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The Crucified Thieves in Ethiopian Art: || literary and iconographical sources*

All four evangelists mention two thieves as having been crucified together with Christ. Matthew and Mark also relate that they had blasphemed against Jesus (Mt 27:38,44; Mk 15:27,32). The story of the thief who repented at the moment of death is only found in Luke (23:32-33, 39-40), while the *crucifragio* is mentioned by John alone (19:32).

The apocryphal accounts take their inspiration from Luke and develop the theme of the "good thief and the bad thief". Seeking to make the Evangelist's narrative complete, they present us with folkloric details on their origin and destinies.

In texts such as the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*, the apocryphal *Gospel of John*, the *Miracles of Jesus*, the *Vision of Theophilus*, present in the Ethiopian literary tradition, as well as in the recension B of the *Acta Pilati*, in the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea* and in the *Book of the Bee*, it is reported that during the Flight into Egypt the "good highwayman" protected the Holy Family and was promised admission to paradise after the Crucifixion.¹

* Abbreviations:

- BL British Library, London;
- BN Bibliothèque nationale, Paris;
- CCSL Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, Turnhout;
- CSCO Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Louvain;
- CSEL Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, Wien;
- DACL Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de la liturgie, Paris;
- IES Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa;
- PG Patrologiae cursus completus, series graeca, ed. J-P. Migne, Paris;
- PL Patrologiae cursus completus, series latina, ed. J-P. Migne, Paris;
- PO Patrologia Orientalis, Paris, Turnhout;
- SCh Sources chrétiennes, Paris;

¹ **Arabic Infancy Gospel:** K. von Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, Leipzig 1876, p. 181-209; *Evangelies apocryphes*, ed. & transl. Ch. Michel & P. Peeters, II, Paris 1914, p. 26-28;

Gospel of John: O. Löfgren, *Det apokryfiska Johannesevangeliet*, Stockholm 1967, p. 30-32; L. Moraldi, *Vangelo arabo apocrifo dell'apostolo Giovanni da un manoscritto della Biblioteca Ambrosiana*, Milano 1991, p. 68-69.

Miracles of Jesus: S. Grébaut, *Les miracles de Jésus*, PO 12:4, (1967), p. 555-62, esp. 612-24. See also the text in note 117;

Vision of Theophilus: A. Mingana, *Vision of Theophilus: or the Book of the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt*, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 13 (1929), p. 401, 408-11; C. Conti Rossini, *Il discorso su Monte Coscam attribuito a Teofilo d'Alessandria nella versione etiopica*, *Reale Accademia dei Lincei: Classe di scienze morali... Rendiconti*, 5:21 (1912), p. 395-471, esp. 459-61.

Ethiopian painting illustrates these stories. We find them in a group of illuminated manuscripts containing the *Miracles of Jesus*.² In churches they are commonly placed on the south wall of the *mäqdäs*,³ as for example in Däbrä Yohannēs Kidanä Möhrät near Sokota⁴ (fig. 1).

In the *Acts of Pilate* and the *Narration of Joseph* we find the Good Thief acting as Christ's messenger: carrying a shining cross or a letter, he ascends to heaven, opens the gate of paradise to those liberated from Sheol and guards it from demons.⁵ In the Syrian text called the *Cave of Treasures* he is furnished with the

Acta Pilati: The redaction B of *Acta Pilati* identifies the leprous child healed by the water in which Jesus was washed with the son of the Good Thief, *The Apocryphal New Testament Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses*... transl. by M. R. James, Oxford 1953 (= 1924), p. 117;

Narration of Joseph of Arimathea: The *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*: Tischendorf, *op. cit.*, p. 495-70, esp. 460-64; *Apocryphal Gospels, Acts and Revelation*, transl. E. Walker (in:) Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Edinburgh 1870, p. 237-44;

Book of the Bee: E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Bee (Anecdota Oxoniensia, Semitic Series, vol. I, part II)*, Oxford 1886, p. 87.

The stories about the thieves found their way to the western literature as well, see for instance: *De institutione inclusarum* of Aelred of Rievault, C. H. Talbot, *The De Institutis Inclusarum* of Aelred of Rievault, *Analecta Sacri ordinis Cisterciensis* 7 (1951), p. 167-216; *Liber de infantia Salvatoris*, M. R. James, *Latin Infancy Gospel, A New Text, with a Parallel Version from the Irish*, Cambridge 1927, p. 120-126; *Pseudo-Matthieu*, see M. Geerard, *Le bon larron. Un Apocryphe inédit, Patrologia Sacra. Bibliche und patristische Studien für Hermann J. Frede und Walter Thiele zu ihrem siebzigsten Geburtstag*, II, Freiburg i. B., 1993, p. 361-63.

- 2 It seems that illustration of the *Miracles of Jesus* started at the beginning of the XVIIIth century. Most of the miniatures known today represent the so called second Gondar-school, cf. for example the following manuscripts: Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Ms. 913 – 57 miniatures, E. Cerulli, *I manoscritti etiopici della Chester Beatty Library in Dublino, Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali., Memoriae*, 8:11 (1965), p. 289 sq; Paris, BN, d'Abbadie 226 – 21 miniatures, C. Conti Rossini, *Notice sur les manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection d'Abbadie, Journal asiatique* 1912-15, p. 41-42; London, BL, Or. 8824 – 40 miniatures, S. Strelcyn, *Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts in the British Library acquired since the year 1877*, London 1978, p. 19-21; Qirqos Church, Tana – 91 miniatures, O. Jäger, *Ethiopian Manuscript Paintings, Ethiopia Observer* 4 (1960), p. 383-85 (= Gonder XXVI). A particular group of the miracles performed by the Child Jesus are included in the as yet unedited Ethiopian text *Nägärä Maryam* (Story of the Virgin Mary). The manuscripts of *Nägärä Maryam* are usually richly illustrated in the style of the second Gondar-school, cf. for instance Ms. London, BL, Or. 603, fols 158r-173v and W. Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum acquired since year 1874*, London 1877, Ms. CCXIII.

- 3 W. Staude, *Die ikonographischen Regeln in der äthiopischen Kirchenmalerei, Archiv für Völkerkunde* 13 (1958), p. 257, 262, 298, fig. 2. It is also the place for the miracles based on the *Nägärä Maryam* text. Iconographically most of the paintings follow the scheme worked out by the second Gondar-school.

- 4 The scene is divided into two episodes. The former depicts the miracle with the broken sword belonging to the Good Thief which was mended by Jesus. The second shows the Good Thief carrying the Child Jesus on his arms and mocked by the Bad Thief.

- 5 *Acta Pilati*, chap. X, and *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*, chap. II, see Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, (n. 1), p. 358-62, 460; James, *Apocryphal NT*, (n. 1), p. 161-65; *Apocryphal Gospels*, (n. 1) p. 241-43. See also F. Pasquero, *Il Buon Ladrone e la promessa di Gesù*, Roma 1947.



Fig. 1. Wall-painting, Däbrä Johannəs Kidanä Məhrät Church near Sokota

decree written in the blood of the Saviour.⁶ This episode also appears in the Ethiopian text known as the *Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth* and in the homily by the “Orthodox” on the *Crucifixion and the Thief on the right side*.⁷

These topics have entered Syrian liturgy. The *soghyatha* – dialogues in the form of a dispute between two people – on the subject of the “two thieves” and the “entry of the Good Thief into paradise” were sung and acted out in Syrian churches during Holy Week.⁸ They served too as a source of inspiration for Syrian painters. A miniature in the Gospel Book, London, BL, Add. 7169, from the turn of the 12th century, shows the Good Thief bearing a large cross in front of gate of paradise, watched over by an angel.⁹ The motif became part of the repertory of Ethiopian painting, as is testified by a miniature in the manuscript containing the *Dərsanä Mahyawi* (Discourses on the Passion for Holy Week), which represents Christ and the penitent thief each carrying his cross.¹⁰

In the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*, the *Arabic Infancy Gospels* and the

6 *La Caverne des trésors: les deux recensions syriaques*, éd. & trad. Su-Min Ri, Lovanii 1987 (CSCO 486-7, SSyr 207-8), p. 432-33, T.p. 432, V. p. 166.

7 *Le Livre des Mystères du ciel et de la terre (les trois derniers traités)*, éd & trad. par S. Grébaut, PO 6:3, 1980 (= 1911), p. 425 sq; cf. the manuscripts EML 2375 and 1584 in: *A Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts microfilmed for the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library*, Addis Ababa and for the Hill Monastic Manuscript, vols VI (1982), VII (1983). See also the text on Joseph and Nicodemus in the Ethiopian Synaxary, *The Book of the Saints of the Ethiopian Church*, [transl. by] E. A. W. Budge, Hildesheim 1976 [= Cambridge 1928], p. 1182.

8 *Soghita* über die beiden Räuber (in:) B. Kirschner, *Alphabetische Akrosticha in der syrischen Kirchenpoesie*, *Oriens Christianus* 6 (1906), p. 1-67; 7 (1907), p. 254-91; F. Graffin, *La soghita du chérubin et du larron*, *L'Orient Syrien* 12 (1967), p. 481-90. English translation by S. Brock (in:) *Soghiatha, Syriac Dialogue Hymns*, Mannanam 1987 (St. Joseph's Press), p. 28-35. F. Pennacchetti, *Il ladrone e il cherubino, Dramma liturgico cristiana orientale in siriano e in neoaramaico*, Torino 1993. See also S. Brock, *Syriac Dialogue Poems. Marginalia to a Recent Edition*, *Le Muséon* 97 (1984), p. 29-58.

9 J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures*, Paris 1964, pl. 122:1; *idem*, *La Soghita du chérubin et du larron source d'une miniature du manuscrit syriaque du B. M. Add. 7169*, *Parole de l'Orient*, 6-7 (1975-76), p. 413-19.

10 CatCollegeville (n. 7), Ms. EML pr. 871, f. 58v, vol. III (1978), p. 194.

Miracles of Jesus, the Good Thief appears as a heavenly figure to the people guarding Joseph of Arimathea in prison. He is surrounded by light and sweet fragrance. Together with the angels, the cherubim and the Four Apocalyptic Creatures he belongs to the celestial court of Christ.¹¹ According to this first text his heavenly majesty is also revealed to John the Evangelist.¹²

The theme of “the good thief and the bad” has likewise provided material for a number of homilies and sermons written for use on Good Friday,¹³ as well as for the religious chants and hymns.¹⁴ In Ethiopia sermons on the penitent rob-

11 *Apocryphal Gospels*, (n. 1), p. 242-43; Löfgren, *Johannesevangelium*, (n. 1), p. 173-75; Moraldi, *Vangelo arabo* (n. 1), p. 199. The text of the *Miracles of Jesus* is taken from the manuscript London, BL, Or. 634, f. 181va, translation W. Witakowski: “And we saw on the right of him who was sitting on the throne one of the two robbers whom we had crucified together with Jesus, and in his hand he held keys. Then we saw the thief come before him who was sitting on the throne, interceding for the sinners, since he had found the presence and a great grace before Him”.

12 *Apocryphal Gospels* (n. 1), p. 243.

13 Hippolytus of Rome, *On two thieves*, preserved in fragments by Theodoretus, *Dialogus III*, PG 83, col. 285 A-B and Ps-Hippolytus, see *Un homélie inspiré du traité sur la Pâque d'Hippolyte*, éd. & trad. P. Nautin, Paris 1950, (SCh 27) p. 133, 185; John Chrysostom, *De Cruce et latrone*, sermo 1 and 2, PG 49, cols 399-408 and 407-418 and a latin version of the sermo 1: *De passione Domini VI, seu de Cruce et Latrone*, PL 39, cols 2047-50; *idem*, *In Genesim*, sermo 7 (= *Quid sit: Hodia mecum eris in paradiso?*), PG 54, cols 607-616; Ps-Chrysostom, *In sanctum Pascha*, sermo 52, Ch. Baur, *Drei unedierte Festpredigten aus der Zeit der nestorianischen Streitigkeiten*, *Traditio* 9 (1953), p. 109 sq; *In latronem*, ascribed Proclus, PG 59, col. 719-722, see also Proclus, *In Crucifixionem*, sermo 29, J.F. Leroy, *L'homilétique de Proclus de Constantinople*, Roma 1967, §§ 28-37, p. 211-12; Severian of Gabala, *De caeco nato* 5-6, PG 59, cols 550-54; *De cruce et latrone*, ascribed Severian, A. Wenger, *Le sermon 80 de la collection augustinienne de Mai*, restitué à Sévérien de Gabala, *Augustinus magister*, I, Paris 1955, p. 177-82; Eusebius of Alexandria (Johannes Notarius?), *De Passio Domini*, sermo 4, PG 62, cols 721-24; J. Simon, *Homélie copte inédite sur S. Michel et le Bon Larron* attribuée à S. Jean Chrysostome, *Orientalia* 3 (1934), p. 217-34; F. Rilliet, *Un homélie Pseudo-Chrysostomienne sur le dernier samedi de carême*, *Rivista degli studi orientali* 54 (1980), p. 18-22; A homily attributed to Ephraem Syrus by Assemani, J. S. et St. Ev. Assemani, *S.P.N. Ephraem Syri opera omnia graeca*, t. III, p. 471-76. See also D. Hemmerdinger-Iliadou, *Sermon grec inédit de S. Ephrem sur le Bon Larron*, *Analecta Bollandiana* 85 (1967), p. 420-39; M. van Esbroeck, *Un homélie inédite éphrémiennne sur le bon larron en grec, géorgien et arabe*, *Analecta Bollandiana* 101 (1983), p. 355-62, (here the list of 15 textes); Jacob of Serugh: *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, ed. P. Bedjan, Paris 1910, “*On the Robber of the right side*” t. II, p. 428-46 and “*On the cherub and the Robber*”, t. V, p. 658-687; A. Mingana, *Narsai Doctoris Syri, Homiliae et Carmina*, Mosul 1905, t. II, p. 327-408. On the homilies of Jacob of Serugh and Narsai, J. B. Glenthøj, *The Cross and Paradise – the Robber and the Cherub in Dialogue* (in:) *In the Last Days on Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic and its Period*, Århus 1994, p. 60-77, (Festschrift B. Otzen) where the author gives the synopsis of the homilies. Among the Latin Fathers see at the first place Maximus of Turin, *De latrone*, sermo 74 et 75, *Maximi Episcopi Taurinensis, Sermones*, ed. A. Mutzenbecker, Turnhout 1962 (CCSL 23), p. 309-315; Eusebius of Galia, *De latrone beato*, homily 24, Eusebius Gallicianus, *Collectio Homiliarum*, ed. F. Glorie, Turnhout 1967, (CCSL 101), p. 279-90.

14 H. Junker, *Koptische Poesie des 10. Jahrhunderts*, *Oriens Christianus* 6 (1906), p. 319-411; Romanos Melodos, *Hymne 39: “Adoration of the cross”*, *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes*, éd. J. Grosdidier de Matons, vol. IV, Paris 1967, (SCh 128), p. 326-53. Severus of Antioch, *Hymnus on the Robber*, James of Edessa: *The Hymns of Severus of Antioch and others: Syriac version*, ed. & trans., E. W. Brooks, PO 6:1 (1909), p. 108 sq.

ber attributed to various authors are included in different collections of homilies.¹⁵

On the basis of these plentiful texts, the Good Thief carrying the cross becomes a permanent feature of the image of paradise. An early example, from the middle of the 9th century, is found in the Cappadocian church of St. Theodore near Ortahisar. The robber is depicted as a young man wearing a loincloth, half hidden by a big tree. Beside him stand the patriarchs who clutch the souls of the righteous to their breasts, holy Sion and probably St. Stephen the protomartyr.¹⁶ From the 11th century onwards this image of paradise including the Good Thief becomes part of the complex programme of the Last Judgement.¹⁷ A prime ex-



Fig. 2. Mosaic, Torcello, Basilica

15 Cf. the following manuscripts: EML Nos 411(4/d), 1763(63), 2140(9, f.120b), 2338(8), 2375(12), 2868(10/2), 3617(f.129b), 3625(f.123a), CatCollegeville, (n. 7), vol.II (1976), IV (1979), VI (1982), VII (1983), IX (1987); Paris, BN, éth. 146, fols 238-245, H. Zotenberg, *Catalogue des manuscrits éthiopiens (gheez et amharique) de la Bibliothèque Nationale*, Paris 1877, p. 248; Paris, BN, d'Abbadie 12, f.172v; C. Conti Rossini, Notice sur les manuscrits éthiopiens de la collection d'Abbadie, *Journal asiatique* 1912-15, p. 466; London, BL, Add. 16250, (*Gädlä Həmamət*, f.222), A. Dillmann, *Codices Aethiopici, Catalogus Codicum manuscriptorum qui in Museo Britannico asservantur*, III, Londinii 1847, p. 31.

16 N. Thierry, L'illustration des apocryphes dans les églises de Cappadoce (in:) *La fable apocryphe II*, Turnhout 1991, p. 230, fig. 13.

17 S.G. Tsuji, Stabilisation et diversification de l'iconographie du Jugement Dernier dans l'art byzantin médiéval, *Religion and Civilisation. Bulletin of the Institute for research of Christian culture, University of Sacred Heart*, Tokyo, 7 (1980), p. 20-70; *idem*, Destruction des portes de l'enfer et l'ouverture des portes du Paradis: à propos des illustrations du Psaume 23,7-10 et du Psaume 117, 19-20, *Cahiers archéologiques* 30 (1982), p. 23-24. The presence of the Good Thief

ample is the famous mosaic in the basilica at Torcello from the 12th century, where he is represented together with St. Peter and the archangel Michael¹⁸ (fig. 2). A picture of the Good Thief, Christ, and St. Peter before the gate of paradise – closed and guarded by a cherub – appears in a number of marginal psalters dating from the 12th and 13th centuries, e.g. Rom, Vatican Library, Graec. 752, where it is associated with Psalm 15, and the Hamilton Psalter (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett, Ham. 78A 9), where it is attached to Psalm 117:19.¹⁹

The images of the Crucifixion in late antiquity illustrate the narratives of the synoptics.²⁰ Some, following Matthew and Mark, show the thieves as two identical personages; others, inspired by Luke, use various means of expression to underline the difference between the two personalities.

The former tradition is the less usual. The thieves are shown alive, mostly young, beardless²¹ and similarly dressed, nearly always in a loincloth.²² They hang on their crosses in an entirely frontal position, either with their arms behind them and their feet bound by the rope – the “oriental” form,²³ – as for ex-

in the Last Judgement representations may be also explained by the fact that in the *Infancy Gospel* and in the *Miracles of Jesus* he is presented as a person particularly loved by Christ and one who intercedes for sinners, cf. Löfgren, *Johannesevangelium*, (n. 1), p. 175, Moraldi, *Vangelo arabo* (n. 1), p. 179–80 and above note 11.

18 I. Andreescu, Torcello: I. Le Christ Inconnu, II. Anastasis et Judgement Dernier: têtes vraies, têtes fausses, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 26 (1972), p. 183–223. The other examples see D. Milošević, *Das Jüngste Gericht*, Recklinghausen 1963, figs on p. 23–24, 33, 48, 62.

19 *The illustration in the Manuscripts of the Septuagint*, vol. III: *Psalms and Odes*, Part 2: *Vaticanus Graecus 752*, ed. E. de Wald, Princeton 1942, pl. XX and p. 12–13; Tsuji, *Portes*, (n. 17), p. 23–24, fig. 18.

20 The episode of the *crucifragio* first appears in western art at the end of the 9th century or at the beginning of the 10th century, even though the motif is of eastern origin, G. Schiller, *Iconographie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. II, Gütersloh 1967, p. 116 and figs 390–394. We know only one Ethiopian example representing this episode: a painting on canvas in the collection of the British Museum, from Mädhane Alām church in Adua, which has now disappeared (fig. 15). We may observe however that some Ethiopian paintings seem to take inspiration from European representations of the *crucifragio*, see *infra*, p. 220–21.

21 In early Christian art the depiction of aged, bearded thieves is rare. An exception is to be found on a Syriac silver plate from Perm (St-Petersburg, Ermitage), usually dated to the 6th century, cf. Schiller, *Iconographie* (n. 20), p. 92, fig. 322; to the 9th C dated in Darkevič & B. Maršak, *O tak nazívanom sirijskom blyude iz Permskoy oblasti*, *Sovetskaya Arkheologiya* 2 (1974), p. 213–22.

22 Here again the plate of Perm and the manuscript from Würzburg (see *infra* p. 219 and fig. 22) are exceptional. In these representations the thieves are clothed in tunics just as Christ is.

23 The oriental type derive most probably from the images depicting the thieves on *stauroi*, V.H. Elbern, *Das Relief der Gekreuzigten in der Mellebaudis-Memorie zu Poitiers: über eine vorkarolingische Nachbildung des Heiligen Grabes zu Jerusalem*, *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 3 (1961), p. 158. The other representations belonging to this type are frequent on pilgrims' souvenirs from the Holy Land such as flasks, medallions, bracelets and rings, cf. E. Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion sans Crucifié dans l'art éthiopien. Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Antiquité tardive*, Warszawa-Wiesbaden 1997, figs 5, 8, 11–12, 28–20, 23–27, as well as on the relief from Poitiers (Hypogée des Martyrs), Elbern, *op. cit.*, fig. 1. In this representation the



Fig. 3. Censer, Cairo,
The Coptic Museum



Fig. 4. Column of the ciborium,
Venice, St. Marc

ample on ancient censers (fig. 3),²⁴ or like the figure of Christ, with their arms outstretched and their hands and feet nailed – the “Jerusalem form” – as in the relief on one of the columns of the ciborium at St. Mark in Venice²⁵ (fig. 4).

Sometimes one can observe an attempt to enliven this extremely rigid formula: the bodies of the thieves, their heads or just their eyes being turned towards the cross of Christ.²⁶

Representations of the thieves as two identical personages appear, if only

thieves are nailed by the feet, not tied by a rope, the former being exceptional for the oriental type. The same pattern is used later in the Cappadocian wall-paintings in Kokar Kilise et Pürenli Seki Kilisesi, M & N. Thierry, *Nouvelles églises de Cappadoce: région du Hasan Dağı*, Paris 1963, pl. 60b, 68b, as well as in the same miniatures of Vaspurakan, Akopyan, *Miniatyura Vaspurakana XIII-XV v*, Erevan 1989, fig. 55, p. 94, fig. 17.

- 24 They originate from different parts of Christian Near East and in most cases were made between the 6th and 9th centuries, see I. Richter-Siebels, *Die palästinensischen Weibrauchgefäße mit Reliefszenen aus dem Leben Christi*, Berlin 1990. Fig. 3 shows the censer in the Coptic Museum in Cairo, found in Deir Amba Shenute Monastery near Sohag, G. Maspero, *Un encensoir copte*, *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* 9 (1908), p. 148-49.
- 25 E. Lucchesi Palli, *Die Passions- und Endszenen Christi auf der Ciboriensäule von San Marco in Venedig*, Prag 1942, p. 89 sq. The other examples: the door of Santa Sabina in Rome, the Rabbula Gospels, the painted panel from *Sancta Sanctorum* in Vatican, some Palestinian pilgrim flasks, cf. Schiller, *Iconographie*, (n. 20), figs 326, 327, 329, 324, as well as the plate of Perm and the manuscript of Würzburg already mentioned (n. 22). The Palestinian flasks which belong to this type represent the variant with nailed hands and a rope around feet, A. Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)*, Paris 1958, pl. 11, 14, 16, 26.
- 26 See for instance two medallions: London (University College) and Trier (Universität, Sammlung des Fachbereichs III), Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), figs 19-20.

sporadically, in later Crucifixions which remain true to early iconography. We know examples where the thieves are still alive, e.g. the Utrecht Psalter (Bibliothek der Rijksuniversiteit, Ms. 38), the Gospel Book of Angers (Bibliothèque municipale: Ms. 24), the Farfa Bible (Biblioteca Vaticana, lat. 5729), the *candelabrum* of San Paolo fuori le mura, the Armenian Gospel Book, Erevan, Matenadaran, Ms. 2744.²⁷ However in most cases they are already dead, e.g. *Codex Egberti*, f. 84v, or the manuscripts: Paris, BN, gr. 74 and Erevan, Matenadaran 6303, 316, 3717, 8772.²⁸ Their age, dress and position on the cross vary. In representations faithful to ancient iconography they are young, even boyish, fixed to their crosses in the frontal position, with their arms twisted behind them, as in the miniatures of the manuscripts Matenadaran 6303 and 316. In the Utrecht Psalter and on the San Paolo *candelabrum* their arms are behind them but they have beards and are wearing long tunics, which is contrary to what one would expect in view of the cases cited previously.

In addition there are pictures of the two thieves with haloes. One can envisage that in ancient representations such as a medallion mould (Brooklyn, Museum of Art) or the Berlin medallion (the former Kaiser Friedrich Museum), both from the sixth century, this curious detail arose from a misunderstanding of scenes with two saints, apostles or angels at the foot of the cross.²⁹ But it is difficult to explain its occurrence in the wall-painting of the New Church at Tokalı Kilise, from the 10th century, where moreover they are nailed to crosses whose forms are very close to that of Christ.³⁰ Later on we find thieves with haloes in a miniature in an Arabic manuscript of the 12th century, containing the *Infancy Gospel* (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Med. Pal. 387) and in a Syriac manuscript (Paris, BN, syr. 344) probably illuminated by an Armenian artist (fig. 5).³¹ These cases however can be explained by the influence of Islamic art.³²

In Ethiopia, the oldest representations, preserved in a group of Gospel Books from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries, conform to the model with two identical thieves.³³ Alive and almost without exception young,³⁴ they hang on their

27 Cf. Schiller, *Iconographie*, (n. 20), figs 359, 390, 391; *Armenian Miniature. Vaspourakan*, Erevan 1978, p. 3; P. Thoby, *Le Crucifix des origines au Concile de Trente: étude iconographique*, Nantes 1959, nr. 188.

28 Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), nos 37, 98; Zakaryan, *Iz istorii vaspurakanskoy miniatyuri*, Erevan 1980, figs 35, 36; Akopyan, *Miniatyura Vaspurakana* (n. 23), fig. 55, et p. 94, fig. 17.

29 Cf. Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), figs 17-18.

30 G. de Jerphanion, *Une nouvelle province de l'art byzantin: les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, Paris 1925-42, pl. 84:2.

31 G. Millet, *Recherchers sur l'iconographie de l'Évangile aux XIVe XVe et XVIe siècle*, Paris 1916, fig. 448; F. Macler, *Miniatures arméniennes*, Paris 1913, p. 25.

32 On an Ethiopian representation see *infra*, p. 224-25.

33 Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), figs I-XVI.

34 The formula with bearded thieves appears only in three miniatures: Zir Ganela, Arsima, Ġahġah Giyorgis, *op. cit.*, figs IX, XI, XII.



Fig. 5. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, syr. 344, fol. 4v

crosses in the “oriental” way, with their arms behind them and their feet tied by rope. Only one example of the “Jerusalem form” is known, namely the miniature in the Gospel Book of Qohayn, in which moreover the thieves’ hands are nailed to their crosses³⁵ (fig. 6). This miniature is in one more respect unique: here the thieves are wearing loincloths and pointed headgear.³⁶

Ethiopian painters of the early period depart from the usual iconographical scheme in which the thieves wear loincloths or tunics.³⁷ They prefer to show them entirely naked (two Gospel Books of Hayq, those of IES 2475, Däbrä Maʿar, Däqqi Däššəm, Boru Səllase and the Stockholm fragment), or else in short breeches (Gospel Books: of Zir Ganela, Arsima, Maryam Magdalawit, Däbrä Tənsaʿe, Ġähgäh Giyorgis and the London fragment).³⁸

Outside Ethiopia we can only cite two cases in which the thieves are naked: a miniature in a Georgian Gospel Book of the 12th century (Tbilisi, Academy of Sciences, Institute of Manuscripts) and that in 13th century manuscript of the Gospel of Nicodemus (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, Ms. 3442).³⁹ Whereas in these two cases the reason for the nudity of the figures is not completely clear, in the Ethiopian examples it results from the figures being subjected to a high degree of stylisation.⁴⁰ As for their wearing breeches, this would be due to the influence of Islamic art or possibly to a transformation of the loincloths; these were probably unknown to Ethiopian painters of the early period.⁴¹

The miniature of the Gospel Book from Hayq known as that of Krəstos Təsfanä represents the thieves in a very particular fashion. Although the placing of the upper parts of their bodies suggests that their arms are twisted behind them, their hands are at the same time seen to be at chest height, raised in the ges-

35 In the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea* is said that both thieves were nailed to their crosses. The prints of the nails of the Good Thief were visible to the people when together with Christ he came to liberate Joseph from prison, *Apocryphal Gospels*, (n. 1), p. 240, 242.

36 This detail which reappears in Ethiopian Crucifixions of the later date, see *infra*, p. 220–21 seems not to exist in the other iconographical traditions.

37 Long tunics are represented only once in the Crucifixion of the Paris Gospel Book, BN, éth. 32, Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), fig. III.

38 See n. 33.

39 *Georgian Manuscripts*, Tbilisi 1970, fig. 32; A. di Erbach Furstenau, L'Evangelo di Nicodemo, *Archivio storico dell'arte* 2:2 (1896), fig. 9. On the painted cross from St. Michel in Lucca the thief on the Jesus's right side is naked, E. Sandberg-Valalà, *La croce dipinta italiana e l'iconografia della Passione*, Verona 1929, fig. 119.

40 We can observe the same phenomenon, but applied for the figure of Christ, on two Irish pillars from Inishkea and Duvillaun, cf. F. Henry, *L'Art irlandais*, Paris 1963–64, vol. I, fig. 14 et pl. 51, as well as on some Irish stone crosses, e.g. Muiredach's cross at Monasterboice and the one called “the Cross of Scriptures”, the cross at Clonmacnoise or that at Dubecke, *op. cit.*, vol. II, figs 76, 93, 103.

41 Cf. the reproduction in colour in: *Éthiopie. Manuscrits à peinture*, Paris 1961, pl. IV.

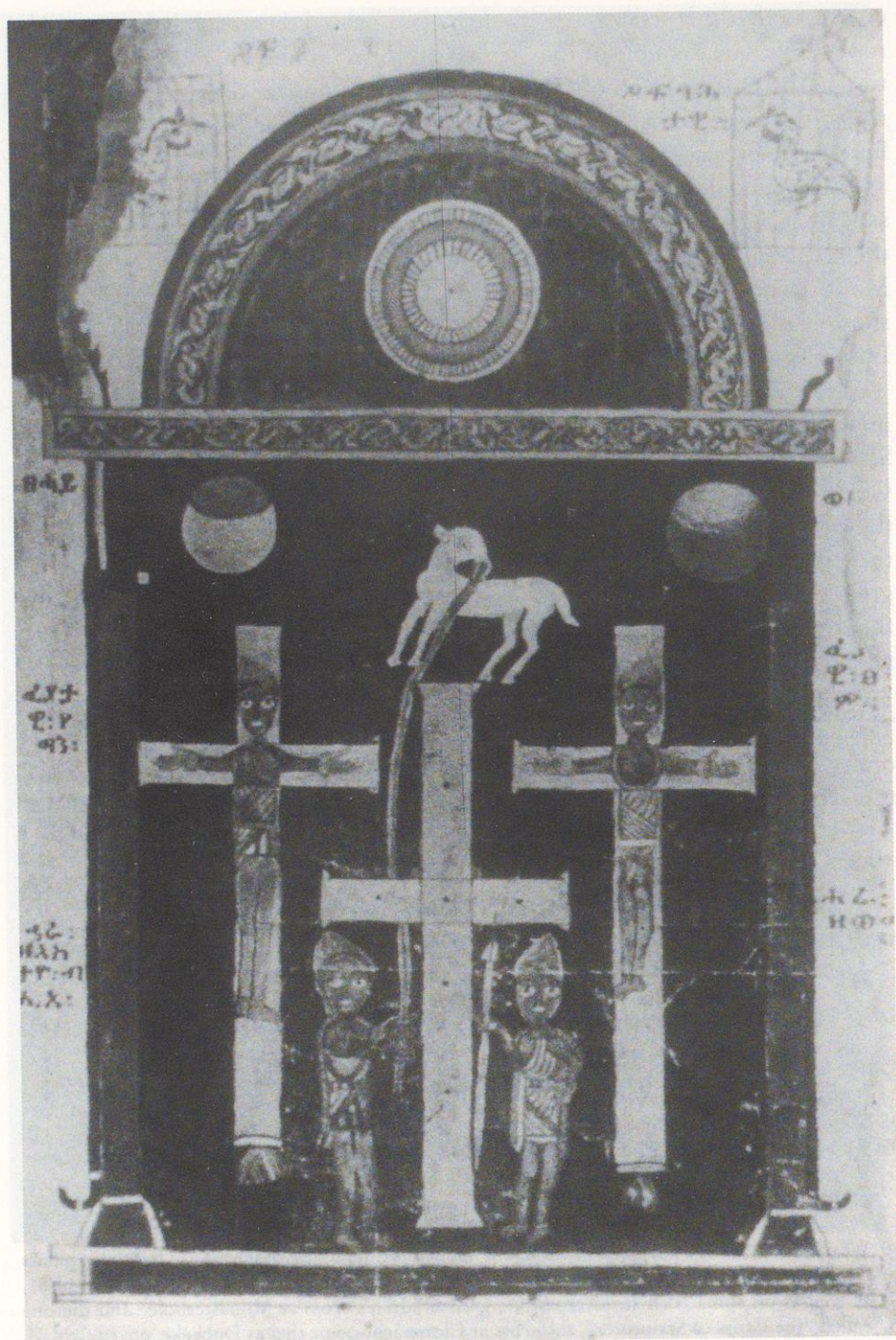


Fig. 6. Gospel Book, Däbrä Maryam Qohayn Church, fol. unknown

ture of the orans.⁴² We have been able to trace a similar depiction in Cappadocia, in Kılıçlar Kilise.⁴³

In the Crucifixion of the Däbrä Tənsa'e Gospels the arms of the two thieves pass behind the crossbar and their hands are joined upon their chests as if in prayer.⁴⁴

Both these gestures are combined in the tympanum of San Domingo at Soria. The Good Thief is shown with upraised hands, while the Bad Thief has them joined and lowered in what might be interpreted as a gesture of despair.⁴⁵

Thieves in an attitude of prayer are to be found in the Crucifixion scene of the Ethiopian triptych IES 4126, attributed to the 16th century. The young malefactors are dead, but their hands are joined on their chests. The impression here of persons at prayer is reinforced by the fact that their knees are bent as if in genuflection.⁴⁶

In the painting on cloth from Ahəya Fägg Qusquam, dated to 17th century, we see the thieves portrayed as in the relief of San Domingo at Soria, but with one difference: the thief with lowered hands is on Christ's right and the other, in the attitude of prayer, is on his left. Moreover each has one knee bent (fig. 7).

The gestures of prayer mentioned in these Ethiopian representations give us reason to imagine that in these cases both thieves were considered to have repented. There are however contrary examples in which both thieves are shown as being in the wrong. To express this the profile is as a rule used – a feature known to oriental art in general but employed with special consistency in Ethiopia.⁴⁷ The Crucifixion in the Kəbran Gospel Book is an ancient case in point. The faces of the thieves, shown alive upon crosses whose arms widen at their extremities, are dominated by a single eye and a pointed beard.⁴⁸

The significant difference between the ancient Christian and the Ethiopian depictions of the thieves concerns the form and colour of thier crosses. In Ethiopia they seem to develop a similarity to Christ's cross: which is remarkable since the latter is not represented as an instrument of torture – *crux realis* – but

42 Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), fig. II.

43 Jerphanion, *Cappadoce*, (n. 30), fig. 51:1. In Pürenli Seki Kilisesi only the Good Thief is nailed to the cross in this position, M & N. Thierry, *Cappadoce*, (n. 23), pl. 68b.

44 Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), pl. XII. Only the Good Thief is represented in this way on a capital of the cloister of Pamplona, J. Bousquet, A propos d'un des tympans de Saint-Pons: la place des larrons dans la Crucifixion, *Cahiers de Saint-Michel de Cuxa* 8 (1977), fig. 2.

45 M. Durlat, *Hispania romanica: die hohe Kunst der romanischen Epoche in Spanien*, Wien 1962, fig. 179.

46 *Religiöse Kunst Äthiopiens*, Ausstellungskatalog, Stuttgart 1973, p. 111 (hereafter RKÄ).

47 W. Staude, Die Profilregel in der christlichen Malerei Äthiopiens und die Furcht von dem Bösen Blick, *Archiv für Völkerkunde* 9 (1954), p. 116-61.

48 *Éthiopie. Manuscrits à peinture*, Paris 1961, pl. XVII.



Fig. 7. Painting on cloth, Ahəya Fäḡḡ Qusquam**

as a sign of his victory – *crux triumphalis*.⁴⁹ It is yellow (the colour which replaces gold in Ethiopia) with expanding arms and often adorned with precious stones.

The thieves' crosses are yellow in all the ancient miniatures, and in most cases they have widening arms. In the miniature of the Gospel Book of Krəstos Täsfaṇä we note a radical assimilation of the thieves' crosses to that of Christ –

** I wish to thank Mrs. D. Spencer for her courtesy in sending me the photograph.

49 E. Dinkler & E. Dinkler von Schubert, Kreuz, *Realenzyklopädie zur byzantinischen Kunst* 5 (1991), cols 15-18, 24-30.

all three are bestrewn with jewels.⁵⁰ It is difficult to find a close parallel for such a treatment as this. It may be observed, however, that in the reliefs of the ciborium of St. Mark and that of the Crypt of the Martyrs at Poitiers the crosses of the thieves have broadening arms, and that in the former case the cross of the thief "on the right hand" is decorated with a precious stone. On the Palestinian ampulla Bobbio 3 the crosses of the thieves are, like that of Jesus, ornamented with balls.⁵¹

It is not entirely clear why the thieves' crosses have come to be like that of Christ. It cannot be ruled out that it happened under the influence of a version of the legend of the Finding of the Cross whereby all three crosses were identical and a miracle was needed to identify that of Christ.⁵² Where the cross of the Good Thief is concerned, its assimilation to that of Christ may be due to the fact that texts mentioning the malefactor carrying on his descent to Hell a shining cross on his shoulder do not say whether this was his own or his Master's cross. As a result of this the cross of the Good Thief was in some quarters considered as a holy relic. According to one tradition the Empress Helena deposited it at Lamezis in Cyprus, but it is also venerated in other places, such as the churches of San Vitale and San Stefano at Bologna.⁵³

The thieves' crosses differ in colour from that of Christ in two ancient Ethiopian miniatures: in the Gospel Books of Boru Səllase and Ġähgäh Giyorgis.⁵⁴ In the former the thieves seem to be attached rather to the stakes than to the crosses as their crossbars are shorter than the thickness of the stakes.

One finds the thieves fixed to stakes in a group of ancient Christian pilgrim *eulogia* associated with the Holy Land: the ampullae Monza 6 and 12, the bracelet of the Fouquet collection, the Stuttgart medallion as well as in a number of early censers.⁵⁵ In Ethiopia this type of cross occurs in the triptych IES 3992, which can be dated to the 16th century, and the later wall-painting in the Church of Däbrä Sina near Gorgora, carried out towards the end of the 17th century.⁵⁶ In the Ġähgäh Giyorgis miniature what the thieves are tortured upon is simply the crossbar of Christ's cross; they have no stakes or crosses of their own. The

50 Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), fig. II.

51 Grabar, *Ampoules* (n. 25), pl. 34.

52 M. van Esbroeck, L'opuscule "Sur la croix" d'Alexandre de Chypre et sa version géorgienne, *Bedi Kartlisa* 37 (1979), p. 113 sq; S. Borgenhammar, *How the Holy Cross Was Found: from event to medieval legend*, Stockholm 1991, p. 36-46.

53 J. C. Thilo, *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti*, Lipsiae 1832, vol. I, p. 581 sq; J.-J. Gaume, *Histoire du Bon Larron dédiée au XIXe siècle*, Paris 1868, p. 310-321, esp. 320.

54 Balicka-Witakowska, *Crucifixion*, (n. 23), pls VII, XIII.

55 *Op. cit.*, figs 22-23 and supra n. 24.

56 S. Chojnacki, *Major Themes in Ethiopian Painting*, Wiesbaden 1983, fig. 39; W. Staude, Étude sur la décoration picturale des églises Abbā Antonios de Gondar et Dabra Sinā de Gorgora, *Annales d'Éthiopie* 3 (1959), p. 213-235, pl. XCla.



Fig. 8. Triptych, Kõbran Island, St. Gabriel Monastery

same composition is to be seen in the triptych of the monastery of St. Gabriel on Kəbran Island (fig. 8).

No other analogous portrayals are known to us. Nonetheless the idea of linking the crosses of the thieves to that of Christ to which they form pendants is realised for instance in a relief on a capital in the 6th century Syrian church at Dehes, in the Letters of St. Paul (Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M. p.th.fol.69) and in the Vaspurakan miniatures in the manuscripts Matenadaran 6303, 316 and 8772.⁵⁷ In an Irish relief in the church at Maghera, from the 11th or 12th century, the thieves are hung directly upon the arms of Christ's cross.⁵⁸

In Ethiopia the custom of representing the thieves as identical with each other continues in the 16th century. The miniature of the manuscript containing the text *Labä Maryam* (Lamentation of the Virgin Mary) from Bethlehem Church near Däbrä Tabor⁵⁹ is true to ancient convention. The thieves, bearded, wearing loincloths and shown in the completely frontal position, are fastened to their crosses in the "oriental" mode, i.e. with their arms bound behind them. Their feet are neither nailed nor attached by ropes. The inscription "*when they crucified the Saviour between two thieves ...*" expresses just what the image expresses – that there was no difference between the thieves.

The Crucifixion in the Amba Gəšen manuscript⁶⁰ is likewise dependent upon ancient iconographical tradition (fig. 9a). The thieves, alive, bearded and wearing loincloths, are turned towards Christ. Their crosses once again broaden somewhat towards their extremities, but they are brown in colour. Moreover the lower parts of the crosses are missing, giving the impression that the thieves are not hanging but standing with the upper parts of the crosses behind them.

A similar reduction can be found in other Ethiopian Crucifixion scenes. The diptych in the Gaduna Giyorgis Church on the island of Däq (lake Tana), in a style reminiscent of magical drawings, remains true to archaic iconography.⁶¹ The thieves are portrayed after death, but they are young, dressed in tunics and shown in the frontal position. They too are presented standing, since their crosses have been reduced to very short crossbars at chest height.⁶²

57 E. Baccache, *Eglises de village de la Syrie du Nord*, Paris 1979-80, fig. 215d; Karl der Grosse: *Werk und Wirkung*, Aachen 1965, Ausstellungskatalog, nr. 448; Zakaryan, *Vaspurakan*, (n. 28), figs 35, 36; Akopyan, *Miniatyura Vaspurakana*, (n. 23), p. 94, fig. 17.

58 F. Henry, *L'Art irlandais*, Paris 1963-64, vol. III, pl. Va.

59 J. Leroy, *La Pittura Etiopica*, Milano 1964, pl. XII; Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), p. 58-59.

60 This manuscript, which contains four Gospels, *Senodos* and some historical documents, is tentatively dated to the first decades of the 16th century, D. Spencer, Trip to Wag and North Wällo, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 9:1 (1967), p. 103.

61 E. Hammerschmidt, O. Jäger, *Illuminierte Äthiopische Handschriften*, Wiesbaden 1968, fig. 9.

62 We can observe the same phenomenon resulting from the process of stylisation on the Irish slab of Cardonaugh. Here, in contrast to the Ethiopian picture, the crosses are depicted on the chests of the thieves who are represented as standing, N. Åberg, *The Occident and the Orient in the Seventh Century: The British Isles*, Stockholm 1943, fig. 16. On a Georgian relief from Zebelda,

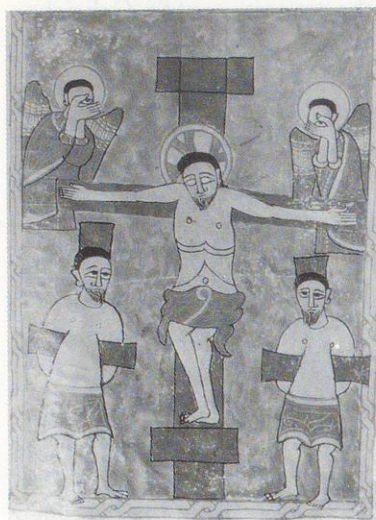


Fig. 9a Gospel Book & Senodos, Amba Gəšen, fol. unknown



Fig. 9b Gospel Book & Senodos, London, British Library, Or. 481, fol. 106r

The same diminution of the crosses is to be seen in the diptych IES 4055,⁶³ but here the thieves' arms, very long and twisted behind them, pass just below the crosspiece.⁶⁴ The figures seem to hang on the their crosses because the feet are crossed and turned inwards. As for the other details, the malefactors are shown young, dead and with large black eye-sockets. They are wearing short loincloths and bulb-shaped headwear.

The triptych IES 3972 has the thieves young and alive, but here they are given in profile.⁶⁵ Both of them look towards Christ. Dressed in loincloths and pointed caps they are attached in "oriental" style to crosses reduced to crossbars. Nevertheless their bodies are not shown from in front but in semi-profile, with their knees slightly bent. One can imagine that this is a reflection of Western depictions of the late Middle-Ages in which the dead thieves are portrayed realistically in agonised contortions and with their legs having been broken in the *crucifragio*.⁶⁶ This detail, adopted by Ethiopian painters during the 16th century,

dated to the 7th C, the thieves are presented without the crosses standing with their arms crossed in front of them and tied by ropes, R. Mepisaschwili & W. Zinzadse, *Die Kunst des alten Georgien*, Leipzig 1977, fig. on p. 244.

63 S. Chojnacki, Notes on Art in Ethiopia in the 16th Century: an Enquiry into the Unknown, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 9:2 (1971), fig. 12.

64 Cf. also the Crucifixion in the Sacramentary of Fulda, Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 381.

65 Chojnacki, Notes, (n. 63), fig. 9.

66 E. Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France*, Paris 1949 (5), p. 87 sq; Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), p. 159-161, 187-191, nrs 283, 322, 340, 366; Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 518. On

becomes a characteristic feature in depictions of the thieves up to the modern period. Occasionally it is misunderstood and transformed into a gesture of prayer. In fact a group of Crucifixions (e.g. IES 4126, 3992, 4463) shows the thieves kneeling rather than twisted in pain.⁶⁷

Depictions of identical thieves which can be attributed to the 17th and 18th centuries are rare. One is to be found in the triptych of St. Gabriel Kəbran mentioned above (fig. 8). Another peculiarity of this picture is the fact that the dead thieves, in each of whose faces a single black-coloured eye is the dominant feature, turn their backs on Christ. A similar composition is to be observed in the mural of the Church of Emmanuel at Balči, painted in 1867 (fig. 10). Outside Ethiopia this type seems not to exist. A partial analogy is provided by an ancient censer (Bagdad, National Museum), on which the thieves shown from in front turn their heads away.⁶⁸

On the silver-gilt hand-cross donated to the Narga Səllase Monastery by King Iyyasu II (1750-55), scenes of the Passion are inserted into open-work decoration in the form of stylised vegetation.⁶⁹ The theme of the Crucifixion is divided into three levels. The thieves, at the lowest level, are turned towards the left. They are young and dressed in loincloths and hang on their crosses with their arms stretched along the crossbeams. Their crosses are presented diagonally – an arrangement also found in a group of paintings from the second half of the 18th century. It is very likely that it derives from Western Crucifixions in which the thieves' crosses are shown in perspective at right angles to that of Christ.⁷⁰ Ethiopian painters, unable to copy this kind of drawing correctly, contented themselves with reproducing the diagonal crossbeams.

An especially interesting portrayal of the thieves is presented by a painting on canvas in the Rayfield collection, dating from the 19th or 20th centuries⁷¹ (fig. 11). The thieves, dead and young, are fastened to their crosses by a complicated construction made of doubled rope, to be seen behind their backs and on

the influences of European art on Ethiopian painting during the 15th and 16th centuries see: Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), p. 375-432. An Ethiopian representation which seems to be very close to this type of pictures is to be found in the triptych IES 244, dated to the 17th century, cf. RKÄ, (n. 40), p. 117: the thieves, already dead, hang on their crosses in positions which suggest the painful death: their bodies are contorted in convulsions, their legs are markedly bent and their heads are twisted.

67 Chojnacki, Notes, (n. 63), fig. 15; Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), figs 38-39.

68 Richter-Siebels, *Weihrauchgefäße* (n. 24), nr. 4, fig. 148.

69 *Koptische Kunst, Christentum am Nil*. Ausstellungskatalog, Essen 1963, nr. 504, see also *Les Dossiers de l'Archéologie* 8 (1985), p. 99.

70 See for instance Jean Fouquet, Heures d'Étienne Chevalier, Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), nr. 321 or the triptych with scenes of the Passion by the Master of Hamburg, Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 525.

71 *The Rayfield Collection of Ethiopian Art, Catalogue*, Art Gallery of York University, February 20-March 12 1978, Toronto 1978, nr. 7.



Fig. 10. Wall-painting, Balčí, Emmanuel Church

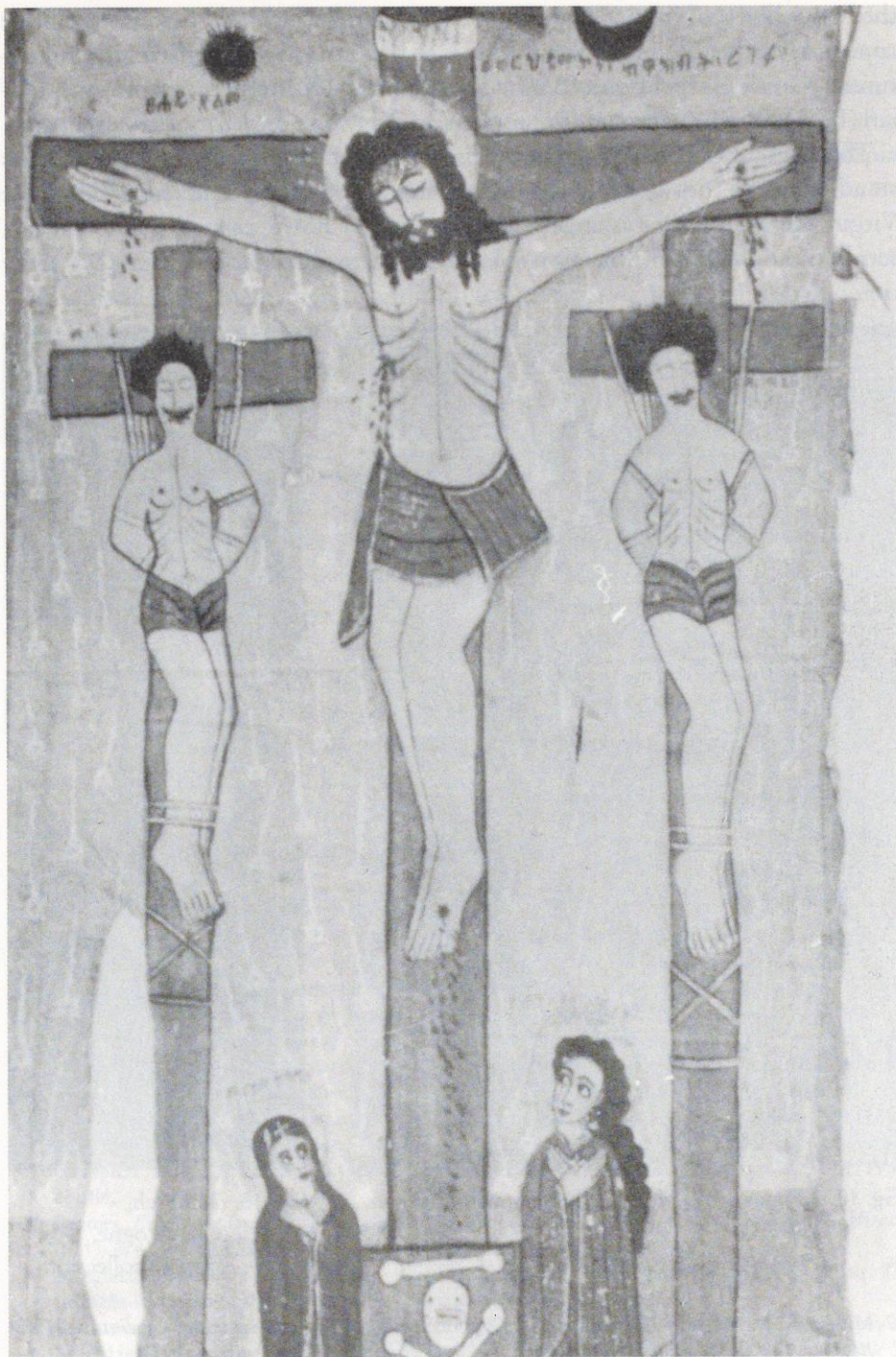


Fig. 11. Painting on canvas, Toronto, Rayfield collection

the lower limbs of the crosses. We know no parallel to this. However a double rope on the arms and feet of the thieves is to be found in two 12th century miniatures: a Greek Gospel Book (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Ms. gr. quart. 66) and Syrian (BL, Add. 7169).⁷²

The decorations of certain magic scrolls contain pictures of two persons standing at the foot of the cross. Most often these are interpreted as being the Virgin and St. John, or as angels or saints. It may however be the case that in a scroll in the Littmann collection (Mainz, Universitätsbibliothek, aeth. 33)⁷³ the

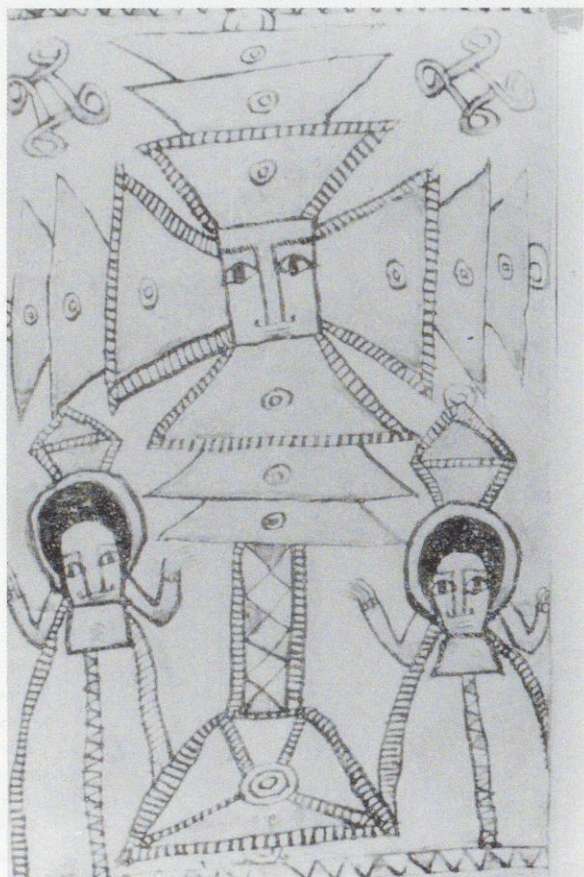


Fig. 12. Magic scroll, Mainz, Universitätsbibliothek, aeth. 33



Fig. 13. Triptych, Chevetogne, private collection

72 Millet, *Recherchers* (n. 31), p. 431, fig. 452; J. Leroy, *Les manuscrits syriaques à peintures*, Paris 1964, pl. 122:2.

73 E. Wagner, *Die Illustrationen der Äthiopischen Zauberrollen der Sammlung Littmann*, *Der Orient in der Forschung, Festschrift für Otto Spies*, Wiesbaden 1967, p. 728.

painter's intention was to depict the two thieves (fig. 12). The figures are alive, young, shown entirely from in front with their arms raised. Their crosses are missing: conical forms visible behind their heads may be understood as pieces of headwear rather than the uprights of crosses.⁷⁴ It may be added that if our interpretation of the identity of these figures is right, this is the only Ethiopian representation of the thieves with haloes.

The second tradition, making a distinction between the thieves, is much more widespread than the former. In addition to the account of Luke it is based upon the apocryphal literature mentioned at the beginning of this article. In these texts the thieves are given names. In the early *Acts of Pilate* the penitent thief is called Dusmas (Dymas, Demas, Dismas) and the condemned one Gestas (Cestas).⁷⁵ In Syrian, Arabic and Ethiopian texts they are called Dumahos and Titos and their characters are transposed: Dumahos becomes the wicked thief and Titos is the good one.⁷⁶ In the *Vision of Theophilus* there is a supplementary detail – the Good Thief comes from Egypt and the wicked one is Syrian or Jew.⁷⁷ In an Ethiopian apocryphal passion gospel known as the *Homily and Teaching of Our Fathers the Holy Apostles* the brigands are named Awsemaby of Antihido, called Qwəstas, and Sälikonidaki of Ephesus, called Demos.⁷⁸

More detailed information on the two thieves is offered by the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*. The text underlines their dissimilar natures. Gestas had been robbing and killing travellers, hanging women upside down and cutting off their breasts. He had drunk the blood of children. Demas's crimes were not so frightful. He had robbed the rich but given to the poor. When he stole it was from Jews, among them Caiaphas's daughter.⁷⁹

74 Cf. the thieves' headwear in the painting at Ahəya Fägg Qusquam, fig. 7.

75 Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, (n. 1), p. 245. In Western Christian literature other names have appeared, for instance in the *Collectanea* attributed to the Venerable Bede they are called Matha and Joca; in the story of Jesus Christ by the Jesuit Jérôme-Xavier, Lustin and Vissimus. On the names of the thieves see primarily B. Metzger, Names of the Nameless in the New Testament. A Study in the Growth of Christian Tradition (in:) *Kyriakon: Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, Münster 1970, p. 89–92. See also H. Leclercq, Larrons, DACL 8:1, Paris 1928, cols 1402–1404; E. Rupin, La mort du bon et du mauvais larron, *Revue de l'Art Chrétien* 8 (1897), p. 119; Dismas and Gestas (in:) *Lexicon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. III, col. 342, vol. IV, col. 456; F. Zoepfl, Dismas und Gestas (in:) *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte* 4 (1958), col. 84.

76 Peeters, *Evangelies* (n. 1), p. 26–28, Moraldi, *Vangelo arabo*, (n. 1), p. 68–69; Grébaut, *Miracles* (n. 1), p. 612 sq; Metzger, Names (n. 72), p. 92–94.

77 Mingana, *Vision of Theophilus*, (n. 1), p. 401; Conti-Rossini, *Il discorso*, (n. 1), p. 395 sq. This thought is typologically developed by certain Church Fathers, see n. 87.

78 R. Cowley, The So-called "Ethiopic Book of the Cook – Part of an Apocryphal Passion Gospel", "The Homily and Teaching of our Fathers the Holy Apostels" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1985), p. 19.

79 Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha*, (n. 1), p. 460; *Apocryphal Gospels*, (n. 1), p. 237–38.

In the figurative arts the tradition that establishes the distinction between the thieves on the basis of legends containing their names appears relatively late. It is first observed in a Sinaite icon from the 8th century; next, during the 9th century, in the Gospel Book of Angers⁸⁰ and in the *Gerona Beatus* where they are called Gestas and Limas (fig. 23). Later it is the art of the provinces of Christendom that makes use of the legends. Thus we may read the names of the thieves on the wall-painting of the hermitage of St. John of Choziba in Palestine and in the Georgian church of Sabereebi in the desert of David Garedja, in the Vaspurakan Gospel Book, Matenadaran 8772, in the Coptic manuscript, London, BL, Or. 6796 and in the Cappadocian murals at Kokar Kilise and Pürenli Seki Kilesi.⁸¹

In Ethiopia inscriptions with the names of the thieves are uncommon. In the painting on canvas of Ahəya Fäḡḡ Qusquam, already mentioned, the thief to the right of Christ is called Tətos, the one on the left Dakrəs (fig. 7). In a 20th century triptych at Chevetogne (fig. 13) they are named Tətos and Du(ma)rəs. In the wall-painting of the Mādhane Alām Church at Mandaba (Lake Tana), also of the 20th century,⁸² (fig. 14) the names are identical to those found in the Ahəya Fäḡḡ painting.

In the oldest Crucifixions the righteous or unrighteous character of the thieves is associated with how they are placed in relation to the cross of Christ. The thief crucified on Jesus's right was regarded as the penitent, the one on His left as the impenitent. It may be supposed that this arrangement, unknown to the canonical gospels, has arisen under the influence of the symbolism of the right and left sides⁸³ and on the basis of a version of the *Acts of Pilate* which mentions this disposition of the thieves.⁸⁴ Therefore the thief on the right hand side, considered to be a Jew, begins to signify Jewry, or indeed the Synagogue, which refused to accept the New Covenant, while the one on the left, a heathen, signifies the gentiles, or the Church, which did accept it. This symbolism, already fa-

80 K. Weitzmann, *The Icons, I: From the Sixth to the Tenth Century*, Princeton 1976, nr. B 36; Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 390.

81 Y. Meimaris, The Hermitage of St. John the Chozebite, Deir El-Qilt, *Liber Annuus* 28 (1978), figs 12, 13; N. Thierry, Iconographie sacrée et profane en Transcaucasie. Caractères ponctuels des influences (in: *Il Caucaso. Cerniera fra Culture dal Mediterraneo alla Persia secoli IV-XI*, Spoleto 1966, p. 995-96, figs 21-22, 25; Akopyan, *Miniatyura Vaspurakana*, (n. 23), p. 94, fig. 17; A. Kropp, Die Kreuzigungsgruppe des Koptischen Papyrus Brit. Mus., Ms. Or. 6796, *Oriens Christianus* 3 (1928), fig. 1; N & M Thierry, *Cappadoce*, (n. 23), fig. 29, pl. 68b.

82 The paintings in this church were executed by *abba* Tāwāldā Bərhan.

83 H. Rahner, *Symbole der Kirche: die Ekklesiologie der Väter*, Salzburg 1964, p. 91-164; O. Nussbaum, Die Bewertung von Rechts und Links in der römischen Liturgie, *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 5 (1962), p. 158-71; U. Deitmar, Die Bedeutung von Rechts und Links in Theologischen und Literarischen Texten, *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Altertum und Deutsche Literatur* 80 (1969), p. 265-92.

84 Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (n. 1), p. 361.

miliar to Hilary,⁸⁵ Augustine,⁸⁶ Ephraim the Syrian,⁸⁷ and Hieronymus,⁸⁸ spreads through the iconography of Eastern and Western art.

The place of the Good Thief on Christ's right is important for other reasons. According to certain Fathers of the Church, the blood mingled with water from the wound in Jesus's right side had sprinkled itself upon the thief crucified to the right of Jesus and baptised him. These teaching is to be found in Cyprian, Hilary, Jerome, Augustine, Jacob of Serugh and Pseudo-Chrysostom.⁸⁹ It is often com-



Fig. 14. Wall-painting, Mandaba, Mädhane Aläm Church

85 *In Matthaeum* 33,5, PL 5, col. 1074A-B.

86 *Sermo* 218 and 327, PL 38, col. 1085A, 1451B; *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus* 124, 38:7, ed. E. Willems, Turnhout 1954, (CCSL 36), p. 341.

87 Cf. hymnes: *De Crucifixione* V:7 et VIII:9, G. Rouwhorst, *Les Hymnes pascales d'Ephrem de Nisibe: analyse théologique et recherche sur l'évolution de la fête pascale chrétienne à Nisibe et à Edesse et dans quelques Eglises voisines au quatrième siècle*, Leiden 1989, vol. II, p. 68, 82.

88 *In Matthaeum* 27, 44, PL 26, p. 221.

89 Cyprian, *Epistula Ad Iubaianum* 73,22, S. Thasci Caecili Cypriani, *Opera omnia*, ed. G. Hartel, Vinobonae, 1868, (CSEL 3:2), p. 796; Hilarius of Poitiers, *Tractatus in Psalmos*, In Ps. 65,26, S. Hilarii, *Tractatus super Psalmos*, ed. A. Zingerle, Lipsiae 1891, (CSEL 22), p. 266-67; idem, *De Trinitate* X,34, PL 10, col. 370B; *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, Epistula 58,1: *Ad Paulinum Presbyterum*, ed. I. Hilberg, Lipsiae 1810, (CSEL 54), p. 527; Augustine, *De diversis questionibus* 83, questio 62, PL 40, col. 53; idem, *De anima et origine animae libri quattuor*, Sancti Aureli Augustini, *Opera*, VIII,2, ed. C. F. Urba & J. Zycha, Lipsiae 1913, (CSEL 60) I,9,11, p. 311; Severian, *De caceo* (n. 13); Bedjan, *Mar-Jacobi*, (n. 13), p. 677-80.

bined with the highly developed theme of Christ's open wound through which the thief enters paradise.⁹⁰

In art exceptions to this "rule of right and left" are rare. We may call to mind the example of the door of Santa Sabina at Rome, two Sinaite icons, the mural at Pürenli Seki Kilisesi and a drawing in the Coptic manuscript, BL, Or. 6796.⁹¹

In Ethiopia the association of the thieves with their respective sides is very strong. In depictions they are as a rule distinguished by inscriptions designating them as *fayyatawi za-yaman* – "the thief of the right hand side" – and *fayyatawi za-dagam* – "the thief of the left hand side", or simply *dägamay*, the left and *yämanay*, the right. This indication is especially useful when the thieves are shown as identical figures.⁹²

We know of only two instances of the Good Thief being placed on Christ's left: the diptych IES 4132 and that of the Däbrä Libanos Monastery.⁹³ It is true that these representations lack inscriptions, but certain details seem to make the identifications assured. Thus in the IES diptych the thief on our right, unlike his companion, is alive, turned towards Christ and touched by an angel. In the Däbrä Libanos diptych he is turned towards Christ, who is looking at him – and he is moreover young and beardless, while the other thief is of mature age and has a pointed beard.⁹⁴

Of the ways in which the difference between the thieves is emphasised by purely artistic means, the most widespread is that by which the Good Thief is turned towards Christ and the Bad one turned away from Him. There is also a simplified variant showing the gazes of the malefactor directed towards or away from Christ. This iconographical type is grounded in first place upon the Lucan text already mentioned, according to which one of the thieves sets about insulting Christ while the other expresses his repentance and faith; by this act alone he obtained salvation and entered paradise before all other people, without need of doing penance. Several Church Fathers have commented upon this

90 J. Daniélou, *Terre et paradis chez les pères de l'église*, *Eranos Jahrbuch* 22 (1953), p. 455 sq; R. Murray, *The lance which re-opened Paradise*, *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 39 (1973), p. 224-34. The paper read by M. van Esbroeck at the III symposium on Georgian art in Bari entitled "Le bon larron et la porte du paradis" has not been available to me. See also supra p. 208-9.

91 Schiller, *Ikongraphie*, (n. 20), fig. 326; Weitzmann, *Icons*, (n. 80), nr. B 36 and B 50; M & N Thierry, *Cappadoce*, (n. 23), pl. 68b; Kropp, *Kreuzigungsgruppe*, (n. 81), fig. 1.

92 The same inscriptions are found in the Vaspurakan miniatures, Matenadaran 346, Akopyan, *Miniatury Vaspurakana*, (n. 23), fig. 55; Matenadaran 2744, *Armenian Miniature. Vaspourakan*, Erevan 1978, pl. 3. On the plate of Perm the inscriptions make a distinction between the thieves and tell of the thief "on the left side" and "the thief whose sins were forgiven" cf. Schiller, *Ikongraphie*, (n. 20), fig. 322.

93 Chojnacki, *Notes*, (n. 63), fig. 20. The only one existing reproduction of the diptych of Däbrä Libanos is the water-colour painted by B. Playne and published in: B. Playne, *In Search of Early Christian Paintings in Ethiopia*, *The Geographical Magazine*, February 1950, p. 403. The diptych is difficult to date. Most probably it was executed at the end of the 17th C.

94 On the signification of these details see infra, p. 230.

theme and analysed it.⁹⁵ In the Ethiopian Lenten Antiphonary we also find a text treating this problem; it centres on the idea that at the moment when the Good Thief was converted he had seen a sign sent by God.⁹⁶

In ancient Christian artefacts, such as the Palestinian ampullae, the Perm plate or a painted covering of the reliquary at the Vatican (Museo Sacro), the thieves are distinguished by their position with regard to Christ.⁹⁷ Nonetheless the Rabbula Gospel Book presents the relationship between the three figures more subtly. The Good Thief bows his head in a gesture full of humility towards Jesus, who seems to be looking at him, while the Bad Thief raises his head with a provocative air.⁹⁸ Later it is precisely the meeting of Christ's and the Good Thief's eyes which most often serves to point out which malefactor obtains forgiveness. We may recall the example of the miniature in the *Codex Egberti*, f. 83v, or that in the Chludov Psalter, f. 45v.⁹⁹

In Ethiopian art the establishment of the thieves' identities by means of their position with regard to Christ is first witnessed during the 16th century. A case is provided by the triptych IES 4126, already mentioned several times. It should be noted that this is seldom the only means of identification. Normally it is supplemented by other details having the same import.¹⁰⁰

95 For instance Origen, *Commentarius ad Epistula ad Romanes* 3, 27-28, éd. & trad. J. Schéner, Le Caire 1957, p. 164; Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10, 121, éd. & trad. G. Tissot, Paris 1958, (SCH 52), p. 195-6; John Chrysostom, *In Genesim sermo* 7,4, PG 54, col. 613; Ps-Chrysostom, *In Adorationem venerandae crucis*, PG 61, col. 747; Augustine, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, in Ps. 68,8, Sancti Aurelii Augustini, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, ed. D. E. Dekkers & I. Fraipont, Turnholti 1956, CCSL 39, p. 908; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, XVIII, 40,64, PL 76, p. 74. Through the Middle Ages the idea was developed according to which the Good Thief became free from his sins by the intervention of the Virgin Mary who reminded Jesus of his good deeds during the stay of the Holy Family in Egypt, L. Kretzenbacher, St. Dismas, der rechte Schächer. Legenden, Kultstätten und Verehrungsformen in Innerösterreich, *Zeitschrift des Historischen Vereines für Steiermark (Graz)* 42 (1951), p. 121. We can observe that even here the typology thief-Church and thief-Synagogue is possible, cf. supra n. 87, 88.

96 The thief on the right (said to the thief on the left): "Who has had pity on you, and who has made this clear, so that you may recognise Him?", "I have not questioned the Prophets nor followed the Apostles, but the Sun has given me a sign. When I saw, I belived. The power of the Cross has been my salvation.", *ῥωμα Δόγμω*, texte pour le sexte dans 3e semaine de Carême, B. Velat, *ῥωμα Δόγμω*, *Antiphonaire du Carême*, PO 32 (1969), V. p. 409.

97 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), figs 322, 324, 325, 329 and Ch. P. Moorey, The painted panel from Sancta Sanctorum, *Festschrift P. Clemen*, Bonn 1926, p. 150-67.

98 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 327; *The Rabbula Gospels*, ed. C. Cecchelli, G. Furlani, M. Salmi, Olten-Lausanne 1959.

99 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), figs 335, 392. This idea is developed in Ps-Ephraem, *In S. Parascenen et in crucem et latronem*, (in:) *Opera omnia graece et latine*, t. 3, Romae 1746, p. 475-76.

100 Cf. the diptych IES 4132, Chojnacki, Notes, (n. 63), fig. 20 and triptych of Chevetogne (fig. 13), the miniature of Ms. London, BL, Or. 639 (Miracles of the Virgin Mary) (fig. 17), the wall-painting of Dābrā Bōrhan Sōllase, see n. 106, the painting on wood from the monastery of Abṛāntant, Girma Elias, The Monastery of Abṛāntant in Waldibba, *Abbay* 8 (1977), fig. 9.

Apparently the identification of the thieves by means of their position was employed above all by the first Gondar-school. Later it was taken up by painters working towards the end of the 19th century and during the 20th. We can observe it on one hand in a miniature in the Gospel book, London, BL, Or. 510, made for King Fasilidäs in 1666, and in a diptych in a private collection in Germany,¹⁰¹ and on the other in a painting on canvas at Adua and a mural at Mandaba (figs 14, 15).

Note must be taken of the Crucifixion in a manuscript containing the *Acts of Michael* of the Gubaraya Giyorgis Church.¹⁰² Although of 20th century origin it relies upon ancient iconography. The thieves, alive and boyish, are attached to their crosses with their arms outstretched. They are shown entirely from in front, and only the positioning of their feet shows that the thief on Christ's right is turned towards Him and the one on His left is turned away.

The Ethiopian custom of depicting unrighteous persons in profile was applied to both thieves in a group of ancient representations. Later it was used to mark the difference between them, the head of the impenitent thief being shown in profile and that of the penitent in full face or in semi-profile. A good example of this is furnished by a 17th century hand-cross from the Däbrä Dammo Monastery¹⁰³ (fig. 16). Although both thieves are young and turned towards Christ, it is easy to recognise the penitent since his face is shown from in front. The other malefactor displays his profile with one great eye opened wide. In a manuscript of the *Miracles of the Virgin Mary*, London, BL, Or. 639, the thieves are dead and the Bad Thief is shown in profile with a black eye-socket¹⁰⁴ (fig. 17).

The difference between the thieves could be told by means of their age. In ancient art the Good Thief is drawn as a young, beardless man, or even as a boy, the Bad Thief as a bearded adult or an old man with grey hair. This iconographical schema reflects the idea that a young person corresponds to the Greek ideal of beauty being associated with goodness (*kalokagathia*), whereas an elderly or mature person denotes ugliness and perversion. Among the oldest examples illustrating this thought is the Rabbula Gospel Book. It recurs later in (for exam-

101 E. A. W. Budge, *The Queen of Sheba and her only son Menyelek*, London 1922, pl. XXVI and Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), fig. 56. See also from the same time the painting on cloth in the Bethlehem Church at Gaynt, W. Staude, *Une peinture éthiopienne datée dans l'église de Beta-Laham (région de Gaynt, province du Begemder)*, *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 156 (1959), fig. on the p. 67.

102 Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), fig. 221e.

103 *Koptische Kunst*, (n. 69), nr. 515; J. Leroy, *Éthiopie. Archéologie et culture*, Paris 1973, figs 89-90.

104 Other examples: the triptych of Chevetogne (fig. 13), the painting of Däbrä Bərhan Səllase, see n. 106.



Fig. 15. Painting on canvas, Adua, Mädhane Aläm Church

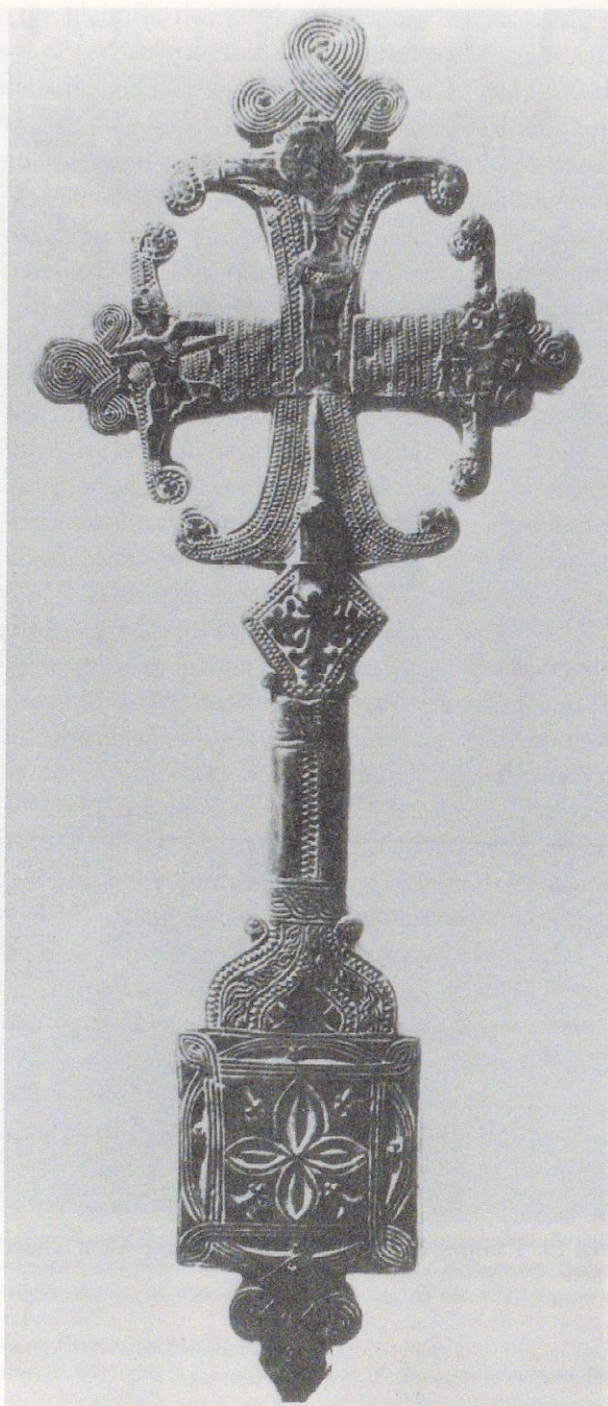


Fig. 16. Hand cross, Däbrä Dammo Monastery



Fig. 17. *Miracles of the Virgin Mary*, London, British Library, Or. 639, fol. 181v

ple) the Cappadocian painting at Kılıçlar Kilise and the Vaspurakan miniature of the manuscript *Matenadaran* 4813.¹⁰⁵

Over the centuries this point of view changes, and towards the end of the Middle Ages painters give expression to the opposite conception: the Bad Thief, ignorant and capable of impertinence even in the face of death, is young; the

¹⁰⁵ Jerphanion, *Cappadoce* (n. 30), pl. 51:1; Akopyan, *Miniatyura Vaspurakana* (n. 23), p. 91, fig. 12.

Good Thief, wise and experienced, filled with repentance and reproaching his companion, is perceived as an old man. This latter view of the age of the respective thieves prevails up to modern times.

When at the beginning of the 16th century Ethiopian painters started to mark a distinction between the age of the thieves, they adopted the ancient correlation. This is an astonishing fact, if one remembers that by and large they were inspired by Western pictures produced in the late Middle Ages. On a painted board of the 16th century, belonging to a private collection in Italy (fig. 18), the Good Thief is depicted as a little boy, the wicked as a man of mature age. This formula was abandoned during the 17th century because the first Gondar-school preferred to make the malefactors identical. The second Gondar-school took it up again, as is witnessed by for example the mural of Däbrä Bərhan Səllase at Gondar.¹⁰⁶ From then on it remained in use: viz. the Adua canvas and the Chevetogne triptych (figs 13, 15).

The other, less ancient correlation was also known in Ethiopia, but only in modern paintings executed during the last fifty years.¹⁰⁷ An interesting example is provided by the Crucifixion in the *Miracles of the Virgin Mary* from Harra Amba Mikael in Ankober, dating from the 19th century.¹⁰⁸ Stylistically this drawing can be linked to magical scroll-painting. The figures are rendered in such an abstract way that it is sometimes difficult to know whom they represent. The bodies of the thieves are extremely simplified, the crosses are missing. The penitent thief, placed on Christ's right hand side, has grey hair.

Another iconographical convention in current use shows a thief alive a second death. In ancient depictions the Bad Thief is dead, with unseeing eyes, that is to say, definitively damned. The Good Thief is alive, with open eyes, having won eternal life. In the language of the ancient Church he symbolises a humanity that is guilty but repentant and forgiven.¹⁰⁹ Romanus the Sweet Singer (*Romanos Melodos*) poetically develops the typological idea that the first effect of the Redemption is to open the spiritual eyes of the thief, which have been closed since the sin of Adam.¹¹⁰ This idea has an apt iconographical counterpart in a minia-

106 The wall-paintings are dated to 1815-25 but it is possible that they copied an older ensemble, G. Annequin, *De quand datent l'église actuelle de Däbrä Berhan Sellase de Gondar et son ensemble de peintures, Annales d'Éthiopie* 10 (1976), p. 215-225. The reproduction in colour of the Crucifixion, *The European*, November 29-December 1 (1991), p. 25.

107 Taking into consideration the fact that no photographic documentation of these paintings exists we reproduce here one example – the wall-painting from Qaha Iyyasu Church in Gondar, created around 1960 (fig. 19).

108 *Cat. Collegeville VIII* (1983), (n. 10), No. EMMML 2999, p. 269-299, E. Jenkins, *Four Miniatures from 19th-20th Century, Sawā – an African Perspective?*, (in:) *Aspects of Ethiopian Art: from Ancient Axum to the 20th Century*, London 1993, fig. 139.

109 On the texts which probably created a basis for this iconography see n. 95.

110 Hymne 39: "Adoration of the cross", Romanos, *Hymnes*, (n. 14), p. 327. See also Bedjan, *Mar-Jacobi*, (n. 13), p. 680-81. The other references: Hermmendinger-Iliadou, *Sermon*, (n. 13),

ture in the Chludov Psalter (f. 45v): the penitent thief raises his head to look upon Christ's face; the other is dead, his head and body leaning heavily forward.¹¹¹

It may be remarked that in time this conception too is modified. Crucifixions from the end of the Middle Ages depict the Good Thief as having died; nonetheless his reposeful body and head leaning to one side display dignified calm. Death is not here considered as God's scourge but as the soul's deliverance from the ties of the body. In this way the Good Thief becomes the patron saint of quiet, painless death.¹¹²

We might add that since the end of the Middle Ages the formula is standardised whereby these two iconographical conventions are superimposed. Almost always we find the Good Thief portrayed as a dead older man and the Bad as young living one.¹¹³

In the Ethiopian triptych IES 4463 the Good Thief has his eyes open and looks towards Christ.¹¹⁴ At first sight he seems young, with his small body and boyish face; but closer examination reveals him to be an old man with grey hair. The Bad Thief, shown dead, is with his black hair obviously a young man.

Seventeenth century examples on the same lines include two painted boards, belonging stylistically to the first Gondar-school, from the monasteries Abräntant and May Labata.¹¹⁵ In the first painting the thieves, in a "kneeling" position upon their crosses, are almost identical, but the one on our right has open eyes and looks towards Christ; the other, turned away, is dead. In the second painting both thieves are turned away from Christ, but the repentant one can be recognised by his open eyes and white hair. His companion is dead, with his head leaning on one side, his eyes closed; his hair is hidden under a turban.¹¹⁶

p. 432. The thieves represented in this way can once again symbolise the Synagogue and the Church, the first blind, the second enlightened.

111 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 335. The other examples: a Mosan ivory of Brussels; a wall-painting of San Urbano alla Cafarella in Rom; Hours of Salisbury, Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), figs 58, 87, 207.

112 In Gallipoli (Tarento), Bavaria and Austria. He is celebrated on the 25th of March in the Western Church and on the 23th of March in the Eastern; Zoepfl, *Dismas-Gestas*, (n. 75), col. 84; *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 3 (1963) col. 600; A. Bressières, *Le bon larron Saint Dismas*, Paris 1937; E. Krausen, *Der Kult des heiligen Dismas in Altbayern*, *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde, Festschrift T. Gebhard*, Würzburg 1970, p. 16; Kretzenbacher, *St. Dismas*, (n. 95), p. 119-139. On the Good Thief interceding for Porphyrius of Gaza during his ascension to heaven see a homily of John of Jerusalem, M. van Esbroeck, *Une homélie sur l'Église attribuée à Jean de Jérusalem*, *Le Muséon* 86 (1973), § 44, p. 295.

113 See the followings exemples: Barna di Siena, wall-painting in San Gimignano Church; paintings on wood: Master of St. Veronica and Master of Cologne, Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Schiller, *Iconographie*, (n. 20), figs 509, 521, 522. Padua, St. George, wall-painting by Altichiero; Prayer Book of Rohan, Paris, BN, Ms. Lat. 9471, Thoby, *Crucifix* (n. 27), nrs 277, 320.

114 Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), fig. 38.

115 Girma Elias, *Abrentant*, (n. 100), figs 9-10.

116 On this detail see *infra* p. 241.



Fig. 18. Painted wood panel, Italy, private collection

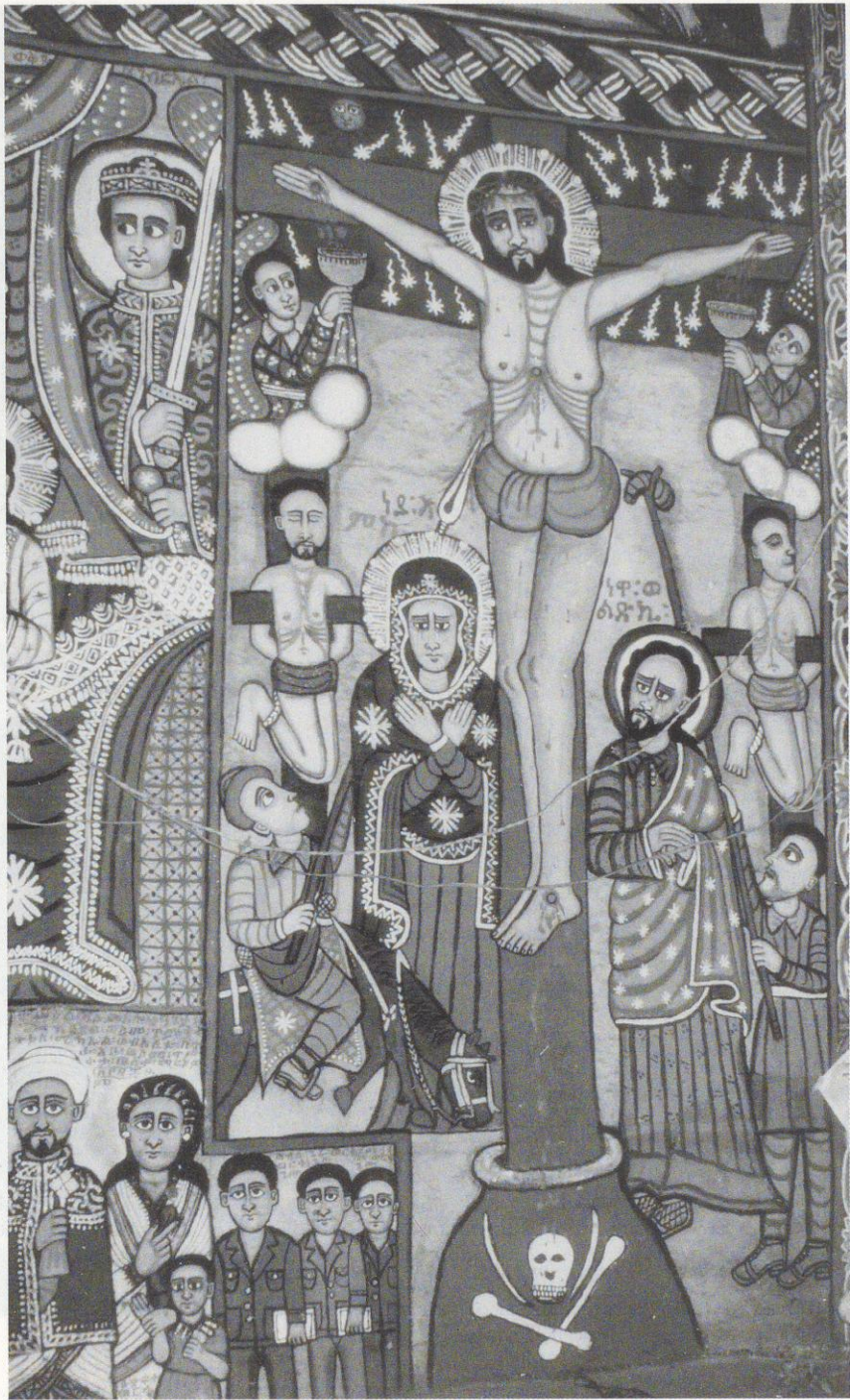


Fig. 19. Wall-painting, Gondar, Qaha Iyyasu Church

The formula under consideration is not foreign to the painters of the second Gondar-school. In a wall-painting in Däbrä Məhrät Səllase Church at Čäläkot (fig. 20) the Good Thief, an elderly man, raises his head to look at Christ's face, while the Bad Thief, a young man, is already dead, his head resting on his shoulder.

In a painting in the Emmanuel Church at Balči both thieves are turned away from Christ, but the one on His right is alive, the one on His left dead (fig. 10).

The tradition of showing the penitent thief dead and the impenitent one living, especially popular in the West, appears not to have been adopted in Ethiopia. In the repertory of Crucifixions known to us there is no example of this type.

It is quite possible that the persistence of the scheme whereby the Good Thief has open eyes can be explained by the fact that this motif was well rooted in Ethiopian tradition. The text of the *Miracles of Jesus* relates that the malefactor repented after seeing a vision of Jesus enthroned in the Kingdom of Heaven.¹¹⁷

Attempts to draw attention to the difference between the thieves and at the same time to underline the special status of the penitent one have led to representations in which the latter comes in some degree to resemble the crucified Christ. In the relief of the San Marco ciborium the cross of the penitent thief is adorned with a precious stone, just like the cross of Christ in the middle (fig. 4). In the tympanum of Saint-Pons-de-Thomières, (Hérault), (fig. 24), the Bad Thief wears a loincloth, his companion and Christ himself long tunics. In the miniature of an Armenian manuscript executed in the St. Anthony Monastery near Kaffa the halo distinguishes the penitent robber from his partner while in the Pürenli Seki Kilisesi painting the wicked thief is attached to his cross with his arms behind

117 "And the robber who (was) crucified on (His) right side rebuked him (= the other robber) (saying):

"Keep silent! We have been crucified for our crimes, but this man has no sin or guilt."

When he said this his eyes were opened and he saw the Lord Jesus sitting on the throne of His glory in heaven, and His angels singing glory around Him. When he saw this, he opened his mouth and said to our Lord Jesus Christ:

"Remember me, o Lord when Thou enterest into Thy kingdom!"

Said our Lord Jesus Christ to him:

"Behold, thou art worthy to see my splendour and glory. Truly, I tell thee that today thou wilt be with me in the Garden of Eden and join me in my happiness which thou hast seen today. You wilt be among the heirs. Go to the Garden of Delight, for, behold, I give thee the power to open its gates. If thou seest angels do not be afraid (either of them) or of the sea of fire over which thou shalt walk, because it cannot hinder thee. Know that today thou wilt be there with me, and have entered (there) before Adam."

Then He told him:

"O Titos, what I told thee on the way from Egypt has been fulfilled today."

The fragment is taken from the manuscript, London, BL, Or. 712, fol. 173va-b, 18th. C. Translation by W. Witakowski.



Fig. 20. Wall-painting, Čäläkot, Däbrä Məhrät Səllase Church

him, but the repentant thief is nailed to his cross like Christ.¹¹⁸ This latter disposition is mentioned in the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*.¹¹⁹ On the ivory plaque from Essen the Good Thief's cross is like that of Jesus edged with a ribbon.¹²⁰ The same idea is brought out in a miniature in the Gospel Book, Matenadaran 4806, where the penitent thief's cross is assimilated to Christ's by its limbs broadening towards their ends – and by the fact that the Good Thief and Jesus have similar faces and hair.¹²¹

The tradition of representing the Good Thief with features characteristic of the Crucified Christ seems to be absent from Ethiopia.

Finally we must mention some unconventional expedients by which to make plain the difference between the thieves. On the door of Santa Sabina the impenitent thief, turned away from Christ, is smaller than the penitent while on a capital in Pamplona the Good Thief is shown in an attitude of prayer.¹²² In the Syrian Gospel Book, London, BL, Add. 7169 the thief on Christ's right is touched by one angel while another seems to be moving away from the other thief.¹²³ On the Cross of St. Michael at Lucca the thief on Christ's right is naked. Given that this is the penitent thief one may surmise that his nakedness denotes his having been reborn in his baptism on the cross.¹²⁴

The most original manner of distinguishing the malefactors is on view in two Sinaite icons. The evil thief is shown with feminine features, long hair and a woman's breasts.¹²⁵ Kurt Weitzmann, the first to notice this, connects this peculiar iconography with a monastic environment which is hostile to women.

Also in Ethiopia painters use unconventional means to point up the difference between the thieves. These means are however unlike those enumerated above. In a miniature of the Arsima Gospel Book the thief "on the right hand side" has red spots on his cheeks and forehead; in that of Däbrä Tənsa'e the thief "on the left hand side" has a black furrow on his brow. In the manuscript London, BL, Or. 481 the Good Thief, distinguished from his companion by looking upwards, hangs on a cross forming part of the cross of Christ (fig. 9b).¹²⁶

Finally a cap worn by both thieves in the ancient miniature of Däbrä Maryam

118 H. H. Buschhausen, *Die illuminierten armenischen Handschriften der Mechitaristen-Congregation in Wien*, Wien 1976, pl. 54:143; M & N Thierry, Cappadoce, (n. 23), pl. 68b.

119 *Apocryphal Gospels*, (n. 1), p. 210; James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 164.

120 Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), no. 54.

121 Zakaryan, *Vaspurakan*, (n. 28), fig. 11.

122 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), fig. 326; Bousquet, Saint-Pons, (n. 44), fig. 2.

123 Leroy, *Mss syriaques*, (n. 72), fig. 122:2.

124 Sandberg-Valalä, *Croce dipinta*, (n. 39), fig. 119. On the texts in which such teaching is given see n. 89.

125 Weitzmann, *Icons*, (n. 80), nrs B 36, B 50 and p. 62, 80.

126 On the manuscript see Wright, *Catalogue of the Ethiopic Manuscripts in the British Museum* (n. 2), p. 1-6. We observe that this detail does not exist in its model – the miniature from the Gəsen Amba Gospels, (fig. 9a).

Qohayn (fig. 6), and later in two triptychs, IES 3972¹²⁷ and that of the Kəbran Monastery (fig. 8), becomes a sign of the impenitent thief, as can be seen in the triptych IES 3992¹²⁸ and that of Chevetogne, (fig. 13). In the course of time the cap is transformed into a turban.¹²⁹ Since the turban is worn by Muslims it has received negative associations and become the attribute of both thieves when regarded as unrepentant criminals, e.g. the mural from Qaha Iyyäsu, Gondar (at present in Paris at the Musée de l'Homme) and the hanging in the Betaləhem Church near Däbrä Tabor.¹³⁰ It is no surprise that there exist representations in which the Muslim turban is worn only by the wicked thief; witness the painting on wood of the May Labata Monastery.¹³¹

Of all the representations of the Crucifixion in Ethiopian art, the scene in Princess Zir Ganela's Gospel Book is uniquely interesting (fig. 21). The distinction between the two thieves is not, as in the examples cited above, limited to details which in principle might escape the onlooker's attention. Rather it is developed into a sort of narrative episode: the soul of the Good Thief is being protected by an angel and that of the Bad Thief seems to be in the process of being strangled by a demon. The accompanying inscriptions are as follows: *nafsa fayyatawi za-yaman zakama 'awd'ä mal'aka bəran wa-sallala bakənafihu* – "the soul of the thief on the right hand side when the angel of light leads it away and shields it with his wings", and *mal'aka səlmət zakama 'awd'ä nafsa fayyatay za-dagam* – "the angel of darkness when he leads away the thief of the left hand side".

The theme of the death of the thieves in the figurative arts is probably of oriental origin.¹³² An important part in its development can be attributed to apocrypha, particularly such early Christian apocrypha as the *Apocalypse of Peter* or the *Apocalypse of Paul*, which describe, often in a highly evocative fashion, the reception awaiting the souls of the just and the unjust after death.¹³³

Nevertheless this theme has seldom been illustrated in early Christian art. One of the oldest depictions is contained in the previously mentioned 8th cen-

127 Chojnacki, Notes, (n. 63), fig. 9.

128 Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), fig. 39.

129 We may consider the onion-shaped headgear in the triptych IES 4055 and in the painting on cloth of Abəya Fägg as a transitional form, Chojnacki, *op. cit.*, fig. 39.

130 J. Leclant, *Éthiopie millénaire, Les Dossiers de l'Archéologie* 8 (1975), fig. on p. 17; Staude, *Une peinture éthiopienne* (n. 101), fig. on p. 67.

131 Gigar Tesfaye, Abrentant, (n. 100), fig. 10.

132 Schiller, *Ikonographie*, (n. 20), p. 116.

133 James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 507-25; D.D. Buchholz, *Your Eyes will be opened. A Study of the Greek (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Peter*, Atlanta 1988; see also R. Bauckham, *The Apocalypse of Peter. A Jewish Christian Apocalypse from the Time of Bar Kokhba*, *Apocrypha* 5 (1994), p. 7-111. James, *op. cit.*, p. 525-55; C. Kappler, *Apocalypse de Paul, Introduction, traduction et notes*, Strasburg 1990; see also P. Piovanelli, *Les origines de l'Apocalypse de Paul reconsidérées*, *Apocrypha* 4 (1993), p. 25-64, where the state of research on this text is set out.

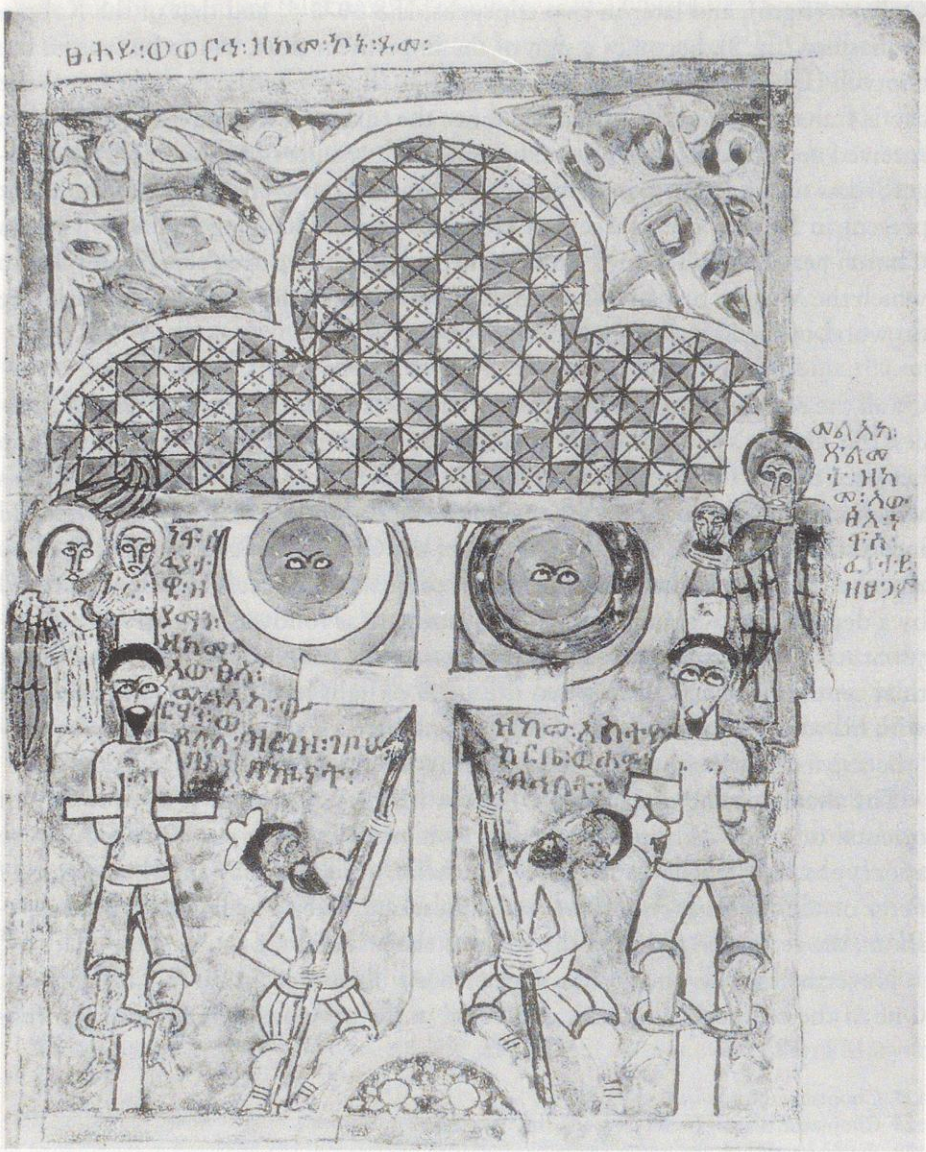


Fig. 21. Gospel Book, called of Zir Ganela, New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 828, fol. 14r

tury Irish manuscript from Würzburg (fig. 22). There one finds two angels with human faces and birds' bodies flying towards the thief on Jesus's right. This manner of depicting angels is altogether exceptional, and may have to do with the widely spread belief that the angels are the "birds of God".¹³⁴

Two black birds ascend towards the thief of the left hand side. One of them seems to be pecking him with its beak. In ancient Christian tradition various birds of prey were associates of the devil and of evil spirits.¹³⁵ It was also thought that they thronged the air at the time of the Crucifixion. A writing of Eusebius of Caesarea affords us a suggestive picture of this occurrence: Christ saw "with His inspired eyes – while His body was still hanging on the scaffold of the Cross – foreign powers incorporeal and invisible to men, spread throughout the air like birds of carrion and like wild beasts circling around Him ...".¹³⁶ As for the Würzburg miniature, it probably exemplifies folk beliefs, especially long-lived in Ireland, according to which demons appear in the form of black-coloured birds.¹³⁷

Another characteristic feature of the miniature under discussion must be noted: the two thieves are alive and the souls coveted by angels and demons have not been freed from the bonds of the body.

A century later the same scene would be reproduced in a miniature in the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by Beatus of Liébana (Gerona, Museo de la Catedral)¹³⁸ (fig. 23). The Good Thief is however approached here by a conventional angel holding a book. In the absence of a cross on its cover one must suppose that this is the book in which the good and evil deeds of the thief had

134 Even though the association of the birds with the angels seems to be quite natural (the wings, their dwelling in heaven, their song), cf. H. Leclercq, *Anges*, DACL 1:2 (1907), col. 2124, the angels-birds appear first in the art of the late Gothic, A. Rosenberg, *Engel und Dämonen: Gestaltwandel eines Urbildes*, München 1967, p. 32, 69. Another early example, apart from the miniature of the manuscript of Würzburg, is also of Irish provenance – the cross of Termonfechin dated to the 10th c, A. K. Porter, *The Crosses and Culture of Ireland*, New Haven 1931, fig. 98.

135 H. Leclercq, *Corbau*, DACL 3:2 (1914), col. 2912; L. Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ: la mystérieuse emblématique de Jésus-Christ*, Milano 1975(2), p. 45-67, 469-70, 857. A bird-demon called Reshab is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, A. Caquot, *Sur quelques démons de l'Ancien Testament* (Resheb, Qeteb, Deber), *Semitica* 6 (1956), p. 53-68. The bird-demons clawing at sinners appear in the Apocalypse of Peter, Buchholz, *Apocalypse of Peter*, (n. 133), p. 218-19.

136 *Demonstratio evangelica* X,8,73, Eusebius, *Die Demonstratio evangelica*, hrsg. v. I.A. Heikel, Leipzig 1913, p. 485.

137 L. Gaugoud, The Earliest Irish Representations of the Crucifixion, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 50 (1920), p. 133-34.

138 Beato de Liébana, *Comentario al Apocalipsis: edición, facsimil del codice de Gerona Apocalypsin libri duodecim*, Codex Gerundensis A. D. 975, Madrid 1975.



Fig. 22. Letters of St. Paul, Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, M.p. fol. 69, fol. 7r

been recorded – a common motif in the context of the judgement of the dead.¹³⁹

On one arm of the Bad Thief's cross stands a devil, who touches his head with a fork. This motif is known from the *Apocalypse of Paul*, where devils are said to poke at souls with forks, pointed sticks and hooks.¹⁴⁰ The devil arriving specifically to get the evil thief's soul and trap it appears in the Crucifixion story of the *Narration of Joseph of Arimathea*.¹⁴¹

On the Pamplona capital only devils accompany the two thieves.¹⁴² The presence of two evil spirits can be explained if one posits that the scene is set before the conversion of one of the thieves. It is equally possible that the artist has followed the tradition which considers both thieves unrepentant evil-doers.

The iconographical convention described above still survived in the thirteenth century. On the tympan of Saint-Pons-de-Thomières¹⁴³ (fig. 24), an angel stands beneath the crossbeam of the Good Thief. On the opposite side, close to the other malefactor, a devil is seen in a half-crouching position. His face is seen to be gashed,¹⁴⁴ a detail likely to be derived from an ancient apocryphal text. Sinners with gashed faces and bodies are mentioned in the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Paul*.¹⁴⁵

In a miniature of the Syrian Gospel Book, London, BL, Add. 7169, each thief is accompanied by an angel.¹⁴⁶ It may be that these are the guardian angels which according to some apocalyptic texts accompany a dying person. They assist the soul to separate itself from the body and escort it to the Judgement of God which takes place immediately after death. Before the divine tribunal it is their duty to report the persons earthly deeds, and they may intercede for him. After judgement the righteous soul is handed over by its angel to St. Michael, who takes it to paradise; the impious soul is abandoned by its angel and brought by the devil to hell.¹⁴⁷ We have already seen that in the Syrian miniature the thief "of the right hand side" is being touched by one angel, while another seems to be

139 Ps. 69(68),29; 109(108),14; Es 65,5; Ne 13,14; Ml 3,16; Dn 7,10; Ap 20,12; I Enoch 81,4, and 89, 61-77, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, Louvain 1983, I, p. 59, 68-69. See also P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, Tübingen 1934, p. 290-93.

140 James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 543. We find them in the textes of Falascha, in the *Book of Angels* and the *Apocalypse of Gorgorios*, *Falascha Anthology*, trans. W. Leslau, New Heaven 1951, p. 55, 82.

141 *Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 241; James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 163.

142 Bousquet, Saint-Pons, (n. 44), fig. 2.

143 Bousquet, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

144 *Op. cit.*, p. 31.

145 Buchholtz, *Apocalypse of Peter*, (n. 133), p. 221; James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 543.

146 Leroy, *Mss syriaques*, (n. 72), pl. 122:2.

147 See primarily the *Apocalypse of Paul*. On the other texts where this topic is present, Piovanelli, *L'Apocalypse de Paul*, (n. 133), p. 56, n. 89; J. Danielou, *Les Anges et leurs missions*, Chevetogne 1953, p. 127-140.

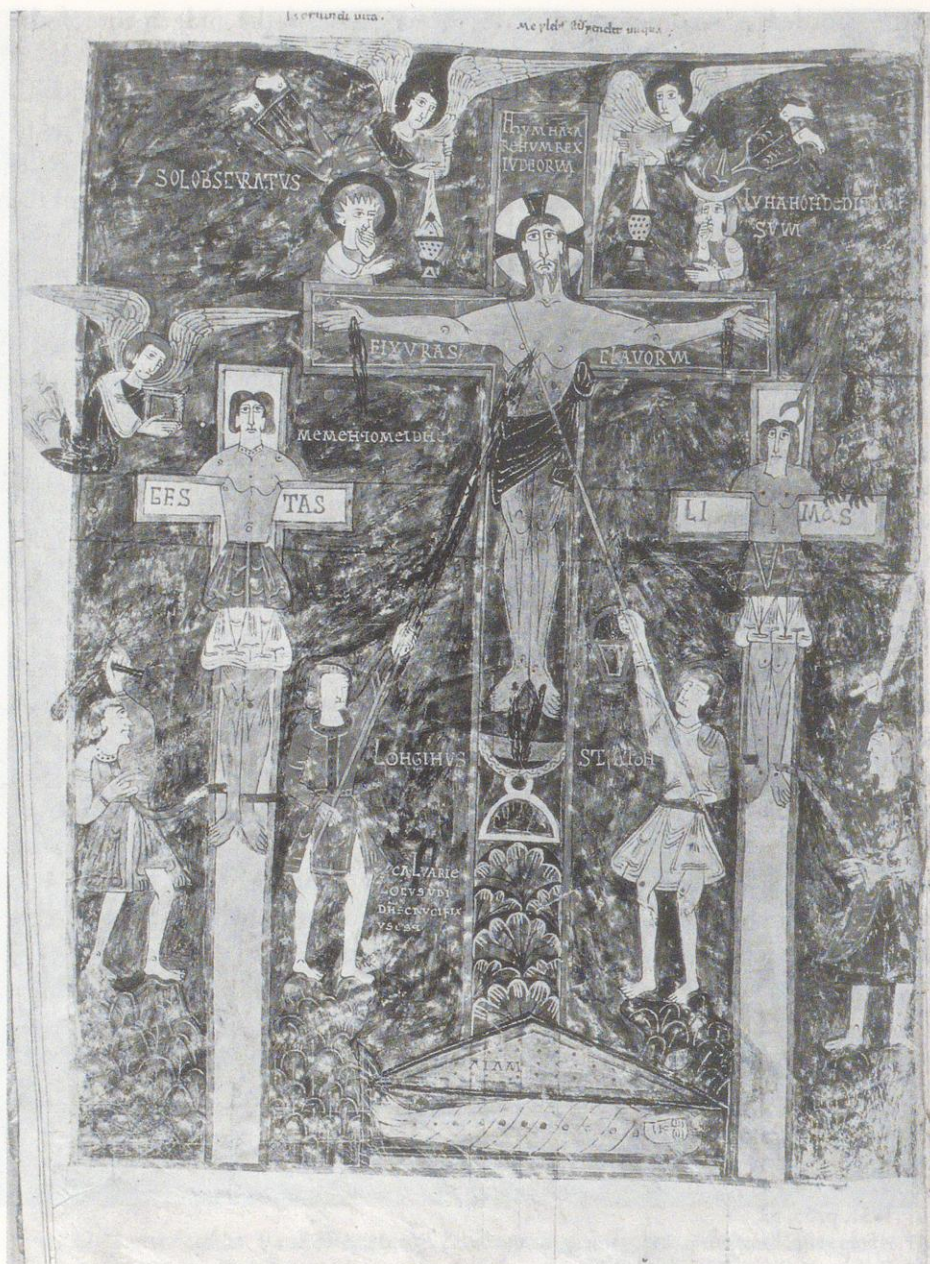


Fig. 23. Beatus-Apocalypse, Gerona, Museo de la Catedral, fol. 16v



Fig. 24. Tympan, Saint-Pons-de-Thomières, Hérault ***

departing from the other thief. It can therefore not be ruled out that the painter of this picture may have been inspired by the texts mentioned above.

The scene of the death of the thieves was transformed, it appears, during the 13th and 14th centuries, for the Crucifixion became more dramatic and more spectacular. The changes which then took place were based on mysteries and mystical writings which elaborated freely marginal themes in the accounts of the Gospels.¹⁴⁸

We have previously remarked that at this period, unlike that immediately before, Crucifixion scenes show the penitent thief as an old man, dead and with a tranquil expression, and his companion as a young man, living, racked by convulsions, his face pale with horror. It is exactly this kind of depiction into which an angel and a demon were introduced in the rôle of psychogogues. The former fishes with a line for the soul of the repentant thief in order to take it to heaven, the latter grasps at the robber's soul which is about to go down to hell.

There is no doubt that these images have been shaped under the influence of apocalyptic texts that emphasise the difference between the soul of a just man and that of an unjust. The former is gathered up by good angels who embrace it and instil it with courage. It is brought to heaven and presented before God. The

*** I wish to thank Mr. T. Cynkin for his courtesy in providing me with this photograph.

148 Schiller, *Iconography*, (n. 20), p. 151 sq; K. Yung, *The Drama of the Mediaeval Church*, Oxford 1933, t. I, p. 492-530.

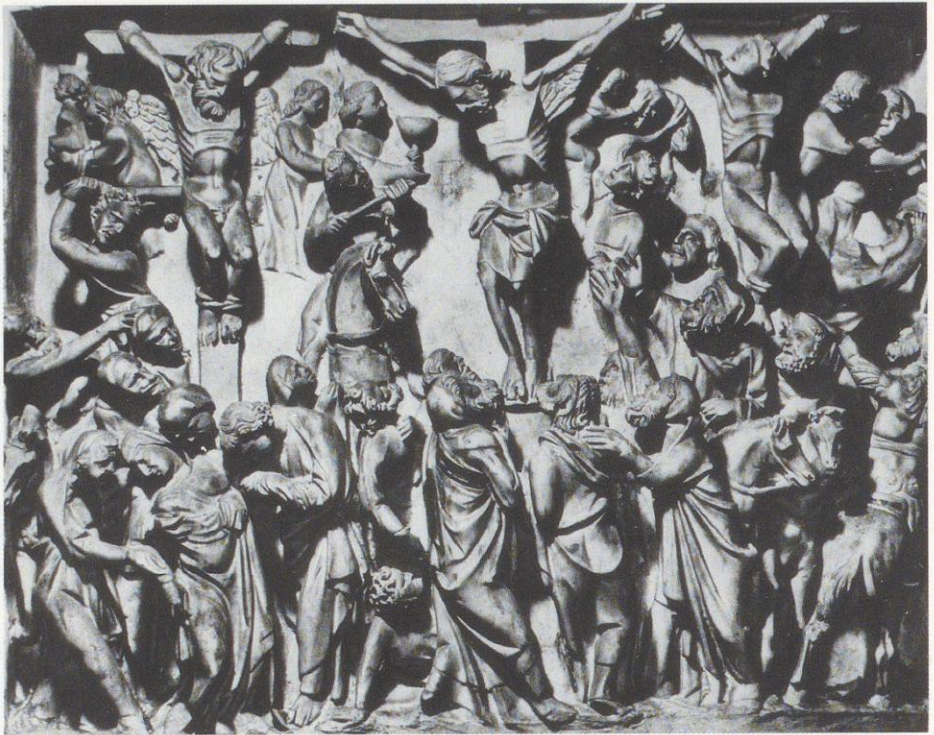


Fig. 25. Cathedra, Giovanni Pisano, Pisa, Cathedral

latter is surrounded by evil spirits who wish to transport it immediately to hell. If it is allowed into heaven to be judged this is solely due to the intervention of its guardian angel. Having been condemned, lamented by the heavenly beings, it is finally given over to the devils.¹⁴⁹

An early representation of this kind forms part of the Crucifixion on the cathedra at Pisa, the work of Giovanni Pisano in 1304¹⁵⁰ (fig. 25). The righteous thief is depicted here as an old man. He has died and his soul is being taken to heaven by an angel. The wicked thief, a young man, looks upwards and cries out in horror. His soul is hanging from the claws of a demon who, it is worth noting, has only one arm and only one leg. He and his prey are being pushed by another angel.

Among the paintings which very early on exploited the theme of the death of the thieves the following Crucifixions should be included: that in Pamplona Ca-

149 James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 531-33. See also Origen, *Commentarium in Epistolam B. Pauli Ad Romanos*, Lib. VII, 12, PG 14, col. 1135A; Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, in Ps 44, PG 23, col. 404C; Ephraem, *Hymnes de Paradiso*, VI, 24, Éphrem de Nisibe, *Hymnes sur le Paradis*, trad. R. Lavenant, Paris 1968, (Sch 137), p. 91.

150 M. Ayrton, *Giovanni Pisano, Sculptor*, London 1969, p. 157-169.

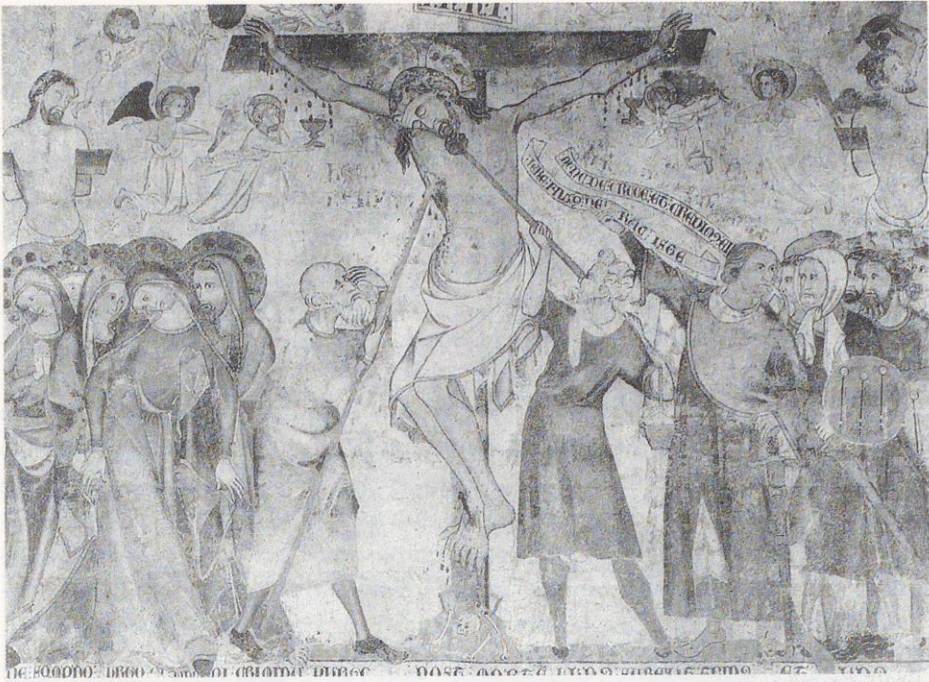


Fig. 26. Wall-painting, Giovanni Olivieri, Pamplona, Cathedral

thedral, painted by Giovanni Olivieri around 1330 (fig. 26) that of Sacro Speco at Subiaco, dating from the mid 14th century, that in the Church at San Gimignano, painted by Barna di Siena between 1350 and 1355, and that in the Chapel of the Spaniards in Santa Maria Novella, done around 1355 by the studio of Andrea da Firenze.¹⁵¹

Certain portrayals went even further in the evolution of this episode, imagining the reactions of the souls to what happens to them. Thus for example a German panel painted around 1400 by Master Hans (fig. 27) has the soul of the Good Thief kneeling with its hands joined in prayer, while that of the wicked thief is trying to escape from the demon coming towards it.¹⁵² Once again we find here a reflection of apocalyptic texts in which souls are treated as bodies

151 *Das Hohe Mittelalter*, ed. O. von Simson, Propyläens Kunstgeschichte 6, Berlin 1972, pl. LIV, p. 407; X. Barbier de Montault, Subiaco: les fresques du Sacro-Speco, *Annales archéologiques* 18 (1858), p. 351; S.L. Faison, Barna and Bartolo di Fredi, *Art Bulletin* 14 (1932), p. 285-315, fig. 30; E. Carli, *I Primitivi senesi*, Milano 1961, p. 40-41, fig. 40; Thoby, *Crucifix*, (n. 27), nr. 278; M. Boskovits, *Pittura fiorentina alla vigilia del Rinascimento 1370-1400*, Firenze, 1975, p. 276-79.

152 A. Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik, Bd. XI: Österreich und der ostdeutsche Siedlungsraum von Danzing bis Siebenbürgen in der Zeit von 1400 bis 1500*, Nendeln 1969, p. 11-20. Other representations of this kind are enumerated in Zoepfl, Dismas-Gestas, (n. 75), col. 85.

able to receive physical impressions by the intermediary of the senses and to react like living persons.¹⁵³

All the examples cited above lie in the field of Western art, for this theme, despite its oriental origins, has been used neither in Eastern Christian art nor in Byzantine art of the classical period.¹⁵⁴ Therefore the provenance of the depiction in the Zir Ganela manuscript is not easy to explain, the more so since it constitutes a *hapax* in the corpus of Ethiopian Crucifixions known today.

Given that souls were introduced on to the scene in the guise of tiny figures one might advance the hypothesis that the Ethiopian painter was inspired by a Western picture of the 14th century, when this fashion had become established.¹⁵⁵

The history of the manuscript seems to corroborate this supposition. It was carried out at the end of the 14th or the beginning of the 15th century, which is to say the moment at which Ethiopia had just established contact with Europe and above all with Italy. Italian painters came to Ethiopia, as did European religious pictures destined for the Ethiopian emperor.¹⁵⁶ Zir Ganela, for whom the manuscript was prepared, belonged to the royal family.¹⁵⁷ It is entirely possible that the painter working for her had access to the latest acquisitions of the imperial court. He might equally well have got to know one or other of the foreign artists who had just arrived.

If this really was the case, it must be said that in making use of his models the Ethiopian painter showed invention and creativity. In fact, even if the general conception of the picture is of European origin, a great number of details bear

153 In the *Apocalypse of Paul* we find a passage about a sinful soul complaining at bad treatment from the side of the spirits bringing her before the judge. Later she tries to escape from the punishment, saying that she is innocent, James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 534-5. This topic is developed in a very colourful way by two Irish apocrypha: the *Vision of the Two Deaths* and the *Dialogue of the Soul with the Body*, C. Marstrander, *The Two Deaths*, *Ériu* 5 (1911), p. 120-125; M. Dottin, Une version irlandaise du dialogue du corps et de l'âme, *Revue Celtique* 23 (1902), p. 1-39.

154 It appears sometimes in recent paintings influenced by Italian art, see f. ex. the wall-paintings in the Mount Athos monasteries, Lavra et Kutlumus, G. Millet, *Monuments de l'Athos I: Les peintures*, Paris 1927, figs 129:2 162:1, or an Cretean icone, Geneva, Musée d'Art, *Les icônes crétoises dans le musée d'art et d'histoire*, Genève, Genève 1985, nr. 5.

155 A enamel triptych preserved in the Maryam Dəngəlat Church (Tigre) discovered by R. Schneider at 1970 confirms the presence in Ethiopia of this kind of representation, Gigar Tesfaye, Reconnaissance des Trois Égiles Antérieures à 1314, *Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 12:2 (1974), p. 65, pl. VIIIa.

156 Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), p. 376-78. Another itinerary followed by European models during this period may have gone through the Holy Land. We know that king David (1383-1414) organised a pilgrimage to Jerusalem after having made peace with the Moslem rulers of Egypt, A. Caquot, Aperçu préliminaire sur le Maṣḥafa Tefut de Gechen Amba, *Annales d'Ethiopie* 1 (1955), p. 89-108.

157 S. Grébaut, Note sur la princesse Zir Ganela, *Journal asiatique* 213 (1928), p. 141-45 identifies her with the daughter of king Säyfa Ar'ad (1343-71).



Fig. 27. Painting on wood, Master Hans, Linz, Landesmuseum

witness to its adaptation to literary and iconographical traditions which are as much oriental as indigenous Ethiopian.

Let us note firstly that the episode of the souls was incorporated into the ancient Ethiopian Crucifixion in which, of course, the thieves are shown as two identical figures, alive and affixed to yellow crosses in "oriental" fashion.

The idea of designating the angel and demon coming for the thieves' souls as the angel of light and angel of darkness was doubtless taken from ancient writings influenced by gnosticism. The texts of the Essene community at Qumran which teach the duality of a universe divided into light and darkness, such as the *Vision of Amram*, the so-called *Damascus Covenant*, the *Rule of the Community* or the *War Scroll*¹⁵⁸ speak of the cosmic struggle between angels having power over the light, led by the Prince of Light¹⁵⁹ and angels having power over the darkness, commanded by the Prince of Darkness.¹⁶⁰ In Christian literature these, especially the angels of light, appeared as psychagogues, as in the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*, or the *Life of Macrina* by Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁶¹

Among Ethiopian texts these spirits are mentioned in the *Apocalypse of the Virgin*¹⁶² and in the Falasha texts, for example the *Commandments of the Sabbath* (*Tə'əzazä sānbat*) and the *Book of the Angels*. Here the Angel of Light and the Angel of Darkness associated with the right and left sides¹⁶³ are the angels which accompany a man during his lifetime and record all his good and evil deeds. They write them down in books which are brought before God and weighed on the scales.¹⁶⁴

Let us go on to consider the miniature's iconographical details. The angel's wings are red. Perhaps this is an allusion to the sphere free from sin where angels dwell, which is symbolised by this colour,¹⁶⁵ or else to the nature of fire which is characteristic feature of these spirits, often mentioned in Jewish and Christian religious literature.¹⁶⁶

158 A. Dupont Sommer, *Les écrits esséniens découverts près de la Mer Morte*, Paris 1968, p. 179-84; F.G. Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated. The Qumran Texts in English*, Leiden 1994, p. 3-71, 95-125, 272-75; J.T. Milik, 4Q Vision de Amram et une citation d'Origène, *Revue biblique* 79 (1972), p. 77-97.

159 Often identified with the archangel Michael, cf. M. Stone, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, Philadelphia 1984, p. 521 sq.

160 Called Belial, T. Gaster, Belial (in:) *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. IV, p. 427-28; B. Teyssèdre, *Le Diable et l'Enfer au temps de Jésus*, Paris 1985, p. 232-37; *Falasha Anthology*, (n. 140), p. 160-61. On the Angel of Light and the Angel of Darkness see: N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton 1987, p. 192-211.

161 Peeters, *Evangelies* (n. 1), I, p. 226-27; *Vie de sainte Macrine de Grégoire de Nysse*, ed. P. Maraval, Paris 1971, (Sch 178), p. 221 et p. 220 n. 2. See also Danielou, *Anges*, (n. 147), p. 129.

162 On this text see n. 173.

163 A. Recheis, *Engel, Tod und Seelenreise*, Roma 1958, p. 55-64.

164 Leslau, *Falasha Anthology*, (n. 140), p. 52-54.

165 Rosenberg, *Engel und Dämonen*, (n. 134), p. 64-65.

166 Ps 103(104),4; *Apocalypse of Henoch* 3 (Jewish) 6: 15, 35, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, (n.

In Ethiopia the association of angels with fire seems to be particularly strong. In the already mentioned *Book of the Angels*, it is said that some of the spirits that descend from heaven to meet the souls are of light, and others of fire.¹⁶⁷ The *Apocalypse of Esdras* and the *Apocalypse of Elias* teach that God created the angels from “the spirit of fire” and by means of the “flame of fire”. The former speaks *expressis verbis* of the squadron of angels of fire with wings aflame.¹⁶⁸

The angel in the miniature holds a cross in his hand and shields the soul with one of his wings. This gesture is typical of Ethiopian representations. It is most notably found in pictures of the Virgin with the Child, where she is flanked by two angels with raised wings forming an arc above her head.¹⁶⁹ Other figures, such as Christ, saints and kings, are also depicted beneath the wings of angels.¹⁷⁰ It should nonetheless be made clear that in this miniature the significance of the gesture is underscored by the inscription. It is therefore possible that in yet another regard the Ethiopian painter has been inspired by early apocalyptic literature. In such texts passages are to be found which tell how the guardian angel protects the soul from the onslaughts of evil spirits trying to stop it from proceeding on its way to heaven.¹⁷¹

There is no doubt that such a source lies behind the white robe and the haloed

139), p. 261, 267, 288; Dionysius of the Areopagite, *Celestial Hierarchy*, Denys l'Aréopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, ed. R. Roques, G. Heil, M. de Gaudillac, Paris 1958 (SCH 58), XV,2, XV,4, p. 166-67, 178; Sedulius, *Carmen Paschale*, Lib. V, 328, PL 19, col. 740. See also W. Cramer, *Die Engelvorstellungen bei Ephraim dem Syrer*, Roma 1965, p. 45-46, 116-17; P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur Rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, Berlin 1975, p. 51-57.

167 *Falasha Anthology*, (n. 140), p. 58.

168 *Tē'ezāza Sanbat (Commendements du sabat)*, accompagné de six autres écrits pseudo-épi-graphiques admits par les Falaschas ou Juifs d'Abyssinie: texte éthiopien publ. et trad. par J. Halévy, Paris 1902, p. 165, 181. An angel with red wings is represented on a miniature of Ahōya Fägg, D. Spencer, The Monastery of Ahōya Fägg Qusqam in Wallo – its Illuminated Manuscripts and Other Treasures, (in:) *Aspects of Ethiopian Art* (n. 108), fig. IX.

169 See the examples cited in Chojnacki, *Major Themes*, (n. 56), p. 179-195.

170 See for instance: Christ on the cross, the miniature from Gännätä Maryam Gospel Book, *Les Dossiers de l'Archéologie* 8 (1975), fig. on p. 72; Virgin Mary in Annunciation, see examples in: E. Balicka-Witakowska, Observations sur l'iconographie de l'Annunciation dans la peinture éthiopienne, *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Lund, 26-29 April 1982*, Addis Ababa-Uppsala 1984, p. 149-164 and S. Chojnacki, The Annunciation in Ethiopian Art. Its iconography from the 13th to 19th century, *Nubia et Oriens Christianus. Festschrift für Detlef G. Müller zum 60 Geburtstag*, Köln 1987, p. 281-351; Christ in the baptism scene, see examples in: S. Chojnacki, A Note on the Baptism of Christ in Ethiopian Art, *Annali Istituto Orientale di Napoli* 36 (1976), p. 103-115; St. George: on the wall-painting in the rock-hewn church of Kororo, J. Leroy, *L'Éthiopie. Archéologie et culture*, Paris 1973, fig. 72; a king: E. Balicka-Witakowska & M. Gervers, Monumental Ethiopian tablet-woven silk curtains: a case for royal patronage, *The Burlington Magazine*, June 1966, fig. 22.

171 *Apocalypse of Paul*, chap. 14, James, *Apocryphal NT* (n. 1), p. 531.

head of the soul depicted in the miniature. Righteous souls wearing fine clothes and radiant crowns are mentioned several times in these texts.¹⁷²

If we take into account all the details regarding the group of the angel and the soul in this miniature, a fragment from the *Apocalypse of the Virgin* seems especially pertinent: "And then I saw twelve angels of light (holding) in their hands the tree of the cross ... and they descended to receive the soul of this righteous person. And the angels of light and the angels of darkness came upon this soul. The angels of darkness lost it because it was not theirs, and they abandoned this soul. Then the angels of light came, surrounded and encircled that soul in order to take it from its body." "And He (Christ) gave that soul bright garments, brighter than the sun, which had neither been spun or woven. He gave it shining crowns that were more glorious than the sun and moon."¹⁷³

If the *Apocalypse of the Virgin* was composed in the 15th century¹⁷⁴, that is to say around the same time that the Zir Ganela Gospel Book was produced, the dependence of the miniature on the text is a possibility.

The soul of the evil thief is black and haloless – as befits a sinner. It is also naked – a detail explained by a fragment of the *Book of the Angels* which relates how the armies of Beryal punish a sinful soul by crushing, beating and stripping it.¹⁷⁵

The soul is being strangled by an angel of darkness that is of a dark blue-green tint, almost black, having a halo of the same colour and only one arm and one leg.

The colour blue was used to denote both the airy bodies of demons and the place in which they dwell.¹⁷⁶ As regards the angel of darkness having one arm and one leg, Meyer Schapiro has shown that the absence of limbs is typical of depictions of demons in the art of Late Antiquity and in oriental art.¹⁷⁷ A one-armed, one-legged demon named Aqimos figures in a miniature of the *Commentary on the Apocalypse* by Beatus, BL, Add. 11695 (fig. 28). Giovanni Pisano gave a similar appearance to the demon coming for the soul of the Bad Thief on the Pisa cathedra (fig. 25).

In Ethiopia it is not unusual to depict an evil spirit without a full complement of limbs. In the painted canvas of Amidale Daga we find a one-armed demon managing in an original manner to torment a damned soul, while another demon

172 Cf. for instance the Ethiopic *Book of Baruch* and the *Book of Angels*, *Falasha Anthology*, (n. 140), p. 52-53, 65, 69.

173 *Apocrypha de B. Maria Virgine*, ed. & interpr. M. Chaine, Roma 1909, texte, p. 54, 56.

174 The *Apocalypse of the Virgin* re-ses the text of the *Apocalypse of Peter*, which is not attested in Ethiopian tradition, S. Mimouni, *Les apocalypses de la Vierge. État de la Question*, *Apocrypha* 4 (1993), p. 102-104.

175 *Falasha Anthology* (n. 140), p. 54.

176 Rosenberg, *Engel und Dämonen* (n. 134), p. 63-64, 187.

177 M. Schapiro, *From Mozarabic to Romanesque in Silos*, *Art Bulletin* 21 (1939), p. 330-31.



Fig. 28. Beatus-Apocalypse, British Library, Add. 11695, f. 2r



Fig. 29. Magic scroll, British Library, Or. 3716

nearby lacks both arms.¹⁷⁸ A one-armed, one-legged evil spirit named Saytan appears in the magic scroll, BL, Or. 3716¹⁷⁹ (fig. 29).

Finally it may be stated that oriental apocryphal literature has evidently influenced several other details characterising the angel of darkness in our miniature, such as the red eyes, the gaping mouth, the oversized foot and the large hand used to smother the wicked thief's soul. Let us quote by way of example a fragment of the *Epistle of the Apostles*, known in Ethiopia under the title of the *Testament of Our Saviour in Galilee*.¹⁸⁰ It contains a detailed description of the devil which provides an excellent literary parallel to our picture: "his right eye is flecked with blood, his left (eye) is dead ... his big lower lip, his large feet ..." and later "... his right hand is torture...".¹⁸¹

178 Gigar Tesfaye, Notes sur Gunda Gundē, *Abbay* 10 (1979), fig. 7.

179 Strelcyn, *Catalogue of Ethiopian Manuscripts in the British Library* (n. 2), nr. 71, p. 115-16.

180 *Le Testament en Galilée de Notre Seigneur Jésus-Christ*, éd. & trad. L. Guerrier, PO 9:3, Paris 1912, p. 183. Cf. also the homily on Ps. 33 of Basile the Great telling of angels dark with vengeance, their faces black with hate, with ardent eyes and with burning breath, PG 29, col. 372A.

181 On the appearance of Devil see J. B. Russel, *Lucifer. The Devil in the Middle Ages*, London 1984, p. 68-69, 130-133.