

Vol 7, no 1, (2015): pp(66 -87)

Manufacturing Emperor Tewodros's cannon at Gafat

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Abstract

The main objective of this study intends to identify significant sites that have basic acquaintances with Emperor Tewodros II (1855 – 1868) in Dabra Tabor and its surroundings. It was conducted in quantitative methods – literature reviews, interviews and direct observations. It attempts to identify the real place where Emperor Tewodros manufactured his cannon at Gafat, the source of raw materials used, the people involved and the technology implied in the manufactures of the cannon as well as part of the route along with the cannon was dragged to Maqdala. It also overviews other heritage potentials of the surrounding of Gafat, such as the ruins of the palaces of Emperor Yohannes IV at Semernaha and Emperor Suseneyos at Aringo Abo; historic churches in the area such as Dabra Tabor Iyesus, Hiruy Gioyrgis, Dabra Tabor Medhane and Wukro Medhane Alem.

Key Words: Emperor Tewodros, Gafat, Maqdala, Sebastopol

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1. Introduction

Even though much has been said about Emperor Tewodros, such as, his success to clear the way to the throne, his vision to unite Ethiopia, his dreams to introduce modern technology to the country and his end, some of the issues related to the emperor are still vague. Literatures and oral information do not agree on some very important facts. The contradiction starts with the birth date of the emperor. While Rubenson (1966) believes that Tewodros was born in 1820, Bahru (1991) and Paulos (1985 Ethiopian Calendar) (EC)) suppose 1818. There seems not to be enough literatures to also indicate the source of the raw materials and technology for the manufacture of the cannon, the hardship of manufacturing and transporting the cannon and the route along which the Emperor dragged the mortar from Gafat to Maqdala. Since no identifying remarks are attached to the important sites, no one knows for sure the exact sites where significant activities took place during the manufacture of the mortar.

Other uncertainties are related to the exact places where the Emperor was born and his body was buried. Many people believe that he was born at Cherge Mariam in Quara and the local people marked and fenced the place with stones. But some argue that he was born in Gondar and some still indicate some other places out of Gondar. Paulos Gnogno's novel (1985 EC), entitled in Amharic, *Atse Tewodros*, is one of the important references regarding the life of the Emperor. But, this novel also contradicts itself regarding the birth place of the Emperor. On page 7 it states that Kasa (name given to the Emperor at birth) was born at a particular place named Dawa, only 12 Kilometers away from Gondar Town on Tir 6, 1811 EC (January 14, 1918) and baptized at Abiye Egzie Church in Gondar.

On the other hand, the same novel states on page 13 that after he served Dejazmach Goshu of Gojjam as a soldier, Kasa escaped to his birth place in Quara when Goshu suspected him of treason and wanted to detain him. The same paragraph of this novel added that at his arrival in Quara, Kasa was arrested by Ato Bitawa, the local governor of the time, appointed by Mennen, mother of Ras Ali II. Though it failed to mention the specific name or location within Quara, this paragraph attempts to specify the birth place of the Emperor within Quara while it narrates his escape from Bitawa's detention and his movement within Quara to the specific village where he was born (Paulos, 1985 EC: 7 and 13).

Another contradiction comes with the burial place of the Emperor's body. While it is believed that Emperor Tewodros's body remained at Maqdala, where he was buried two days after he committed his dramatic suicide, some references indicate that it was dug out three years after his death and buried at Mahebere Sellassie Monastery in Mettema, where he attended his church education. Thus, Emperor Tewodros's history is full of ambiguity and most of available references contradict one another. This literature gap is caused by the destructions and looting of important references soon after his sudden heroic death. According to Prof. Pankhurst, one sided character of the documentations, particularly for the last part of his life reflected only the negative side of the Emperor and ignored his achievements.

As per the suggestions given at our workshop² in Dabra Tabor, we have developed another proposal to answer these questions and to identify significant sites that have basic acquaintances with Emperor Tewodros in Quara and Derasgie, aiming at

² See acknowledgement at the end of the paper

connecting the root of the Emperor from his birth place in Quara to Gafat where he manufactured his cannon. This study will serve as a complement to the study conducted from Gafat to Maqdala by intellectuals from Addis Ababa and Mekele Universities so as tracing the root of the Emperor from his birth place in Quara to the place where he committed his suicide in Maqdala.

The main objective of this study is to:

- Examine the importance of Gafat at the time and reasons why it was selected by Emperor Tewodros;
- Identify the sites where the raw materials of for the cannon were collected and processed; and where the mortar was manufactured,;
- Trace the technology and people involved in the manufacture of the cannon and its transportation to Maqdala.

Both primary and secondary information are used for this paper. The historical part approaches the historic archaeological view of Gafat. The primary information is obtained from the Ethiopian Tourism and Culture Bureau officials, local communities, and other stakeholders. Information was gathered by personal observation, focus group discussions and interviews (both structured and semi-structured). The secondary information was collected from relevant materials, both published and unpublished documents, such as reports, magazines, books and related sources.

2. Emperor Tewodros manufactured his cannon at Gafat

It is to be recalled that one of the greatest ambitions of Emperor Tewodros II was to manufacture fire arms and he had achieved it at Gafat. Gafat is located at about 4 Kilometers to the Northwest of the town of Dabra Tabor. Dabra Tabor was founded in

the early 19th century and situated in the highland plateau of Northwest Ethiopia at about 55 Kilometers Northeast of Lake Tana, 95 Kilometers from the town of Bahir Dar and 660 Kilometers from Addis Ababa. It served as a seat of the Yeju dynasty during Zemene Mesafent/Era of Lords (1769 – 1855), a capital of the Ethiopian Empire during the reign of Emperor Tewodros and as a second capital during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872 - 1889). Dabra Tabor continued as a seat of Ras Gugsa Wole , governor of the area in the early 20th century, up until he lost his life at the Battle of Anchem (1930).

Tewodros achieved his greatest ambitions to manufacture fire arms at Gafat. Professor Bahru (2002: 34) emphasizes on the significance of Gafat to Tewodros's unrelenting drive to acquire modern fire arms while writing, "The upshot of this strategy appeared at Gafat which, more than any other place, symbolized Tewodros's modernizing derive." But references overviewed the details of the productions of the cannon and its transportation from Gafat to Maqdala.

It is obviously known that the motive of the emperor to manufacture the cannon at home was to defend Ethiopia's independence from foreign aggressions and to introduce modern technology to the country. Particularly after his defeat by the Egyptians at the Battle of Debarqi (1848), Emperor Tewodros became aware that he could not secure the sovereignty of the country without modern fire arms, as it is described as, 'for his fully aware that this is the best way ... to secure his independence'

Local informants told us that the present Gafat is believed to have got its name from the Gafat people, who had inhabited Gafat before the coming of other people to that locality. The Gafat people and later the Falasha people are said to have been

engaged in artisan activities and became blacksmiths at Gafat. As a result, the locality acquired another name, *Tieboch Mender*, literally meaning, village of the Blacksmiths. While selecting Gafat to settle the Europeans, the Emperor might have hoped to exploit the experiences of both the local blacksmith of Gafat and the Europeans to manufacture fire arms and to expand modern technology in the country.

If one approaches Gafat from the Northeastern direction, there are three separated localities. Each has at least, small uncultivated sections and structural remains. The one from the northern direction is somewhat rectangular and according to some of the informants, it is said to have been the location where the cannon was manufactured. Unfortunately, in our visit in 2010 it is covered with Eucalyptus trees. The Eucalyptus trees are cleared and significant sites are also fenced and protected after this project by the sponsorship of University of Gondar. The name of this locality is *Gong Wuha*. The name is taken from the nearby river, believed to have been used during manufacturing the cannon. The upper part of this river is known by the name Zupil.



A1



B1

Figure 1: The rectangular remain, where many of the local people believe that the mortar was produced. Pictures taken in April 2009 (A1), and in October 2010 (B1).

Some informants indicate that the other structure around the middle was the place used to store the charcoal for the manufacture of the cannon. The third structure to the South is said to have been used to keep the horses, (the horses used to transport the raw materials for the production of the mortar). Other informants reverse the functions of the last two localities.



A2



B2

Figure 2. Structural remains that were supposed to have been used to store the charcoal and keep the horses (A2 and B2)

A big compound is situated at relatively hilly site to the Southwest of the above sites and comprises compartments of buildings. As it can be learned from the structural remains and confirmed by the references and most of the informants, the Europeans who

had manufactured the mortar, settled there by the order of Tewodros and constructed a number of smaller houses for themselves. Local informants state that these Europeans acquired a name, *Yegafat Sewech*, meaning People of Gafat. With the settlement of these European and the Emperor's frequent visit, the locality acquired another name, *Tewodros Mender*, literally, meaning, Village of Tewodros. The remains indicate that some of the buildings, built by the Europeans there were rectangular and some round.



Figure 3. Ruins of a rectangular house in the compound

Part of the compound is full of metallic remains. The metallic remains indicate that the cannon was manufactured there. On the other hand, some of the informants believe that the metallic remains are attributed to the local Gafat and Falasha artisans, who had been engaged in such activities before the coming of the Europeans and before the beginning of the manufacture of the mortar. This argument seems weak by the fact that the activities of these local people might not

be able to produce this much metallic remains.



A4



B4

Figure 4. Metallic remains in the compound (A4 and B4)

Besides, Blanc witnessed that the metal was melted and produced in the compound, while writing, “ when we reached to the fence of the place, where the metal is melted and produced... when we leave the fence of the place where the metal is melted and produced...”(Dagnachew, 1985EC: 123). As we learn from the structural remains, by then we believe that only this complex is fenced.



Figure 5. Part of the remains of the fence of the compound

Some references also indicate that this site was the camp of the Emperor. Waldmeier states, “we had to work ...at Gafat under the orders of the king who had set up his camp at Gafat” (Pankhurst, 1990: 131). The few fortified quarters used by the guards to defend the compound (around the fence) supported this fact. Some informants believe that those on the Northern direction had been lions’ cages. But, the possibility is less for the fact that lions were usually kept along the palace.

Regarding the people involved in the manufacture of the cannon, references indicate that both Europeans and Ethiopians participated. Prof. Pankhurst (1990:127) states that in 1855 the emperor accepted an offer from Samuel Gobat, Anglican Bishop of Jerusalem to send him a group of missionary and craft men from the Christian Institute in Switzerland. The missionaries had 2 gunsmiths, but, both died on their

way. The Emperor treated the missionaries kindly and established them at Gafat.³

The Emperor had asked them politely if they were willing to help him in introducing modern technology in the country. A French metal-caster, Jaquin, agreed to make it if he gets assisted by other missionaries. The Emperor instructed others to help him. They presented the model on paper. At the same time, they were busy searching for references about the technology. Thousands of Ethiopians were assigned to help the Europeans. They built a furnace from bricks and installed bellows to melt the metal (Pankhurst, 1990:127). The first attempt was not successful. The French man was highly disappointed “went half mad, cried ... and asked the King’s permission to leave”. Tewodros insisted other missionaries not to abandon Jaquin’s work, “swore by his death that they should not abandon...but to keep on trying”. They replied they have neither the knowledge nor experience, but he insisted. They collected soil from different localities to produce bricks to build another furnace. They built another furnace and became successful to melt the metal (*Ibid.* p. 28).

The Emperor’s appreciations began there when he called them “my children”. Waldmeier made a gunstock. Morith Hall casted small mortar and some bullets. Tewodros said to have “jumped with happiness, thanked God” and ordered them to cast bigger. They had to work “like slaves night and day and became successful after unspeakable efforts. ...The King became very happy and said to have kissed the cannon and said”, “Now I am convinced that

³ Blanc’s account indicates that there were about 25 Europeans in Ethiopia in 1845 EC, about 3 years before Tewodros came to power (Dagnachew, 1985: 44-45).

it is possible to make everything in Habesha. Now the art has been discovered. God at least has revealed Himself...” (*Ibid.* p.29).

Having rewarded each with 1000 Maria Theresa (Francs) and luxury provisions, the Emperor asked them to make a larger one. They did and the King became extremely happy. Finally, it is stated that at the Emperor’s command, the missionaries produced at Gafat Tewodros’s mortar, the biggest weapon in the history of the country, “so big a weapon [about 75 ton], had never been seen in Ethiopia before...” (Pankhurst, 1967: 153).



Figure 6. Tewodros’s biggest cannon (Sebastopol) today found at Maqdala

In the words of Bahru (2002: 34), “Gafat was a symbol of uneasy relationship between Tewodros and the European missionaries.” Rubenson added, “...the Emperor had...established his gun foundry and workshop at Gafat...put all foreigners who entered the country and who had any suitable skills to work for him with the result that he finally had an artillery force of some 35- 40 pieces.”

Gafat is also recorded, not only as the first industrial site in Africa, but also as the first modern learning center in the history of Ethiopia. The description says “At Gafat, a

school was established where Ethiopian youth acquired literal and some technical skills” (Bahru, 2002: 34). Unfortunately, however, no identifying remark is attached to these sites. Local informants contradict one another in identifying the exact sites where the school was constructed and where other activities took place. On top of that, all the land in the compound is currently occupied and cultivated and hence it is difficult to identify where these activities took place as well as other significant sites. In our field work, we were told that one of the farmers residing in the compound, discovered pieces of parchments and a number of bricks in his land. In our visit, we proved that about 62 bricks were dug out from the site, where the piece of the parchment was discovered. This site is in the compound, not far from the residence of the Europeans. This confirmed, therefore, that the furnace used to melt the metal was constructed there.



Figure 7. The place where the bricks and piece of parchment were discovered (inside the compound)

Regarding the raw material used for the manufacture of the cannon, it is stated that “brass was collected from all parts of the country to be melted down together with 30 vases from Maqdala’ (Pankhurst, 1990:131). Some argue that Tewodros used metallic materials looted from churches and monasteries. But we do not trust this

information as some of the local churches still possess very big bells and many metallic objects. For instance, the big bell of Dabra Tabor Medhane Alem Church is believed to have been brought by Emperor Tewodros himself from Dabra Birhan Sellassie Church in Gondar and the later still exists.



Figure 8. Bell of Dabra Tabor Medhane Alem Church

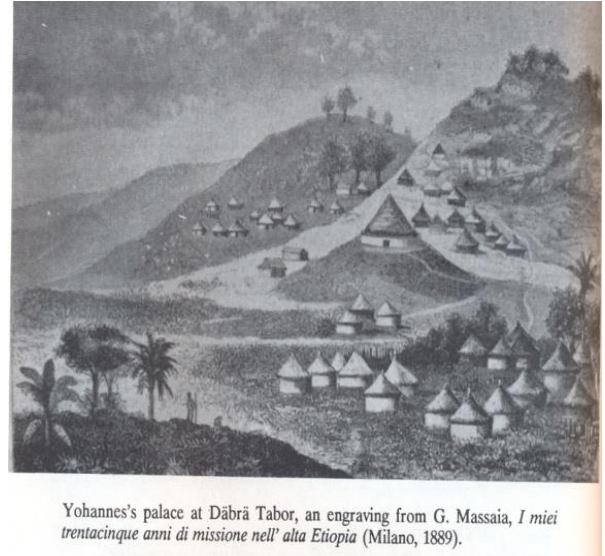
Some of our informants believe that soil for the bricks of the furnace was brought from 4 localities namely: Aferawanat, Deray (Delina), Enqulay (in Farta), and at a place near Semernaha (semera); and water from the nearby river, Zufil or *Gong Wuha*. Out of these localities, we were able to visit only Enqulay which is about 7 Kilometers away from Dabra Tabor on the way to Wereta.



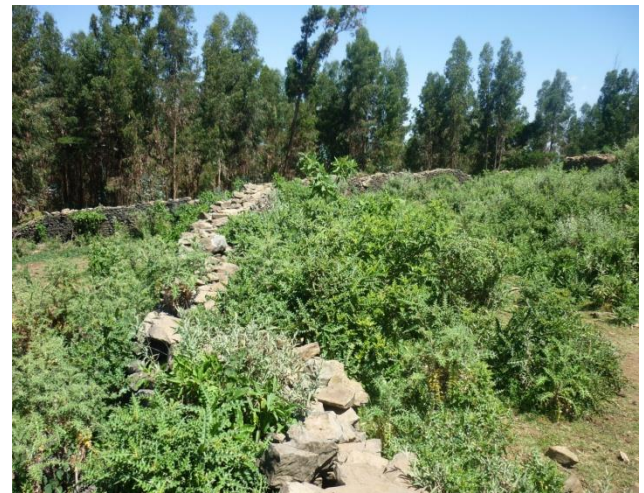
Figure 9. Soil of Enqulay

3. Other tangible attractions in the surroundings of Gafat

Emperor Yohannes's palace at Semera is the nearest attraction to Gafat. According to the guide to the attraction sites in Amhara Region (prepared in Amharic language by the Culture and Tourism Bureau of the region in 1991 EC), the palace was known as a summer palace. This indicates the Emperor might have spent the rainy seasons there. At his first arrival to the site, Emperor Yohannes is said to have been fascinated by the position of the site and while he was told that the name is Semera (as a response to his question about the name of the locality), he is supposed to have said, "Semernaha" literally meaning, "we like it" in the Tigrigna language and decided to construct his palace there. Thus, the locality is still known by the two names. The hot spring to the North of the palace is said to have been another factor for Semera to be chosen. The ruins are very complex with a number of compartments, and relatively well preserved, though it is difficult to identify the function of each section. It is still encircled within its original compound.



A10



B10

Figure 10. Sketch of Yohannes IV' palace at Semera (A10. from Kasa and Kasa) and ruins of the same palace taken in 2010 (B10)

Hiruy Giyorgis Church is located on the left side of the gravel road to Gafat and Semernah from Dabra Tabor. It is said to have been founded by King Saifa Ared (1334- 1344) and renovated by Yohannes IV. The church preserves significant antiquities, most of them attributed to Emperor Yohannes. There is an Ethiopian flag, its color consists of yellow, green and purple and dated back to the time of Emperor Yohannes. This is a good signal to

perhaps study the history of the Ethiopian flag, particularly on the origin of the colors of the present flag. There is one tall spear attributed to Fitawrari Gabreye, war general of Emperor Tewodros.



Figure 11. Historic objects at Hiruy Giyorgis Church



Due to lack of viable structural remains within the compound, we thought that Emperor Tewodros's palace would be somewhere in Gafat. Blanc confirmed that the palace was at a hilly site in Dabra Tabor (Dagnachew, 1985 EC: 118); and local informants suggest that the hilly site in Dabra Tabor is the site of the present Medhanealem Church.



A12



B12

Figure 12. Dabra Tabor Medhane Alem Church and its traditional school

The historic church of Dabra Tabor Eyesus on the Southern outskirts of Dabra Tabor was founded by King Saife Ared (1344- 1368). It was destroyed by Gragn Ahimed and renovated in 1810s by Ras Gugsa of the Yeju Dynasty. The present church was built by Ras Gugsa Wale. The church poses

significant relics and known for its church education in Aquaquam (Church chanting).



Figure 13. Dabra Tabor Eyesus Church

A ruin of Emperor Suseneyos's palace at Aringo Abo is only 12 Kilometers from Dabra Tabor.



Figure 14. Part of the ruins of Emperor Suseneyos's palace at Aringo Abo

Rock hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem situated at 37 Kilometres from Dabra Tabor is believed to have been curved by King Lalibela.



Figure 15. Rock hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem

4. Dragging the cannon from Gafat to Maqdala

In our fieldwork in 2009, we left Gafat in the afternoon of April 12 and drove across smaller towns and villages such as Kimir Dingay, Sali, Wogo, Nefas Meucha, Checheho Medhanealem⁴, Dabra Zebit,

⁴ Checheho Medhanealem Church is also known by the name Beklo Agit (meaning mule sequester) and the derivation of this name is related to Emperor Tewodros. The priests at the Church told us that on

Kokit, Agrit and spent that night at Flankkit, capital of Meket Wereda, in Northern Wello administrative zone. Flankkit is about 113 Kilometers away to East of Dabra Tabor and 145 Kilometers to West of Weldia. The total distance from Gafat to Maqdala is about 270 Kilometers but it took us 3 days as we made multiple stopovers in areas where the topography caught the eyes of the geologists who were part of our journey. The total distance from Gafat to Maqdala is about 270 Kilometers but it took us 3 days as we made multiple stopovers in areas where the topography caught the eyes of the geologists, who examined the formation and the nature of rocks and took GPS data to

his campaign against rebels in Wello, Emperor Tewodros passed along the church and is said to have vowed to give his mule to Checheho Medhanealem Church if he will be successful in his struggle against his enemies. He complied and on his way back to Dabra Tabor, his mule is said to have stopped by itself at Checheho Medhanealem Church. Tewodros gave his mule to the church as a fulfilment of the vow. Thus the name Beklo Agit derived from the above event.

According to the same priests, the name Checheho is also said to have been derived from an event which occurred at the same locality. The area was known for bandits and once upon a time a bride and groom passed along that road with the attendants of the wedding, someone said “chiche bel” (meaning, be quiet), not to be noticed by the bandits and then said “ho bel” (play) when they reached a safe place and the name of the locality is said to have been derived from the combination of the two words, ‘Chich’ and ‘Ho’ and gradually converted into ‘Checheho’.

The priests of the church also told us that the Checheho Medhanealem is also called ‘Zingero Aschebchib’, literally meaning, ‘Monkey Clapper,’ and this name is also believed to have been derived from another event. According to the priests, local people of the area around the church are said to have abandoned the area due to natural disasters and there were no people to celebrate the festival of Timket (Epiphany) of the church. The monkeys of the area are said to have come out from the forest and escorted the Tabot (ark) when it was taken from the stream, where it spent the night to the church by clapping their hands.

mark potential billboard setup sites; historians and archaeologists, who gathered historical archaeological data; and development professionals who collected full information relevant for the product development and economic analysis and infrastructure expansion.

The cannon is said to have been dragged from Gafat along the present Debre Tabor Waldia road, at least to Meket Wereda in Northern Wello administrative Zone. It is believed to have been dragged, sometimes in parallel to the road and sometimes overlapping to it, in both cases, the route is deformed by the natural and human activities. At Checheho Medhanealem, the route of the cannon can be clearly seen, parallel to the present day gravel road to the right⁵ down the cliff and it serves still as footpath. It ascends the cliff, after it crosses the stream, referred as the border between South Gondar and North Wello administrative zones, overlaps to the present gravel road and then detaches to the right.

The whole day of April 13 was devoted to the route from Flankkit to Ajibar town in Tenta Wereda. We drove across smaller towns such as Geregera, Anchem, Arbit, Yeneja, Kone, Wagal Tena and the gorge of Jita and Beshelo. The route of the cannon detaches to the right from the Dabra Tabor Waldia main road at Arbit, few kilometers from Flankkit. We took the route of the cannon from Arbit to Kone. There is about 19 Kilometers bumpy gravel road, said to have been constructed following the route of the cannon by the Italians during the occupation (1936- 1941) and the road is still in use.



Figure 16. The bumpy gravel road, said to have been constructed following the route of the cannon by the Italians from Arbit to Kone

Local people told us that while taking the cannon to Maqdala, Emperor Tewodros spent some time at Melie Mariam Church on the right side of this route. Yeneja market, near Yeneja Mikael Church, is an important attraction along this route. The market still serves as an open air museum on every Monday to watch huge attendants with diversified goods, cereals and animals from different localities.

Then we crossed the gorges of Jita and Beshelo. The gorge of Jita is about 26 Kilometers (10 Kilometers descending and 16 Kilometers ascending after we cross the river) and Beshelo about 57 Kilometers (22 Kilometers descending and 35 ascending (after we cross on a very long bridge over the river. We reached Tenta at about sunset. Tenta is situated at the edge of the gorge of Beshelo, about 253 Kilometers from Dabra Tabor and the historic site of Maqdla is about 17 Kilometers from Tenta.

From the interviews of our key informants, we have learned that the route of the cannon detaches to the right from the main road we drove at Kone. According to our

⁵ Directions for this report are taken while we were driving from Gafat to Maqdala.

informants, it crosses villages, rivers and streams such as Delango, Gurba, Jita River, Chehore, Senbelet, Beshelo River, Workwuha, Errogi, Meslay, Kesse and reached at Selamgie. Sembelete is another place where Tewodros is said to have spent considerable time while bringing the cannon to Maqdala. Meslay and Kesse are not villages, but names of localities along the hills between Erogi and Selamgie.

Important literatures about the times of Emperor Tewodros overview the transportation of the cannon from Gafat to Maqdala. For example, Bahru (2002:34) put the transportation of the cannon in a single statement as follows, "...was dragged in 1867 all the way up to Maqdala massif at considerable sacrifice." Alaga Walda Maryam also summarizes it: "The mortar was placed on wheels and to drag it, they attached to it five cables, each pulled by fifty men. And to stop it running downhill while they were pulling it uphill they fixed a mechanical brake to it".

Blanc (in his work translated by Dagnachew 1985 EC) listed in his account the villages and rivers crossed by the route of the cannon. Accordingly, the emperor started his journey with 14 mortars and cannons on wheels dragged by people and animals (the biggest weighed 15,000 to 16,000 pound); spent few days at a place called Ayibna Kab, near Kimer Dingay, reached Chechaho on November 22, 1867 and Zebit [Dabra Zebit] on 14 December; spent few days there; reached a particular place named Bet Hor in Wadla on 24 December and spent considerable time at Bet Hor; crossed Jita River on 27 January, 1868; reached Delenta on February 9; settled at the foot of Selamgie mountain on March 24; and the biggest mortar reached the top of Selamgie mountain on April 2, 1868 (Dagnachew, 1985:217- 244). But, the villages and streams mentioned by our

informants like Kone, Delango, Gurba, Chehore, Senbelet and Workwuha are not mentioned here.

Though references are not mentioned, the guide to the attraction sites in Amhara Region (1991EC:28) claims that there was a known footpath along the route of the cannon from Dabra Tabor to Maqdala, frequented by local and foreign travelers. According to the accounts of Blanc, Tewodros's European prisoners including Rassam and Blank himself were taken from Dabra Tabor to Maqdala about two years before the cannon. In his personal account, Blank listed the localities they crossed and spent nights. Accordingly, they started their journey with the Emperor himself on July 5, 1866; spent that night at a particular place, named Jan Hoy Meda; spent the following night at another place named Kulaliko; and the night after at a place called Ayibna Kab, at the foot of Guna Mountain. They visited Guna Mountain on 8 July, and spent the night at a village known as Argabi; they crossed a river known by the name Jida⁶ in their travel the following day and spent that night at a place known as Magot in Dawnt. They descended the gorge of Beshelo on the following day and spent the night in a village⁷ in the gorge; they crossed Beshelo river early the following morning, reached a place called Watat at 11am; ascended a steep mountain from Watat to Maqdala and reached Maqdala about 6pm on the same day on July 12, 1868 (Dagnachew, 1985EC)⁸. This information too does not mention the villages and streams (Kone, Delango, Gurba, Chehore, Senbelet and Workwuha) mentioned by our informants.

⁶ For the name of Jida is not mentioned here, and the author describes the difficulty of crossing the gorge of this river equally with Beshelo, there is a higher possibility this river could be Jita.

⁷ The name of this village is not mentioned.

⁸ Note that they traveled for 5 days from Dabra Tabor to Maqdala.

Regarding the construction of the road, Rubenson(1966:74) describes that:

“In order to be able to move his army quickly from one end of the country to another end, he pioneered road making.... After the rains of 1867 Tewodros...took with him all the new guns and mortars, to which he had devoted so much of his thought during the last difficult years, and blasted a road to Meqdela, both literally and figuratively for himself and remainder of his once invincible army. Because of the road construction for the heavy mountain, it took him nearly 6 months to make that 5 days journey...And reached Meqdela March 27, 1868”.

Alaqa Walda Maryam describes the construction of the road for the mortar as follows: “When the mortar reached Chachaho, it was necessary to fill up ravines and level and flatten [the track]. Rocks on the road were removed in the following way: holes big enough to put in a finger were drilled in 3 or 4 places on their surface; these holes were then filled with English powder (i.e gun powder and a wick were attached...the wick was then lit and...after the exploration, the rocks were shattered...” (Pankhurst, 1967:153- 154). Road building of this kind had never been carried out before in Ethiopian History.... (Pankhurst, 1967:153- 154). Blanc stressed on the difficulties to cross mountainous areas after Checheho and particularly the gorges after Bet Hor (Dagnachew, 1985: 219- 220). According to Alaqa Walda Maryam, the transportation of the mortar was “giving the men who had dragged it such great fatigue that some of them collapsed (Pankhurst, 1967: 154).

Henery Blanc witnessed that the mortar reached Selamgie on April 2, 1868 (Dagnachew1985 EC., 244). According to Robenson (1966: 82 and 88), the mortar“... reached Meqdela March 27, 1868, ,...about

two weeks before the British arrived on the plain of Aroge just below the fortress...”. On the other hand, Fantahun (2000:330) believes that it reached in Yekatit (maybe in February or early March). Takla Tsadik Mekuria (1981) also believes that the mortar reached at Selamgie, in March 1868.

It is to be recalled that while Tewodros was constructing the road for the mortar from Gafat to Maqdala, the British expedition was also constructing the road from Zula to Maqdala. The difficulty of this construction is also described in the following ways: “There are very great difficulties in the new ways. It took one day to advance 5 miles. The whole army was employed in forming a road.”(Pankhurst, 2002:71). It needs, therefore, an extensive investigation from Gafat to Zula to compare and contrast the difficulties of road constructions and transportations from both directions to Maqdala in terms of technology, people and animals involved. Thus, the first modern road was constructed from Gafat to Zula.

5. Maqdala and its surroundings

Our fieldwork in 2009 devoted April 14 to the significant sites of Maqdala and its surroundings. Thanks to the Culture and Tourism Bureau of the region and the local community, the marks attached to each significant locality at Maqdala and its surroundings minimized difficulty of identifying sites we experienced at Gafat. The first target was Battle of Erogie, at the foot of Selamgie Mountain, at which the first confrontation between the Ethiopian and the British army took place on 10 April, 1868, and claimed the lives of Fitawrari Gebreye and many others.

The body of Fitawirary Gabreye is believed to have been buried on the spot and the burial site is recognized (marked with a plate and fenced). It is situated about 20

Kilometers from Tenta, on the left side of the road from Tenta to Yederek Elementary School, at the Western foot of Selamgie Mountain (3 to 4 Kilometers from the top of the mountain). An elementary school on the same side from the road is also named after the hero. On the other hand, Fantahun (2000 EC.:331) believes that, Gabreye's body was buried at Maqdala Medhanealem Church on the same day he died (April 10, 1868).



Figure 17. Gabreye's place of burial

Maqdala Amba is divided by precipices in Totwo, Maqdala (to the East) and Selamgie (to the West). The bumpy gravel road descends the mountain from the Eastern direction and reaches at the place where Tewodros's biggest mortar (Sebastopol) is situated at the top of Selamgie Mountain. One smaller cannon is situated at the Southern foot of the cliff, on the right side of the road up the mountain. It was manufactured at Gafat and brought to Maqdala with the biggest mortar and said to have been left at the top of the mountain. According to our informants, a local person's leg was cut off and thrown down to the foot of the cliff, not to be blamed. It is

fenced, marked with a plate and sheltered in an iron sheets roofed shelter.



Figure 18. Tewodros's smaller cannon at the foot of the cliff of Maqdala

Thanks to the local community and the regional Culture and Tourism Bureau for fulfilling Tewodros's dream, at least regarding road construction, we drove up the hill and reached the site of the famous mortar. We were highly excited, while looking the real mortar, about which we heard and read more, particularly some of us who have seen it for the first time. It reminds us the descriptions such as, "so big a weapon had never been seen in Ethiopia before...a man could go in and out of it ..." (Pankhurst, 1967: 153).

The mortar had been laid down on the floor, up until 1993 EC, when the Culture and Tourism Bureau of Amhara Region constructed the floor with cement. It is fenced, marked with a plate and an iron sheet roofed shelter is constructed up on it.



Figure 19. Tewodros's Sebastopol at Selamgie

Our final destination was Maqdala Amba. We are told that Maqdala could be accessed during the time of Tewodros only through two important entrances, namely Kokit Ber (Kokit Gate) from the West and Kafir Ber (Kafir Gate) from the East. In our visit, however, the only functional entrance was Kokit Ber. According to local informants, Kokit Ber is said to have been named after a woman who had resided on that side of the Amba (outside the compound), during the time of Tewodros and the root for Kafir is not known for the time being.



Figure 20. Maqdala mountain from different view

We approached Maqdala from Selamgie, driving up to the foot of the mountain and entered through Kokit Ber on foot. Maqdala comprises a number of significant historic sites such as the place where Tewodros committed his dramatic suicide, his burial place, ruins of his palace and Maqdala Medhane Alem Church. The first encounter while entering through Kokit Ber is the place where the Emperor took his life.

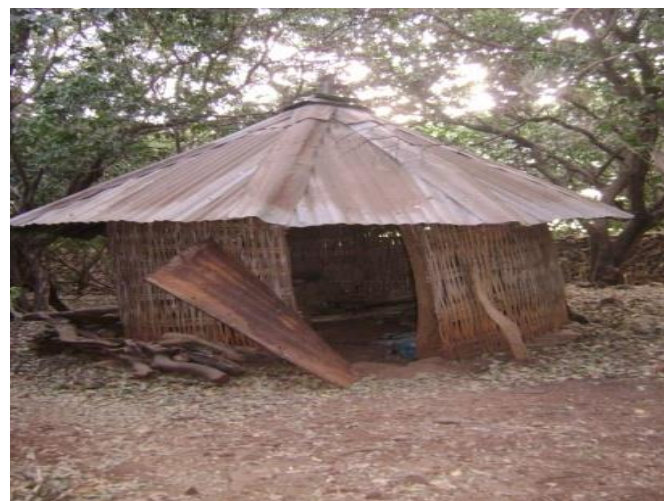


Figure 21. Tewodros committed suicide there

We can next see the ruins of Medhanealem Church and the palace to the Northeast, and the burial site of the Emperor at the Southeast. The burial site of the Emperor is commemorated by a monument and an additional monument was erected during the Ethiopian Millennium (in 2008) by the regional and Culture and Tourism Bureau beside the older one. A portrait of the Emperor is also attached to the site. All are fenced and marked by plates. Fantahun (2000) writes that Tewodros's body was dug out three years after his death, and was buried at Mahebere Sellassie Monastery in Metema, where Tewodros is said to have attended his traditional church education. In our visit to Mahebere Sellassie Monastery, monks agreed that the body of the Emperor was buried there and they have another version about how it was brought from Maqdala (their version will be part of the upcoming research). They told us that his burial is in a very small round tukul, used as a grinding place the wheat for the mass.



A22



B22

Figure 22. Tewodros's burial at Maqdala (A22) and supposed to be the last burial at Mahebere Sellassie (B22)

There are a number of other ruins around the ruins of the palace. These buildings are attributed to the store of the Emperor. Emperor Tewodros had a special interest to Maqdala and chosen it to be his treasure house. It is to be recalled that he had controlled Maqdala only few months after he came to power in 1855. Rubenson (1966: 52) describes the significance of Maqdala for Tewodros, while writing, " The stronghold Meqdela, which was later to play such an important role as Tewodros's main

fortress , treasury and state prison, was captured ...on September 22, 1855.”

According to Alaga Walda Maryam, one of the chroniclers of the Emperor, “Magdala became the store of the King’s treasures, and a proclamation announced this saying, “Magdala will be the store of my treasures; let those who love me come here!” (Pankhurst, 1967: 149). In the words of Richard Pankhurst (1967: 149), “Tewodros established himself at Magdala which was a natural mountain fortress and hence an ideal place for the warrior Emperor’s camp.” Bahru (2002: 34) also describes“ ...was established with 15 cannons,7 mortars, 11063 rifles, of different types, 875 pistols and 481 bayones, as well as ammunition including 555 cannon shells and mortar shells and 83,563 bullets...” For Maqdala was also a “place of asylum for the faithful people who had been chained for treason found refuge there...”, (Pankhurst,1967:149) and other ruins of buildings are attributed to the royal prison, where the European and local prisoners were kept.

The treasures of the Emperor and Maqdala Medhane Alem Church were looted and destroyed by the British expedition. It is to be recalled that while destruction has been the perennial problem to the immovable heritage properties of Ethiopia, plundering and illicit traffic have remained as persistent challenges of movable antiquities. It is to be recalled that most of the remains, particularly those at Maqdala, were burned and destroyed during the British expedition. Besides its massive destruction, the British expedition under Robert Napier resulted in the looting and smuggling of thousands of cultural heritage properties. The British plunder of Maqdala ranged from Emperor Tewodros's ‘blood stained shirt and his long hair by which he had been identified, to about 1300 parchment books and ten

tabots’. It required about 15 elephants and 200 mules to transport the movable items (Girma Kidane, 1990:210-212).

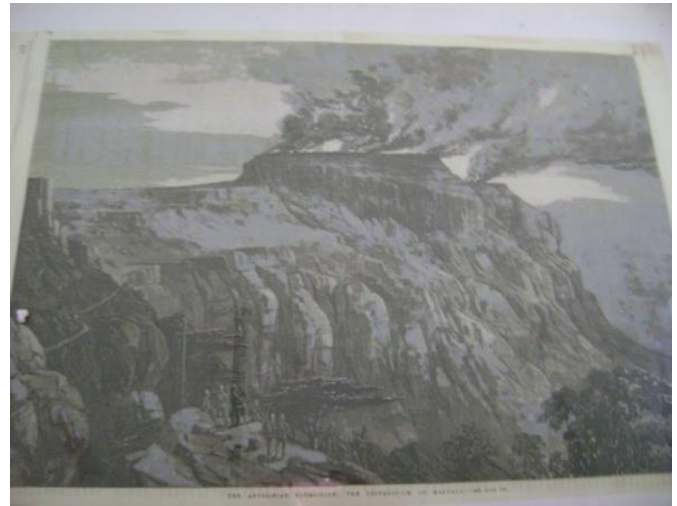


Figure 23. Burning Maqdala

The team of the 2009 field work identified the following scenery sites to be marked by billboards for community based ecotourism developments:

1. Gafat Historical and Scenery Site
2. Yohannes Palace at Semera
3. Guna Scenery
4. Nefas Mewcha Scenery
5. Checheho Medhanealem Historical and Scenery Site
6. Dijer Scenery Site
7. Jita Scenery site
8. Delanta Scenery site
9. Eroghe Historical and Scenery Site
10. Selamgie Historical and Scenery Site
11. Maqdala Historical and Scenery Site
12. Tenta Scenery Site

6. The way forward

There are a number of questions not answered. Even though Gafat, Maqdala and their surroundings are endowed with different archaeological, cultural and natural attractions having a potential to attract

tourists, tourism contribution to the local economy is very low. Even though there are limited studies, the tourism resources and archeological sites are neither identified nor promoted. Moreover, conservation and preservation works have not been undertaken. This implies that the sites are losing their historical significance and not contributing for the benefit of the local community.

Heritage properties are supposed to have mutual relations with the local society. They should provide the society with economic, cultural and political values and in turn the society should take care for their promotions and continuity. Their economic benefit should be ensured while they become magnets of tour attractions, facilitate sustainable economic development and create job opportunities.

References indicate that about 14 canons and mortars were manufactured at Gafat and dragged to Maqdala. But only two cannons are available at Maqdala and we do not know what happened to the others. It needs further study to look for the fate of the remaining mortars and cannons. Efforts should be made to strengthen ways to cope with challenges associated with the management of heritage and historical resources in the area and to motivate the local community to preserve and maintain the physical heritage, spiritual heritage, cultural heritage as well as their history.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was fortunate enough to participate in a remarkable field mission conducted 11- 16 April, 2009 from Gafat all the way to Maqdala by researchers from Addis Ababa and Mekele Universities to map the route along which Emperor Tewodros dragged the

cannon and to promote community based eco-tourism. This research was organized and led by Dr. Mulugeta Fiseha, the then Dean of the College for Development Studies at Addis Ababa University and sponsored by the Amhara Regional State Culture and Tourism Bureau. I would like to express my special appreciations, therefore, to Dr. Mulugeta and the regional Culture and Tourism Bureau for allowing me to participate in this incredible fieldwork, from which important information for the background of this study was gathered. As we devoted only one day for Gafat during this fieldwork, time did not allow us to explore the locality for further identification of important sites.

The University of Gondar took another initiative in 2010 to identify the exact place where the cannon of Emperor Tewodros was manufactured at Gafat and raw materials collected. The University organized a team, consisting of myself and Teshager Habtie, from the Department of History and Heritage Management; Seleshi Girma and Yohannes Negash, from the Department of Tourism Management. While my responsibility was to identify historic sites and Teshager's was to identify intangible heritages, Seleshi and Yohannes examined the opportunities and challenges to promote these treasures for tourism.

The research was conducted from September to December 2010 and presented to the stockholders and the local community in a one day workshop on December 3 at Hibret Hotel in Dabra Tabor. All the inputs received from the workshop were incorporated in this article. The University covered all the expenses of the study and the workshop. I would like therefore to express my appreciation for the University of Gondar for taking the initiative and funding this research, as well as the team members

from the University for their participation. This paper focuses only on my part of the work, i.e. the historical and archaeological sites with basic acquaintance with Tewodros's cannon and other tangible treasures, hoping that other members will come up with their respective sub-themes. Dr. Mulugeta Fiseha has already addressed part of his work in his book entitled: *The Fundamentals of Community Based Eco Tourism Development in Ethiopia*, published in 2012.

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