ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

TRADITIONAL SMITHERY AND ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT IN AKSUM

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A Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Addis Ababa University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Art in Social Anthropology

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name HAFTSH FITSUM

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Addis Ababa University, 2012

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GLOSSARY

aklil	crown like head decoration of deacons and priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church
alobo igri	decoration that women are wearing on their legs
atransos	book stand
balstera	part of a car that serves as raw material for black-smiths
bazeqa	mercury
buda	evil eye
cowrry	tool made from clay used for melting the metal in it
deblbl-kisaj	flat pliers
fham	charcoal
foruja	manual machine used as bellows
gigar	tweezers
gutaets	large and small pliers
habl	necklaces
hagadi	someone who handle with fire, usually interchangeable with "buda"
hammed-hasten	a soil that serves as iron ore
hareg	vine leaf
Hedar Tsion	anniversary celebration on 21 November to respect St. Mary and the Ark of Covenant
Hosaena	Palm Sunday
ide-Solomon	hand of Solomon (wisdom)
jan-shellamii	royal jewelers
kasha	tissue like material that is used in the preparation of wax
katim	rings
mahtem solomon,	Solomon stamp which represent the David star
maqwamiya	prayer staff usually held by priests
mazen	angle model used to measure angles and lines
mebred	iron that helps to modify and decorate metal
medeghe	bow-saws
meflah	melting and pouring of the metal to the clay

meflash	the process of purification gold and silver
megaze-srah	a technique that uses as small saw
megodal mislii	failure in the last stage in lost wax casting
mehkiki smaii	knife like metal tool used for the preparation of wax
mekretse smaii	pen size metal tool used for making design on the wax
menbere tabot	replica of the Ark of covenant
menekesha	different types of iron tools used for emblem and decoration on the metal
menfihia	bellows
meokoki	ear picks
meret cowrry	type of clay uses for making cowrry
meret mwkat	preparation of clay mixed with cotton and animal waste produced by repeatedly, hammering it
meret-cowrry	clay uses to make cowrry
meret-mslli	clay used for covering the design wax
mesfine	anvil
meslli	designed wax
metsbek	alloy of different metals that helps to join different parts of silver ready to use
mshfan messlli	the process of covering the designed wax by clay
mwacho	the upper part of designed wax which serves as open place to help to enter the melted metal.
naysmaii-srah	literally means the work of wax
qedamot	forefathers
qweii	harvest season
sefef	remains of honey
sekir	upper ear decoration
sellat	the bottom part of crosses
semaii	wax
shasma	local stone used for making neck crosses and other objects
tesnastil	sistrums
tibib	skilful and wise person, sometimes interchange with a person with evil

	eye
tsfh-kisaj	pointed pliers
weleba	hair pins
weska	a iron tool used to shape different large materials especially for *mekomya* sistrums, hand crosses and processional crosses
zebto	circle like decoration usually put in the middle of the neck cross
zewhit -tekaait	an instrument used for ductility and malleability of metals

ABSTRACT

This study is about "traditional smithery and its cultural context in Aksum." This study focuses on the historical background of smiths and smithery of those different catagories: describing smithery with different aspects of culture, status of smiths and analyzing the relationships between traditional smiths and local people. In order to achieve the objective of the study, both primary and secondary data were collected and used. Secondary data were collected from a review of literature, including books, published reports and unpublished sources. Various methods of primary data collection were used to collect the required information such as: observation, participant observation, key-informant interviews and focus group discussion.

Even though traditional smithery in Ethiopia has a long history and still is practiced in different parts of Ethiopia, it is not well studied. Traditional smithery studies usually focus in fragmented way on a single aspect of smithery. Some scholars have attempted to study the status of the smiths and the artistic expression of the traditional metalwork, but still do not cover all the dimensions of it. The traditional smiths' culture was and still is ignored. Most writers are only appreciating and focusing on the materials and designs and do not even mention who has made those objects.

Therefore, this thesis intends to add some facts to the limited data available on traditional smiths and smithery in Aksum. The traditional smiths in this town have a long history which usually relates legend, religion and oral history of the area. Most of the contemporary traditional smiths claim that they are descending from ancient Aksumite craftsmanship and some of them claim that they came from Israel with the Ark of Covenant. In Aksum now, there are three types of traditional smiths. There are the black-smiths, the liturgical smiths and the jewelry-smiths, with their own expression of identity. They produce different types of objects, and use different technologies. The lost wax casting is one of the best techniques in producing church objects. There are many technical terms, names of objects and materials. The artistic expression of smithery also testifies the long history of the area and the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. The smiths have the local knowledge about the nature of the metals, clays and tools. The status also relatively differs among the groups of smiths and is now undergoing status changes. In this thesis also an ancient "language" is identified. This language is called Owadu "language" and sometimes called "Seyyak language." The "language" is very secret and the local societies do not even know about its existence. Now the general trend of smithery in Aksum is at rapid change. The technical terms, language and the lost wax casting technique is only concentrated in a few persons and is found at a late stage of extinction. Whereas the goldsmiths' is expanding country wide, agricultural tools and devices are more and more imported and replace the traditional implements produced by the local blacksmiths by industrial fabrication.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In many societies there are individuals who are engaged in special crafts such as: weaving, pottery, gold smithery, black smithery or wood working. The origin of craftsmanship was related with the emergence of complex societies and economic specialization in ancient societies like in: Indus Valley, Egypt, China, Greece Civilization, etc (Douglas 2000:416).

Craftsmanship in Ethiopia has a long history. Historical, linguistic and archeological evidences show that the beginning of craftsmanship in Ethiopia is deep-rooted in the production of stone tools, ceramics and metal implements in prehistory periods (Adejumobi 2007:7).

The self sufficient economy in the remote past forced the villages and small cities communities or local clans to develop their indigenous methods of production. As result of this, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa have witnessed considerable advancement in arts and crafts. History indicates that for thousands of years, Ethiopian craftsmen were engaged in the production of farming tools, household goods, clothing, weapons and jewelry (HASIDA 1978:3).

Historians and archeologists state that the ancient Aksum civilization showed some of the highest craft achievements in the Ethiopia history. For example, according to Bahru Zewde (1998:96), "in metalworking the Aksumites produced for a long period of time gold, silver and bronze coins bearing the effigies of their kings." In addition to that, Munro-Hay (1991:203) states that the type of smithery in ancient Aksum was divided into two. The first were items of luxury, such as jewelry, costly boxes, small decorative objects, bowls, figures in gold, silver and bronze, or combinations of those metals. In the second category of metal objects were tools, weapons, and other objects, like iron sickles, knives, chisels, saws, axes, tweezers, hinges, spear and arrow heads, hooks or staples. In present Ethiopia also some of the above mentioned types of smithery existed to some extent until today.

Contemporarily in East Africa, smiths greatly contribute to the material wealth of the society in which they live. For example, writing about iron smiths, Hunley (cited in Nahu Senay 1998:4) states: "they make agricultural tools, valued possessions, commodity goods, and clothes and build houses". In Ethiopia, the Beta Israel blacksmiths were skilled in making ploughs, knives, swords, spears, spades, axes, hoes, picks, and other metal implements (Asres 1995:96). Currently, there are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of different types of silver and gold objects produced by smiths in the highlands of Ethiopia (Silverman and Sobania 2004:354). The present Aksum is one of the centers of traditional smithery in highland Ethiopia (Atakelty 2000: 42).

In the research area, Aksum, there are many traditional smiths. For example, materials used for church services are still produced by traditional liturgical smiths. The cross, the vessel and spoon used during communion, the prayer staffs, the book-stand (atransos), etc., are made from metal ranging from brass and bronze to silver and gold. The homelike symbol for a replica of the Ark of Covenant (*menbere tabot*) is sometimes also made from metal (Atakelty 2000: 42).

In addition to religious objects, in contemporary Ethiopian societies such as Amhara, Tigray, Harar, Gurage, etc. wearing gold, silver copper and bronze jewelry is common, and those items are still produced by traditional smiths. For example, Atakelty (2000: 42) explains that, in Tigray, women are known for wearing different types of metal decorations given to them before the wedding ceremony by the groom's family. Those objects may include *kutsha*, (earrings) *alobo igri* (a decoration that women are wearing on their legs) and bracelets made from copper, bronze, silver and gold.

The current culture of traditional smithery in the study area and in the whole country seems transmitted from generation to generation from ancient Pre-Aksumite, Aksumite and Post-Aksumite civilizations. Archeological research made by Cinizia et al. (1997:26) indicates that the continuation of techniques and other skills of smithery, from past times in to contemporary Ethiopian society is more visible in the study area, Aksum. This research was conducted in Aksum by interviewing over thirty gold and silversmiths, blacksmiths, and two tinsmiths: conducting investigations about their work and basic biographical information, documenting the types of artifacts made, and the techniques and processes make these artifacts. Interviews were also conducted with their patrons /customers. According to Cinizia et al. (1997:26), (1) "smiths

still occupy a specific social niche in the Aksumite society, and particular quarters in Aksum seem to be associated with them, and (2) "despite technology and materials which have dramatically changed over the last fifty years, older metal smiths still use traditional tools, such as oil lamps and the hammer and anvil, for producing metal artifacts."

The research area, Aksum, is located in Ethiopia in the Mehakelegnaw Zone of the Tigray Region near the base of the Adwa Mountains. Geographically and administratively, the present Aksum town is situated at around 2,100m on the plain of Hatzebo, in the Laelay Maichew *Wereda* (district), central zone, in the regional State of Tigray, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (Chiarie 2009:17). Its population is estimated 51,727 in 2008 (CSA 2008).

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Historical and archeological evidences show that Ethiopia was the home of many traditional craft works including smithery (Phillipson 2000:374, Munro–Hay 1991:203). Those evidences indicate that smithery started and was well developed in ancient Ethiopia and had a regress in Feudal Ethiopia. In contemporary Ethiopia also, there are many traditional smiths located in many parts of the country (Merid Weldearagay 1976:5).

Most of the information regarding smiths are scattered in books, articles, and also are found in some social scientists' works; but these cover only a small portion of the whole work. Most of those works emphasize the artistic expression and the status of the smiths.

The artistic expression of smithery received good attention from different social scientists. These works sometimes are found as well among general art as in the form of independent topics. Regarding this category, the following are significant works: Brus (1975) *Ethiopian Crowns: African Arts,* Chojnacki, S (1966) *Ethiopian Traditional Art;* Deasy (1999) *Ethiopian Christian Africa: Art, Churches and Culture*; Henze, Paul (1993) *Aspects of Ethiopian Art from Ancient Aksum to the 20th Century*, McKay (1974) *Ethiopian Jewelry: African Arts.* Some critics, like Gunther (1968:77), indicate that such works of social scientists in metalwork only focus on aesthetic aspects and disregard the function and history of the object in the culture in which it was created. He suggests that in the study of metalwork, the culture of the people producing it cannot be ignored.

The other aspect of smiths found in different works of social scientist scholars is their status. Most of the scholars group smiths as part of the craftsmen and put them in one of the despised groups. For example, according to Merid Weldearagay (1976:5), the status of craftsmanship including smiths in Ethiopia's past feudal system considered as occupation of despised groups, which is still common in most of rural Ethiopia.

Moreover, in much of highland Ethiopia, particularly in the Christian parts, craftsmen in general belong to a segregated class and were in many cases social 'outcasts'. Such skills as tanning, smithery, weaving and pottery were left to marginal communities. The Bête Israel in northern Ethiopia, the *Fuga* among the Gurage, Kambata and Hadiya, and the *Wata* among the Walayta found in many other parts of Ethiopia are good examples of this fact (Bahru Zewede 1998:100; Levine 1974:169). It is also very common in Aksum. Finneran (2003:427) suggests that this is not a rural phenomenon brought about by ideas of economic envy and distrust; even in such a thriving and rapidly modernizing metropolis like Aksum handicrafts are despised because they engage in certain manual works, but traditionally not n agriculture.

Besides the above contexts, smithery as part of the material culture has a relationship with other aspects of the culture. For instance, Pfaffenberger, cited in Gosden (1999:161), puts forward the idea of technology as a social fact involving political, symbolic, social, historical and legal dimensions. Besides this, metallurgy needs some physical and scientific knowledge. For example, in their study of bloomer iron smelting in America and Africa, Gordon and Killick (1993: 243), mentioned in (Lahiri 1995:116), underscore the necessity of recognizing that metal technology is always practiced in accordance with the principles of physics and chemistry and the natural resources available. Some anthropologists suggest that like other occupational activities smithery extends far beyond the economic importance of metals in warfare, agriculture, and trade (Childs and Killick 1993:319), and reaches cultural and religious dimensions.

Recent literature shows that traditional smithery in Ethiopia is at a dramatic change. The traditional smithery and its cultural parameter are not well studied in Ethiopia. For example, Silverman and Sobania (2004:355) recommend the following:

> *One of the most promising lines of inquiry for reconstructing the history of gold and silver working in the documentation and interpretation of contemporary tradition has yet to be pursued. Although many of these traditions are still*

practiced throughout Ethiopia, some of them certainly are beginning to atrophy, and there is a pressing need for documental specifically collecting vocabularies of technical terms and the names of objects; oral histories concerning the fabrication and use of gold, silver, and cuprous objects; and biographies of individual silversmiths.

But considering the above context still there is no ample anthropological work available on Aksum. As a result of this anthropologist' point of view smithery is superficial and does not cover the different aspect of smithery. It is clear that the previous studies about smiths and smithery in Aksum were limited to a specific area and shallow. Most of those studies are conducted by non- anthropologists who usually employed a survey method. Traditional smithery activities and its cultural context in Aksum still is not well studied. This study is going to fill the following research gaps.

1) The oral tradition of smiths in Aksum, describing them with their socio-cultural history, how they became smiths and the historical backgrounds of smiths to engage in smithery activities; 2) The explanations of traditional smithery activities, what materials smiths use in the process of smithery and recording names of objects, materials and technical terms; and 3) The relationships between the traditional linkage Aksumite smiths with contemporary local peoples.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate the historical background and the types of smiths explaining and recording traditional smithery activities; name of materials, objects and technical terms as well as the relationship between traditional smiths with the local people. So, it is important to study traditional smithery and its cultural context in Aksum to investigate some important facts about traditional smithery of Aksum.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1.3.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to investigate the traditional smithery and its cultural context in Aksum.

1.3.2 Specific Objectives

In the light of the general objective, the study also has the following specific objectives:

- To describe the historical background of the traditional smiths of various categories
- To explain traditional smithery and its changes.

- To investigate artistic expression and knowledge of traditional smiths regarding their work.
- To investigate the social and cultural status of the traditional smiths.

Based on the above specific objectives, the basic research questions are:

- Who are traditional smiths, and how do they describe themselves?
- What is traditional smithery, what are the types of traditional smithery?
- What is artistic expression of smithery and knowledge's of traditional smiths about their smiths?
- What are the forms of interaction between traditional smiths and the non-smiths?

1.4. Site Selection

The site selection was largely influenced by my childhood experience and memories. When I was a child, I used to go to the field with my friends to search for *riesi hans* (ancient Aksumite coins). It was common to find coins especially during a summer that followed a heavy rain. As a result of this, when I was a child, I was fortunate enough to find 5 coins in five consecutive summers. During that time, I was surprised about the smallness of the coins and their high price. I also heard many oral traditions about how the ancient Aksumite produced coins and many other metal objects. Moreover, during my childhood our home was surrounded by blacksmiths, liturgical smiths and jewelry smith. This created a good opportunity for me to see how metal objects were made daily. Even sometimes I participated in the smithery process as children of smiths did. When I grew up, I was very surprised when I met gold and silver smiths in Gondar, Addis Ababa and as far as Southern Ethiopia, like Dilla town, and to hear that the smiths originated from Aksum.

Because of the above mentioned reasons I was very interested to study traditional smithery. The idea of such a study on traditional smithery came to my mind when I had joined the M.A. program in Social Anthropology, Addis Ababa University as a student. I selected traditional smithery and its cultural context for my M.A. thesis about a matter not yet well studied by anthropologists.

1.5. Field Experience

My fieldwork was carried out from 7th February 2011 to 27th March, 2011 in Aksum. I knew the research area very well before. But these two months were a very critical time for me to see Aksum in a new perspective. My childhood perception about the people and Aksum was changed.

When I arrived in my home town, Aksum, as a researcher, in the first few days I tried to introduce myself to traditional smiths. But mostly, I was not welcomed. I was frustrated and worried how to continue my research. After this, I discussed about how I could introduce myself to the traditional smiths with my father and two of my friends. In the morning, my father introduced me to one of his best friends, a liturgical smith. My friends also introduce me to their jewelry smith relatives. This experience gave me ample information about how anthropological fieldwork is very difficult to conduct and how one can manage smoothly get introduced: it needs tolerance and full cooperation of the local people.

During my fieldwork, I was very much confused how to raise the issue of 'evil eye' with my informants. As I grew up in that town I knew that the concept of 'evil eye' is very difficult to discuss with persons who are considered to have the 'evil eye' by non-smiths. But during my fieldwork, I was very surprised that the traditional smiths discussed with me very frankly about the 'evil eye' issues from their point of view.

The other part of my field experience was the process of lost wax casting. This fieldwork was conducted in one famous liturgical smith's home for 45 days. In this part, I exerted great effort to persuade him to let me take part in the whole work process. After a long discussion with him he agreed and put some preconditions for me before I could participate in the whole process. With this liturgical smith I spent a good time, which I will have never forget for the rest of my life. He introduced me with ancient and contemporary Aksum technologies, and showed me how they survived. By participating in lost wax casting for 45 days I acquired basic skills how crosses are made by this technique

1.6. Research Methodology

1.6.1 Research Approach

In order to achieve the objectives of the study: both primary and secondary data were collected and used. Before going to the field, I collected and read written materials related with the research topic. The main research methods employed in this research were largely depending on qualitative aspects. This was because the nature of the topic needed fieldwork and it covered many dimensions to address the research objectives. In addition to the qualitative field-based information's, secondary data from documents employed to enhance analysis. Therefore, this thesis is based on primary and secondary sources.

1.6.2 Data Collection Methods

1.6.2.1. Secondary Data Collection Methods

Secondary data were collected from the literature, including books, published reports and unpublished sources. Those data were utilized in order to investigate and understand the traditional smiths and different aspects of their culture.

1.6.2.2. Primary Data Collection Methods

Various methods of primary data sources were used to collect the required information such as: observation, participant observation, key-informant interviews and focus group discussions.

1.6.2.2.1. Participant Observation and Observation

I stayed 45 days in a liturgical smith's workshop. This liturgical-smith is well-known in the research area among smiths and more respected in the local churches. He made many precious church objects and many crosses for high priests and bishops. During the fieldwork, he was at the age of 65. This inspired me to know more about this person and I selected this liturgical-smith for participant observation. In addition to this, the selection further influenced me because the liturgical smiths represent the main area of traditional smithery in Aksum.

Fortunately, I successfully convinced him to participate in his daily life with special emphasis on his material production. This helped me to find fundamental aspects of the culture: what people do, what people know, and the objects made and used; I learned and shared this by participating into the daily life with him and members of his family. In the whole process of this fieldwork, I took field notes and many photographs daily.

Participant observation of liturgical smiths through actively participating in the daily life gave me a chance to record the day to day activities. Specially, it was very important to follow up the whole process of the material production. In addition, this method helped me to get the internal (emic) point of view and encouraged my cultural interpretation. This also created an opportunity to introduce me with many smiths. I also acquired the basic skills about the production of liturgical objects.

Besides collecting data using the above methods, throughout the fieldwork time, I tried to observe those aspects which might give additional insight into the issues under investigation. I attempted to look into the nature of smithery in the working area. I also visited the different parts of the town, the Archeological Museum, Churches as well as many tourist shops.

1.6.2.2.2. Key Informant Interviews

In every society, there are individuals that have a special knowledge about the socio-cultural practices of the society where they live in. In anthropology, we use the term key informant. For this study, key informants are individuals who are considered as experts of the traditional metal technology and knowledgeable about traditional smiths' culture. Key informants were identified after personal contact and after I had developed some relation with local smiths.

10 key informants were included in the study from all three types of smiths. Among them, nine were men and one woman. The researcher selected six from jewelry-smiths, two from the liturgical-smiths and two blacksmiths. The selection was made with the help of my two of Aksumite friends. They helped me in the whole process of my fieldwork. The key informants were knowledgeable about smiths' tradition as well as smithery material technology. Most of the time, the interviews were conducted in the working area and during working time. Some interviews were also conducted in shops and *indaswa* (local beer shop). One additional jewelry smith key informant was also included from Gondar. In addition to that 3 key informants were among priests of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Those key informants were knowledgeable about the culture of the local people. Interviews with those key informants helped me to see the traditional smiths from a religious and non-smiths point of view.

In the whole process, I repeatedly contacted with key informants for further elaboration of facts when I faced some unclear information.

1.6.2.2.3. Focus Group Discussion

The method of FGD was selected because of the possibility to discuss with different persons and the opportunity to understand common feelings and differences of the participants. In addition to this, I understand that this research method helps to crosscheck and enrich the information gained from other methods. One group with 6 members has been formed. They selected based on the type of smithery they are engaging in. The group members selected two from blacksmiths, one from liturgical smiths and three from jewelry-smiths.

This FGD helped me to better understand the attitudes, opinions, or self-reported behaviors of the traditional smiths. The FGD was held after I had introduced the purpose and goals of the FGD and developed a list of participants, and determined the place and length of the sessions. Then FGD participants were first introduced to the aim of the discussion and then invited to discuss on such topics as: their origin, oral tradition, their relationship with the local people. The FGD was conducted for two times for two and a half hours for each discussion.

1.6.3. Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis is depending on what types of research are employed. Based on the qualitative research methods employed in data gathering, the data analysis in this thesis is mainly qualitative. Data was described, explained and analyzed to arrive at significant and tangible results. Most of these data are in the form of words, photos and rather than in numbers, and in general, the researcher employed a triangulation method to give meaningful analysis. The data was gathered by using key informants interviews, observation and participant observation, focus group discussion and secondary sources of information.

In addition to the triangulation method, some information has been gathered from participation was taken as it is and discussed with the help of photos. Moreover, technical terms and names of objects were recorded and many photos were taken to explain how the materials were made daily. With the help of research guides, every idea of the participants was noted down and tape-recorded. After conducting interviews and discussions, at night it was my task to transcribe the recorded information along with the research questions.

1.7 Scope, Significance and Limitation of the Study

The scope of this study on "Traditional Smithery and its Cultural Context in Aksum" is the following:

In this thesis, the focus is on traditional smithery means a kind of metalwork as practice by black smiths, liturgical smith and jewelry smiths. The dimensions of smith's culture covered in this thesis are limited to different aspects of smiths that make them distinct from other local people. Even though there is a traditional smithery found in different towns of Tigray, Amhara, Addis Ababa, Harar, etc, this thesis only focuses on traditional smiths found in Aksum.

1.7.1. Significance of the Study

Studying traditional smithery in Aksum can have the following significance:

Even if anthropological studies are conducted in many parts of the country, not enough attention is given to traditional smithery. So, this study focuses on traditional smithery of three kinds, and is expected to fill gaps and to encourage other researchers to conduct further studies.

In addition to that, it gives information for those who are interested in traditional smithery within its cultural parameters. It is also important to know about the contemporary situation of smithery's technology and about smiths in Aksum.

1.7.2 Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the study start from the literature. I faced a serious problem to find anthropological studies related to my work. This is why most of the literature I consulted for this thesis is from non-anthropological publications or other sources. The other problem was the budget. The money given to me by the university was only enough to cover transport costs. However, two months of fieldwork is not enough to get more detailed information.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

2.1 Conceptual Framework

The literature is collected from different sources related to craftsmanship, metalwork, artistic expression of metalwork, social status, historical and social context of traditional smithery. These sources are mostly the products of many disciplines and scattered under different topics. In this thesis, I consider traditional smithery as a type of craftsmanship that originated as a result of the evolution of complex societies in the remote past and still is practiced to some extent in many parts of the Ethiopia.

Before I go into details, let me clear the concepts that related with the topic of the thesis. As already mentioned, the title of the thesis is: *Traditional Smithery and Its Cultural Context in Aksum*. In this thesis, in a broad sense, 'traditional' means that a way of life of a particular group existed for long period of time. Generally 'tradition' means, according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2006), "a belief, custom or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group; a set of these beliefs or customs." But when 'tradition' is related with smithery activities, the proper definition has to be taken from the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology (2002) which defines tradition as: "styles of artifacts, assemblages of tools or other items of material culture, architectural styles, economic practices, or artistic styles that last longer than a phase or the duration of a horizon. The idea of a tradition implies a degree of cultural continuity even if there are local or regional patterns in the archaeological material."

Of course, the idea of culture does not refer only to archaeological materials, showing some kind of continuity; it is understood in Social Anthropology as connection of history with the contemporary situation, and connection of material and non-materials.

The concept of 'culture' in this thesis is used in two ways. The first one applies to culture as including material and non-material culture. For this purpose, I use Tylor's (1958 [1871]) definition of culture. He defines "Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is

In addition to this, in its nature, smithery (metalworking), as Bier 1998:349) explains, "encompasses both the products and the processes of production that comprise most aspects of material culture." He further elaborates that the work is influenced by "availability of materials, local traditions of craftsmanship, levels of state intervention and other sources of influence, as well as aesthetic preferences." The same is true in history of Ethiopia; smithery is mostly affected by the above criteria. As R. Pankhurst (1970:1) states: "an innovation to be acceptable had therefore to be of advantage, or thought to be of advantage, to either, or still more by, both church and state."

That's why, historically, Ethiopian highlander's precious metal smiths mainly concentrate on the production of church materials and government jewelries. This situation is explained by Merid Weldearagay (1983:5) as follows: "the smiths, whether jewelries or iron workers, were organized into workshops, curiously enough known by the lofty name of *Jan Shellamii* or royal jewelers. Those workshops were almost located in the courts of the emperors or provincial governors." As a result of the above mentioned reasons, much of the best work of traditional smiths has been done in Ethiopia in the center of political and religious authority. Therefore, Northern Ethiopian smithery largely depended on the benefit of church and state (Simoons 1960:174, Chojnacki 1966:5). Also in Southern Ethiopia, smiths in Dimam and Bodi were servants of the local chiefs (Mapunda 1997:113).

Cassier (1975:108) suggests that there was no reason for Ethiopian artisan to abandon their traditional methods because the objects they created corresponded to a real social need." For example, Brus (1975: 8) recalls the impact of 1974 Ethiopian Revolution on traditional Ethiopian smithery as follows: "The recent fall of Haile Selassie's monarchy in Ethiopia marked the end of 3000 years of imperial rule in Africa's oldest independent state. Concomitant with that collapse is the termination of one of Ethiopia's ancient artistic traditions: the creation of jeweled crowns for the emperor, his queen and his noblemen."

Even though, the above facts, in contemporary Ethiopia there are many blacksmiths in many rural and urban areas of Ethiopia. Besides this in contemporary Ethiopia, there are many traditional gold and silver smiths whose works are concentrated in Ethiopian towns. Smiths, as other traditional craftsmen, existed based on the economic and social need of their society. For example, according

to Cassier (1975:107), the rural Ethiopian society was based on subsistence economy, the handicrafts developed spontaneously out of the requirement of daily life.

Today, in every community in highland Ethiopia, there is a workshop that makes or repairs item like axes, sickles, hatchets, hammer, and plough shares (Belai Giday 1987 E.C:40). In most parts of Ethiopia, the blacksmiths, as in contemporary Gurage at present times, depend mainly on selling services. Since they do not often produce original materials, they make their living by repairing iron tools for a small profit. Sometimes, payment by the customer is given in kind (Nahu Senay 1998:74-75). This may show that there is a change in the way of production. Dimi is also one of the most famous centers of blacksmiths in Ethiopia. Dimi blacksmiths are producing all agriculture devices and weapons locally demanded by local people until 1970s (Mapounda 1997:113). In addition to this, traditional craftsmen played a significant role in producing culturally and socially important objects.

Regarding the source of the raw materials and the local exploitation of minerals in Ethiopia, it is not well documented, but gold seems to have come from the Sudan (Sasul), some southern Ethiopian region and possibly from Gojjam, Eritrea, and the Beja country, and iron ore, silver, lead and tin are also mentioned, mostly in Portuguese sources (Munro–Hay 1991:171). In general local exploitations of different types of minerals are not well documented, with the exception of gold. The main source of raw material is the re-using of metal objects. As Perczel (1981:55) states, melting down of coins or metal objects to re-use is the main source of metal. He (1981:55) also suggests that this practice," may have been going on long before the melting down of Maria Theresa Thaler." Simoons (1960:178) also explains the same fact that, "the principal source of silver in North West Ethiopia is the Maria Theresa Thaler, which is melted down to make different types of metalwork by the cire perdue process."

The other key concept related with smithery is the social status. The status of smiths most of the time is grouped under craftsmen and artisans. The general characteristic of Ethiopian craftsmen including smiths, they are despised and, nevertheless, play an important role in their society (Cassier 1975:118).

Hallpike (1968:258) summarizes about the Ethiopian crafts status as follows: "From the existing literature it seems that the artisans in the whole Ethiopia most commonly despised are weavers, smiths, potters, and tanners, and we sometimes hear of hunters."

Regarding smiths' statues most of time mentioned blacksmiths issues. For example, according to Mapounda (1997:113) in the Dimi community of Ethiopia, "blacksmiths were despised groups and they were not permitted to own or inherit land and cattle. They could not intermarry with other members the blacksmith caste and were forbidden to enter the homes of ordinary royal Dimi

This situation seems common in other parts of East Africa. For example, Poggo (2006:169) states that, "in Kenya the Kuku blacksmiths occupy a paradoxical position in the society: they were respected and despised. They were highly revered for their technical skills, but were despised because they deviated from the Kuku values and norms." In many parts of Ethiopia craftsmen are usually consider to be with an evil eye. In Ethiopia, the transfer of the evil eye is thought to be located in the low caste people who transmit it from generation to generation Quirin (1998:208).

Schlereth (1985:27) explains that metal artifacts have symbolic and aesthetic values. He also suggests that, "it is characteristic of the material culture which scholars have to take into account, not only cognitive and behavioral activity, but also aesthetic and sensory experience." In this regard there is a different artistic expression among smiths. For example blacksmiths are mostly producing the same and useful objects far from artistic expression. The common artistic expression of smithery is found in jewelries and works of liturgical smiths. Liturgical and jewelries smiths' artistic expression started in ancient Ethiopia. For example, Heldman (1993:117) states that, "artistic tradition from this period (Aksumite) remained viable through later centuries." Munro–Hay argues in the same way that the Aksumite civilization has had influence on later Ethiopian smithery artistic expression. He explains this situation by using Aksumite coins as examples. Munro-Hay (1991:251) also maintains that, "there is also certain amount of evidence that the remarkable development of elaborate variations on the cross motif for Ethiopians even now very notable, was in full swing in the Aksumite time."

Korabiewicz (1973) in the book, *The Ethiopian Cross*, gives an introduction about the artistic expression of Ethiopian crosses. The author states that, "the Orthodox Church has not only

preserved the Christian faith in Ethiopia; it has also contributed to the development of a wide range of aesthetic values and religious symbols, which in turn have generated a variety of arts." Besides this, as Perczel (19981:55) points out, one can find also Pre-Christian astral symbols readily recognizable in the Christian crosses, and repetition and variation of the original motifs have continued.

Hence, as Ullendorff (1973:152) explains, in its art, Ethiopia displays the same syncretistic traits which we have observed in other facets of civilization.

Therefore, the objects made by smiths fall under "practical" and "prestige" technologies. Hayden (1998:46) summarizes this difference as follows: "Practical technologies have very different logic, goals, constraints, design considerations, and outcomes than prestige technologies. They should, therefore, be analyzed using a slightly different framework, although both types of technologies can be effectively dealt with using a design theory approach." In this context, objects made by blacksmiths are mostly categorized under practical technologies and the objects made by liturgical and jewelry smiths are categorized under prestige technologies.

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Chapter Three

Description of the Study Area and the People

3.1. Description of the Study Area

A. Map of Aksum Town

Aksum is a small town in north Ethiopia. It is now part of Tigray National Regional State and the capital city of Tigray its central zone. The town is surrounded by mountains and hills. The ancient part of the town is located at the foot of the Iszgi-Hasera and May-Kiho mountains. In the town, there are many churches such as: two St. *Maryam Tsion* (Mary of Zion) churches, built by emperor Fasildes and Haile-Sellassie I, respectively. There are also other churches including: Innda-Eyesus, Arbat Inssasa, Abbine-Argawi, Kidanmhret and Inda-Mikale.

The legend of the Queen of Sheba is well known in the study area. In Aksum, the Queen of Sheba has three different names: Azeb, Makeda and Dengure. Villagers around Aksum call the town Aksum *Inda-Maryam* which means home of St. Mary. In the town there is a celebrated ceremony called *Hedar-Tsion,* the anniversary to celebrate of the Ark of Covenant and St. Mary (Ki1, Ki2 and Ki3; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 2011 and March 1, 2011; Observation, Aksum, February 2011 and March 2011).

The people of the town are in majority 'conservative' Orthodox Christian believers. Even small children in the town are swearing by *Maryam-Tsion* and *Tabot-Tsion* ('Mary of Zion 'and the 'Ark', respectively) many times per day. Aksum is the only town in Ethiopia without a Mosque and other non-Orthodox Churches (Ki1, Ki2 and Ki3; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 2011 and March 1, 2011).

In addition to that, Aksum is the home of many beautiful monuments and many palaces and tombs. Now, the largest parts of the old town became an archeological site and the people are in transferring their residence to new parts of the town. Most of the children found around the church and the obelisks produce different types of crosses and other objects made from a stone locally called *shasma* (Observation, Aksum, February 2011 and March 2011). This is targeted for sale to tourists and for pilgrims. Nowadays, Aksum is a small city with a great past and memory its. It has not forgotten that it was the center of one of the most powerful states in the history of ancient Africa (Chiarie 2009:17).

Historically, the town survived after the destruction of the Aksumite Empire, as a small town and religious center of Ethiopia. For example, Manoel de Almedia and Pero Pais stated about Aksum in the 1600s (cited in Gamst 1970:377) as follows:

> *Aksum had at that time a population of about 100 and Pero Pais recorded more realistically an estimation of buildings indicating a population of 1,000 or less. There is no evidence of the existence of any other such small towns during the next seven centuries following the destruction of Aksum, but a few may have occasionally flourished.*

James Bruce (1838:166) also says in a few words about the town of Aksum and its population, in his famous book *To Discover the Source of the Nile*, that: "The present Aksum stands at the foot of the hill, and may have about six hundred houses. There are several manufacturers of coarse cotton cloth, and here too the best is made of goats' skins, which is the ordinary employment of the monk."

The above two quotations show how Aksum survived in different times even if its population was sometimes very small. And the town has continued as a center of many crafts. The other part of the history of the town is shared with "modern" Ethiopian towns' history. Aksum was re-

established in the present feature, more or less related with the intrusion of the Italians in Ethiopia. This intrusion created an opportunity to re-establish constructions and favored urbanization in north Ethiopia, including that of Aksum (Gamst 1970:380).

In the course history, Aksum has been of religious importance, because this town is the holy city of Christianity in Ethiopia. Levine (2000: 111) explains that one text calls the Aksum the "royal throne of the kings of Zion, mother of all lands, pride of the entire universe, and jewel of kings." This indicates how this town still has historical and religious importance in Ethiopia, even though it lost its position as capital city before one thousand years. In addition to that, it contributed to preserve different types of Aksumite traditions of smithery important for the church (Ki1, Ki2 and Ki3; Aksum, February 10, 11 and 12, 2011 and March 2011).

Therefore, contemporary Aksum started as a "modern" town after the Italian conquest in the 1930s. The first asphalted road in Aksum was built by the Italians. In present days, one can find many beautiful houses built by the Italians. Still, the center of the town is known as *piazza* (Ki1, Ki3 and Ki4; Aksum, February 10, 11 and 12, 2011; Observation, Aksum, February 2011 and March 2011).

The above highlights show how this small town has continuity for almost three thousand years. This helps to draw a long history of smithery in the study area.

In present Aksum, on the street from the obelisks to the Aksumite Foundation Library, one can find many tourist shops offering traditional clothes and different materials made of stone, wood and metal. In other parts of the town, one can also find many tourist shops, gold- and silver-smiths' work made of gold and silver: earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, ear picks, neck crosses, and hair pins (sometimes including beads) (Observation, Aksum, February 2011 and March 2011).

In addition, the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches are full of many precious metal-works such as: crowns, processional crosses, hand crosses, neck-crosses, sistrums, finials of prayer sticks, chalices and are still in demand from the Church, and still produced by local smiths (Ki1, Ki3 and Ki5; Aksum, February 12, 19 and 21, 2011; Observation, Aksum, February 2011 and March 2011).

The craftsmen's achievements in art and architecture were so extraordinary that they had a profound cultural influence in the region for centuries. Evidence of those outstanding cultural achievements are provided by the astonishing monuments that make Aksum a city unique in the world and one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites (Chiarie 2009:18).

3.2 Who are the Traditional Smiths?

He who built the house has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone.

(Hebrews 3:3-4)

In daily life, the smiths' products are more valued than the smiths. In addition to that, this quotation from the Bible tells us that every material has a maker and that the maker deserves more honor than the product. But in most of the literature, found the opposite.

In the literature, it is easier to find data about the materials than about their makers. The makers were and still are ignored. Most writers are only appreciating and focusing on the materials and they do not even mention who has made them. They simply try to understand the products without the context in which the objects produce culture. Regarding this, Silverman (1999:8) writes: "Most scholars have chosen not to engage the people who produce and use the objects to study". Of course, this is a reality faced when I reviewed the literature. It should be known that group identity is more than what a person works, and more than a source of income.

In social anthropology, work can be analyzed in terms of physical transformations, social transactions, economic activities or personal identities. Wallman (1979:1) explains the relation of work and identity as follows: "Work controls the identity as much as the economy of the worker, whether as an individual or as the member of a caste or an occupational group."

So, it is important to include in this thesis the traditional smiths' background, their identity and cultural context. Because it is necessary to include the makers, before we say something about their products.

The origin of smiths in Aksum is largely shaped by a mixture of legend, religion and oral history of ancient Ethiopia, because Aksum is at the center of the legend, religion and oral history of north Ethiopia. There is oral tradition how they started smithery and their origin as occupational group. Besides the oral tradition, archeological evidences also show that there was smithery in

ancient Aksum. Local smithery in ancient Aksum included smelting, forging, welding, riveting, production of even-thickness plates, drilling, casting, polishing, plating (including both annealing and mercury gilding) and enameling (Phillipson 2003: 4).

3.2.1 Biblical Bezaleel

During my fieldwork, when I asked smiths' key informants and FGD discussants about themselves and their background, I heard a name "Bezaleel", more often than other names. Sometimes, I was confused about the name Bezaleel, because some seemed to know him very well, and others told me that he was the father of the liturgical and jewelry smiths in Aksum. When I heard repeatedly this name, I asked my key informants and FGD discussants to make this clear to me.

According to discussants (FGD1, Aksum, February, 15 and 25 2011) and jewelry smiths and liturgical key informants (Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki10 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13, 16, 19, 2011 and March 2, 2011) the oral tradition of the traditional liturgical and jewelry smiths in Aksum claims that they descend from the Biblical Bezaleel. Their work is called *Seyak* work, which means the work of 'wise men' and they consider themselves as children of Bezaleel. As religious key informant (Ki1; Aksum, February 19, 2011), also told me the same story about the origin of traditional jewelry and liturgical smiths and gave me some information about Bezaleel from the Bible. Then I tried to get acquainted with the Biblical Bezaleel from the Bible context.

Who is Bezaleel? What does the Bible tell us about him? How is he connected with the traditional smiths? I found the name "Bezaleel" in the Bible (Exodus 31: 1-11) mentioned nine times. The most important thing that attracted me is that the name Bezaleel is mentioned in the Bible directly in connection with the Ark of Covenant, as the traditional smiths told me in Aksum. Then, if Bezaleel is related with the Ark of Covenant, I expected that he is related with the legend of the Queen of Shaba and Menelik I. In the local oral tradition, usually the Queen of Sheba, Menelik I and the Ark of Covenant are inseparable. This story is also mentioned in the famous book *Kebre-Negest* ("Glory of Kings") first compiled in the early 14th century (Levine 1974:93).

Let me see Bezaleel in the Bible (Exodus or Moses II 31:1-4): "And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying. 2. See, I have called by name Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: 3. And I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. 4. To devise cunning works, to work in gold, and in silver, and in brass."

From the above Biblical quotation we can understand that Bezaleel is shown as an all-round craftsman including cunning, gold, silver, brass, carving timber and many other crafts. Bezaleel was getting all these skills directly from God. Bezaleel was elected by God to produce all necessary materials to Judaism.

Then Bezaleel taught other persons who were helpers in the whole work; according to this idea the bible (Exodus 35:34) says the following: "And he hath put in his heart that he may teach, [both] he, and Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan." Then this craft activity passed from generation to generation, according to the bible, because God gave him helpers and Bezaleel taught them. Finally, the Bible concludes that Bezaleel finished the work that God dictated him (Exodus 38:22) "and Bezaleel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the Lord commanded Moses."

The other part of the story of the smiths explains how Bezaleel's skill came to Aksum. This oral tradition is related with the Queen of Sheba and her son Menelik. According to the oral tradition of the local traditional smiths in Aksum, their genesis started with the visit of the Biblical Queen of Sheba to King Solomon around 1000 B.C. They told me how the Queen of Sheba went to Israel and for what reason, as this event is written in the Bible and people in Aksum believe in it like in historical fact. (1 Kings 10:1-2), "1. And when the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. 2. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart."

In my fieldwork, I observed that most key informants completely believed that the Queen of Sheba is an Ethiopian even though her country is not specifically mentioned in the Bible. Of

course, this story is very famous in Ethiopia (including Eritrea) especially among the Tigray and Amhara. The important story here is how Bezaleel's craftsmanship came to Aksum. This is directly related to how the Ark of Covenant is believed to have come to Aksum.

According to most key informants, (Ki1-Ki13; Aksum, February and March 2011), and most FGD discussants, the Ark came to Ethiopia by Menelik I, Queen Sheba's son. When the Ark came to Ethiopia there were many people coming with him. So, among those people, there were smiths. Regarding this story in the literature, it is found in Kebre-Negest ("Glory of Kings" (Ethiopia) translated into English by Budge). In this book there are many stories about Ethiopia including the detailed story about the Queen of Sheba and Menelik I. This book focuses on the Ethiopian Glory of Kings. The greatness of the Ethiopian kings is there enhanced by the kings as descendants of David and Solomon by the Queen Sheba and Menelik I. Hoberman (1983:2-3) summarizes the '*Kebre-Negest*' as to how the Ark came to Ethiopia in his article "The Ethiopian Legend of the Ark", as follows:

> *The Ethiopians have inherited Israel's mantle as God's Chosen People. The kings of Ethiopia are now the legitimate successors of the kings of Israel and Judah. The Ark was taken to Aksum, capital of Ethiopia, where its arrival sparked great rejoicing. The people disavowed their native gods and embraced the God of Israel. Ethiopia becomes the second Zion; Aksum, the New Jerusalem. And the Ark is the unmistakable emblem of this geographical transfer of divine favor.*

According to the oral tradition of traditional smiths, (based on most smiths' key informants, Aksum, February and March) they claim that their forefathers came with the Ark and this oral tradition explains that when Menelik I returned to Aksum with the Ark of Covenant, priests and other persons important to serve the new religion came to Aksum. Among them, some were specialized to produce religious objects. Therefore, it is believed that the craftsmanship, specifically of those who are producing liturgical objects, came to Ethiopia to serve the Ark as Moses order them to do (Ki1, Ki2, Ki3, Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 16 and March 2, 2011).

During fieldwork an orthodox key informant priest, (Ki1, Ki2 and Ki3; Aksum, February 12, 13 19 and March 1, 2011), told me that there are many liturgical materials not common in other Christian communities. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is more focused on the Old Testament than other Christian congregations. "The Ark of Covenant became an integral part of our faith."

Regarding this, Hoberman (1983:1) states that: "In no Christian country has veneration and imitation of the Old Testament been a more prominent feature of the national religious life than in Ethiopia."

3.2.2. Origin of Liturgical and Jewelry Smiths

In Aksum, the traditional smiths that claim their origin from the Queen of Sheba and Bezaleel call themselves '*Seyak*'. *Seyak* means in their 'language' a wise and skillful person. The word *Seyak* is not known to outsiders. The *Seyak* call the local people '*Hydeba*' which means 'ignorant.' *Hydeba* is derogative, but *Seyak* has a positive connotation. The '*Seyak*' consider themselves more beautiful and physically more attractive than the *Hydeba*. Besides this, the local people believe that if a person is handsome, he or she may descend from a *Seyak* family (Ki6, Ki7, Ki11, K12 and Ki13, Aksum, February 16, 17, 19 and March 2, 2011).

The contemporary traditional smiths and specially the *Seyak* claim their descent from Israel. They also think that their diet is as superior to that of the *Hydeba*. My liturgical key informant, (Ki5, Aksum, February 21, 2011), said that "We are eating white *teff ingera* and the animals are slaughtered strictly according to the law so that we do eat only fresh food." This may indicate their economic strength or their background related with ancient Israel's and Moses' dietary laws. During my discussion with one jewelry-smith, (Ki7, Aksum, February 17, 2011) he said, "I am *Seyak* but I am not Tigrian."

Moreover, their work sometimes is called *Ide-Solomon,* which means the 'hand of Solomon'. And the David star is called *Mahte-Solomon,* which means 'Solomon's stamp'. It is usually found in most metal objects made by local smiths. One elderly jewelry-smith key informant, (Ki4, Aksum, February 13, 2011), told me: "We are Israelites. Sometimes I do not understand why Israel's government does not remember us. In the past when the Israel government took many Beta-Israel from nearby (probably the operation Moses or Solomon), I decided to go to Israel but I did not go for the sake of my family."

The same informant told me that, though he thinks that his ancestors came from Israel, he does not consider himself a Beta-Israel. In addition to that, the traditional smiths in Aksum do not intermarry with the Beta-Israel. Most smiths key informants, (Ki6, Ki8, Ki10 and K12, Aksum,

February 16, 17, 18 and March 2, 2011), and FGD discussants, (FGD1, Aksum, February 25, 2011) call the Beta-Israel who live around Aksum and Shire *Keyla* and *Agaw*.

Historically, the *Seyak* served as *Jan-Shellamii* (royal jewelry makers) in producing crowns and jewelries. They are still very important for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Fortunately I visited the Ethiopian Church in Aksum and I saw precious objects made by local liturgical smiths.

According to my smiths' key informants and FGD discussants who were born and grew up in Aksum, most of them are descendants of the traditional *Jan-Shellamii*, the *Seyak* family.

Based on my findings the origin of traditional smiths in "modern" Aksum can be grouped into two. The one group is called *Seyak* and it seems similar to the previous *Jan-Shellamii*. In the literature I did not find any mention of the terms *Seyak* or *Hydeba*. But I found the designation *Jan-Shellamii* in works of Merid Weldearagay (1983:5). Most informants, (Ki5, Ki6, Ki7, Ki10, Ki11, and Ki12, Aksum, February 16, 17, 18, 19 and March 2, 2011), and FGD discussant, (FGD1, Aksum, February, 15 2011), told me that *Jan-Shellamii* only relates to those *Seyak* or liturgical- and jewelry-smiths, in other words, not including blacksmiths. But Merid Weldearagay states, "*Jan-Shellamii*" include jewelry workers and iron workers. He states that, "The smiths, whether jewelry or iron workers, were organized into workshops, curiously enough known by the lofty name of "*Jan-Shellamii*" or royal jewelries."

But if *Jan-Shellamii* means 'royal jewelries' workers as Merid says, it seems that the expression of *Jan-Shellamii* is only appropriate for liturgical and jewelry smiths, because in history as well as in contemporary Ethiopia, jewelry made from iron is very rare.

Regarding the classification of traditional smiths in north Ethiopia, I found one book, '*Tarik Ittyopya*', 'History of Ethiopia' in Tigrinya written by Debtera Fisha Abyezgi (1889:158). According to this book, "*Tibebti* are classified into two: one is gold- and silver-smiths producing jewelry and the others are blacksmiths only producing agricultural tools and other metal objects made from iron." He further states that the *tibebti* are physically more handsome than the local people, and in the local society, when one is physically attractive, he or she is considered as *Tibib*, or he or she has some genealogical relation with *Tibib*. He compared their physical attractiveness with the children of God and human beings mentioned in Bible (Genesis 6:1-2):

"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them as wives of all which they chose."

But in my fieldwork, I observed that the smiths are physically indistinguishable from the local people. But still they consider themselves to be relatively more handsome. Regarding this the following example gives a hint about their perception of their physical appearance. When I discussed this point with the father of a small girl who asked me, *Are you Seyak?*, I answered, '*yes*'. But the girl said: *I do not think that you are Seyak, because you are not beautiful.* Then, I reported this to her father and her father told me: "It is common if a stranger comes to our home that our children ask him or her whether he or she is *Seyak* or *Hydeba*. If the answers is "*Seyak*" they easily approach the stranger as *Hydeba*, showing their un-willingness to approach or even to talk with the stranger." (Ki5; Aksum, February 21, 2011).

Most liturgical and jewelry-smiths key informants, (Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki7, Ki10, Ki11, Ki12 and Ki13, Aksum, February 13, 16, 21, 17, 18, 19 and March 2, 2011), remember that Aksum born *Seyak* families became *Jan-Shellamii* and served in the court of Emperor Yohannes 4th. During the reign of Emperor Yohannes the 4th, they were *Jan-Shellamii* at the court; among them were *Begrond* Araya and Ingeda Haftu. *Begrond* Araya *Jan-Shellamii* produced different types of objects for the emperor. Even my informants (most of them are descendants of emperors' *Jan-Shellamii*) did not specify what they produced. They said simply: *everything*. Among *Jan-Shellamii* in the past, there are still very famous ones in Aksum because of their wealth such as: *Degacht* Kenfu and *Fatwrari* Gebremaryam who were in Asmara during the reign of Haile-Sellassie I.

3.2.3 Origin of Blacksmiths

The second group of traditional smiths in Aksum traces its origin from blacksmiths' families. They originate from Aksum and the surrounding villages. They produce different agricultural tools. They do not know the story of Bezaleel, not the 'language' of the *Seyak*. They are, as other blacksmiths, found in different parts of the country; in the Aksum context, they are mainly living in villages around Aksum (FGD1; Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011). The centers of the blacksmiths around Aksum include villages such as: Asba, Mayakono, Flfli, Addi-Kluluzab,

Addi-Taka and Merera, and as far as Segli, near Adwa. When compared with other small cities, Aksum is surrounded by blacksmiths' villages. This large amount of blacksmiths' villages may indicate that there was a large amount of smiths in previous times in that area. This may be related to the past importance of blacksmiths (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February 18 and 19, 2011).

In this regard, Merid Weldearagay (1976:1) states the importance of blacksmiths in the Aksumite period in the following way:

> *The Aksumite had also developed an iron culture. Local as well as imported iron was smelted, tempered and shaped into several tools and weapons. In addition to the skills and tools necessary for the erection of heavy buildings and hewing of granite monoliths, the Aksumites were able to dig out or construct reservoirs for drinking as well as for irrigation purposes.*

Some blacksmith key informants (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February 18 and 19, 2011) told me that in the past, there were unknown large metal objects in Aksum and that they were taken away by the Italians.

Therefore, the *Seyak* specialized in precious metalworking necessary for church, state, and contemporary jewelry necessary for wedding ceremonies. But blacksmiths specialized in agricultural tools; in the past they also produced *hasin-meskel* (iron crosses) (Ki8 and Ki9, Aksum, February 18 and 19, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

3.3. The Owadu Language

On my way to the study area, Aksum, I had a stop off in Gondar where I came across a gold smith with whom I had a conversation on a topic related to my study. He had tipped me about a functional "language" common among gold and silver -smiths. He advised me to have a look into this language which, he said, is called ***Owadu***. I had not read of a "language" named ***Owadu.*** The gold-smith with whom I got a chance to speak a person who has knowledge about the language.

He related that the birth place of ***Owadu*** is Aksum. "It is a common "language" among the smiths all over the country. For instance, gold and silver smiths in Gondar do speak ***Owadu***. I know of gold and silver smiths in Asmara, Adama, and Addis Ababa who speak the "language"

far better than I do. And I will give you an address of a smith who can really be a good help in this regard" said the informant I met in Gondar." (K14, Gondar, February 2, 2011).

Owadu is also called ***Seyak's*** language. I learned from the data collected, (Ki4, Ki6, Ki7 and Ki12, Aksum, February 13, 16, 17 and 2, 2011), that there are words that originated from Tegre, Aramaic Hebrew, Arabic and Tigrinya. At this time, ***Owadu*** is nobody's mother tongue, has no elaborat grammar and only a limited vocabulary for simple purposes.

As my liturgical key informant, (Ki5, Aksum February 21, 2011), told me, ***Owadu*** is created and used by the *Seyak* smiths to ensure secrecy in transmitting message among themselves. ***Owadu*** is a language which exhibits a strong affiliation with Arabic and Hebrew. I understand that ***Owadu*** is more common amongst the liturgical and jewelry smiths than among the blacksmiths. The following words are specimens of common words of the ***Owadu.***

Owadu	**English**
'ægv:z	old
ækfl'r	gossip
æmrvt	female (both human and animal)
'æsкá'n	silence
bädii	materials
bäqal	soldier
bät'ni	he
bäyaii	trade
bïshroo	which
buda	evil eye
duskul	inactive
erur	bronze
jemii	famine
jemaii	poor
haftu	gold
Haydeba	ignorant
humer	donkey

ïfuy	disease
ïdran	drunkard
kibsi	foolish
kisra	*ingera* (local bread)
krum	broken
lahum	meat
lihuk	good
mara	woman
mäbshel	copper
mädkul	make it polluted
mäqdar	know
mäsdädya	money
mäshabati	water(or drinkable liquid)
mäshäbrti	make foolish
mät'näy	my share
mogdom	steal
mugsham	lost
mïzrii	*swa* (local beer)
muzni	ear
nät'rïb	let us go
naywad	silver
nefrz	hit
ossey	food
rägan	rich
räwši	fear
samulla	prostitution
sesma	slave, black
Seyak	the work of skillful person
shahuway	my friend
sïqni	work
sïqur	child

sut'ar	bulky
täbee	man
täkulem	speak
täkulumena	we speak together
täwbo	hide it
tekuyami	opportunists
teäsmalit	prostitute (female)
tiyaž	bad
zuba	male sex organ
zehndeba	to wear

The above words are very far from the Tigrinya language that is common in Aksum, except *muzuni*, which means ear, it seems derived from *ezni,* the Tigrinya word meaning ear. The other words such as "*humer*" and "*kisra*" seem directly derived from Arabic words which means "donkey" and *ingera* respectively, with the same meaning in Arabic.

I wrote these words after cross-checking their meaning with my informants. All the above words were included in the list when my informants agreed on the meanings. With relation to this language, liturgical smith key informants told me the following story:

> *Before 60 years one precious object was stolen by someone from the church. Then one person found the object in Addis Ababa, and sent a letter to the church, the introduction part written in Tigrinya and he said: give this letter to my friend, but he wrote the details in the Owadu language. Finally, his friend interpreted it and the church gave this information to the police and thus the object was returned from Addis Ababa.*
>
> (Ki13; Aksum, March 2, 2011).

Sometimes the language, also used mixed with Tigrinya, transfers some hidden message, for example the *Seyak* say that, "*Haydeba naywa hiben mebshal zehndba*", which means that *haydeba* give us silver but they received copper from us. This means, *haydeba* are ignorant, they do not even differentiate silver from copper.

Contemporarily the Owadu language's function seems to be the argot of a particular group. On the other hand, it in line with the context characteristics of argot, it seems too far from argot. For example, Leslau (1952:102) under the title of "An Ethiopian Minstrels' Argot" states that, "the characteristic feature of the argot is the deformation of the root of the general language that is Amharic." and he further explains, "The great majority of the words is taken from Amharic."

Generally, characteristics of Ethiopian argots such as merchants', *azmaris'* (minstrels), and persons "possessed by *zar* spirits", as Teshome Demisse et al. (1983: 339) explain "these argots are Amharic-based: They are composed of deliberately transformed Amharic words and sentence structures, and are used for confidentiality in in-group communication." For these words, the argot makes use of dialectal expression" But when we look at ***Owadu,*** they neither deform Tigrinya nor are most roots from Tigrinya. These words and expressions are still rudimentary in its collection. It seems to be a secret work language among the *Seyak*, but neither a basic grammar nor syntax has yet been identified. It needs further study before concluding whether the category argot applicable or not.

Chapter Four

Work Analysis of Traditional Smithery

4.1 General Description of the Nature of Traditional Smithery in Aksum

The traditional smithery in Aksum, the way of acquiring the skill, as well as most of the smithery knowledge is traditional. In present Aksum, smithery is primarily an economic activity; and it is also a science and art. The historical roots go back to Aksumite and pre-Aksumite civilizations.

Every traditional smith whether he/she is a blacksmith, jewelry-smith or liturgical-smith, learns the skill sometimes from his/ her neighbors and friends as a result of socialization from childhood and gets materials that have importance in the whole process from his /her relatives or friends. This type of learning is common among most traditional smiths (Ki5, Ki7 and Ki9; Aksum, February 16, 17 and 18, 2011). For example, Silverman (1999:16) states that, "traditional craftsmen in Ethiopia acquired their specialized knowledge by observing and imitating the actions of family members and friends."

Traditional smiths are expected to know the whole process of the work, because they are not cooperating with each others. They consider their work as a hidden work. Sometimes, they are not even ready to share their skill and knowledge with their close relatives (FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

So, every smith is expected to have the knowledge to involve him-, herself completely in the whole process, independently of others. Every smith is expected to have the knowledge and experience of the historical past and of the technical processes of the present. Liturgical smiths (Ki5 and ki13; Aksum, February, 15 and March 2, 2011) are also aware of the necessity of historical and religious knowledge for their art and aesthetic expression when they design and decorate their work. Moreover, the work is also influenced by individual creativity, capacity of innovation, the use of different tools and the understanding of the work process.

An analysis of the work usually includes division of labor, specialization of work, work place, economic activities, etc. In the study area, most of the smiths are doing at home. Some others

also are doing in their shops. Wallman (1979:12) writes that, "in some cases work is so closely identified with a particular place that the place becomes the means of its performance." This applies to the work areas of traditional jewelry -and liturgical-smiths. The working area of jewelry and liturgical smiths' key informants looks like a small laboratory. This area is prepared to perform a specific work. Children and strangers are not allowed to enter the work area, with some exceptions concerning the wife's and children's participation (Ki4, Ki5, Ki10, Ki11 and Ki12: Aksum, February 2011).

In all types of traditional smithery, there is a division of labor that includes children's and wife's participation. Of course, all societies practice at least some division of labor by sex and age (Platter 1989:318); what anthropologists, along with others in neighboring disciplines, have been discovering is that men are only partial economic providers.

In addition to that, the participation of women and children in the traditional smithery process is very common and important. Without women's and children's participation, especially in the lost wax casting technique, it is nearly impossible to finish a work alone. The division of labor and the nature of Ethiopian crafts can be seen in the work of Cassier (1975:105), which gives some additional hints about the metalwork in the following way: "The Ethiopian artisan is a handworker; his tasks are organized like a sort of family enterprise, based on the secular methods that his parents transmitted to him." For example, in blacksmiths' families, there is a division of labor between father and son; they can be seen heating the fire with a pair of bellows, beating or filing down the metal. Even though most traditional smiths are male, I found two women in the study area engaged in traditional smithery as full time workers. One of them told her life history in her words about, how she became jewelry smith:

> *I was born in Asba village near Aksum. During my childhood, I worked in pottery with my mother. At the age 17, I married a gold- and silver-smith who lived in Aksum. Then I helped my husband for many years in our home. Unfortunately, my husband suddenly died. At this time, I had five children. I was frustrated and anticipated a serious economic crisis. During this time some people came to our home and told me 'we gave an order for your husband to work this and that jewelry' Then, I said to them, 'come tomorrow and I will check it.' I had found the objects which were not finished. Then I decided to finish the objects and I finished them in two days. I feared that they would accept it or not. Then they came and I said, 'Fortunately he already has finished them.' They appreciated the objects*

and gave me 200 birr. From that time on I became a gold-and silver-smith. As you see now, I can work bracelets, ear picks (meokoki), necklaces (hable), earrings (kutucha), rings (katim), etc.

(Ki7; Aksum, February 24, 2011).

This indicates that even though traditional smithery in Aksum is dominated by men's work, if the opportunity is opened and the local perception is changed, it is possible to find women engaged in this work. Of course, I heard that some women can work with their husbands in their home, but the income and fame is only given to their husbands and sons.

Murray (cited in Wallman 1979:12) states that the most common evaluation of work by the place in which it is done pertains to the place in which women most often work, whether in "traditional" or "modern" societies: home-centered work, household production and housework are defined by the place of performance of women and are economically undervalued, sometimes given no formal economic value at all.

The traditional smiths in Aksum are doing their work in their home. But this implies the opposite of the above idea of work analysis. First, the work is traditionally dominated by males. Second, their economy is stronger than other activities. So, it is important to understand this work in its specific setting.

As Wallman (1979:13) writes, "some work is appropriate only to particular kinds of people, either the 'real' requirements of its performance demand strengths, skills or talents that they only have, or because it is restricted by custom, by right or obligation to a particular social category."

Of course, the primary cause of the existence of traditional smithery as work-specialization as a group performance has historical reason. But traditional smiths in Aksum include what Wallman (1979:13) listed as background: cause of specialization of work as 'real' requirements of its performance demanding strengths, skills or talents, and because it also is restricted by custom and by right or obligation to particular social categories.

Traditional smithery in the study area can be understood as a work full of risks. Some smiths key informants told me that physical injury can happen at any stage of the work. Serious injury can also happen especially during melting and hammering the metal, when comparing the probability of risk, it is common among blacksmith, liturgical smiths than jewelry smiths. The same

informants said that their health status is not good; they believe that this is a result of a daily long time exposure to fire without any protection. As a result of this, sudden death is common among them (Ki5, Ki7, Ki9 and Ki10; Aksum, February 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

4.2 Types of Traditional Smiths in Aksum

There are three types of traditional smiths in contemporary Aksum: those are black-smiths, liturgical-smiths and jewelry-smiths.

Black smiths are those who are engaged in producing axes, sickles, hammers, plough shares, and tools that may be used by other smiths (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February, 2011 ; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

Liturgical-smiths are those who are producing objects important for the church such as: crowns (*zewdi*), priest and deacon crowns (*aklil*), processional crosses *(kewami meskel),* hand crosses *(edd meskel),* staff finials *(mekomyia*), sistrums *(tesnastil),* etc (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February, and March 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

Jewelry-smiths are those who are producing beads (*albo*), earrings (*kutucha*), rings (*katim*), necklaces (*hable*), ear picks (*meokoki*), neck crosses (*nay ksad meskel*), and hair pins (*welba*) (Ki4, Ki6, Ki7, Ki10, K11, Ki12 and Ki13; Aksum, February and March 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

Those three specializations are not clearly demarcated, especially in the case of those who are producing liturgical objects, and those who are producing jewelry. Sometimes, liturgical smiths can work processional crosses or other object for anybody who asks for them. Those groups are more or less exhibiting differences in technology, skill, knowledge, economy, and status.

4.2.1. Blacksmiths

The blacksmith technology in contemporary Aksum is a relatively simple technology, when compared with jewelry-smiths and liturgical-smiths' technology. Blacksmiths use iron only for making axes, knives, and different agricultural tools. They are few in number. But historically, they had a very important contribution for that area.

A lot of material evidence came to the knowledge of the scientific community from excavations at Aksum. Previously, the iron was locally obtained, as Munro–Hay (1991:172) states: "sources of iron ore were apparently fairly common in Tigray." It was melted and used for different purposes, as Phillipson (2000:405) states: "Iron knives, triangular section, and bladed hammerheads that were excavated in Aksum."

Among the tools of the liturgical smiths (where I conducted participant observation, Aksum, February and March 2011), I found different types of materials made by local blacksmiths. These tools help to make other tools in the processing of liturgical and jewelry objects. This was one type of the traditional blacksmiths' contribution. This may be different from other blacksmiths found countrywide. This type of technique seems to have a long history and was one of the preconditions for the production of other smithery as it has been known for thousands of years.

For example, in the study area, the blacksmiths produced different types of hammer (*medosha*) for different purposes. In addition to this, the hammer was also used for the preparation of *meret-mslli* and *meret-cowrry*. The anvil locally made by local blacksmiths, is called *mesfn*. The literarily meaning of *mesfn* is feudal, it is used to hammer any metal and the name also indicates their unlikeness to the feudal system. *Weska* (photo one) is an iron tool that helps to reshape and decorate materials and is usually used for sistrums and other functions. *Mebred* is an iron file that helps to modify and decorate metal. It is also used for sharpening materials. *Mazen* a square a material used to measure angles and lines. The main function of *mazen* is to help design on wax and is used to measure angles and lines. It is an iron compass to measure circles in wax or on the metal. *Menekesha* (photo two) is a group of small metals used for embalming and decorating the metal, *muzewhi* (photo three) is used for ductile materials. All these metal objects were made by local blacksmiths and other smiths and still exist to some extent.

These materials are still common among the liturgical smiths and previously were also common among jewelry smiths. By doing this, until recently, Aksumite blacksmiths are remarkable in preserving so much of their ancient traditions.

Photo One: *Weseka*

Photo by: The researcher (February 20, 2011 Aksum)

This instrument (Photo one) which is called *weseka,* is made from iron by blacksmiths almost unchanged since 100 years. This instrument is used to shape different large materials especially for *mekomya* (sistrums), hand crosses and processional crosses.

Photo Two: *Menakesha*

Photo by: The researcher (February 20, 2011 Aksum)

These three tools, called *menakesha*, are used to emblem and decorate the material after casting it into metal. These materials are made from iron by blacksmiths, sometimes by liturgical and jewelry smiths themselves. Each *menakesha* has its unique function. For example, a *menekesha* called *hashwa* is used to produce many dots at one time. The other common *menakesha* is used as a pencil to draw pictures on the metal.

Photo Three: *Mezzewhi*

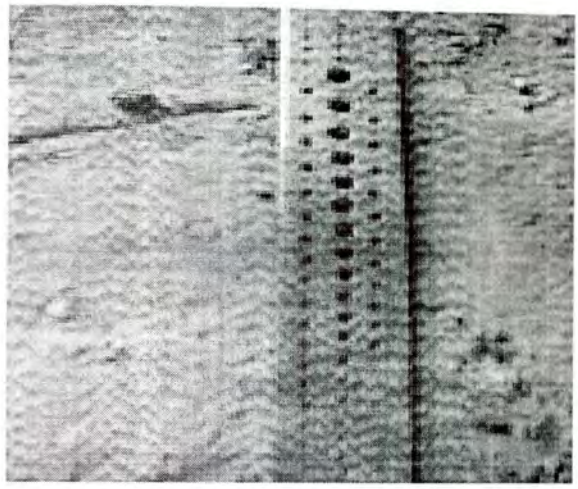

Photo by: The researcher (February 21, 2011 Aksum)

This material is made by local blacksmiths and other smiths since 100 years. This is called *mezzewhi* used to shape the metal long and wire like. But now, this material is replaced by a machine, a metal forming instrument called rolling mill used for wires.

Sometimes, blacksmiths are engaged with repair of iron material including cars, mills and other machines in the town. Contemporary blacksmiths in Aksum employ only a few implments which consist mainly of charcoal (*fham*), *menfihia* made of goat skin (bellows), hammer and anvil (*mesfn*), large and small pliers (*gutaets)*. They often use a piece of flat iron as an anvil. In addition, implements such as iron files (*mebred*) are used to sharpen and modify the blade of knives and sickles. This indicates that they use only a small stock of working instruments. The charcoal is a special type of charcoal called *faham lehay* which means: charcoal made from the *lahay* tree. This type of charcoal burns a long time before it turns to ashes. This helps because

iron needs a stronger heat than other metals (Observation, Aksum, March 2011; Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February 17 and 18, 2011).

The basic technique of the blacksmiths in Aksum is similar to the familiar method beating or squeezing the metals into the designed shape, and iron was softened by heating it hot in a fire. The blacksmith uses iron anvil and beats the iron into a shape with a hammer. The work is very similar, even identical, to other blacksmiths' work. For example, what Simoons (1960:181) wrote about blacksmiths of North West Ethiopia is very similar to what I saw in Aksum:

> *The smith usually starts his work in the cool of the early morning, and sometimes works for the entire day. He builds his charcoal fire in a circular pit about one foot deep and one or two feet in circumference. The pipe ends with two bellows placed down at one end of an iron pipe which extends underneath to the charcoal fire. An apprentice operates the bellows, one in each hand, moving them rhythmically up and down. The iron to be worked is buried in the hot coals of the fire and the bellows are operated for five minutes or so until the iron is red hot. Then the smith picks up the iron with long pincers and places it on an anvil while he either pounds himself or holds it while someone else pounds it with a heavy hammer. Often, two men or boys pound the iron in turn or with alternating blows. When the iron cools, it is replaced in the fire and reheated. To bend the end of a hoe or plow point, the smith stretches the iron between two rocks and pounds it down, to make holes in the implement. He places a small iron plate with a hole in it on the anvil, places the red-hot implement over it, and then pounds it with a hammer and chisels it until a roll is formed above the hole in the plate.*

Confirm with (Observation, Aksum, March 2, 2011; K8, Aksum, February 17 and 19, 2011).

Blacksmiths, when they produce agricultural tools with the same ancient technology, the produce does not show any change. For example, Merid Weldearagay (1983:16.) states that this situation shows: "Agricultural technology, in particular, remained unchanged for millennia."

Of course, agricultural tools in rural Ethiopia are still unchanged, but other materials made by blacksmiths that are very important for other smiths are found at the last stage of extinction. The tools such as: *weska*, *mebred*, *menekasha*, anvil, hammer, iron compass, formerly made by traditional smiths, are now replaced by imported ones.

The other most important aspects concerning the iron smithery is the change in getting the iron source. Iron smithery started from the discovery of smelting various iron ore. Blacksmith key informants told me that in the past the forefathers produced iron from *hammed hasten*, which

means iron ore which came from *Medbay,* a place 5 km North West of Aksum. But the contemporary blacksmiths do not know where the *hammed hasten* (iron ore) is located there and they are even astonished of how their grandfathers were able to melt the iron by using bellows (*Menafh)* (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February 17 and 18, 2011).

This indicates lost of iron mining and the change in accessing iron sources. This happened as a result of the intrusion of Italy in Eritrea. During that time, iron was easily obtained at a cheap price. In addition to that, the new iron was very easy to get re-used for making different types of tools. The iron was imported in the form of utensils and different spare part of old cars. Compared with the traditional mining, the availability of iron as spare parts and old metal objects was very easy. In the fieldwork mining of iron from iron ore has totally disappeared. In contemporary Aksum, the source of iron is old cars and different types of military weapons.

After a 14 year lasting struggle, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) took control of the entire northern Ethiopian Province of Tigray in 1989 (Young 1997:81). During the civil war, some of the blacksmith participated by repairing and maintaining the weapons. One of the blacksmiths key informants told me that during the civil war, one Beta-Israel blacksmith near Selekleka place around 30 km West of Aksum, could even produce guns by his own (Ki8; Aksum, February 17, 2011).

The long years of civil war and the Ethio-Eritrean war (1998-2000) created a chance for the availability of different types of iron objects for traditional smiths. Those wars also had a direct impact on the source of iron in that area. In one blacksmiths' home, I saw many used military weapons as iron source (Ki9; Aksum, February 18, 2011). In addition to that, it also became the source of copper and bronze for other smiths. These weapons were collected by themselves during the civil war and the later war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Sometimes, the weapons are bought for a few *Birr*. The blacksmith, the liturgical smith and jewelry smith do not use the weapons directly. First, they neutralize the weapon and make it ready for re-use. But sometime, it outbursts and kills or injures the smiths (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February17 and 18, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

Moreover, in recent times, the replacement of agricultural tools made by traditional smiths by imported factory products is very high. Contemporary blacksmiths largely are engaged in maintaining and repairing agricultural and other iron tools. As a result, most of the blacksmiths leave their work and shift to other types of economic activities such as trade, liturgical and jewelry smiths (Ki9; Aksum, February 18, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25 2011). In the field, I found only a few people engaged in black smithery. I also found them as jewelry smith with a blacksmith background. One jewelry smith informant said the following:

> *I was born in Asba near Aksum. My father was a blacksmith and a farmer. So, I helped my family by participating in farming and smithery. Then during the Derg, I joined the 1978 military and served for many years. And I returned and tried to live as a blacksmith, but I could not get enough income. In the middle of this, I married the daughter of a silver-smith in Aksum. This changed my life and I started to learn the skill and knowledge of gold-and silver-smiths's work from my father-in-law. Now I am working gold and silver jewelries and even my son learnt from me and he has opened a small shop in Addis Ababa.*
>
> (Ki9; Aksum, February 17, 2011)

The above example shows the shift of work from blacksmith to liturgical-and jewelry-smith as a result of marriage and economic reasons. This type of shifting is now very common in Aksum.

4.2.2. Liturgical Smiths

Liturgical smiths are mostly related with the production of church objects. The primary technique to produce those church objects is known as lost wax casting technique. The Aksum Mary of Zion church contains many precious objects produced by this technique. Brus (1975:8) summarizes the history of Aksum Mary of Zion Churches with mass of crowns as follows:

> *As Christianity spread, churches were built, the most important of which was the Cathedral of St. Mary of Zion at Aksum. Not only was this church once the coronation site for Ethiopian sovereigns, but, as it was the custom for each ruler to have a new crown made for his coronation and for the crown of his predecessor to be preserved, the cathedral also served as a treasury for coronation crowns.*

The lost wax casting technique is also applicable in jewelry smithery, but recently it is in the process of replacement by other techniques such as *megaze-srah*. *Megaze-srah* is a technique that uses small saw and other tools mainly in producing small neck-crosses and small jewelries.

This method seems what Hecht et al. (1990:7) explain as "another method, used with some processional crosses, hand crosses and even neck-crosses, ... to trace the image of the crosses on a sheet of the metal and then to cut or punch it out. Crosses made by this technique are thinner than ones made by the lost wax method."

Lost wax casting is locally called *naysmii-srah*, which literally means: work of wax. The general process of lost wax casting is a technique for making a unique object by casting it in molten metal. McKay (1974: 36-38) writes that, "the cire perdue or lost wax method of casting is an ancient art and it has a long history."

This technique is a general process of wax replacement by gold, silver, copper, bronze, etc. The process of the lost wax gold technique is very complex. In contemporary Aksum, sometimes the preparation of wax from honey is also part of this technique.

The general process of the lost wax method seems the following as described by Hecht et al. (1990:7):

> *Most of the early processional crosses were made in the lost wax method. The image was first made on wax. This was then covered with the fine clay, leaving two channels or openings. The clay was heated so that the wax melted and ran out. The empty core of the backed then had the negative shape of the crosses. Afterwards the molten metal was poured into this mould. Once the metal cooled and set, the clay mould was broken. Then every cross made in this way is unique.*

Lost wax casting is very common for liturgical objects, but is especially well-known for different designs of crosses. Even though lost wax casting as a general technique is known in other part of the world, it seems that the lost wax technique using for more complex designs of church objects is more common in Ethiopia. Perczel (1981:52) puts the particularity of the Ethiopian lost wax technique for complex designs in the following way:

> *The metal cross produced by lost-wax casting is a significant traditional art form in Christian Ethiopia, and its infinite variety and distinct decorative character are particular to Abyssinia. This does not appear to have been the case, for lost-wax casting was not used to produce emblems or ornaments in early Mediterranean art, and, further, the cross was not a significant form in the Greco-Roman world.*

Another casting technique practiced among traditional liturgical smiths is the use of molten metal poured in holes in stone or clay molds and recently they use cement clay moulds and

sands. When the metal becomes solid, it would take the shape of the cavity of the mold. This type of casting helps to produce one object many times. Sometimes, well-designed sand mold casting uses as a machine to produce one design many times. But lost wax casting is used only for one time (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13 and March 2, 2011; Participant Observation, Aksum, March 4, 2011). Comparing it with other casting techniques of lost wax casting Greer (2009: 15) states that, "it played a large step forward in the metal casting industry."

4.2.3. Jewelry Smiths

Jewelry smiths are those who produce earrings (*kutucha*), rings (*katim*), necklaces (*hable*), ear picks (*meokoki*), neck crosses (*yeksad meskel*), and hair pins (*weleba*), different types *sekir* (upper ear decoration), *zebto (*circle like decoration usually put in the middle of the neck cross), including bead decoration (*albo).*

In Tigray culture, wedding ceremonies without some of the above mentioned jewelries are not common. The bridegroom's family gives jewelries to the bride and this event is called *meshlam.* During the wedding ceremony, the relatives of the bridegroom say: *intay amtseki nabzi zeza izom yshlmuki workihabsh aleowo,* which means "why are you searching in this home and they should praise you with gold of *habsha.*" This may show that the giving of jewelries is culturally appropriate and highly valued (Ki1: Aksum, February 19, 2011).

Most of these jewelries are made by local smiths. Generally, the task of traditional jewelries smiths is dong by order and sometimes they look for the market through relatives and friends. Some of them may have their gold and silver shop, and others work in their home.

Some of the metal objects are more than decorative objects. For example, *katim* (ring) is primarily used for the decoration of fingers. But *katim* also uses for the symbolic meaning when young people avow in front of their families and relatives to stay together for all of their life (Ki3: Aksum, February 12, 2011).

In Aksum, there are two liturgical smiths who can make crowns and priests' head decorations (*aklil*) (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 21 and March 2, 2011). But the contemporary jewelry smiths only make wedding jewelry and decorating jewelry. The jewelries are very small and usually measured in a few grams. Large objects such as: processional crosses, *aklil*, and hand

crosses are not made by jewelry smiths (Ki4, K6, Ki7 and Ki10; Aksum, February, 13, 16 and 17, 2011; FGD1 Aksum February 25, 2011). In addition to that, the jewelry smiths do not know how the lost wax casting is done. The tools that are important for making large objects are not available in their working area. One jewelry-smith key informant told me that he does not have an idea of how the lost wax casting technique is practiced. But he is very skilled in his smithery (Ki10; Aksum, February 2011).

Compared with blacksmiths and liturgical smiths, the jewelry smiths are more exposed to "modern" metal technology. Most of them are businessmen and have gold and silver shops. The instruments they use are made in foreign countries. But still the uses compass, tweezers (*gigar*), flat pliers (*deblbl-kisaj*), pointed pliers (*tsfh-kisaj*), bow-saws (*medeghe*), magnifying glass (*lins*), round ring triblet (*katim mesrhi*), and hammers (*medosha*) are in use.

In addition to that, some of their skills and knowledge seems adopted recently and affected by those imported tools. Of course, the change started before many years. For example, Chojnacki (1966:5) gives the similarity with other parts of the world as follows: "Especially, silver filigree work, of some resemblance to that of the Middle East, has attained a high standard of perfection."

Perczel (1981:54) gives the same idea about changes of jewelry smiths and their skill and knowledge as follows:

> *Originally employed by silversmiths for making jewelry, appliqué and filigree methods were adopted for the manufacture of neck crosses of which the traditional surface patterns consist of interlaced bands and engraved motifs. Twisted wire and beaded ornaments are common characteristics of the more recent appliqué types.*

They also use an imported instrument called *zewhit-tekaait*, an instrument used for ductility that allows to be pulled or stretched into a wire, and to be malleable and squeezed into a sheet. Those are the common characteristics of metal that can be formed into a number of useful shapes without breaking or cracking (Observation, Aksum, March 2011). Two important working properties of metal are ductility and malleability. This work is done by the *zwahit-tekaiit* instrument. In addition to that, *menafhi* (bellows) are now totally absent and are replaced by *foruja*. *Foruja* is a manual machine that serves the same function as *menafh*. It is made in Italy

and Germany. The oil lamp that was commonly used by jewelry smiths and used to join different parts of metal objects is also replaced by an electric machine (Ki4 and Ki6; Aksum, March 2011).

4.3 The Process of Lost Wax Casting in Present Aksum: by Taking One Silver Hand Cross as an Example

4.3. 1 Preparation of Wax (*Semaii*)

In this part most of the information was gathered from my direct participation in lost wax casting in Aksum, February and March 2011.

The type of wax used for this technique is the yellowish wax. First, from the collected remains of honey called *sefef*, water is boiled and added to the *sefef* after some minutes and poured into the hollow object that contains water. When pouring boiled water into that jar, one must use a cloth like tissue called *kisha* in order to prevent dirty from the boiling water. After a short time, the wax is taken out of the water. This is usually done by all members of the family, including women and children. After this procedure, the wax can be stored for a long time and is ready for use at any time.

4.3. 2. Designing of metal sample in wax

Photo Four: Designing of metal sample in wax

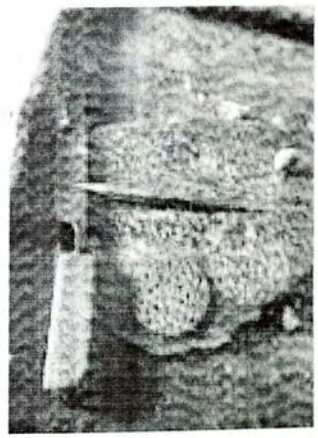

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, February 25, 2011)

This step is to prepare a good quality of wax depending on the size of the planned object. The most common type of preparing wax for designing the material is prepared like *ingera* then reshaped and prepared with the help of an instrument called *mehkeki smii,* a knife-like tool made from iron. The design is made primarily with a tool, *mekrtse smii,* (pen size tool made from metal). In designing the wax, it is also common to use *mazen* which measures the perfect angles, and a metal compass for measuring circles. After the design is finished, a filling hole, *mwacho,* must be prepared at the top of the wax which serves as open place to help enter the melted metal. Then it is covered with clay.

Photo Five: Designed wax upper part

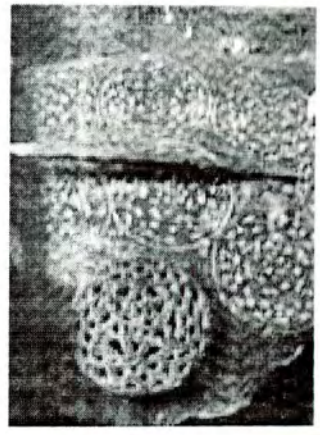

Photo Six: Designed wax middle part

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, February 27, 2011)

Designing wax for a cross is done separately. The most common type of designing is to treat the parts separately, the upper part, middle part, and bottom part. These three parts are separately designed, covered by clay and melted independently.

Photo Seven: The bottom part of the cross ready to be covered with clay

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, February 29, 2011)

4.3.3. Preparing the Clay

The clay is known as *meret mslli*, which means clay of the image. This clay comes from Izgi-Hasera, a small mountain in Aksum. The clay is brought by children under strict secrecy, to preserve the secret where the clay is found. Then the clay is prepared in a special way and covered with the *mslli* (designed wax). In the final preparation, the clay called *meret mwkat* (which means that preparation of clay mixed with cotton and animal waste products) and repeatedly beat on stone by a hammer. This is entirely the task of women and children (Observation: Aksum, March, 2011; Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 16 and March 2, 2011).

This preparation of the *meret mslli* (clay) is based on the main function to preserve the designed wax well, keep the integrity of the wax design and help to protect the probability of cracking and suddenly breaking of the clay when fired and when the melted metal is poured into the clay. The careful process of covering the designed wax by the clay is called *mshfan mslli*. This part is done by the designer of the wax.

Photo Eight: Clay covered with wax called *mslii* and Photo Nine: *Mslii* with its mouth called *mewacho*

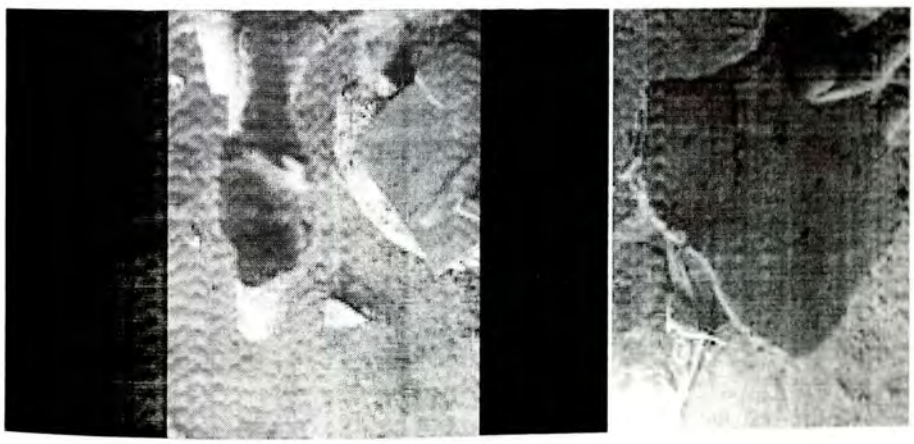

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 1, 2011)

4.3. 4. *Mflah* (Melting) the Metal and Poured to the Clay

This is the last stage of lost wax casting, called *mflah* (melting). This is the process of the direct replacement of wax by gold, silver, copper, bronze, etc. At this stage, the clay is fired in order to melt the wax from the clay and empty it. Then it melts the metal in the clay is called *cowrry*. The *cowrry is* also prepared by a local liturgical smith. The clay is used for *cowrry is* called *meret cowrry*, and it comes from the lowland of the Merb River very near to the border of Eritrea. The clay is brought to the town by villagers, but the contemporary traditional smiths do not know the exact location (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum February 21 and March 2, 2011). The color of the clay is white, but the color of *mert mslli* is red. It is used only to prepare *cowrry*. The preparation of the *cowrry* is the same as the preparation of *meret mslii*. Then the *cowrry* is dried in the sun and sometimes in fire. But recently the *cowrry* has been replaced by *cowrry* made in Italy and Germany (Participant Observation, Aksum March 6, 2011; Ki4, Ki5, Ki6 and Ki10; Aksum, February 2011). Then they are pouring the melted metal into the *mslli* immediately. After some minutes break the clay and obtain the metal as designed in the wax (Participant Observation, Aksum February 9, 2011).

Photo Ten: Locally made *cowrry* Photo Eleven: The melting process with the help of traditional *cowrry*

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 9, 2011)

Sometimes, it may not be successful in the last stage. This is called *megudal mslii* (which means failure in the last stage). So *mflah,* is usually conducted in a very silent room: any stranger is strictly forbidden to enter at this stage. Usually *mflah* is conducted with preparation of some sort of ceremony such as coffee and sometimes preparation of food by slaughtering a hen, sheep or goat. This ceremony is believed to create a good condition for *mflah* and minimize *mgodal* (Observation, Aksum, March 9, 2011; Ki4 K5, K6 and Ki10; Aksum February 16, 17 and 18 2011).

Photo Twelve: The metal after having replaced the wax to joining different parts

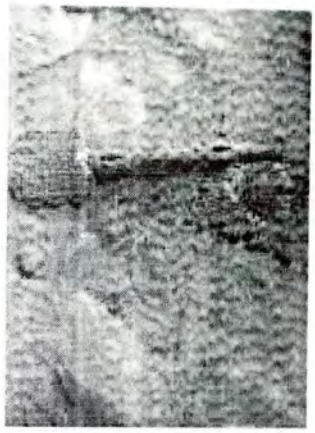

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 12, 2011)

Then the metal is given its final shape; it is made completely by hand or by using only simple tools.

Photo Thirteen and Photo Fourteen: Show the final result of the hand cross

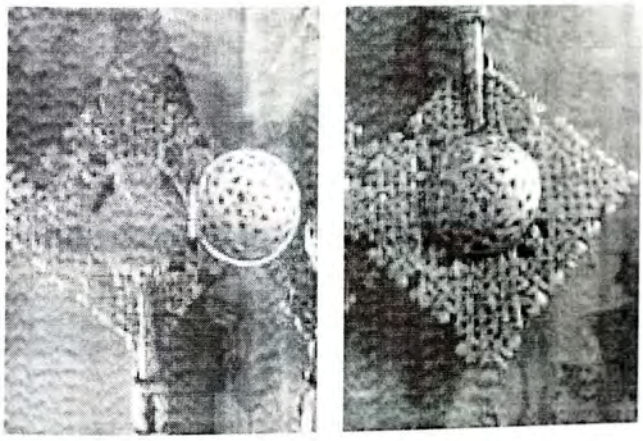

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 18, 2011)

4.4. Local Knowledge and *Mflash*

Smithery in Aksum is done based on the cumulated knowledge over a long period. People in that profession have knowledge about the nature of metals copper, silver, gold and alloys: nickel, bronze, etc. Most of the traditional smiths can easily identified element without using fire or acid experiments (Ki4. Ki5 and Ki6; Aksum, February 13 and 16, 2011). For example, if the element has an attractive yellow color, brightness and a certain weight, it is gold (Participant Observation, Aksum, March 3, 2011).

They are also aware of the melting degree of each element. Most liturgical and jewelry key informants put the elements in a chronology based on the melting point in a relative manner. The following chronology is the common knowledge of local smiths about the melting nature of elements. From the lowest to the highest melting point relatively stand silver, gold, copper, nickel, and iron. This chronology fits with the scientific truth of the melting point of each element: silver (962), gold (1064), copper (1083), nickel (1453), and iron (1535) in degree Celsius (Ki4 K5, K6, and Ki7; Aksum February 13, 16 and 17, 2011).

This knowledge is very important to join different parts of large objects. For example, if the object is only silver, it is important to alloy it with nickel that helps to raise the melting point and it resists to fire join the different parts.

When joining different parts, the traditional liturgical and jewelry smiths use a mixture of different elements called *metsbek*. This helps in joining two parts; *metsbek* should melt before the two parts do, and this joins them. This is prepared with the full knowledge in metallurgy and is usually done under great secret. Among liturgical and jewelry smiths in Aksum, this part of the knowledge is the secret of only a few persons.

Photo Fifteen: *Metsbek* (the alloy of different metals that helps to join parts of silver)

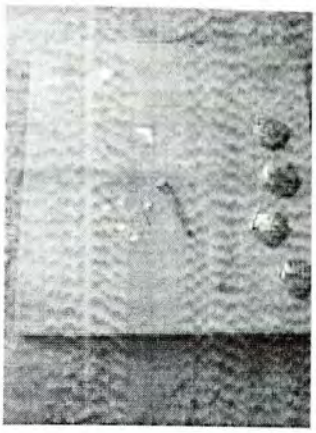

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 14, 2011)

Liturgical smiths know what weight of wax gives what weight of gold, silver, copper, bronze, etc. This is very important in lost wax casting because it helps in determining the size of the *cowrry* and weight of the metal needed. Lack of this knowledge leads to serious failure of lost wax casting at the last stage of finishing, called (*megudal)* (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 21 and March 2, 2011).

Mflash (the process of purification of gold and silver)

Usually elements are found mixed with other elements. The process of removing unnecessary items from gold and silver is locally called *mflash.* The primary method of removing dirt is by using fire. This is done by repeatedly melting the elements. Then, finally, one gets pure gold and silver. I observed that 20 grams of "gold" contains 15 grams of pure gold and that 5 grams of copper becomes pure as a result of repeatedly melting and use it with white acid (Participant Observation, Aksum March 4, 2011).

Sometimes, liturgical and jewelry smiths are also practicing the direct opposite of *mflash,* called *mdkal.* This is done by adding copper to gold and silver melting together in one *cowrry.* The purpose of this is to increase the weight of gold or silver, and, for economic reason. Sometimes, *mdkal* can be done, because it helps for the process of the work. For example from pure gold it is very difficult to make jewelry; it is better alloy with copper. The same as pure silver which is also difficult to join by using fire: So, one should add some nickel in order to increase its melting

point (Ki4, Ki5, Ki6 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13, 16 and March 2, 2011; Participant Observation, Aksum, March 2011).

The most common type of *mflash* is the use of very dangerous mercury (*bazeqa*); a solution carries finely grounded particles of one over plates covered with mercury. This can be done by one person in a very far place where children and animals are absent. The person also immediately leaves the area after he puts it into fire. After, that it is heated in plates and boiled with a yellow color gas and with its bad smell. This is done repeatedly. Finally, one gets pure gold (Participation Observation, Aksum, March 2, 2011).

The knowledge a traditional smiths in Aksum claims is that it descended from their ancestors called *qedamot (*forefathers*)*. According to Phillipson (2000:497), most of the metallurgical studies of objects excavated from Aksum have yielded information on the different types of copper alloys and gilds, as well as an alteration of the original elemental composition, or corrosion.

The contemporary liturgical and jewelry smiths in Aksum know the elemental composition of the original element. For example, they use the element copper for alloy of gold and silver, but they do not alloy bronze with gold and silver. Because they know that a small amount of bronze alloying with gold or silver can have a serious effect on the elements, because gold and silver do not contain bronze in the natural composition. To their understanding, gold and silver contain copper in different proportion. This knowledge agrees with "modern" chemical knowledge. For example, 18 karat gold means, in modern chemistry, a composition of 75% gold, 10% silver, and 6.5% copper and other elements. The gold also is used for gilding silver or copper.

4.5. Design and Artistic Expression of Smithery in Aksum

In contemporary Aksum, the designs and artistic expression of traditional smiths are common to the liturgical smith and the jewelry-smith, rather than to the blacksmiths. The artistic expressions and the design of the objects are influenced by pre-Aksumite, Aksumite and later Ethiopian history. Christianity has played a very great role in the design and decoration of metal objects. The best examples of metalwork design and decoration are found on Aksumite coins. Religious ideology had a large influence on the design and decoration on those coins.

The main criteria to divide the Aksumite coins into pre-Christian and Christianity is the design and the motto written on the coins. The images on the pre-Christian Aksumite coins have different writings, signs and images. The Aksumite coins have become source of design for different types of crosses even after the fall of the kingdom. Munro-Hay (2005:152) states the following, "the coins issued by the Christian kings of Aksum over several centuries bear a rich variety of cross forms, including precisely the 'Crusader' and 'Templar' crosses. They preceded the European usage of the same form by many centuries, and can be seen carved on Egyptian temples by Coptic Christians as well."

In addition to that, regarding Ethiopian crosses. Hecht et al. (1990:1) state that, "there is no region in the world where the artistic endeavour to represent the cross symbol has produced, since centuries, so many flourishing varieties as in Ethiopia." Hecht et al. (1990:8) further explain that, "the decoration is incised; pictorial decoration occasionally occurs. Inscriptions consist mainly of the name and prayers of the individual priest. Some inscriptions give the name of the donor."

Contemporarily, the sources of designs for liturgical and jewelries smiths are nature, ancient jewelry, modifying of previous materials. In addition to that the Aksumite obelisks and church buildings are found in some crosses and other liturgical objects (Ki4, Ki5, Ki6 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13, 21 and March 2, 2011; FGD1; Aksum, February 15, 2011).

Nature provides many opportunities for the design of jewelry. It gets its designs by copying animals, plants and landscapes. For example, *kutusha*, well known Tigray type of earrings, seems derived from *gelegle meskel* flower. I found some magazines and books as source of design in liturgical and jewelry smith houses. One jewelry key informant told me that he copies different photos of metal objects from different magazines and books and he uses them as source of design and sometimes modifies them. The copy of ancient objects or some part of it is a means of acquiring designs and decoration. I found one jewelry smith who can copy ancient Aksumite design almost perfectly (Participant Observation, Aksum, March 11, 2011; Ki6; Aksum, February 2011).

Photo Sixteen: Original coin Photo Seventeen: Copied coin

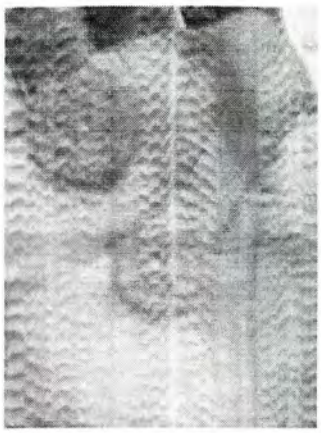


Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 11, 2011)

The Process of Designing

The designs of metal objects are various. For example, in the case of large objects made in lost wax technique, most of the liturgical smiths start the work with a design in mind and finish the design in a long work process. The decoration of crosses and sistrums, usually called *hareg,* include a decoration by complex interrelated different lines and holes that originate in the plant vine (Participant Participation, Aksum, March 2011; Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum February 21 and March 2, 2011).

Photo Eighteen: Design on wax Photo Nineteen: Addition decoration and design on metal

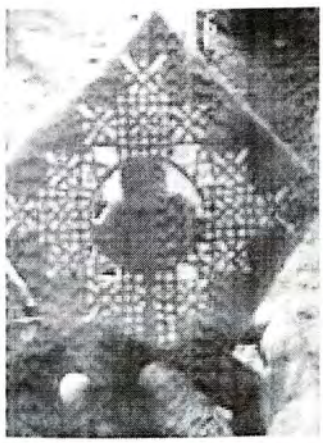


Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 2 and 14, 2011)

The complex designs of crosses, sistrums and other liturgical objects (*newaye qiddisat)* have symbolic and religious interpretations. For example the most common expression of processional and hand crosses represent the bottom part called *sellat* and the above part represents the *tabot*. Sometimes the above part of the cross is decorated with the picture of St. Mary and her beloved son. This is done under strict order of the priests and sometimes the priest comes with an old cross and permits to copy its designs. In addition, innovation and modification of designs are made by some talented smiths (Observation, Aksum, March 2011; K4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki10 and Ki11; Aksum, February 2011).

4.6. Source of Metal in Contemporary Aksum Town

When I interviewed a jewelry smith (K11; Aksum, February 19, 2011) about the source of metal he said, "our land is full of many precious minerals including gold. The Queen of Sheba took all minerals away from our land." And the Bible tells in 1 Kings (10:2) "She came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones."

According to the oral tradition of the traditional smiths (FGD1; Aksum, February 15, 2011; Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki10 and Ki11; Aksum, February 13, 16 and 18, 2011), the availability of gold around Aksum is the result of a gold rain. The common oral tradition is that once upon a time, "a rain of gold, pearls and silver fall at Aksum for eight days and nights."

In contemporary Aksum, the main source of raw material is the re-use of metals. Mining of metals is totally absent. The only source of metal locally found is gold "mining". For example, gold is found in different parts of Tigray such as around Addi Arbate, Shrarao, Tekeze, Mereb River, etc. So, jewelry smiths buy a few grams from the local people (FGD1; Aksum, February 15, 2011).

The source of iron is already mentioned under the sub-topic blacksmith in detail. But in addition to that the clients sometimes come with iron usually called *balstera* (part of car) and order the blacksmith what type of object he should make, they then pay only for the work (K8 and Ki9; Aksum February 18 and 19, 2011).

The primary source of silver in contemporary Aksum is Maria Theresia Thalers. It has a silver purity of 800 karat which means it contains about 80% pure silver. It has a weight of 28 gram (Belai 1987 E.C:44). This silver is usually used alloyed with copper. Another method of gaining silver is re-using other silver objects (FGD1; Aksum, February 15, 2011; Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki7, Ki10, Ki11 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13, 16, 17 18, and March 2, 2011).

Photo Twenty and Twenty One: Maria Theresia Thalers as main Source of Silver in Aksum

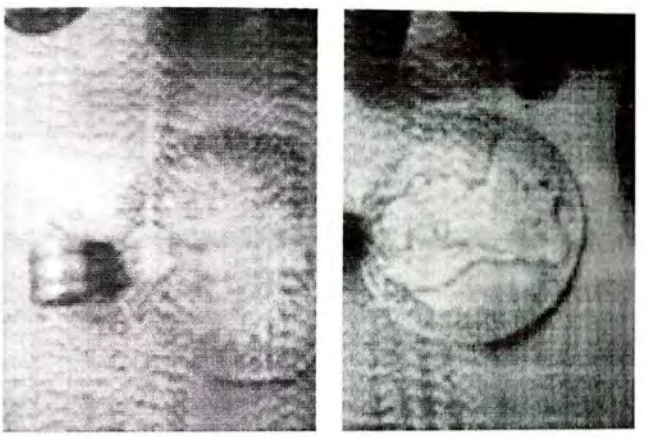

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, March 3, 2011)

The availability of natural silver in the local area is a controversial matter. According to my liturgical smith key informants (Ki5 and Ki13; Aksum, February 21, and March 2, 2011) few months before I went to the field more than one kilogram of silver was found in one village around Aksum. It was the first time that such a large quantity of silver has been found in Aksum. This created a hot discussion: Is this silver natural silver or some processed silver? It is common to find processed silver or silver somebody had previously prepared for use in a few grams. Of course, I used to search for silver during my childhood, as my friends did. But this large quantity of silver was difficult to identify, whether processed by previous smiths or found in nature. Then some liturgical and jewelry smiths tried to identify it by using fire and acid. But they did not reach an agreement. Some of them said that it is a natural silver and they expects to find more of it. Others said that this is a processed silver.

The most common sources of copper and bronze are imported objects and remains of different types of military weapons. One jewelry key informant told me that during Haile-Sellasie's time

people tried to collect copper wires from telecommunication area by cutting them. As a result of this, the informant and his friends were put in prison for one month (Ki4; Aksum, February 13, 2011).

Nickel is gathered in the form of re-used imported objects, like spoons and forks. Sometimes, the raw material is also found in the form of electric wires.

Chapter Five

5. Status and Social Relationships

The most common indicators of social status are wealth, prestige and power. According to the functionalists, status is one of the key elements used to analyze social relations.

In different societies, the way of acquiring status can be grouped into two. According to Layton (1997:19) "statuses that are assigned to individuals automatically, by virtue of their possessing certain socially defined characteristics, are said to be ascribed. Statuses which can only be taken on as a result of demonstrating certain skills or accumulating sufficient wealth are said to be achieved."

Nahu Senay (1998:39) summarizes the status of artisans among the Gurage and his definition of status seems also appropriate for this thesis. Bergel (1962:20), cited in Nahu Senay (1998:39), defines status as "resting essentially on conception of social honor or esteem which is attached to particular styles of life that are pursued by groups of people." I agree with definition that also can be applied to the situation in Aksum.

Regarding the above idea, Merid Weldearagay (1976:5) states that it is common in highland Ethiopia, historically and contemporarily, "to have a number of pejorative terms which drive their origin from the word *gebir* (Geez root for doing or working) which is mainly derived from economic activities."

Of course, it is not only in Ethiopia, but also common in other parts of Africa, that the status of smiths is "low". Especially blacksmiths are the most despised group in most parts of Africa. Finneran (2003:427) states that, "this is part of the symbolism of iron working and magical powers that the iron working artisan possesses, seems that this may have a common and universal foundation."

In the existing literature, it is common to find that the status of smiths is considered the same, but this seems to be too much of a generalization. Some scholars suggest that this classification

needs further research. Among those scholars, Silverman and Sobania (2004:351) suggest the following to show the status variations among artisans:

> *There is a tendency in much of the writing about these occupations all groups to treat them as a whole. Many authors suggest that all smiths were treated in the same manner. But evidence found in travel accounts, hagiographies, and ethnographies suggests that there may be some variation of stratification among the various artisanal groups.*

Broadly, the type of smithery can be grouped into two, first practical technology, and second prestige technology. Practical technology of metalwork includes all agricultural tools and other objects worked by blacksmiths and prestige technology includes all jewelries and liturgical objects. It is also usually better to take into account change and continuity of status in the "modern" world as a result of globalization. Therefore, the status of smiths should take into account the economy, artistic expression of traditional smiths in Aksum.

Of course, the urban origin of prestigious smiths differs from the rural origin of the blacksmiths' work in terms of art, economic and religious implications (Ki1, Ki2, KI3, Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki8 and Ki13; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17 and March 2, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 25, 2011). The spread of the concept of the "evil eye" in Aksum was not inherited from an ancient Aksumite perception and ideology, rather it was the result of the feudal system that emerged after the fall of the Aksumite kingdom. Merid Weldearagay (1976:5) clearly states this: "The caste like position which, throughout the centuries, craftsmen have held amongst various Ethiopian societies can be understood only in terms of the superimposition of a 'primitive' culture over the urban and cosmopolitan Aksumite civilization."

As already mentioned in the previous chapters there are two lines of origin of smiths. Their genealogical lines show that these two groups were put in different categories, especially those who live in Aksum. Historically, these groups were different, the first one is of urban origin and specialized in church and jewelry objects, the second one is of village origin and specialized in agricultural tools and other household objects. They were also different in terms of status, economy and way of life. The *Seyak* called the blacksmith *Hydeba* "ignorant", belonging to the common people. One of my informants, a religious teacher, (Ki3; Aksum, February 13, 2011), explained the difference between *Seyak* and *Hydeba:* "*Seyak* are respected because they produce

materials that serve in the church such as: crowns, processional crosses, neck crosses, *mekomyia* (staff finials), *tesnastil* (sistrums), to praise God." He further explained that: "The blacksmiths were neglected until recently; were forbidden to give services in church because the local people believe that they have the 'evil eye' and are considered dangerous to people and church, until recently actions were taken in order to minimize the fear of the common people to evil eye power."

The Beginning of Intermarriage between Smiths and the Expansion of Smithery

As mentioned in the former paragraph, there are two lines of origin of the traditional smiths in Aksum. Most of my key informants, (Ki1, Ki2 Ki3, Ki7 and Ki10; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 17 and March 1, 2011), and most FGD discussants, (FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011), told me that the two groups did not intermarry before 100 years. The *Seyak* intermarried with the clergy engaged in needlework. But the blacksmiths were endogamous. A change came up as a result of disagreements which happened between *Seyak* and the needle-worker groups. After the disagreement for a few years, the *Jan-Shellamii* (*Seyak*) practiced intermarriage among themselves. This made it difficult to find culturally appropriate partners because in Tigray people are not allowed to marry beneath seven descent generations. Then the *Jan-Shellamii* broke this norm and married up to the fourth generation. And the local society said, "*mebsow tibib tesbib*" which means "narrow marriage of *tibib.*" This clearly indicates that this action changed the marriage custom in Tigray from seven to four generations. But this was not a solution, and the number of traditional *Seyak* became less and less as time passed. Then the elders of the *Seyak* discussed seriously about what should be done, about selecting mates, because this was a question of survival for them. Then after long discussions, the elders of the *Seyak* agreed to intermarry with blacksmith and declared that marriage with blacksmiths is appropriate for their members (Ki4, Ki5, Ki10 and Ki11; Aksum, February 13, 16, 18 and 19, 2011).

After this, they increased more and more in number. Then, their craftsmanship and their skills were also transferred to their new partners. Fortunately, this situation was very important in the history of "modern" Ethiopia, because this created an opportunity of the expansion of gold-and silver-smiths from Aksum to the whole of Ethiopia, as urbanization went on. At this time, the traditional smiths claimed that the gold- and silver-smith found across Ethiopia (including Eritrea) originated from Aksum. Most informants, (Ki4, K5, Ki10, Ki12 and Ki13; Aksum

February 13, 16, 18 and March 2, 2011), FGD discussants, (FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25 2011), told me they have relatives in different parts of Eritrea and Sudan as gold-and silver-smiths. In Ethiopia, their relatives are found in Adwa, Shere, Humera, Mekele, Dessie, Hawassa, Gondar, Bahri-Dar, Adama, Direr Dawa, Dilla and in many other towns. In addition to that, most gold-and silver-smiths found in Addis Ababa, including those around piazza, are their relatives.

The precious metal smithery in "modern" Ethiopian towns seems to have spread from Aksum. For example Simoons (1960:178) argues that, "silver working skills were introduced to North West Ethiopia in fairly recent times from Aksum, for neither the Agaw speaking peoples nor other ethnic groups of the region know this skill, and even today the majority of silver-workers claim to have learned their trade in Aksum." In addition, Silverman (1999:186) writes about gold- and silver-smiths that they originated from Aksum and spread out to Addis Ababa in the following way: "Even today, many, if not most, of the silver-smiths in Addis Ababa come either from Aksum or the neighboring community of Adwa."

During my fieldwork I observed that marriage unions are common between Aksum and other towns where gold-and silver-smiths are found. Fortunately, during my field-work, I witnessed marriages of gold-and silver-smiths from Aksum to gold and silver smith families found in Addis Ababa, Dessie, Mekele, even as far as USA.

According to traditional smith key informants and FGD discussants, the ideology of the "evil eye" was introduced in that area by the Portuguese. The Portuguese Catholics said that "in our country there are no blacksmiths and God does not love them. The nails with which Jesus Christ was crucified were made by blacksmiths. From that time, it became the ideology of the local society." (FGD1: Aksum, February 25, 2011; Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki7, Ki8, Ki9, Ki10, Ki11, Ki12 and Ki13; Aksum, February 10, 11, 12, 13 16, 17 and March 2, 2011).

In addition to that ascribed status given by the society to individuals and groups, there are also other criteria to evaluate the status in Tigray society called *kibri*. In this society *kibri* (more or less similar with achieved status) indicates that the general public opinion is evaluating individuals for their achievements, and that the individual tries to keep or improve his/her status.

According to Bauer. mentioned in Mulugeta Debalakew (2000:45), *kibri* is defined as follows: "*Kibri* is what a man possesses, the product of possessing a number of component qualities (spirituality, age, political, and so on), having accumulated wealth and heading a viable independent household are two of the most important components." Regarding the above criteria the traditional smiths have a good status especially those who have a good income, whether liturgical or jewelry smiths.

Therefore, the status of traditional smiths in Aksum shows differences. The blacksmiths have a relatively lower social and economic status. In villages around Aksum and in Aksum itself blacksmiths are feared and despised. There are many gossips about the blacksmiths that possess "evil power" and their "evil deeds." The most common assumption of *buda* in Aksum is that they transform themselves into hyenas and eat human flesh. Sometimes, they can kill a person simply from their home. Their evil power is concentrated in their eye and any one upon whom the 'gaze' of *buda* falls becomes ill or dies. (Ki1, Ki2 and Ki3; Aksum, February 10, 12, 19 and March 2, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011). One jewelry key informant (Ki5; Aksum, February 15 and 21, 2011) told me that in "Aksum we label each other *buda*, but for others who live around Aksum the whole people of the town are considered as *buda*.

The jewelry smiths can be considered as a new developing businessmen. Most of them have gold or silver shops. They are very strong in their economic resource. This kind of work attracts many people from non-smith origin. This has become one of the main sources of income for many people in the town. Their status is usually considered higher than that of the blacksmiths (K5, Ki6, Ki7 and KI10; Aksum, February 16, 17 and 18, 2011; FGD1, Aksum February 15 and 25. 2011).

According to a 76 years old jewelry smith key informant (KI4; Aksum, February 13, 2011) who told me his experience about social statues seems the following.

He was born in a small village near Aksum. Genealogically, he is from a blacksmiths family. Unlike blacksmiths found in other parts of Ethiopia, his family and other blacksmiths placed in different villages of Tigray had their own land before the 1974 Revolution. In other parts of Ethiopia, ownership of land by blacksmiths started after the 1974 Revolution. Not only

blacksmiths, but also the Beta-Israel had their own land in Tigray before the Revolution. This goes in accordance with the following explanation of Abbink (1990:401):

> *Only in the Tigray region, where some Beta-Israel groups settled during the 19th century, they were less restricted in their movements and could sometimes get title to land of their own. But the Falasha were especially known as the craftsmen of Northern Ethiopia: they did the blacksmithery, weaving, tanning, and pottery work. They were forced into these, locally disdained, occupations by their Amhara overlords in the 16th and 17th century.*

Like other blacksmiths found in other parts of the country, they did not participate in church rituals. One informant remembered that during his childhood the blacksmiths were strictly forbidden to participate in church ceremonies and even to enter the church. He remembered even the names of deacons and priests of blacksmiths origin, persons who participated in the local church for the first time when he was 30.

He explained also that sometimes there occurred some serious conflict between the local people and the blacksmiths. The main cause of this conflict is that some local people claim that one member of their family has been attacked or died by the power of blacksmiths. Regarding this conflict happened before many years; the same informant told me the following case:

> *When I was young, a group of people came to our home and said repeatedly to my elder brother: 'please leave our brother, he is in danger and leave him please. And my brother became very angry, but he spoke peaceful and then he said, 'Where is he?' and they answered,' he is at home.' Then my brother said: 'let us go. Then my brother shot at him and he became a shifta.*

The blacksmith informants said that (Ki8 and Ki9; Aksum, February 19 1nd 18, 2011), before some years, their incomes were collected in the form of some amount of crops, animals and animal products from the local people. First, the blacksmith sharpens and maintains the agricultural tools collecting his reward in the next harvest season (*qweii*). The crops were collected by the blacksmiths themselves. But I observed that their source of income is also changed, and by now they collect their income in cash and sometimes they receive grain and charcoal as a gift.

During my fieldwork, I observed that the blacksmiths are attending religious services as non black-smiths people. Of course, according to one blacksmith key informant's observation, some

people complain about their participation in church activities and someone insulted a blacksmith by uttering: "you are not to enter into the church, remember your background, we are not equal." (Ki9; Aksum, February 18, 2011).

Still some priests are not happy about the participation of blacksmiths in religious services. They strongly disagree with the participation of people of blacksmiths origin in the church and try to hinder their participation. During my fieldwork, one key priest informant (Ki2; Aksum, February 11 and March 1, 2011) tried to give me an explanation of the cause of blacksmiths' lower status in the local society and why they should not participate in church activities. He told me that with Judas ex-changed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. The priest asked me where these 30 pieces of silver have gone? He cited the Bible (Matthew 27:3-10):

> *(27:3) Then Judas, which had betrayeth him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,(27:4) Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, what [is that] to us? see thou [to that.](27:5) And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.(27:6) And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. (27:7) And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. (27:8) Wherefore that field was called, the field of blood, unto this day. (27:9) Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; (27:10) And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*

The above quotation is the religious justification of why blacksmiths should not participate in the church. This is related to the non-smiths perception and who are called someone *hagadi* which means: someone who makes fire and is usually interchangeable with *buda*. This also indicates the generalization of insulting who participate in work related with fire, including pottery and smithery.

But blacksmiths, liturgical, jewelry smiths key informants and FGD discussants believe that the cause of the fear and the general perception of the "evil eye" is the result of ignorance of the non-smiths about the nature of work. Melting the metal and maintaining broken tools and performing other smithery activities are perceived by the local people as the work of a devil or a

magician (FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011; Ki4, Ki5, Ki6, Ki7, Ki8, Ki9 and Ki13; Aksum, February 13, 16, 17, 18, 21 and March 2, 2011).

When I was in a blacksmith's a *dabtara* came, and greeted us and bought one small piece of copper for 80 *Birr*. Immediately after the *dabtara* left, the blacksmith laughed loudly, and he told me:

> *This dabtara is my customer and he usually comes to buy a piece of copper considered as protector against the "evil eye". In the first time when he asked me I was not willing. After he repeatedly asked me, I asked him to buy me 80 birr and he says ok. Imagine that this piece of copper is only 2 birr worth. But I sold it for 80 birr! I sell many pieces of copper at this price. In addition to that the dabtara usually confirms that my piece of copper is very effective to protect whom against the evil eye. And I usually 'think about the foolishness of people and that we are offering the medicine against the evil eye.*

(Ki8, Aksum, February 19, 2011)

Photo Twenty Two: Piece of copper made by blacksmiths used to protect whom against the "evil eye":

Photo by: The researcher (Aksum, February 19, 2011).

The status of the liturgical-smiths is not clear. In the literature, they are grouped under precious smiths and *jan-shellamii*. Sometimes their status is simply put among the blacksmiths. But it is clear that their status is not being the same as the blacksmiths. In the past they had land, they could become priests and they used to intermarry with priest families. But blacksmiths practiced

endogamy. Regarding blacksmiths, Silverman and Sobania (2004:351) say the following: "One of the earliest references concerning the status of this group of artisans is found in Alvares' account of his visit to Aksum in which he referred to a village located near the ancient city that was completely occupied by blacksmiths, an allusion to their endogamous status."

Even though, liturgical smiths are few, they have a great contribution for the church and for cultural conservation. Liturgical smiths and some jewelry smiths give free service for the church. During *Hdar-Tsion* and *Hosaena* the precious object of the church are cleaned and maintained by those smiths (Ki1 and Ki3; Aksum, February 10, 12 and 19, 2011; FGD1, Aksum, February 15 and 25, 2011).

With the introduction of a western style of education, urbanization, and globalization, there emerged a new elite group and a status change took place in Aksum as in other parts of the country. Even though their families are not happy about it, in Aksum, marriages among civil servants are common among smiths and non-smiths without taking into consideration their family background. This type of status change emerged with the expansion of towns before many years. For example, Shack (1976:166) explains the change in status and urbanization as follows: "Like in other African towns everywhere, urban Ethiopians now engage in, or aspire to occupations as skilled specialists which carry altogether new social prestige. Traditional values associated with traditional labor undertakings have undergone adjustment and modification."

Therefore, the general characteristic of the smiths in contemporary Aksum is status change and variations among them, as combinations of traditional and new values. Compared with the local people, the traditional smiths in Aksum can be considered as one social group. They have defined limits which establish who is a member and who is not. Because of the negative attitudes of the non-smiths towards traditional smiths, as well as negative attitudes of smiths towards the non-smiths and economic reasons of smiths it leads to the endogamy marriage system.

Chapter Six

Summary and Conclusion

Reviewing literature about smithery has indicated that information about it, is found with various topics such as: craftsmanship, metalwork, artistic expression of metalwork and social status. These sources are mostly the products of many disciplines and scattered under different topics. In this literature it is easier to find data about the objects than about their makers. The makers' background and their culture were and still are ignored. Most writers are only appreciating and focusing on the objects and they do not even mention who has made them. They simply try to understand the products without the context in which the objects produce culture.

The absence of ample anthropological work related with traditional smiths in Aksum makes difficult to conceptualize this thesis. Therefore, the thesis conceptualized with related issues especially from: Crafts, art, metallurgy, work and social status.

This study has attempted to explain the traditional smithery and its cultural context in Aksum. In this thesis, the description of the area, the background of the smiths, their technologies of metalwork, their sources of the metal, artistic expression, local knowledge about smithery and status are described and discussed.

The study was conducted in Aksum. Aksum has been the capital city of the old Aksumite kingdom and center of the legend of the Queen of Sheba and the home of the Ark of the Covenant. Aksum continued as a small but historically important town for almost three thousand years. The town is also registered by the UNESCO as world heritage.

In present Aksum, there are many tourist shops offering traditional clothes and different materials made of stone, wood and metal. In other parts of the town, there are also many tourist shops, gold- and silver-smiths' work made of gold and silver: earrings, rings, bracelets, necklaces, ear picks, neck crosses, and hair pins.

In addition, the Ethiopian Orthodox Churches are full of many precious metal-works such as: crowns, processional crosses, hand crosses, neck-crosses, sistrums, finials of prayer sticks, chalices and are still in demand from the Church, and still produced by local smiths.

The origin of smiths in Aksum is largely shaped by a mixture of legend, religion and history of ancient Ethiopia, because Aksum is at the center of the legend, religion and history of north Ethiopia. There is oral tradition how they started smithery and their origin as occupational group. Besides the oral tradition, archeological evidences also show that there was smithery in ancient Aksum.

The origin of the traditional smiths in Aksum shows two different lines. The first one is the *Seyak* origin. According to the oral tradition of traditional smiths, they claim that their forefathers came with the Ark and this oral tradition explains that when Menelik I returned to Aksum with the Ark of Covenant, priests and other persons important to serve the new religion came to Aksum. Among them, some were specialized to produce religious objects. This *Seyak* origin is related with the legend of the Queen of Sheba and the Ark of the Covenant. They consider themselves as the children of the biblical Bezaleel. Historically, they served as *jan–shellamii* (royal jewelry makers) at the courts of Kings and produced different types of Church objects. Therefore, it is believed that the craftsmanship, specifically of those who are producing liturgical objects, came to Ethiopia to serve the Ark as Moses orders them to do.

The second group is the descendants of blacksmiths families. The origins of those blacksmiths are villages around Aksum.

Among smiths in Aksum, the way of acquiring the skill is traditional. All of this knowledge is learned in Aksum. In Aksum, smithery is primarily an economic activity; and it is also a science, art and hobby. The historical roots of smithery go back even to pre-Aksumite civilizations.

Every traditional smith whether he/she is a blacksmith, jewelry-smith or liturgical-smith, learns the skill and gets materials that have importance in the whole process from his /her relatives or sometimes from his/ her neighbors and friends as a result of socialization from childhood. This type of learning is common among most traditional smiths.

In its general characteristic traditional smithery in the study area can be understood as a work full of risks. Physical injury can happen at any stage of the work. Serious injury can also happen especially during melting and hammering the metal

In my fieldwork, a new "language" could be identified. This language is called *Owadu* "language" sometimes called *Seyyak* "language." The "language" is secret and the local people do not even know about its existence. It seems more or less related to Arabic and Hebrew. But in the contemporary function, it seems a secret language that is usually common in our working area only. I collected some words and in the hope that it can encourage other researchers to conduct further research on this topic. As the word-roots are of the three- consonant type, temporarily a Semitic root can be assumed.

As stated above, there are two lines of origin of the traditional smiths in Aksum. The two groups did not intermarry before 100 years. The *Seyak* intermarried with priests who were engaged in needlework. But the blacksmiths were endogamous. In villages around Aksum and in Aksum itself blacksmiths are feared and despised. Among local people usually many gossip about the smiths that possess "evil power" and their "evil deeds make the round." Marriage between the two groups has only started in the beginning of the 20th century.

Contemporarily, there are three types of traditional smithery in Aksum. There are blacksmiths, liturgical smiths and jewelry-smiths. The blacksmiths are mostly producing agricultural tools from iron. The source of this iron we use nowadays is the re-use of iron objects. Mining of iron is now totally absent. Of course, agricultural tools in rural Ethiopia are still unchanged, but other materials made by blacksmiths that are very important for other smiths are found at the last stage of extinction. The tools such as: *weska*, *mebred*, *menekasha*, anvil, hammer, iron compass, formerly made by traditional smiths and very important for other smiths, are now replaced by imported ones.

Liturgical smiths are producing different types of church objects. The technique that uses to produce the liturgical objects such as: crowns, processional crosses, hand crosses, neck-crosses, sistrums and finials of prayer is called lost-wax technique. It is a complex and long process, including the preparation of wax and the melting of the metal, before designing and structuring the objects. This technique is a general process of wax replacement by gold, silver, copper,

bronze, etc. In contemporary Aksum, sometimes the preparation of wax from honey is also part of this technique.

Jewelry smiths are also producing different types of jewelry made from silver and gold. They use different types of imported materials. Some set up their own businesses for sale of their production. Design and artistic expressions of smithery are largely influenced by the history and religion of the area. The liturgical smiths are mostly under the influence of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and the artistic design of those objects has religious meanings. Recently, jewelry smith and liturgical smiths use different books, magazines, photos as source of inspiration for their design.

Those three specializations are not clearly demarcated, especially in the case of those who are producing liturgical objects, and those who are producing jewelry. Sometimes, liturgical smiths can work processional cross or other object for anybody who asks for them. Those groups are more or less exhibiting differences in technology, skill, knowledge, economy, and status. There is also shift of work from blacksmith to liturgical-and jewelry-smith as a result of marriage and economic reasons.

In all types of traditional smithery, there is a division of labor that includes children's and women's participation. In addition to that, the participation of women and children in the traditional smithery process is very common and important. Without women's and children's participation, especially in the lost wax casting technique, it is nearly impossible to finish a work alone. Even though, there are many women made different types objects, but the income and fame is only given to their husbands and their sons.

Smithery in Aksum is done based on the cumulated knowledge over a long period. People in that profession have knowledge about the nature of metals copper, silver, gold and alloys: nickel, bronze, etc. The local smithery knowledge is usually acquired through socialization, learning from relatives and friends. The knowledge includes identifying the minerals, the chemical compositions of different elements and the melting point of elements. Most of their traditional knowledge is more or less in accordance with modern chemistry.

The common assumption of regarding the status of the traditional smiths in Ethiopia is to put them in "one pot", to see them as one group. But this is too much of a generalization. The blacksmiths in Aksum could have their own land before the 1974 Revolution. But before the Revolution it was not common for blacksmiths to own land in most parts of Ethiopia. In Aksum, there are status' differences among those blacksmiths, liturgical smiths and jewelry-smiths.

The liturgical smiths were related with the church and had their own land, were allowed to intermarry with priest families and participated in church rituals. The jewelry smiths are mostly from *Seyak* families and share a common history with the liturgical smiths, whereas the black smiths were forced to endogamy until recently. Additionally, the introduction of a western style of education, urbanization, and globalization there has been status change took place in Aksum as in other parts of the country. Even though their families are not happy about it, in Aksum, marriages among civil servants are common among smiths and non-smiths without taking into consideration their family background. This type of status change emerged with the expansion of towns before many years.

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Annex I. The Researcher participating in lost wax casting (Aksum, February and March 2011).







Photo by: Bisrat.

Annex II: Profile of Study Participants

1.1. Profiles of Focus Group Discussion Participants

No	Code	Place of FGD	Age	Sex	Occupation	Date of FGD
	FGD	Aksum	65	male	Liturgical-smith	February 15 and 25, 2011
	FGD	Aksum	73	male	Jewelry-smith	February 15and 25, 2011
	FGD	Aksum	26	male	Jewelry-smith	February 15 and 25, 2011
	FGD	Aksum	45	male	Blacksmith	February 15 and 25, 2011
	FGD	Aksum	77	male	Blacksmith	February 15 and 25, 2011
	FGD	Aksum	22	male	Jewelry-smith	February 15 and 25, 2011

1.2. Profile of Key Informants (hint, Ki: Key Informant Interview)

o	Name	Age	Place	Sex	Occupation	Date of Interview
	Ki1	63	Aksum	male	Non-smith	February 10 and 19, 2011
	Ki2	72	Aksum	male	Non-smith	February 11 and March 1,2011
	Ki3	65	Aksum	male	Non-smith	February 12, 2011
	Ki4	76	Aksum	male	Jewelry-smith	February13, 2011
	Ki5	35	Aksum	male	Liturgical-smith	February 16 and 21, 2011
	Ki6	55	Aksum	male	Jewelry-smith	February 16, 2011
	Ki7	60	Aksum	female	Jewelry-smith	February 17, 2011
	Ki8	21	Aksum	male	Blacksmith	February 17,and 19, 2011
	Ki9	51	Aksum	male	Black- smith	February 18, 2011
	Ki10	46	Aksum	male	Jewelry-smith	February 18, 2011
	Ki11	50	Aksum	male	Jewelry smith	February 19, 2011
	Ki12	44	Aksum	male	Jewelry-smith	March 2, 2011
	Ki13	63	Aksum	male	Liturgical-smith	March 2,2011
	Ki14	64	Gondar	male	Jewelry smith	February 2, 2011

Annex III: Research Questions

1.1. Key Informant Interview Guides for Traditional Smiths

General Introduction: The main purpose of this interview is to gather relevant information about traditional smiths themselves and different aspect of their culture from traditional smiths' key informants. This interview is prepared for MA Thesis: *Traditional Smithery and Its Cultural Context in Aks*um. The purpose of this interview is for academic reason only. Thank you for your cooperation and giving your precious time.

1. Personal Data of Key Informants

Age_____

Sex_____

Religion_____

Marital status_____

Occupation_____

Work experience _____

Birth place_____

Place of interview_____

Date_____

2. **Questions Related to Origin and Background of Traditional Smiths and Smithery?**

1. How do you describe your origin?
2. How do you perceive smithery, and how smithery was started in Aksum?
3. How do you perceive being smith?
4. What was the work of your ancestor and how do you describe them?
5. How do you explain your way of life in the past and in present time?

3. **Questions Related with Smithery Activities?**

1. What is the name of your work?
2. How do you explain your work?
3. How do you get the materials, tools and other things important to your work?
4. How do you describe gaining and producing different materials in the past time and in the current situation?

4. Question Related to Relationships between Traditional smiths and to Non-smiths?

1. How do describe your relation with your non-smith?
2. What is the common type of social relation and what to extant are you integrating with the non-smiths?
3. Are you participating in religious ritual activity?
4. How do you explain smiths' marriage?

1.2.Key Informant Interview Guides for Non-Traditional Smiths

General Introduction: The main purpose of this interview is to gather relevant information about traditional smiths and different aspect of their culture from non-smiths' key informants. This interview is prepared for MA Thesis: *Traditional Smithery and Its Cultural Context in Aks*um. The purpose of this interview is for academic reason only. Thank you for your cooperation and giving your precious time.

1. Personal Data of Non-Smiths Key Informants

Age_____

Sex_____

Religion_____

Marital status_____

Occupation_____

Birth place_____

Place of interview_____

Date_____

I. Questions Related with Traditional Smiths and Their Relation with Non-smiths

1. How do you think smiths descended from and the possible reason?
2. How do you describe traditional Smithery and how it was emerged?
3. How do you perceive traditional smiths?
4. What is the contribution of traditional smiths in the local people?
5. Is the traditional smiths genealogy different from Non-traditional smiths?
6. How traditional smiths were treated in earlier times and in the current situation?

1.3. Focus Group Discussion Guides for Traditional Smiths (FGD) February 15, 2011 and February 25, 2011)

General Introduction: the main purpose of this FGD is to gather relevant information about traditional smiths themselves and different aspects of their culture from traditional smiths' FGDs. This FGD is prepared for MA Thesis: *Traditional Smithery and Its Cultural Context in Aksum*. The purpose of this FGD is for academic reason only. Thank you for your cooperation and lending your precious time.

1. Personal Data of FGD Participants

Age_____

Sex_____

Religion_____

Marital status_____

Occupation_____

Birth place_____

Place of FGD_____

Date_____

2. Question Related with Origin of Traditional Smiths and their smithery (February 15, 2011)

1. How do you perceive being traditional smith?
2. How and when traditional smiths emerged?
3. How do you acquire the skills, raw materials and tools?
4. What are the types of traditional smithery and how do you explain them?
5. How do you describe the change and continuity in gaining the raw materials and in producing metal objects?
6. How do you interpret the metal objects made by yourself and what does it mean for you?

3. Questions Related with the Social Relationship between Smiths and the Non-smiths (February 25, 2011)

1. What types of social relationship do you have with the non-smiths?
2. How do you see the interactions you have with the non-smith?
3. Are the social and cultural contexts of Aksum suitable for smiths?

Photo of Aksum Town Around Hawelti

Source: Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project 2007

AKSUM WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Source: Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project 2007

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this is my original work, has not been presented for a degree in any other university and that all sources of material used for the thesis have been duly acknowledged.

Name HAFTSH FITSUM

Signature

Addis Ababa University, 2012