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A HISTORICAL INTERROGATION ON '*BUDA*-RELATED' AILMENTS IN WALLO

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Abstract

This article looks at the nexus between the indigenous cosmology and the different healing techniques that had been utilized to prevent and treat ailments caused by the evil-eye in Wallo, Ethiopia. In particular, it examines the existential and ingrained belief in buda-caused illnesses within the wider context of the history of Wallo. The study also shows how indigenous preventive and therapeutic modalities survived for several centuries, along with their role in explaining the inexplicable misfortunes that befell individuals whose suffering was believed to have emanated from the injurious stare of fellow human beings who were labelled as evil-eyed persons or buda in local parlance. Although noxious spiritual powers were held responsible for most human illnesses, the pervasive nature and purported capability of the buda as one of the causal agents of ill-health and death among the general public deserves closer examination. Documenting the history of the buda-complex contributes to our understanding of the indigenous belief system/s and the various methods applied in diagnosing and treating them and the various healing traditions being espoused and applied in Wallo. The study makes use of secondary written materials as well as primary sources, mainly manuscripts and oral informants.

Keywords: Amulet; Artisans; *Buda*; Ethiopia; Evil-Eye; Indigenous Medicine; Herbal Therapy; Possession; *Tabal*; Talisman; *wadaja*; *yasew ayen*

Introduction

Belief in the existence of "*buda*-related" ailments, a long-held indigenous medical view, presents a valuable area of research. *Buda*, as a causal agent of a range of physical and mental illnesses, has had a very wide geographical coverage. Although many have sought far and wide, no one has succeeded to find out when and how it originated. However, the belief in the evil eye disease "appears in the earliest recorded history and thereafter." [1] The myths, words, inscriptions, paintings and carvings of ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Palestine, Greece, Rome and in the Indian, Mayan, Iranian, as well as in both the Islamic and Christian religions,[2] all testify that belief in the "evil-eye" has had a very long history. "Every culture has a concept of the evil eye and the belief is strongest in the Mediterranean region, West Asia, Latin America, East and West Africa, Central America, Central Asia, and Europe."[3]

As in many African societies, the belief in the malevolent aspect of the *buda* spirit, synonymous with a person with the supposed power of the "evil-eye", appears to be analogous to a belief in witchcraft.[4] Witchcraft is 'imaginary and involuntary; the nearest to it is the man with the evil-eye' [5], says Tippett (1970). The word "witchcraft" is often confused with the term "sorcery". Evans-Pritchard, a pioneer in anthropological studies, has unequivocally shown that the two terms are different, both in their philosophy and their aetiology. For Evans-Pritchard, sorcery is a form of "black magic" meted out by means of manipulative or mechanical methods, while witchcraft is an act of doing evil with the instrumentality of an

1 "The Evil Eye in Cultural and Church History", http://www.soderlamd.pdf p.10

2 Ibid

3 G. Hussein Rassool, *Evil Eye, Jinn Possession, and Mental Health Issues* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019) p.77

4 Assefa Balcha, "Traditional Medicine in Wallo: Its Nature and History," M.A. Thesis, History, Addis Ababa University, 1992, p.14

5 Allan Tippett, *Peoples of South West Ethiopia* (California: William Carey Library, 1970), p.178

inherent psychic power.[6] Hence, the belief in the "concealed malevolence" of the *buda* resembles the latter; the *buda*, like the witch, 'performs no rites, utters no spells and possess[es] no medicine'[7] to harm others. Moreover, the *buda*, unlike sorcerers, cannot be consulted or hired by clients to harm their enemies. The injuring power of the *buda* can thus be regarded as a congenital mystical power readily, and involuntarily, harnessed to harm other human beings. Therefore, it can be argued that the perpetrators (the *buda* or the persons with the evil-eye) may not be held responsible for casting their malicious glare and damaging their victims suffering from the ill effects of their involuntarily action. To inflict injury on the victim, the *buda* would simply gaze at the victim and cast their destructive power of the "evil eye". Whatever the motivation of the *buda*, whether intentional or unintentional, it was necessary to fight back the damage by deploying immediate counter-measures as early as possible, and by using protective written amulets made of thin strips of parchment or paper to prevent the victim from such eventualities in the future.' Amulets were often worn with *matab* (silk thread) being placed around the neck of Ethiopian Christians (or with some other form of necklace in the case of Muslims). Texts were in many cases stitched together to equal the height of the person for whom they were produced, and were generally tightly rolled up to fit into a specially prepared leather container, which was hung round the neck of its owner."[8]

In the past, the belief in the *buda* ("bad eye") or *ayn al-ḥasūd* ("eye of the envious") and the danger it represented, seems to have been

6 E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1970); see also John Middleton and E.H. Winters (eds.), *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa* (London, Rutledge and Paul, 1963), pp.2-3; also I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion* (London, Hazel Watson and Viney Ltd., 1971), p.13

7 Annemarie Malefijit, *Religion and Culture: An Introduction to Anthropology of Religion* (New York, The McMillan Co., 1968), p.243

8 http://ethiopia-stamps.com/wp-content/uploads/200311o4-Emperor-Tewedros's-Amulet.pdf

considerable.[9] Many complaints of ill-health were simply attributed to a person's eye (*yasew ayen* in Amharic), *Al 'Ayn* means in Arabic the one who put the evil eye on another person. Though satisfying explanations were lacking, people fervently believed that being *buda* was an inherited genetic trait, a trait that could not be acquired through training. Based on this information, the term *buda* may be described as a personification of an imaginary offense coming from so-called "evil-eyed" persons, who were born pathogenic. There is no coherent explanation that clarifies the "inexplicable" aspect of *buda*-related and other similar maladies. An attempt to explain such an incomprehensible incidence may have arisen from fear and suspicion.[10] As a result, many illness causations in Ethiopia were socially-constructed. Deviations from centuries-old socio-cultural thoughts were often rejected, and it was thus 'culture, not nature'[11] that defined several human and animal diseases.[12]

The *buda* as a source of loathsome illness was held as a widespread belief throughout the Middle East. According to Messing, the *buda*-"complex" appeared to have developed out of the "medical-religious-ecological…ethnic-religious-Middle Eastern evil-eye complex-[and an] African fear of the ironsmith."[13] Even Strabo in the first century CE wrote about the wearing of shells as 'charms against

9 Cornwallis Harris remarked that "The influence of the evil eye exercises a strong control over the minds of all." See Cornwallis Harris, *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, V.II, (London, Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), p.290

10 Assefa Balcha, "Traditional Medicine," p.10

11 Charles Hughes, "Ethno Medicine," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York, McMillan and Co., 1968), p.89

12 Where modern diagnostic techniques and psychiatric services were lacking, attributing most illnesses to unnatural or spiritual forces seemed to be an appropriate etiological explanation; this outlook also encouraged the acceptability and utilitarian value of indigenous healing.

13 Simon Messing, "The Highland Plateau Amhara of Ethiopia" Unpublished PhD Dissertation. University of Pennsylvania, 1957, p.667

the evil-eye by the people of Trogolodytike',[14] a vague geographic area in the hinterland of the Red Sea at the horn of Africa. As Osler wrote in the early twentieth century, the belief in the "evil-eye" was common 'in the older civilizations, and referred to in several places in the Bible, it passed to Greece and Rome, and today is still held fervently in many parts of Europe.'[15] Anthropologists have equally documented the pervasiveness of possession-related complaints arising either from naturalistic or supernaturalistic entities across the world.[16]

In Ethiopia, as in most other countries, peoples' health-seeking behaviours strongly influenced by culturally held beliefs about disease and their methods of treatments to restore wellbeing.[17] As health and healing practices are influenced by culture, some regions were accused of being "breeding grounds" of "evil-eyed" persons, many of whom were engaged in artisan occupations. Potters, tanners, and blacksmiths were the main culprits. Almost every person living in such communities were generally exposed to a blanket accusation of being a *buda*. Even if accusations towards some families or individuals as being "evil-eyed" has been common, it is not always easy to vindicate other non-malicious individuals from suspicion of practicing the "evil eye". Even "evil-eyed" persons do not know when and where they may find their victims. It could be at a time of an accident that envious caprices towards their victims are triggered. Oral informants stressed that being empty belly would expose a person for the 'buda' to easily attack his/her potential victim; and that

14 Quoted in G.W.B. Huntingford, *The Historical Geography of Ethiopia from the First Century A.D. to 1704* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989), p.36

15 William Osler, "The Evolution of Modern Medicine," *A Series of Lectures Delivered at Yale University*, 1913, p.27

16 Craig S. Keener, "Spirit Possession as a Cross-cultural Experience," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20(2) 2010, pp.218-219.

17 Lisa M. Vaughn, Farrah Jacquez and Raymond C. Baker, " Cultural Health Attributions, Beliefs, and Practices: Effects on Healthcare and Medical Education," *The Open Medical Education Journal*, V.2, 2009, p. 64.

is why they advised people not to go out of their home ever without eating some food or taking even a spoonful of honey.[18] Apart from some watchful individuals who own or carry some protective items to counteract or deflect such an eventuality, no person is immune from being accidentally exposed to the unanticipated misfortune of the envious "evil-eye" glance. It is vital to note that those who possess the evil eye can put a curse on others, usually unintentionally, by gazing at them enviously. As a result, "evil-eyed" individuals are said to have the temerity to attack even their own children and domestic animals 'without having the awareness of doing so', they often release their injurious gaze on unsuspecting individuals who are outside of their close family circles living far from their neighbourhood.[19] It is possible however that a person's wealth within the same locality may have triggered envy on the part of "evil-eyed" individual/s. Not to be exposed to ill-effects of envy arising either from hostility, pride, power or fear may have discouraged individuals from seeking reputation or having too much wealth, a belief that impeded them from upward social mobility.[20] The evil eye (also described as a jealous spirit) is usually developed in a person by coveting of the good fortune of others.[21] In short, envy was regarded as a harbinger of social, psychological and emotional disorder. The *buda*-"complex", either as a source of dreadful illness or as a "personification" of unnatural and imaginary force, appears to have emphasized the inconceivable aspect of some illness etiologies. This suggests that the intrusion of impalpable "entities" into the human body is one of the dominant etiological explanations in Ethiopia,[22] past and present. To

18 Oral Informants

19 For a similar view among the Gusii in Kenya, see Makio Matsuzono, "Rubbing off the Dirt: Evil-Eye Belief among the Gusii," *Nilo-Ethiopian Studies* 1: 1-13 (1993).

20 Boris Gershman, "The Economic Origins of the Evil Eye Belief," American University, June 2014, p.3

21 Chloe Rhodes, *Black Cats and Evil Eyes*, (London, Michael O'Mara Books Limited 2012), p.21

22 Assefa Balcha, "Traditional Medicine," p.10

validate this assertion, and provide some insight into the phenomenon, it is important to explore the indigenous views, as well as associated preventive and therapeutic practices, and this we do next.

Public Perceptions and Where to Seek Treatments

It was a common belief that the sick or the "possessed" were often distinguished by hysteric laughing, weeping, yawning and sighing, speaking in an undifferentiated "language", deliria, biting of lips, gnashing of teeth, kicking, creeping, itching, headache, sweating, stomach pain, sleeplessness, sadness and anxiety, and even howling like a hyena.[23] Symptoms may vary from person to person including sudden and unexpected emotional and behavioural and physical changes. Manifestation of these symptoms would soon induce the family of the sick to consult indigenous medical practitioners whose duty included diagnosis and treatment of *buda*-related ailments. Though not wholly convincing, Nathaniel Pearce in the nineteenth century remarked: 'All convulsions, any hysteric disorders … [were] attributed to the evil-eye of these [*buda*] people'.[24] The '*buda*' (disease-causing) persons, not patients, were also accused of cannibalistic deeds, of having a nocturnal capability to metamorphosize into a mysterious hyena or bodily effluvia,[25] a belief roughly similar to the

23 See Henry Stern, *Wanderings Among the Falasha*, 2nd ed. (London, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968), p.156

24 Nathaniel Pearce, *The Life and Adventures of Nathaniel Pearce* V.I, (London: Sesor Publisher, 1831), pp.287-88

25 Ibid; for the existence of this belief in different parts of Ethiopia in the 19th century, see Augustus Wylde, *Modern Abyssinia*, (Westport: Negro University Press, 1901), pp.384-85; for a similar description, see Henry Salt, *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of That Country* (London, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967), pp.426-27; also Mansfield Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, V.I., (New York: D'Appleton & Co., 1854), p.300; for a similar belief in Tigray, see Dan Bauer, "The Sacred and the Secret: Order and Chaos in Tigray Medicine and Politics," W. Arens and Ivan Karp (Eds.) *Creativity of Power* (Washington, DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp.240-241

Loup Garou in France and the *Werewolf'* in Germany. The *Beta Israel* (often referred to as the Falasha) in Ethiopia had similar beliefs. "The old idea that blacksmiths possessed supernatural powers found expression in the widespread conviction that they could turn themselves into hyenas at night,"[26] wrote Pankhurst.

The *buda's* gaze was often triggered when the inherently "evil-eyed" person got excited by the physical beauty or attractiveness of their potential victim—human or animal. This emotional stimulus could also be activated by the pleasant appearance of a specific area of the victim's anatomy. After being excited, the *buda* would instantly inject their invincible pathogens into the victim's body, and symptoms would begin to manifest after the assault. People believed that the element of jealousy on the part of the *buda* person was also present. As jealousy has been associated with bewitchment, many people, for fear of being sick in some arcane way, would not dare to squabble with, or fix their eyes on, a person suspected of having *buda* power. Irrespective of gender, argued Helen Pankhurst (1992), beautiful, wealthy and happy women and men were said to be equally prone to the envious stare of the *buda*.[27] Illnesses such as *sal* (prolonged cough), *woreza* (vomiting and diarrhoea), *gusimt* (acute pain in the chest), *chife* (skin ulcer), and *ayinet* (blister on a child's head), including emaciation of children, and even spontaneous abortions, were attributed to the *buda*'s injurious stare.[28] To be exposed to the gaze of the *buda* while eating or drinking was thought to be another major source of bewitchment. This principally explains why people often covered themselves while eating outside a house.

26 Richard Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia: The Northern and Central Highlands from Early Medieval Times to the Rise of Emperor Tewodros II* (Trenton, New Jersey, The Red Sea Press, 1992), p.223

27 Helen Pankhurst, *Gender, Development and Identity* (London, Zed Press, 1992), p.163

28 As several childhood illnesses were said to be caused by the *buda*, it was common to see children wearing different bracelets, anklets, necklaces, amulets or charms to distract or ward off the injurious gaze of the evil-eyed persons.

A person's dislike for some food or drink was also explained in terms of previous exposure to such a gaze, sometime in the past. Likewise, the anxiety of guests would have to be allayed by hosts tasting food and drink offered. Even spouses would do the same when offering drinks to their husbands; and husbands often would make their wives taste the stew or *wot* wrapped in *injera* or *gursha* before tucking in the prepared meal together. Additionally, inviting a stranger to partake or taste one's meal would safeguard him/her from the attack of a potentially *buda* individual.[29]

It was also widely believed that once excited, as a result of tasty food, physical beauty, luxurious clothing, jewellery, or other finery, the *buda* would immediately be stimulated to discharge his/her evil-eye attack,[30] and would soon start devouring his/her victim in a mysterious way. Whenever sudden or premature death occurred, the family of the deceased would often seek out a diviner-spiritual healer who would attribute the death to the evil-eye attack, including the identification of the *buda* "person" who was held accountable for the disaster. However, the diviner-healer would not tell the true identity of the *buda* to the family of the dead because they would take vengeance against the alleged "evil-eyed" person. Lacking tangible evidence to prove, the wronged family would not dare present the case in a court of law that would pass judgment against the culprit. Similarly, even cows were said to be bewitched, especially when they refused to feed their calves or be milked. Abortions, still birth, or death of calves, poor milk yield, and being barren, were all associated with the "evil-eye" syndrome. People believed that cows, heifers, young bullocks, and calves were vulnerable to the influence of the evil-eye, and protective amulets were often tied around necks or horns.

As hinted at above, a certain category of individuals, such as tanners, weavers, potters, iron and gold smiths, often referred to as

29 Harald Aspen, "Mediums and Human Worlds: The Amhara Peasants of the North Ethiopian Highlands and Their Traditions of Knowledge," PhD. Dissertation, (University of Trondhein, 1994), p.183

30 Simon Messing, "The Highland Plateau," p.662

bale eje, were invariably suspected of, or impeached for being part of, this *buda* affair.[31] The gross accusation of artisans as *buda* seemed less severe with regard to gold smiths. Why this was so, is not easy to discern, however. Localities around Dessie such as Segerat, Dereq Woyra, Mesqella, and Tigaja have been frequently mentioned as *buda*-inhabited areas. Many people in these areas who were mostly engaged in artisan occupations have been exposed to blanket accusations.[32] Even if these artisans or the *bale eje* did own farmlands, they subsidized their livelihood by weaving traditional garments and manufacturing agricultural implements. Iron smiths were the major producers of "plough-shares, pick-axes, sickles and other agricultural implements, as well as knives and razors, spear-heads, daggers, swords, bullets and spare parts for rifles, besides tent-pegs, hammers, pincers, drills, nails, hatchets, saws and files, steels for striking fire, pans on which to cook bread, bits and stirrups for horses and mules, chains and rings, tweezers, scissors and needles."[33] Likewise, Potters manufactured all sorts of cooking and food receptacles and other earthenware household utensils, such as 'bowls, dishes, pitchers and jars of many shapes and sizes'.[34] They were the ones who produced *mitad* (earthenware plate for baking *injera* or bread), *jebena* (coffee

31 'Buda' is defined as ጠይብ (ጠቢብ) ፣ ቀጥቃጭ ባለእጅ፣ አዋቂ፣ ሠራተኛ፣ ጀንሸላሚ፣ አንጥረኛ፣ … ዛር፣ ጋኔን፣ ምትሀት፣ እጀሰብ፣ ዐይነወርቅ፣ አይነ ወግ፣ ሰውን የሚይዝ፣ የሚያሳብድ፣ አተላ የሚያስጠጣ፣ እንደዥጉ የሚያስንብስ … አው የሚያሰኝ፣ ሰውየው ስለሚከሳና ስለሚመነምን ቡዳ በላው ይባላል። This definition clearly demonstrates how human beings (artisans), spiritual beings and magic have been intermingled and found together. For the above definition, see Desta Tekle Wold, *The New Amharic Dictionary* (Amharic) (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printing Press, 1962 EC).

32 For a similar opinion, see Allan Young, "Externalizing and Internalizing Medical Beliefs: An Ethiopian Example." *Social Science and Medicine*, 10 (3/4). 1976, p.149; also Henry Salt writes that "all workers in iron are called buda by the Abyssinians," *A Voyage to Abyssinia and Travels into the Interior of That Country*, (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1967), p.426

33 Richard Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia*, p.222

34 Ibid, p.226

pots), *dist* (saucepans), *gulecha* (clay made tripods on which cooking utensils rest above the fire). By using *sindedo* (thick plaiting reed) and *akirma* (a kind of grass)), weavers used to produce *wonfit* (sieves), *moseb* (hand woven dining table) and *sefed* (plates made of grass). While tanners produced a wide range of goods, among them 'saddles, shields, scabbards, cartridge and other belts, tents, thongs, straps, bags and pouches, sleeping-skins, articles of clothing, and parchments',[35] wood cutters on their part manufactured and supplied the town of Dessie with household items like *mugecha* (mortars of different sizes made of hollowed out wood for pounding grain and coffee). Moreover, the jewellers manufactured a great variety of 'crosses of all shapes and sizes, for both religious and secular use, as well as hairpins, earrings, necklaces, lockets, bracelets, rings and anklets, ear picks, ornaments for shields, swords, spears and guns, and sundry paraphernalia for horses and mules' as well as 'incense-holders, sistra, small bells, bracelets, chains, jugs and bowls for washing purposes, shield, sword and scabbard ornaments, and sundry mule collar and harness decorations'.[36] As believed by many African peoples, artisanship, particularly blacksmithing, was passed from one generation to the next on a familial basis. Artisans' knowledge and skill was surrounded by an aura of mystery and were considered impure, outcasts, who possessed injurious mystic powers.[37] As a result, those who were suspected or branded as "evil-eyed" persons were highly feared, and were also compelled to lead a socially isolated life.[38] This social ostracism was based on the belief ቡዳን ቡዳ አይበላውም (a *buda* never eats another *buda*). Checking up on a potential marriage partner's family background as far back as seven

35 Ibid, p.227

36 Ibid, p.239

37 For a description of the 'buda' belief since the Gondarine times, see Richard Pankhurst, *A Social History of Ethiopia*

38 For a counter-argument against the *buda* belief and its destructive effect on the country's social, economic and technological development, see a historical fiction, Fisseha Yihun, *Book of Evil-Eye* (Amharic), (Addis Ababa, Neged Printing Press,1990 EC), pp1-48.

generations before arranging wedlock was crucial because being evil-eyed was viewed as a hereditary trait. This clearly indicates the degree of fear and apprehension that surrounded this all-pervasive belief.[39] It also highlights the extent to which the suspected *buda* families have been ostracized and feared.[40]

To deal with this dreadful malady, a variety of remedies were employed. These remedies varied from place to place, and from practitioner to practitioner. They could take the shape of a fumigant or a crushed medicine to be sniffed, squirted into the ear or inhaled up the nose. Bewitched human beings or domestic animals were often fumigated with medicinal vapours.[41] People who were suspected of being victims of the "evil eye" often sought the services of healers to identify the persons who had harmed them. The Christian *dabtara* and the Muslim *sheiks* were the ones who prepared amulets or charms of various kinds for preventive and therapeutic purposes.[42] The clergy conducted rites of exorcism to treat the sick, suffering from "evil-eye" possession, while both Christian and Muslim cleric-healers provided their clientele with written protective amulets in rolls, accordion, or book form, many of which contain talismanic drawings of various

39 Leprosy was also perceived as a hereditary disease that affected a family up to seven successive generations.

40 ተጋቢዎች ዝምድና ካላቸው ከሰባት ቤት መራቅ አለባቸው፤፤ Oral Informants

41 On the burning of a medicinal plant with appropriate incantations for 'buda' exorcism, see Spencer Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London, Frank Cass & Co. & Ltd., 1965), p.28

42 According to Harris, amulets were used by all classes and were "held far more efficacious." See *The Highlands of Ethiopia*, V.II, (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), p.157; similarly, Plowden has remarked that "without strong amulets, any too conspicuous act or appearance become highly imprudent," see Walter Plowden, *Travels in Abyssinia and the Galla Country with Account of A Mission to Ras Ali in 1848*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1860), p.124; on the universal application of amulets as a potent and valuable preventive item, see Henry Stern, *Wanderings Among the Falasha*, 2nd ed. (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., 1968), p.153; Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia*, p.28

designs, images and figures.[43] Countless medical manuscripts owned by indigenous healers and libraries confirm the pervasiveness of the *buda* as a major cause of human and animal ailments. It is hard to find a single medico-magical manuscript that does not mention or contain treatment regimen/s against *buda*-caused ailment.

To treat a sick child with proven *buda* symptoms, potions of herbal drops were often put into the left nostril to induce repeated sneezing so as to force the *buda* to draw its influence away from the ailing infant. Adults were also treated in a similar manner. Fumigating the "possessed" with the smoke of burned hair or a shred of garment worn by the suspected *buda* person was one of the most preferred counter measures against the intrusive agent. Again, the rationale behind fumigation was to choke and force the *buda* to leave the victim. As a symbol of the pathogen's resistance, it was believed the "possessed" would become tight-fisted, putting his thumbs out of reach and not allowing them 'to be taken hold of.'[44] Identifying the 'evil-eyed' individual who bewitched a victim and the reason/s why he/she did that, as well as where he/she resided were vital components of the exorcising process. The *buda* sometimes conceded to leave only under the threat of severe punishment such as burning with a red-hot iron, or 'a repast of glowing coals'.[45] If this procedure was applied, the inflicted damage or the scar would not be visible on the "possessed" person but on the actual *buda* individual known to have sent his/her evil influence. After the evil spirit left, the victim would often request and ravenously consume the 'filth and dirt of the most revolting descriptions',[46] to borrow a line from Stern.

43 For a detailed account of the use of amulets, see Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

44 As Parkyns remarked "The first proof of the devil's [buda's] leaving her [the bewitched] is allowing her thumbs to be taken hold of." See Mansfeld Parkyns, *Life in Abyssinia*, V.II, p.155

45 Personal communication with Oral Informants; for a related account of exorcism, see Henry Stern, *Wanderings Among the Falasha*, pp.157-58

46 Henry Stern, *Wanderings Among the Falasha*, pp.158

During this entire process the *buda* spirit was expected to communicate and confess through the "possessed" why, how and when it entered and/or possessed its victim. With that, the real identity and address of the culprit was said to be revealed.[47] Evil eye has often been associated with other problems like possession or black magic.[48] It was believed that there were different *buda*-inflicted ailments in which the disease-causing agent might be an evil-eyed person, a black cat or a *zar* spirit habitually referred to as *ayna tila* (shadow of the eye) or an "evil-eyed" *jinn* spirit.[49] In other words, there were both "normal" and "evil-eyed" *zar* and *jinn* spirits causing *buda*-like ailments in human beings. "*An Nathara* in Arabic is the envious/evil eye that comes from the *Jinn*."[50]

"Evil-eye" possession could be exorcized only when an appropriate measure was taken in the shortest possible time. Not to do so would result in the gradual loss of the victim's life because the ailment was characterized by poor appetite, insomnia, and constant weight loss. It was believed that the *buda* would keep on "devouring" the victim's body until his/her death. When the *buda* person had died, the possessed would have a good prospect of regaining his/her health. But as long as the *buda* had been alive, the formerly possessed individual would have fallen repeatedly sick and would not have become completely healthy.[51] Mekonnen (1988) notes that naturalistic explanations were mentioned only when an illness was not

47 Ascription of illnesses to human beings 'possessed' by mystic forces assumed a much more concrete form when these low-caste artisan groups were readily implicated.

48 For the intermingling of human beings such as artisans, spiritual beings and magic See, footnote no. 30

49 *Ayna Tila* of a Zar was thought to be "a kind of evil eye much more dangerous than the buda of a human," see Elizabeth Hecht, "Traditional Medicine and Magic Among the Amhara of Ethiopia," paper presented for the *Conference on Ethiopian Feudalism*, Addis Ababa, March 1976, p.7

50 Rassool, *Evil Eye, Jinn Possession*, p.78

51 Personal communication with oral informants

'threatening or often at its initial stage, but beyond that, those of supernatural causations were invoked [or implicated]'.[52]

For fear of accidental exposure to the evil influence of a *buda* person, mothers would not dare uncover their babies in front of a stranger. If a person was suspected of being "evil-eyed", he/she would be politely asked to spit on the child, and this act of spitting would serve as a proof of harmlessness of the 'suspected' person. It was believed that upon such a request a *buda* person would not concede to do so. In an attempt to identify the culprit, and as a first line of defence, neighbours also would be asked to spit on an ailing child. This would probably frustrate the *buda* who would eventually be coerced to remove his/her fascination and evil ocular penetration. This may appear perplexing as the act of bewitching was viewed as being both "involuntary" and "controlled". To fend off, or turn down, the invidious look of the "evil-eyed" person, children were often provided with written amulets, including small sachets of crushed medicinal herbs, and tying a thread of other natural objects such as beads of diverse colours, cowry shells, bronze anklets, or bracelets.[53] It was believed that these items were naturally endowed with an exceptional power for deflecting the *buda*'s extra-sensory power of penetration.

Children were also left with an unshaved forelock on their heads believing that this would greatly reduce their natural attractiveness, which would in turn prevent them from the ocular fascination of the evil eye or *buda* people. Moreover, concealing the real names of children and addressing them as the opposite gender were thought to be effective preventive measures. Whatever the underlying reason may have been, when a child became emaciated, or began to lose significant weight, it was common to ascribe the problem to a *buda*

52 Mekonnen Bishaw, "Integrating Indigenous and Cosmopolitan Medicine in Ethiopia" Unpub. PhD Dissertation, S. Illinois University, 1988, p.77

53 Charles Johnston, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia*. V.II. (London: Greeg Int. Publishers Ltd., 1844), p.264

person who had the opportunity to cast his/her injurious gaze on the sick.[54]

It is important to note that a possessing *buda* spirit could be effectively exorcized either by an exorcist cleric, or by a traditional medical specialist known locally as *buda atagne* (*buda*-fumigator). Both would have acquired their craft from their parents or from other experienced indigenous medical specialists.[55]

Immersing in or dousing the patient's body with *tabal* (holy water), was a common religious method employed to fight against a malevolent spirit. Besides sprinkling the patient with holy water, massaging the body of the sick with a cross for at least a week or two was the most preferred exorcizing method of the church. Although the Church did not officially endorse the existence of naturally malevolent, disease-causing human beings, the exorcist-priests recognized and incorporated the "evil-eye" disease in their spiritual fight.[56] Evil demons were exorcized with the help of prayer books written in the name of benevolent spiritual beings. The church taught that reciting a set of selected prayer books of saints and angels would help alleviate multiple human problems.[57] As legion of evil spirits populating the layman's world were mostly held responsible for most human illnesses; and the church taught the worshipers that all rational therapeutic efforts were worthless because dramatic or miraculous results could only be achieved through spiritual counter

54 The axiom: "He/she is getting thinner and thinner like the one 'eaten' by a '*buda*'" may indicate the alleged devouring power of the '*buda*'.

55 Herbalists of various titles and spiritual healers like '*bala-wuqabi*' may also help.

56 Mekonnen Bishaw, "Integrating Indigenous and Cosmopolitan Medicine," p.80

57 For example, the prayer book of Raphael known to be 'Angel of Healing,' was helpful in childbirth; the *malk* of Abuna Aregawi was good to destroy rats, and snakes; while the prayer book of Archangel Mikael was recited to fight against contagious diseases. Many people expressed their devotion by making vows, offering feasts or gifts in their names believing that they would help them if they made appeals to them. By contrast, no one could prevent *meqseft* (sudden or untimely death).

measures. Similarly, Islam teaches that Muslims can protect themselves from the evil eye by having strong faith in Allah and by putting their trust in Him, seeking refuge in Allah and requesting the blessings of Allah.[58]

According to the Orthodox Church all spirit-afflicted illnesses invariably belonged to the devil and his dominions. Despite this claim, however, their effort to exorcize zar spirits was believed to be ineffective.[59] The mainstream church-based treatment also included unction of, or anointing, the sick to cleanse the internal and external (the flesh as well as the soul) of the patient afflicted by sin. Despite such religious-affiliated efforts, indigenous, community-based treatments were often used against *buda*-related ailments. Here, the tradition of preparing *wadaja*, an originally Oromo group prayer which was later adopted by non-Oromo people through the medium of Islam,[60] is worth mentioning. It was culturally assumed that the best "remedy" against spirit-caused sickness was to make use of the *wadaja* ritual (a group prayer/healing session).[61] Those patients

58 Rassool, *Evil Eye, Jinn Possession*, p.91

59 The Church reiterates a story about "the thirty children of Adam and Eve and how the fifteen most beautiful children became invisible. Thinking to protect her most beautiful children from divine envy, Eve tried to hide them in the Garden of Eden, out of God's sight. God, all-seeing and angered by Eve's actions, declared that these children would remain invisible for eternity. The fifteen unhidden children became the ancestors of humanity, while the invisible children became the forefathers of a class of envious and unpredictable spirits called *zar*." See Monika D. Edelstien, "Lost Tribes and Coffee Ceremonies: Zar Spirit Possession and Ethno-Religious Identity of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 15(2), 153-170, 2002, p.155

60 Tubiana, Joseph. "Zar and Buda in Northern Ethiopia", in *Women's Medicine, The Zar-Bori Cult in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Ioan M. Lewis, Ahmed Al-Safi, and Sayyid Hurreiz, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press for the International African Institute, 1991) pp.29–30.

61 For a comprehensive treatment of the ritual, see Assefa Balcha, "Wadaja Ritual: Portrait of a Wallo Cultural Coping Mechanism", *Eastern African Literary and Cultural Studies*, 3:1, 40-52, 2017.

suspected of being bewitched were, and are, not taken to biomedical institutions for treatment. It was believed that the intrusive spirit would be injured if the "possessed" person received a treatment of injections.[62] This situation, it was believed, would result in the death of the pathogenic "spirit" as well as the "possessed" individual.[63] Owing to this deep-rooted belief, patients suffering from symptomatically similar illnesses were not also encouraged to obtain biomedical care.[64] Even when physical problems were observed, the best option for the patient was elected to be a consultation with a spiritual healer to determine why a particular illness predominated. Through this process, the disease-causing spirit such as *zar*, *atete*, or *jinn*, could be identified as an agent of the physical ailment. This made the taxonomy and aetiology of illnesses and diseases unintelligible to those who would want to understand ill-health only from the point of view of disease causing pathogens, and the attendant biological or physical disorder.[65]

Furthermore, a disease characterized by sores affecting the heads of children called *ayinet,* was attributed to a wicked stare of an envier (Ar. '*Ayn-al-hasad'*). Both the Christian *dabtara* and the Muslem *qallicha* provided cures for this mild sickness. A medicinal potion of an egg's albumen, the flour of burned *zagol* (cowry shell) and lemon juice was applied on the child's head. Words, believed to have magical powers,

62 While treatments administered with the injection needle were highly acclaimed in effecting cure for most physical illnesses, patients believed to have been attacked by disease-causing spirits were mostly advised to avoid injections and seek indigenous treatments as much as possible.

63 Oral Informants; animal sacrifices were made for the sick known locally as *beza* (lit. medicine). It was based on the belief that the possessing spirit could be drawn off from the sick and put into the sacrificial animal.

64 Nowadays the change in attitude of the general public towards 'buda'-caused illnesses is believed to have contributed to the reduction in the number of evil eye complaints.

65 For a brief discussion of such a confusion in Addis Ababa, see Wondwosen Teshome-Bahiru, "Concept of Health, Disease, Illness and Therapy Among the People of Addis Ababa," *Annals of African Medicine*, 3(1); 28-31, 2004.

were also pronounced over the preparation. The foaming mixture would soon overflow from the egg's shell, an instance many people considered miraculous. The *qallicha* would also advise parents to take their ailing children to a marketplace to "magically transfer" the disease-causing agent/s, to the children of unwary mothers.[66]

Having said this, it is also important to note that medicinal plants have been utilized to fight against the loathsome illness caused by the "evil eye." In the preparation of fumigants and amulets, the various parts of the following medicinal plants and herbs were often employed as principal ingredients. Among these are *gizawa*, also known as *eda buda* (*Withania sominifera*); *agam* (*Carissa edulis*); *etse manahi* (*Securidaca longepedunculata*); *qraro* or *marenz* (*Stychnos innocua*); *gumaro* (*Caparris tomentosa*); *kosso* (*Hygenica abyssinica*); *misirich* (*Clerodendrum myricoides*); *tinjut* (*Otostegia integrifolia*); *sindedo* (*Pennisetum sp*.); *aluma* (*Amaranthus angustifolius*); *qatetena* or *yahiya jorro* (*Verbascum sinaiticum*); *girar* (*Osyris abyssinica*); *ret* (*Aloe abyssinica*); *sire bezu* (*Adiantum poirettii*); *tembelel* (*Jasminum abyssinica*); *dadeho* (*Euclea schimperi*); *qabericho* (*Echinops sp*.); *nech shenkurt* (*Allium cepa*); *tena adam* (*Ruta chalepanis*) and *altit* or *etse tut*.

Concluding Remarks

Illnesses related to so-called "evil-eyed" persons demonstrate one of the indigenous and entrenched popular beliefs of disease causation in Wallo. The *buda*-complex reveals the complex relationship between the layman's supernatural world,[67] a world populated by a number of noxious spiritual powers, and human beings. Spiritual entities, by themselves, or through the instrumentality of human beings, were perceived as causative agents of various human maladies. To combat these disease-causing agents, a range of preventive and healing methods, comprising elements of natural, traditional and religious-based treatments, were employed. To demonstrate the importance of herbal medicaments against *buda* ailments in general, and the

66 Oral informants

67 Ronald Reminick, "The Evil-Eye Belief Among the Amhara of Ethiopia," *Ethnology*, V.13, 1974, p.280

therapeutic value of a medicinal plant called *gizawa* (*Withania sominifera*) in particular, it would suffice to look at the following popular verse:

> ግዛዋ ካለ እደጅሽ
> ለምን ሞተ ልጅሽ?[68]
>
> *If there was Gizawa in your courtyard*
> *How could your child pass away?*

All told, the belief in the "evil-eyed" individuals and their alleged power to injure with an invidious gaze has still persisted with extraordinary tenacity.[69] But curiously, the change in the public's overall socio-psychological outlook coupled with improvement in social relations with the purported *buda* persons seems to have decreased the number of "evil-eye" complaints. Most of all, jealousy or envy as a fundamental triggering factor for bewitchment requires a serious investigation. The word, which signifies a highly loaded socio-psychological, socio-economic and 'political' concepts and meanings, should be defined and explained from different perspectives.

The following excerpt of an oral informant's testimony from north Wallo may evidently show the persistence of a similar belief at the turn of the twenty first century:

> Farmers [sic] come to me ... because I am also a blacksmith. So I ask him what he can do for me [by way of payment for my service]. He says he will either pay me in cash or till my land for me. Then I provide him with my service. Some people are satisfied with it. There are also a few bad people who have wrong notions about my profession. They say some people eat others. They should realise that one doesn't eat another person. They should have known that

68 Oral Informants

69 When begging for or receiving alms it is still common to hear "may the Almighty save you from *yasew ayen*", and/or "may God protect you from envious person/s."

> metal doesn't become an implement by itself and that you can't do your farming without implements. So they should have refrained from such talk. But this is what people with long tongues say. Otherwise, any enlightened person knows that [there is no such thing as "evil eye"].[70]

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