. However, the project requires a great deal of money.

We claimed to UNESCO, when Ethiopian soldiers destroyed the stele of Metera, and they gave us \$25,000 for repairing it. The money doesn't cover every thing but as a help we appreciate it.

Therefore, we can imagine how much money will be needed to carry on the huge excavation and research project. Any way, when every thing gets started and organised we are hopeful to solve our shortages.

We are broadening our relationships with abroad and we also have visitors. For instance, President of Nigeria, Abasanjo visited our museum recently, and said, "This is one of the witnesses that Africa offered to the genesis of human being." In the future we are hoping to have a developed independent institution that has autonomous financial system. At the moment we are also working in collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organisations such as CARP and Ministry of Tourism. In addition, we are developing our human resources. For instance, Dr. Yoseph was the only archaeologist in Eritrea, but now he has trained many Eritrean archaeologists at the University Of Asmara. And this is very encouraging progress.

Q. Do you have any expectation to have a building purposely designed for a museum?

A. Our museum should have that kind of building. When the museum opened in 1992, we had suitable building and every thing was settled. But since that building was needed for other purposes, we changed to this insufficient building, which was Comboni's School of Girls. Since it is not spacious, we are able to display only 15 per cent of our artefacts. We have kept the rest in storerooms. We are recommended to have other buildings, but we are expecting for our own museum building.

Q. You have a very limited number of displayed paintings, what is the problem?

A. The insufficient space is our problem. We have displayed only samples of paintings produced during the 30 years of armed struggle. Most of the artists who painted these paintings were martyred in the struggle. We have many other paintings preserved in boxes. PFDJ helped us in changing new frames for the paintings. During the struggle I was responsible for the paintings and still I'm in charge of caring for them. Any way the space problem is resolved, we are going to display not only works of the fighters but also donated paintings.

Q. Do students and researchers visit the museum?

A. Yes, university students visit the museum for research. Students from the School of Art also visit our museum to study the paintings. Elementary and high school students visit the artefacts for educational purposes. We also provide permission letters to those who want to visit our historical sites from inside and out side Eritrea. The fee is quite cheap that for foreigners it is only 50 Nakfa and for citizens it is for free. We are planning to handle this seriously so that it can be a source income. But we need some fund to organize the project.

Q. Do you think that our artefacts can be found in the collections of Natal Museum, South Africa?

A. During the colonial period different Europeans for the purpose of research, expeditions missionary and so on had visited our region. These visitors usually pick some cultural materials. For example, our artefacts such as mummified bodies, manuscripts, books and so on are found in Ethiopia, Germany, Italy and England. So it is possible that the English might took some artefacts from here, and donated them to the Natal Museum.

Interview with Dr Yosief Libsekal

Director of the NME

Interviewer: Merih Weldai, assistant graduate NME,

April 14, 2004, Asmara

Q. Is the draft legislation published and/or officially declared?

A. No unfortunately the draft legislation is not yet proclaimed and is still in draft form.

Q. Why is it late? Is there any hope to be published in the near future?

A. Well, we are still waiting for the progress of the proclamation, yet we don't know when the proclamation will be. Since 1995 it also needed some amendments on which we are working, we hope for its publication.

Q. If it is not published how is the Museum managing its activities?

- A. It is very difficult to manage cultural heritage in the absence of legal means for the progression of cultural heritage but, we are trying to work with the people closely explaining to them about identity of their history and in this way we are trying to profess our cultural heritage so as the people can feel responsible for its preservation. But we still have difficulties.
- Q. Is there any written document about Italian and Ethiopian heritage legislation? If any I will need a copy of it. Prof Anfray has mentioned a bit on the Italian and Ethiopian former legislations.
- A. Yes there was. I heard that there was legislation for cultural heritage. There were some documents from Italy, from Ethiopia as well as from Mexico. I'm not sure if they are available here; Mr Haile or Mr Rezene may answer this question.
- Q. The draft legislation mainly focuses on exploration and excavation of archaeological sites. The museum's internal rules that guide its activities such as collecting, documenting, preserving, etc. or management and preservation of the excavated material is not included in the draft legislation. What are the rules of the Museum? The Museum has internal management rules at least on how to collect, document and how to manage collections. Can I get a copy of any written document about the rules or policies of the museum?
- A. The museum has its own rules regarding the collection and expropriation of cultural heritage and we have the policy to run our institution. But regarding the policy it is partly a confidential matter as the internal policy of the museum is still in draft form, but with the rest of the rules the other museum authorities can deal with it.
- Q. Were the Museum's rules constituted on the basis of the international standard of museum policies? If not is there any plan to standardize the rules?
- A. Yes we are trying to confine our rules with the international standards.
- Q. How is the program of opening of regional museums going? (Dr Yosief mentioned this program in his interview with Netsebraq 2001).
- A. Our plan is to open museums in five different zones. We are trying to open a museum of the armed struggle at Nakfa, cultural museum at Keren, historic museum at Barentu – Zoba Gash-Barka, two museums at Massawa – already one museum is functioning, the Regional Museum of Northern Red Sea Zone, which has Archaeological Section, Natural Science Section, Ethnographic Section, and Military Section. We are also planning to open another museum in Zoba Debub at Senafe or Mendefera.
- Q. Is the Museum getting Fund?
- A. Very limited. For example, we are getting some help, at least some equipment and project materials from the University of Florence for the preservation of cultural heritage in the Danakil area.
- Q. How is the training program going on?
- A. The training program is going well. The field school is going on which was started two years ago and will end this year. The most important thing is that the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology of the UOA which is producing more and more anthropologists and archaeologists.
- Q. How is the relationship with national and international institutions?
- A. We have very good relationship with UNESCO, ICOM, Africa 2009, and other universities and institutions such as the University of Florida, University of Florence and recently with the University of Cambridge.
- Q. What is the hope to having a proper museum building?
- A. We are still hoping to get a proper museum building. The current building is not favourable for a museum.
- Q. Is there any plan of NME to open its own library?
- A. Yes, for the moment temporarily, we are going to renovate and refurbish the current upper building and we will open a reading hall and a library.

- Q. What is the purpose of being administered by the University of Asmara? What are the advantages and disadvantages (if any) of being administered by the University of Asmara?
- A. Untill 1995, the Museum was under the administration of the ministry of Culture and Information. Afterwards it became under the administration of UOA. The advantage is, the close collaboration developed between the Museum and the Department of Archaeology which became richer and more profitable in producing more archaeologists. The disadvantage is, we have limited budget and we are administered academically which is very difficult to administer a National Museum academically. The Museum should have its own administering ways; it is supposed to be administered differently.
- Q. Why is the museum cannot act as an autonomous heritage institution?
- A. We are working to change the situation and we have written a proposal and the Government is assessing how culture should be administered. We are hoping to be autonomous or administered under the Ministry of Culture and in the near future.
- Q. How is the administration hierarchy within the Museum?
- A. The Museum has a director, an administrator, and a very effective and we also have a group of the young archaeologists who work in different study areas such as cultural heritage rescuing services. We have sections of registration and archival services. For the moment we have good organization and is a good start.
- Q. Could you, please, tell me the list of staff members and their positions?
- A. Dr. Yosief Libsekal is Director. Mr. Rezene Russom is Head of administration, Finance and Heritage Management. Mr. Yosief Mobae is Head of Public Awareness and heritage of archaeological and historical period. Lieutenant Dawit is also our new appointee. Mr. Haile Berhe is head of Documentation. We have graduate assistants working in different sections. We are hoping to employ them to work for us in different areas.
- Q. What is the annual budget or any information on budget allocation? If possible.
- A. We have no budget at the moment, we only have petty cash.
- Q. Budget shortage is one of the major problems of the museum. What solutions are planned to challenge the problem?
- A. The UOF has agreed to allow us a financial autonomy and to allow us a sort of autonomous in our administration with our own budget.
- Q. Was there any attempt to generate own income?
- A. Yes, there are attempts, and there are many institutions and universities who help raise our budget, however, the university administrative system does not allow us to have our own usage of the budget.
- Q. What is the general information on the ENM sections regarding foundation, collection, selection, arrangement of objects, number of objects, etc?
- A. We only have about 15% of our collection on display. The rest of our collection is in the store. We are very limited by the display-space we have. The Head of heritage management can provide information on this.
- Q. What is the role of the museum in Eritrean society in terms of educational cultural political and economic developments?
- A. The Museum plays decisive role in the reconstruction of identity of the people and construction of art history. The Eritrean people had been colonized by different powers and colonizers and their culture had been marginalized. The Museum provides historical, cultural and educational approach to the people. The Museum has a big potential contribution to the economic developmental activities by attracting visitors with its collections and historical sites.
- Q. Which group is frequently visiting the Museum? Students? Tourists? Educated people? Rich people? Poor people? Etc. And why?
- A. Most likely the audiences of the Museum are tourists and some intellectual people. We have a very limited number of visitors from the residents of Asmara, which is pushing us to work hard for the

public awareness to reach the students starting from the kindergarten level up to the highest level as well as the whole public.

- Q. Which section of the Museum is most liked or enjoyed by the audience? Why?
A. Mostly people enjoy the natural science section as there are different displayed animals and the ethnographic section.
- Q. Does the Museum participate in the annual Eritrean Festival?
A. Not really.
- Q. How effective is the Museum in terms of public awareness?
A. There was not a lot of public awareness, but recently, we have started it. We have officers for public awareness, including some personnel who studied in the universities of South Africa.
- Q. What plans do you have to exhibit the contemporary art and culture? (Current products of paintings, sculptures, crafts, dresses, and cultural activities such as the coffee-drinking ceremony).
A. It is in the Museum's program. But we need to get halls for such purposes. We need a hall for temporary exhibitions of contemporary art works. We have a plan to open museum-shop so that we can display and encourage marketing cultural objects.
- Q. Why is the museum more responsible for archaeological excavation than ethnography and/ or contemporary art and culture?
A. The plan of the museum is to work equally on archaeological, ethnographic and cultural activities. But we give priority to rescuing the archaeological and historical sites as they are irreplaceable. The developmental activities and other factors are big threats to our archaeological sites.
- Q. Archaeological excavation requires huge budget. How is the Museum managing this while facing very limited budget?
A. That's why we are not doing the real excavation; we are only doing the rescue excavation and exploration which requires lesser budget.
- Q. What methods does the museum use to protect the museum objects from damage or degradation?
A. As the Museum's budget and personnel expertise is limited, we are not doing the scientific conservation methods at the moment. Fortunately, because Asmara is placed in the highlands, there is not big fluctuation in the weather and the air is dry. So we are not suffering from the cause of high and low relative humidity.
- Q. Is there responsible body within the Museum for auditing if the objects are in good condition?
A. Not really, but we only do visual inspection of the objects. Like I said, the natural condition of the city is helping the conservation of our objects.
- Q. Are the objects in the storerooms also considered in terms of conservation?
A. Yes we do follow ups for all our objects.

Interview with Mr. Haile Berhe
Head of Public Relations and Documentation NME
Interviewer: Merih Weldai, assistant graduate NME,
April 22, 2004, Asmara

- Q. Why is the draft legislation late? Is there any hope to be published in the near future?
A. The draft legislation is not yet officially published. It is late due to the change of administration. When it was drafted, the museum was under the Ministry of Information and Culture. But later the administration was shifted to UOA. So, it could not be declared; we hope to see the declaration soon.
- Q. If it is not published how is the Museum managing its activities?

- A. It is difficult to work without proclamation. But the Museum is working by giving public awareness and cooperating with the people.
- Q. How is the program of opening of regional museums going?
- A. In 1995 the museum tried to open regional museums in Keren and Nakfa, but currently we only opened in Massawa.
- Q. Is the Museum getting Fund?
- A. Not at all.
- Q. How is the training program going on?
- A. We give training and workshops about our heritage to concerned individuals such as from the monasteries.
- Q. How is the relationship with national and international institutions?
- A. We have relations mostly with the African institutions, but we also have some relations with the international organizations.
- Q. What is the hope to having a proper museum building?
- A. We are hoping to get a proper spacious museum, so that we can display our artefacts properly.
- Q. Is there any plan for the NME to open its own library?
- A. We do have a small library, but in the future we have a plan to open a large library for the public and the researchers.
- Q. Could you, please, give me general information on the NME sections regarding foundation, collection, selection, arrangement of objects, number of objects, etc?
- A. Collection started during the Italian period and we are trying to arrange them by order. We have some formalin-dried animals, and we have some of the artefacts in the ethnographic section. We have a good collection of the military museum as Eritrea has the longest war in Africa, so we have collection from its beginning up to the independence.
- Q. Which group is frequently visiting the Museum? Students? Tourists? Educated people? Rich people? Poor people? Etc. And why?
- A. Most of our visitors are students from the elementary and high school, because, the students want to study the past history of their country as part of the education program.
- Q. Which section of the Museum is most liked or enjoyed by the audience? Why?
- A. People enjoy most the ethnographic section. Because, they want to know cultures and customs of different ethnic groups including their daily life objects.
- Q. No, we do not accept the idea of participating in the Festivals, because, moving our artefacts from place to place could be risky. Instead we call meetings especially to people living near the historical sites to develop public awareness.
- Q. What methods does the museum use to protect the museum objects from damage or degradation?
- A. We do basic conservation methods such as protecting the objects from dust, direct sun light, rodents and insects.
- Q. Is there any damage caused because of lack of conservation?
- A. Yes, some artefacts are changing colours.
- Q. Is there responsible body within the Museum for auditing if the objects are in good condition?
- A. Every member has an obligation to protect the objects from degradation. We don't have a section that works for preservation of the artefacts.
- Q. Are the objects in the storerooms also considered in terms of conservation?
- A. We check all our artefacts even in the storeroom. But they don't have good storage facilities in the storeroom.

Interview with Mr. Rezene Russom

Administrator, finance and cultural resource manager NME

Interviewer: Merih Weldai, assistant graduate NME,

April 22, 2004, Asmara

- Q. Is the draft legislation published and/or officially declared?
A. It is not yet published, and we don't expect it to be published by now. The 1995 legislation needs some amendments as it does not include all what we want.
- Q. Why is it late? Is there any hope to be published in the near future?
A. When every thing is complete regarding the law, it will be officially submitted to the Government for approval. We don't expect this to happen in the near future.
- Q. Is there any written document about Italian and Ethiopian heritage legislation?
A. Yes there were but we don't have the written legislation at hand.
- Q. Does the Eritrean National Constitution mention any thing on heritage issues?
A. Yes, sure. Not in detail but at least it states some rules for the heritage.
- Q. Did the Museum participate in drafting the constitution regarding heritage issues?
A. Yes the museum was consulted about the inclusion of the heritage rules in the constitution by the constitution commission.
- Q. What are the rules of the Museum? The Museum has internal management rules at least on how to collect, document and how to manage collections.
A. We don't have declared policy in the museum but practically we follow some procedures to handle our collections and the cataloguing ways.
- Q. Is the Museum getting Fund?
A. Yes, currently we have small fund from the World Bank for refurbishment on which we are working now. We also have a small fund to improve our institution's conditions.
- Q. How is the training program going on?
A. UOA is training assistant graduates who can work in the museum.
- Q. What is the hope to having a proper museum building?
A. At the moment we don't have any hope; we plan for refurbishment of the present building.
- Q. Is there any plan to open its own library?
A. A museum without library and research centre cannot give a complete service to the society. We have links with Atlanta Georgia and other institutions to establish these activities.
- Q. What is the purpose of being administered by the University of Asmara?
A. The NME was established under the Ministry of information and Culture. Later it shifted under the UOA for which we don't have a clear reason. As the UOA cannot afford to cover all needs of NME, we hope that the Museum be independent.
- Q. What are the advantages and disadvantages (if any) of being administered by the University of Asmara?
A. I don't see any advantage for being administered under the UOA. Because, the Museum is capable of administering by its own, and other authorities over it is not advisable.
- Q. Why the museum is cannot act as an autonomous heritage institution?
A. It is up to the Government to decide whether it should or should not be autonomous.
- Q. How is administration hierarchy within the Museum?

- A. The UOA is the highest authority. Dr. Yosief Libsekal, Director of the NME is accountable to the UOA. Then we have Mr. Rezene Russom, administrator. Then there are classifications within the NME's administration, Mr. Haile Berhe is head of the Public Relation and he is archivist. We have Habte Tesfay, graduate assistants and the secretary.
- Q. What is the annual budget or any information on budget allocation? (If possible)
- A. The salary is paid from the UOA. But we do not know clearly our budget from the Government or from the UOA. We do not have clear amount of our budget.
- Q. What is the role of the museum in the Eritrean society in terms of education, culture, politics, and economic developments?
- A. Educationally, the museum is contributing a positive input to the students at any level of study including some researchers. To the public, the NME fosters the peoples' identity and of Eritrean culture. The NME makes the public aware of their historical background.
- Q. Which group is frequently visiting the Museum? Students? Tourists? Educated people? Rich people? Poor people? Etc. And why?
- A. We have a large number of visiting students organized by their schools, and found it so interesting. This helps passing on the heritage in to the coming generation. We also organize with the schools for the students to visit the historical sites. Another group is the public, the awareness of the public is also growing and is promising. There are international visitors, tourists and political persons and the number is increasing from time to time.
- Q. Which section of the Museum is most liked or enjoyed by the audience? Why?
- A. The archaeological section is the one that draws attention of the audience. Visitors enjoy it most, because, they are interested to know about the past. Eritrea is attracting well known researchers and is rich with ancient civilization and the life of human beings which has significance for researchers. The ethnographic section is also attractive for the visitors as they want to know the life style of different ethnic groups.
- Q. Does the Museum participate in the annual Eritrean Festival?
- A. No. Due to conservation and safety concern, we decided not to participate in the festival. There could be deterioration and even destruction of our objects as we move them.
- Q. What plans do you have to exhibit the contemporary art and culture? (Current products of paintings, sculptures, crafts, dresses, and culture like the coffee ceremony).
- A. The Museum is towards supporting and encouraging contemporary art and culture by preparing exhibition halls.
- Q. Why is the museum more responsible for archaeological excavation than ethnography and/ or contemporary art and culture?
- A. The museum is not only interested in archaeological matter, but also in ethnography. However, because of man power and financial problems, our plans regarding the ethnographic section is kept for the future.
- Q. Archaeological excavation requires huge budget. How is the Museum managing this while facing very limited budget?
- A. At present I don't think we can afford excavation, so what we can do is minor works such as rescuing activities.
- Q. What methods does the museum use to protect the museum objects from damage or degradation?
- A. We follow up the conditions of the objects regarding direct sunlight and humidity. Scientific ways of conservation is something we look for the future.
- Q. Is there responsible body within the Museum for auditing if the objects are in good condition?
- A. Every member of the museum has a limited knowledge of conservation and every one is responsible for the conservation of the objects. Otherwise, we do not have a separate office that audits the conditions of the objects.

- Q. Are the objects in the storerooms also considered in terms of conservation?
A. We look after the objects in the storeroom as well.

Interview with Mr. Yosief Mobae (selected points)

Head of Public Awareness NME

Interviewer: Merih Weldai, assistant graduate NME,

April 23, 2004, Asmara

- Q. How is the public's awareness on art and heritage in general?
A. For example, a new archaeological site was found in Sembel and Gejeret. But 80% of the residents do not know what happened, they never even heard of it. In every scientific activity, archaeology or related field, the first step of the process is that to consult and make aware the public. In Eritrean this method was not introduced, so the public do not know what is taking place in their environment.

In general people do not have knowledge about our heritage; even they do not know where the NME is let alone to visit it and gain some knowledge from the institution.

- Q. What is your opinion in promoting awareness?
A. The public awareness campaign should be part of the education program having its own department. In the Museum, there should be a syllabus for each section and has to be included in the education program of the students. The public should be reached and told about the heritage in their places through well organized campaigns. It should be in mind that cultural or historical objects are not collected for the purpose of preservation only, but also to be used by public as a means of economic values and a source of information.

- Q. Why is the NME didn't do higher efforts to make aware the public of the heritage?
A. There is shortage of human power, and there was not a section for the public awareness within the Museum.

Interview with Mr. Yohannes Ghebreyesus (selected points)

Director Massawa (Northern Red Sea) Regional Museum

Interviewer: Petros Ghebrehiwot,

February 7, 2003, Massawa

- Q. When was the Massawa Regional Museum opened? And how is its administration?
A. This Museum was opened on 10-02-2000 on the occasion of celebration of the tenth anniversary of the liberation of Massawa by the EPLF freedom fighters. The Museum is administered by the administration of Northern Red Sea Region.

- Q. Do you get enough funding?
A. No we do not have budget. So we cannot improve this institution. As it is a new Museum, it needs a lot of input, but we are restricted by the financial problem.

- Q. How is the awareness of the public on this museum?
A. People do not know about it as it is recently opened. We will need to make a lot of effort to acquaint the people with the Museum and the heritage materials.

- Q. How about the future prospects?
A. The future is promising as this region is rich with heritage materials and historical sites such as the well known ancient port of Adulis. I have written a proposal on how this Museum should be improved. So once we get the funding, I am sure it will be an influential Museum that represents the true identity and history of the Eritrean peoples.

Appendix 7

Non-structured interviews with some Eritrean individuals regarding Eritrean art and material culture

Interview with Merigieta (Cantor) Yitbarek Berhe Head Public Relations and Advisor at the Patriarchate of the Orthodox Church of Eritrea.

Interviewer: Mercy Kahsai

March 12, 2005, Asmara

The coffer's head

- Q. Could you please, tell me what this object is? Why is it called coffer's head?
- A. This is a religious object found in Orthodox Churches that constitutes the upper part of the coffer. The faithful mainly the celibates who live alone in the caves consider this object as a coffer. Paintings made on the material that opens and closes such as the ones on the doors of this object are common among the celibates. They open the doors of this object and pray in front of it.
- Q. What is its function?
- A. We should talk about the coffer rather than the coffer's head as the coffer's head represents the coffer. The coffer holds the tablets of the scriptural law *tabot*.
- Q. Does the coffer exist in every Church?
- A. the coffer is found in every Church that has *tabot* or the scriptural law. Its design depends on the needs and affordability of the Church.
- Q. So is this object decorative?
- A. The coffer's head is one of the decorative carved woods known as 'monkey's head' found in the Church. It does not have any function in the Church, it does not even found in every Church. But the coffer, as it holds the *tabot*, it is a must to exist in every Orthodox Church.
- Q. what are the doors used for?
- A. The coffer's doors are four in number and they represent the four directions of the world (north, south, west and east). Prayer is done from the four directions and the priests and faithful stand in four directions.
- Q. When are the doors open? Are they made open to show the pictures?
- A. The doors are opened during prayer and Mass. And it is not a must to have pictures on the doors.
- Q. Does opening doors have specific meaning?
- A. As the *tabot* is placed inside the coffer, the doors are kept open during prayer.
- Q. Who makes this kind of object usually, debtera or priest?
- A. The coffer or the paintings are made by any expert.
- Q. Is this object made by a special order of the Church?
- A. The coffer is made by an order of the Church as it has to be owned by the Church, but the coffer's head is made by a choice of the Church or individuals.
- Q. How is the respect of the *tabot* in the Church?
- A. The meaning and respect given to the *tabot* in the Church is very high. Because, the wine and bread used for the Holy Communion is blessed by putting over the *tabot*.

- Q. Is there a Church without the tablets or the *tabot*?
- A. There is no an Orthodox Church without *tabot*. It is found only in Orthodox Church. Some Churches built in the fields far from the community to offer services such as funeral or healing in the Holy Waters do not have *tabotat*, but they are blessed once a year by bringing the *tabot* in to the Churches.
- Q. Occasionally *tabot* is carried by priests in procession. When is this activity carried out? And is there a particular person to carry the *tabot*?
- A. During anniversaries of the Church, during Epiphany or during a special prayer to ask God to have mercy on the people in very harsh situations such as drought and war. *Tabot* is carried only by priests.
- Q. Does the coffer moves out of the Church during procession?
- A. No, it is constant in the Church, only *tabot* moves.
- Q. Can *tabot* be seen or touched by people?
- A. *Tabot* once it is blessed with the Holy Oil (*meron*), it can only be touched by the priests.
- Q. what is *tabot* made from?
- A. *Tabot* is made of a durable and strong wood.

Interview with Dr. Abba Isaak Ghebreyesus, an Eritrean writer.

Interviewer: Saba Kahsai

March 17, 2005, Asmara

Mahzel

- Q. Is there any thing known about the origin of *mahzel*?
- A. It is started when the African people started to use leather for different activities. Herodotus mentions that the Africans were wearing the leather skirts and the Greeks made skirts to their goddess Ilida borrowing the African way. The use of leather started when people start domesticating animals. *Sherara* (leather skirt) is made of goat-skin and *dino* is made of sheep-skin. I remember my sister worn *sherara* until she got married. So the use of *mahzel* is no different from this.
- Q. Why is *mahzel* decorated with cowrie shells and glass beads? Is it for decoration or it has social meaning?
- A. It is for decoration purposes, initially cowrie shells were used and later it was substituted with beads. Even later, pieces of metals such as bottle corks were used. It was very common to decorate leather material culture with shells and beads.
- Q. The bead-fringes on *mahzel* produce sounds when the woman is moving. Is the sound supposed to entertain the baby?
- A. It is just part of the decoration, the experts always try to produce beautiful *mahzel* and they put embellishments. I have not heard if it is designed to entertain the baby, I don't think so.
- Q. Is there any traditional meaning given to the cowrie shells may be linked to superstition? Why are they put on *mahzel*?
- A. The cowrie shells are used by sears to traditionally unveil secrets. But there is no superstition linked with *mahzel's* decoration. The people decorate material culture with shells even they incorporate them with their hair styles.

- Q. Why is *mahzel* made from leather? Is it because it is durable or it has social meaning?
 A. *Mahzel* has social value in society. The husband offers his wife a *mahzel* as one of his wedding presents. The leather *mahzel* denotes wealth as to make the *mahzel*, you need to own goats and sheep. Its durability is also obvious; it is much stronger than fabric.
- Q. How is the use of *mahzel* at present? Is it replaced with modern materials?
 A. Sometimes we see *mahzel* replaced with fabric and other materials especially in Asmara, but majority of the people use *mahzel*, and is still valuable and much liked material.
- Q. Is *mahzel* used as wall decoration in towns or traditional (cultural) places?
 A. *Mahzel* is not used for wall decoration. It is hang on the wall when not in use, or is displayed on the wall in the market.
- Q. Is there religious or traditional meaning associated with *mahzel*?
 A. When a mother carries her baby with the *mahzel*, this indicates the mother's beauty and readiness to nurture her baby and her management to the motherhood in general.
- Q. Do the mothers use *mahzel* when in long travel or even when at home?
 A. They use it at home as well. They carry the baby and do all the domestic stuff. They can manage different activities including playing the hand drum that requires vigorous body movements in the cultural dance.
- Q. When they carry a baby with the *mahze*, do they use any sheet of cloth underneath to protect the child from warm or cold climate?
 A. Yes, to protect the child from warm or cold air they use pieces of cloth known as *gizguz* or *sarso*. This cloth also protects the *mahzel* in case the child urinates.
- Q. Who makes *mahzel* including its decorations? Man or woman?
 A. It is all made by women. There are some experts who make it beautifully and receive cereals as a means of exchange. Some of them make it to present their friends. At present it is available in the market so that the mothers can purchase it.
- Q. For how long is a child carried by his/her mother?
 A. Until she gets the next child. Sometimes even if the child is 3 years old, the mother keeps carrying him/her as she enjoys the mother-child relationship.

Walta, sheild

- Q. Is this kind of shield common in all ethnic groups or it is only in Tigrinya and Tigre? What does the Tigre people call this object?
 A. I don't know what the Tigre call it. The origin of this type of shields is from Beja who live in the western part of Eritrea and Eastern part of the Sudan. There are different kinds of shields such as the Kunama shields and Somali shields, but this kind is known as Habesha shield and is made from elephant's hide. The style differs with the experts' taste. At present the Habesha shields are not easily found in Eritrea as the Ethiopians have collected them.
- Q. This shield is highly decorated. Is it ceremonial or functional?
 A. Basically shields are produced for defence, but there are some which are decorated to be used in ceremonies, festivals and cultural events. Decorated shield is also linked with status or authority.

Q. Whom does such a decorated shield belong for?
A. It belongs to elephant, tiger or lion hunters. It belongs to heroes such as enemy killers who gain bravery. This kind of status shield is accompanied by a special cape and sword. These status materials were used in wedding ceremonies as well.

Q. What social meaning does the shield have?
A. The shield is a symbol of tolerance. Based on its function, it is also common to say that the 'Lord is my shield'.

Interview with Mr Berhane Adonai, an Eritrean artist and Ex-Director of the Asmara School of Art (selected points).

Interviewer: Petros Ghebrehiwot

February 05 2003, Asmara

Q. Can we say that the religious paintings in Eritrea are indigenous?
A. The Byzantine styled paintings are originated in those early Christian countries such as Byzantium. But as it has practised for centuries in Eritrea, we can say it has developed some indigenous values, so we can say it is our traditional art.

Q. Why is sculpture not common in Eritrean art history?
A. Our society is highly religious. So the Eritrean society had to respect religious restrictions regarding carved figures both Christians and Moslems.

Interview with Mrs/ Ms. Satina Debesay and Mrs. / Ms Martha Ghebru Voice of the Broad Masses, radio broadcasting, Ministry of information

Interviewer: Melake Siltan, Ministry of information

March 17, 2005, Asmara

Lakaja

Q. What do the Kunama call this object in their language?
A. Lakaja.

Q. Is it made by women?
A. Yes.

Q. Do they make it at home, or they buy it in the market?
A. They make it at home; it is usually made by older women, not by the young women.

Q. How do they use this object? And how do they prepare aifa (dagga)?
A. Over three days sorghum dough is prepared. The dough is semi cooked over angala, ceramic flat oven, or metal oven. When it is cooled down, it is mixed with sorghum sprouts and is kept in a ceramic pot. The next day, unfermented sorghum mash is prepared, and is semi cooked. When it is cooled down, it is mixed with sorghum sprouts and is mixed with the other product. After one day, it can be strained using lakaja and is then ready to serve. They usually do not strain or filter the whole malt at one time; instead they filter a part of it enough for the time being.

Q. When is aifa usually prepared?
A. Any time, there is no specific time.

Q. Is there any cultural explanation linked to lakaja?

- A. No.
 Q. In the Kunama groups, is there any social meaning given to lakaja?
 A. No.

Interview with Mrs/ Ms. Satina Debesay (Kunama Radio Program), Mrs. / Ms. Asha Osman (Tigre Radio Program) Mrs. / Ms. Hayat Abubeker, Mr. Osman Adem and Mr. Salih Idris (Saho Radio Program), Mr Abdu Mohammed (Bilein Radio Program), Mr Mohammed Idris (Afar Radio Program), and Mr. Bekit Salih (Hidareb Radio Program).

Voice of the Broad Masses, radio broadcasting, Ministry of information

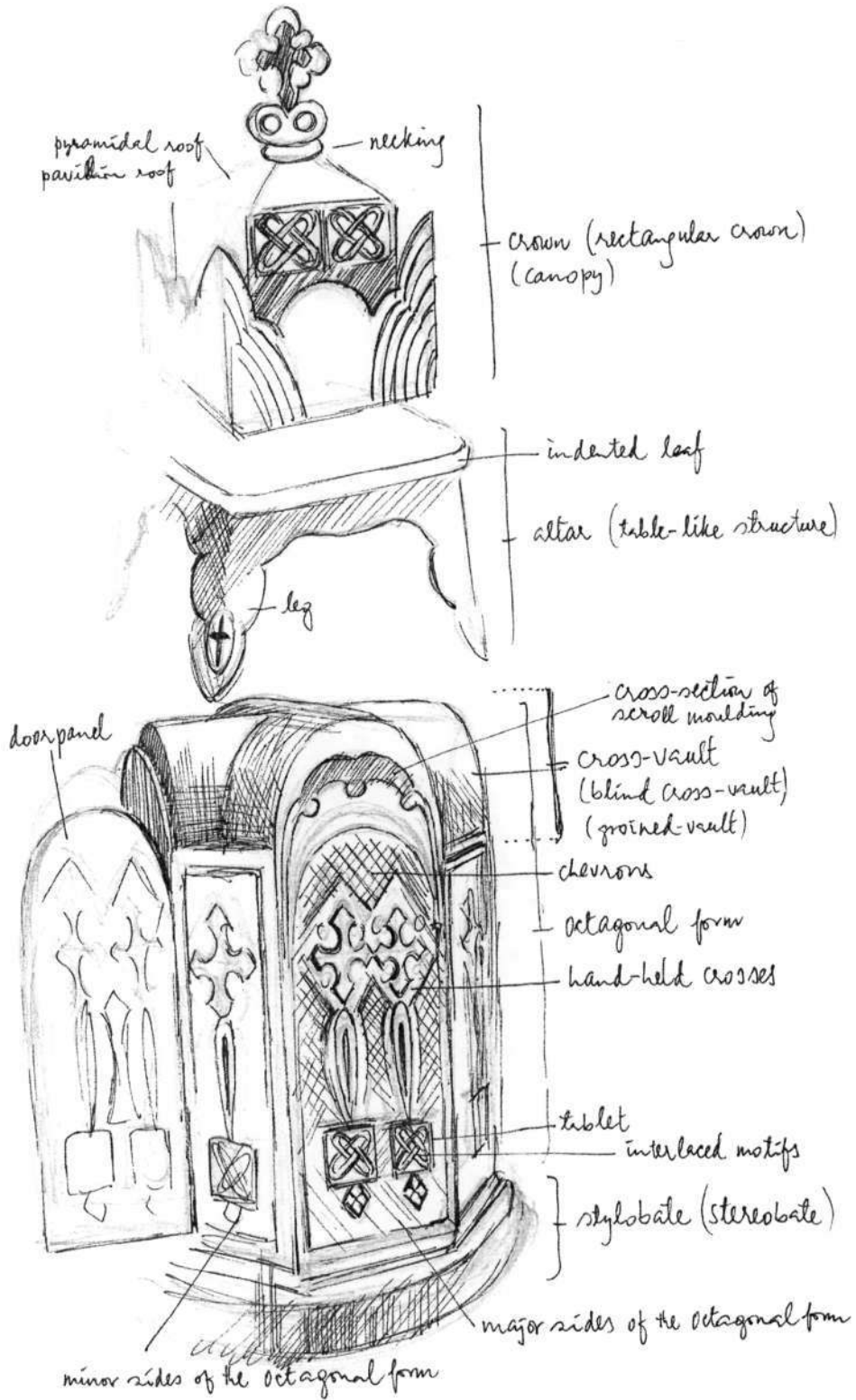
Interviewer: Melake Sultan, Ministry of information

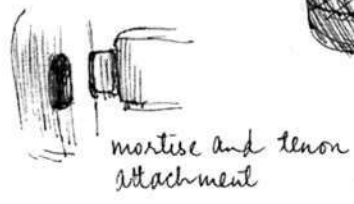
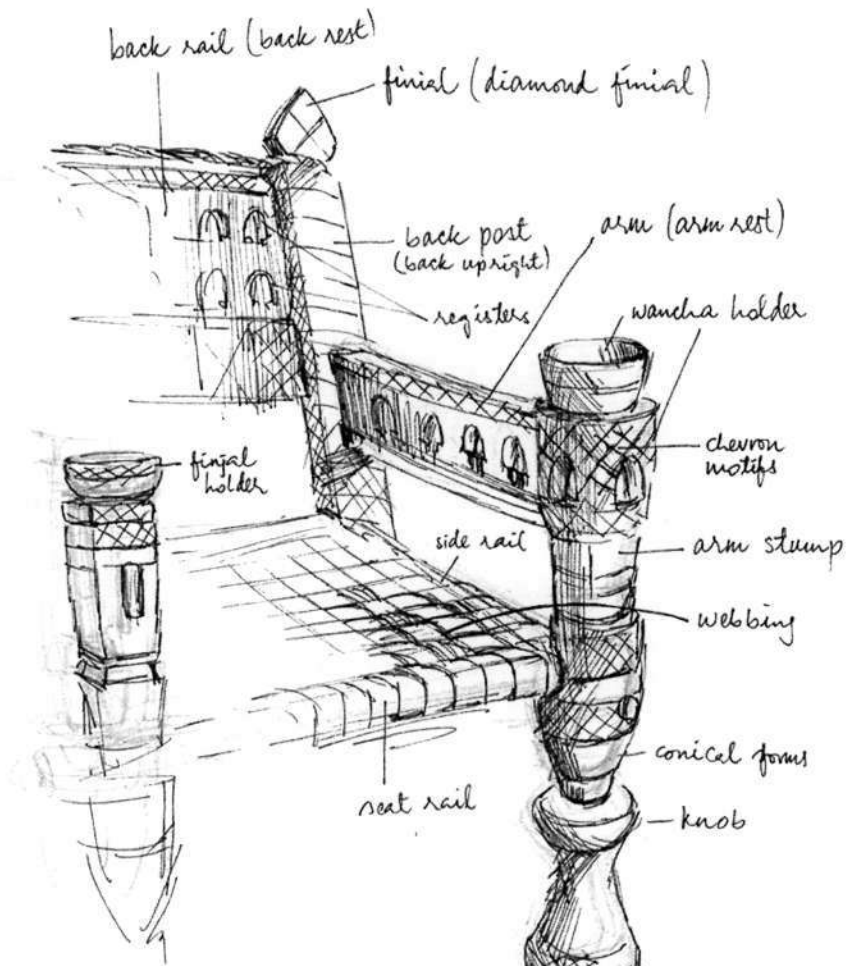
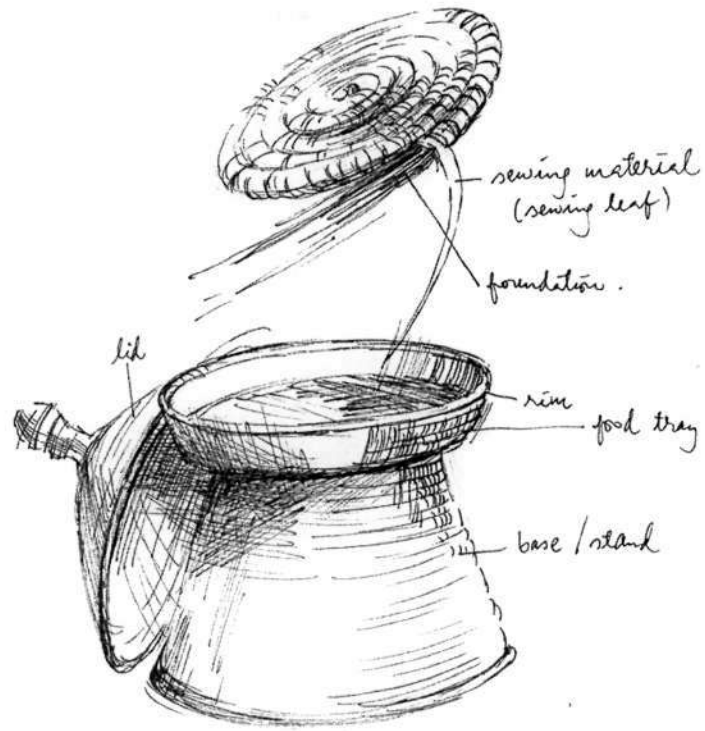
March 18, 2005, Asmara

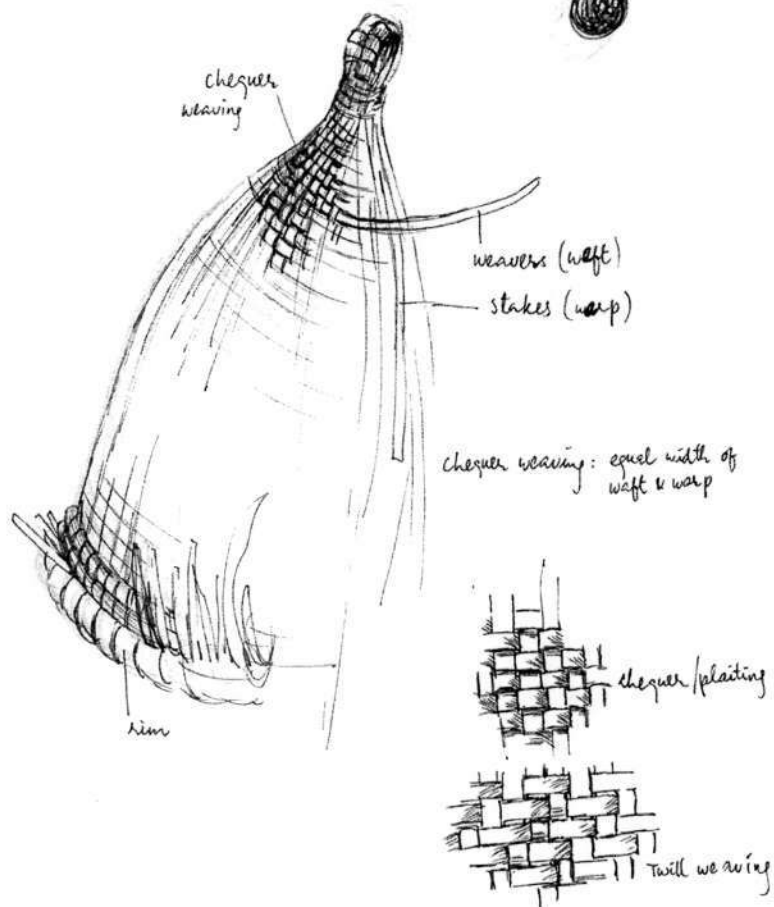
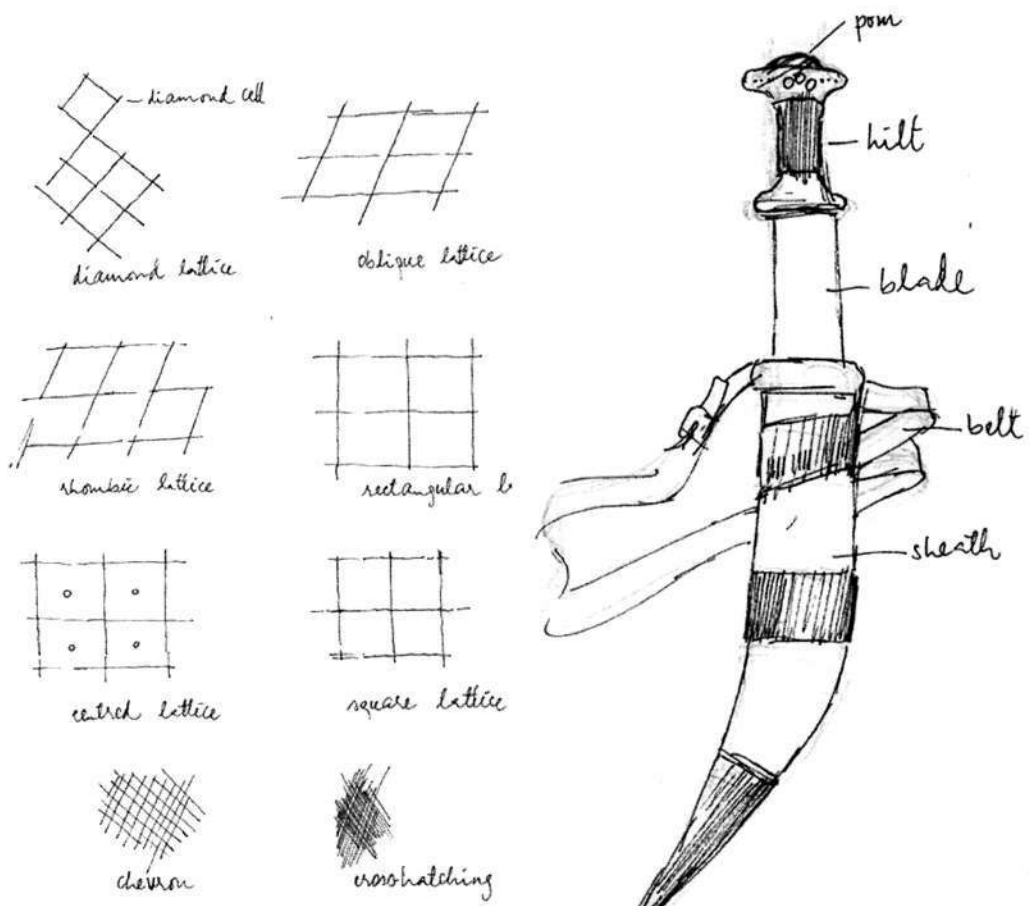
- Q. The leather and wooden headrests are used by the Saho, Bilein, Tigre, Afar, nara and Kunama groups. What does each group call the headrest?
 A. The leather headrest is called *berkuma* (Saho), *wldiwldora* (Bilen), *wesidet* (Tigre), *barkuma* (Afar) and *tonbas* (Hedareb). The wooden headrest is called *dawliena* (Saho), *dukur* (Bilein), *meter'as* (Tigre, Afar and Hedareb). Wooden headrest with only one leg is called *tlagaday* in the Hedareb groups and is used in the fields by the shepherds.
- Q. Are these headrests made by women and men?
 A. The leather headrests are made and decorated by women. The wooden headrests are made by men.
- Q. Are the headrests available in the market?
 A. People make their own headrests. But at present the leather headrests are available in the market.
- Q. What is the main use of these headrests?
 A. Except in the Kunama group, these headrests are marriage gifts for the bride and bridegroom. People use them to support their heads while sleeping.
- Q. Is there any cultural meaning linked to this headrests, such as linked to dreaming or sleeping?
 A. There is no any known meaning linked to what you mention.
- Q. How about when they are offered as gifts to bride and bridegroom?
 A. All the groups use them only as wedding gifts except the Bilein and the Saho. In the Saho groups, a single leather headrest (*berkuma*) is given to the bride and bridegroom by the bride's mother or parents. The meaning of the one headrest denotes unity. In the Bilein groups, a single leather headrest is filled with sorghum and is given to the bride to take it with her to the bridegroom's home. Then half of the sorghum contained in the *wldiwldora* is cooked and served to the bridegroom's close friends. The meaning of the sorghum is to wish the bride good fertility. In the Bilein society, the best man makes a wooden headrest and offer to the bridegroom.
- Q. Is there any arrangement on how the headrests should be used?
 A. There are no sleeping rules. But in most cases, a man sleeps on the right side and the woman on the left. In different activities, the man's position is on the right side. This may indicate respect offered to the man or even it may have religious connection.
- Q. Is there any other value or traditional explanation given to the headrests?
 A. Most people use headrests to protect their wet hair, bed sheets and pijamas from dirt. People usually use *likhay* to treat their hair.

Appendix 8

Descriptive drawings and labels of some of the study samples







Appendix 9

Note on Tigrinya (Ge'ez) letters

During the first millennium BC, south Arabians (Sabaeans) established settlements around the present-day Massawa which later expanded to the Eritrean plateau and northern Ethiopia. One of the contributions of the Sabaeans to Eritrea was the art of the Sabaean writing. There are Sabaean inscriptions and monuments that suggest the existence of Sabean culture in Eritrea. Since the third C BC, the Greeks gained access to establish their colony in Eritrea through the Ptolemys' of Egypt (the Hellenists) who replaced the Pharaohs. The combination of Semitic and Greek cultures and the intensive maritime trade through Adulis (the ancient port near today's Massawa), led to the establishment of the wealthy indigenous state of the Aksumite Empire which developed its own language, Ge'ez with its own characters. Thus Ge'ez was derived from the Sabaean and was a spoken language of the Aksumites since the first C AD. Even though Ge'ez gave up to be a spoken language more than a thousand years ago, it still continues as a language of the Church and traditional education. Ge'ez gave rise to Tigrinya, Tigrè and Amharic which are modern languages spoken in Eritrea and Ethiopia. At present, these written languages use Ge'ez letters.

The earliest Sabaean inscription in Eritrea dates back to the fifth C BC with a boustrophedon type. The earliest Ge'ez inscription on stones and coins in the third C AD shows that Ge'ez was written without vowels, eg. the stele of Metera. Before the end of the third C, the Greek legend was substituted by Ge'ez on the gold, silver and bronze coins which were mainly minted for the purpose of international trade. The vocalized Ge'ez developed in the 4th C AD after the introduction of Christianity (Buxton 1970: 179-179, Heldman 1993: 47, 57, EPLF-RB snetbeb 1982: 7-8, Kifle 2001: 22-28, Weldemaryam 1984: 36-43)

Vocalization in Ge'ez is shown by modifying the basic characters. Ge'ez has seven different sounds.

The following table (Buxton 1970: 179) shows the comparison of Semitic and other alphabets and the close dependency of Ge'ez syllabary on the south-Arabian (Sabaeon).

Phonetic value	Phoenician	Sabaeen (south-Arabian)	Ge'ez	Hebrew	Classical Greek	Arabic
ʔ	𐤀	𐩇	ዐ	א	Α	ا
ɸ	𐤁	𐩈	ዑ	ב	Β	ب
β	𐤂	𐩉	ዒ	ב	Β	ب
γ	𐤃	𐩊	ዓ	ג	Γ	ج
δ	𐤄	𐩋	ዔ	ד	Δ	ד
ε	𐤅	𐩌	ዕ	ה	Ε	ه
ζ	𐤆	𐩍	ዖ	ו	Ζ	و
η	𐤇	𐩎	዗	ז	Η	ز
θ	𐤈	𐩏	ዘ	ח	Θ	ح
ι	𐤉	𐩐	ዘ	ט	Ι	ט
κ	𐤊	𐩑	כ	כ	Κ	כ
λ	𐤋	𐩒	כ	ל	Λ	ל
μ	𐤌	𐩓	מ	מ	Μ	م
ν	𐤍	𐩔	נ	נ	Ν	ن
ξ	𐤎	𐩕	נ	ס	Ξ	ס
ο	𐤏	𐩖	ס	ע	Ο	ע
π	𐤐	𐩗	ע	פ	Π	פ
ρ	𐤑	𐩘	פ	צ	Ρ	צ
σ	𐤒	𐩙	צ	ק	Σ	ק
τ	𐤓	𐩚	ק	ר	Τ	ר
υ	𐤔	𐩛	ר	ש	Υ	ש
φ	𐤕	𐩜	ש	ת	Φ	ת
χ	𐤖	𐩝	ת	ת	Χ	ת

Vocalized Ge'ez letters

ዓለከ e Basic character (consonant) like French <i>le</i>	ካለብ u like <i>butcher</i>	ሳልስ i like <i>king</i>	ራብእ a like <i>but</i>	የምስ ie or è like <i>ten</i>	ሳድስ neutral like <i>blow</i>	ሳበእ o like <i>call</i>
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ሀ _{he}	ሁ _{hu}	ሂ _{hi}	ሃ _{ha}	ሄ _{hie}	ህ _h	ሆ _{ho}
ለ _{le}	ሉ _{lu}	ሊ _{li}	ላ _{la}	ሌ _{lie}	ል _l	ሎ _{lo}
ሐ _{he}	ሑ _{hu}	ሒ _{hi}	ሃ _{ha}	ሔ _{hie}	ሕ _{ha}	ሐ _{ha}
መ _{me}	ሙ _{mu}	ሚ _{mi}	ማ _{ma}	ሜ _{mie}	ም _m	ሞ _{mo}
ሠ _{se}	ሡ _{su}	ሢ _{si}	ሣ _{sa}	ሤ _{sie}	ሥ _s	ሦ _{so}
ረ _{re}	ሩ _{ru}	ሪ _{ri}	ራ _{ra}	ራ _{rie}	ር _r	ሮ _{ro}
ሰ _{se}	ሱ _{su}	ሲ _{si}	ሳ _{sa}	ሴ _{sie}	ሰ _s	ሶ _{so}
ሸ _{she}	ሹ _{shu}	ሺ _{shi}	ሻ _{sha}	ሼ _{shie}	ሽ _{sh}	ሾ _{sho}
ቀ _{qe}	ቁ _{qu}	ቂ _{qi}	ቃ _{qa}	ቄ _{qie}	ቅ _q	ቆ _{qo}
ቈ _{qhe}	቉ _{qhu}	ቊ _{qhi}	ቋ _{qha}	ቌ _{qhie}	ቍ _{qh}	ቆ _{qho}
በ _{be}	ቡ _{bu}	ቢ _{bi}	ባ _{ba}	ቤ _{bie}	ብ _b	ቦ _{bo}
ተ _{te}	ቲ _{tu}	ቲ _{ti}	ታ _{ta}	ቲ _{tie}	ት _t	ቶ _{to}
ቸ _{che}	ቹ _{chu}	ቺ _{chi}	ቻ _{cha}	ቼ _{chie}	ች _{ch}	ቸ _{cho}
ኀ _{he}	ኁ _{hu}	ኂ _{hi}	ኃ _{ha}	ኄ _{hie}	ኅ _h	ኆ _{ho}
ኘ _{ne}	ኙ _{nu}	ኚ _{ni}	ና _{na}	ኔ _{nie}	ን _n	ኖ _{no}
ኘ _{nye} (gne)	ኙ _{nye} (gnu)	ኚ _{nyi} (gnu)	ኛ _{nya (gna)}	ኜ _{nyie} (gnie)	ኝ _{ny} (gn)	ኞ _{nyo} (gno)
አ _e	አ _u	አ _i	አ _a	አ _{ie}	አ _e	አ _o
ከ _{ke}	ከ _{ku}	ከ _{ki}	ከ _{ka}	ከ _{kie}	ከ _k	ከ _{ko}
ኸ _{khe}	ኹ _{khu}	ኺ _{khi}	ኻ _{kha}	ኼ _{khie}	ኽ _{kh}	ኾ _{kho}
ወ _{we}	ወ _{wu}	ወ _{wi}	ወ _{wa}	ወ _{wie}	ወ _w	ወ _{wo}
ዐ _e	ዐ _u	ዐ _i	ዐ _a	ዐ _{ie}	ዐ _e	ዐ _o
ዘ _{ze}	ዘ _{zu}	ዘ _{zi}	ዘ _{za}	ዘ _{zie}	ዘ _z	ዘ _{zo}
ዝ _{zhe}	ዝ _{zhu}	ዝ _{zhi}	ዝ _{zha}	ዝ _{zhie}	ዝ _{zh}	ዝ _{zho}

𐌶 _{ye}	𐌷 _{yu}	𐌸 _{yi}	𐌹 _{ya}	𐌺 _{yie}	𐌻 _y	𐌽 _{yo}
𐌲 _{de}	𐌳 _{du}	𐌴 _{di}	𐌵 _{da}	𐌶 _{die}	𐌷 _d	𐌸 _{do}
𐌺 _{je}	𐌻 _{ju}	𐌼 _{ji}	𐌽 _{ja}	𐌾 _{jie}	𐌿 _j	𐌿 _{jo}
𐌿 _{ge}	𐍀 _{gu}	𐍁 _{gi}	𐍂 _{ga}	𐍃 _{gie}	𐍄 _g	𐍅 _{go}
𐍆 _{te}	𐍇 _{tu}	𐍈 _{ti}	𐍉 _{ta}	𐍊 _{tie}	𐍋 _t	𐍌 _{to}
𐍍 _{che}	𐍎 _{chu}	𐍏 _{chi}	𐍐 _{cha}	𐍑 _{chie}	𐍒 _{ch}	𐍓 _{cho}
𐍔 _{pe}	𐍕 _{pu}	𐍖 _{pi}	𐍗 _{pa}	𐍘 _{pie}	𐍙 _p	𐍚 _{po}
𐍛 _{tse (xe)}	𐍜 _{tsu (xo)}	𐍝 _{tsi (xi)}	𐍞 _{tse (xa)}	𐍟 _{tsie (xie)}	𐍠 _{ts (x)}	𐍡 _{tso (xo)}
𐍟 _{tse (xe)}	𐍠 _{tsu (xo)}	𐍡 _{tsi (xi)}	𐍢 _{tse (xa)}	𐍣 _{tsie (xie)}	𐍤 _{ts (x)}	𐍥 _{tso (xo)}
𐍇 _{fe}	𐍈 _{fū}	𐍉 _{fī}	𐍊 _{fa}	𐍋 _{fīe}	𐍌 _f	𐍍 _{fo}
𐍎 _{pe}	𐍏 _{pu}	𐍐 _{pi}	𐍑 _{pa}	𐍒 _{pie}	𐍓 _p	𐍔 _{po}
𐍑 _v	𐍒 _v	𐍓 _{vi}	𐍔 _{va}	𐍕 _{vie}	𐍖 _v	𐍗 _{vo}

Additional letters

𐍅 _{hua}	𐍆 _{lua}	𐍇 _{mua}	𐍈 _{sua}	𐍉 _{rua}	𐍊 _{sua}	𐍋 _{shua}
𐍌 _{bua}	𐍍 _{tua}	𐍎 _{chua}	𐍏 _{tua}	𐍐 _{chua}	𐍑 _{zua}	𐍒 _{zhua}
𐍓 _{nua}	𐍔 _{nyua (gnua)}	𐍕 _{dua}	𐍖 _{jua}	𐍗 _{tsua (xua)}	𐍘 _{fua}	𐍙 _{pua}
𐍚 _{pua}	𐍛 _{vua}					
𐍟 _{qua}	𐍠 _{q'w}	𐍡 _{qui}	𐍢 _{quie}	𐍣 _{que}		
𐍤 _{qhua}	𐍥 _{qh'w}	𐍧 _{qhui}	𐍨 _{quie}	𐍩 _{qhue}		
𐍫 _{kua}	𐍬 _{k'w}	𐍮 _{kui}	𐍯 _{kuie}	𐍰 _{kue}		
𐍱 _{khua}	𐍲 _{kh'w}	𐍴 _{khui}	𐍵 _{khuie}	𐍶 _{khue}		
𐍷 _{gua}	𐍸 _{g'w}	𐍺 _{gui}	𐍻 _{guie}	𐍼 _{gue}		

Ge'ez numbers

፩₁ ፪₂ ፫₃ ፬₄ ፭₅ ፮₆ ፯₇ ፰₈ ፱₉

፲₁₀ ፳₂₀ ፴₃₀ ፵₄₀ ፶₅₀ ፷₆₀ ፸₇₀ ፹₈₀

፺₉₀ ፻₁₀₀ ፳፻₂₀₀ ፷፻₃₀₀ ፵፻₄₀₀ ፹፻₅₀₀ ፺፻₆₀₀

፺፻₇₀₀ ፷፻₈₀₀ ፵፻₉₀₀ ፲፻₁₀₀₀ ፳፻₂₀₀₀ ፴፻₃₀₀₀ ፵፻₄₀₀₀

፶፻₅₀₀₀ ፷፻₆₀₀₀ ፸፻₇₀₀₀ ፹፻₈₀₀₀ ፺፻₉₀₀₀ ፻₁₀₀₀₀

፪፻፻₂₀₀₀₀ ፫፻፻₃₀₀₀₀ ፬፻፻₄₀₀₀₀ ፭፻፻₅₀₀₀₀ ፮፻፻₆₀₀₀₀ ፯፻፻₇₀₀₀₀

፰፻፻₈₀₀₀₀ ፱፻፻₉₀₀₀₀ ፲፻፻₁₀₀₀₀₀