

## 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 Goyrgis, Dabra Tabor Medhane and Wukro Medhane Alem.*

### 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 EC) suppose 1818. There seem no literatures enough also to 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 with the emperor dragged the mortar from Gafat to Maqdala. For 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

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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 too contradicts itself regarding the birth place of the Emperor. On page 7 it states that the kasa was born at a particular place named Dawa, only 12 kilo meters away from Gondar Town on Tir 6, 1811 E.C (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 soldier, kasa escaped to his birth place in Quara when Goshu suspected him 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 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 that, escaped from Bitawa's detention, kasa moved within Quara to the specific village where he was born ( Paulos, 1985 E.C: 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 committed his dramatic suicide, some references indicate that it was dug out three years after his death and buried at Mahebere Sellassies monastery in Mettema, where he attended his church education. Thus, though recent relatively, 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 workshop 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 connecting the root of the emperor from his birth place in Quara to Gafat where he manufactured his cannon. This one was supposed to serve as a supplement 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 he committed his suicide in Maqdala will be complete. The results of this part will be finalized for the upcoming publication.

The main **objective** of this study intended therefore to:

- Look at significance of Gafat to be selected by Emperor Tewodros,
- Identify the sites where the raw materials of the cannon were collected and processed and the mortar was manufactured,
- Trace the technology and people involved in the manufacture of the cannon and dragging it to Maqdala

Regarding the **methods**, both primary and secondary data are used. The historical part approaches the historic archaeological view of Gafat. The primary data and information is obtained from tourism and culture bureau officials, local communities, and other stakeholders. It is gathered by personal observation, focus group discussion and interview (both structured and semi-structured). The secondary data and information are collected from relevant materials, both published and unpublished documents, such as reports, magazines, books and related sources.

### **Emperor Tewodros Manufactured His Cannon at Gafat**

It is to be recalled that one of the greatest ambitions of Emperor Tewodros II (1855- 1868) was to manufacture fire arms and he had achieved it at Gafat. Gafat is located at about four kilometers to the northwest of the town of Dabra Tabor. Dabra Tabor was founded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and situated in the highland plateau of northwest Ethiopia at about 55km northeast of Lake Tana, 95 km from the town of Bahir Dar and 660 km 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 (1855- 1868) and as a second capital during the reign of Emperor Yohannes IV (1872 - 1889). Dabra Tabor continued as a seat of Ras Gugsä Wole , governor of the area in the early 20<sup>th</sup> 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 derive 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 is 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.

Some informants indicate that another structure around the middle is the place used to store the charcoal for the manufacture of the cannon. The third 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.



**Figure 1: The rectangular remain, where, many of local people believe that the mortar was produced : Taken in April 2009(A), and in October 2010(B).**



**Figure 2: Structural remains supposed to have been used to store the charcoal and keep the horses**

Another big compound is situated at relatively a 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 here 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 here 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 here. 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 so weak for the fact that the activity of these local people might not be able to produce these much metallic remains.



**Figure 4: Metallic remains in the compound**

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, 1985E.C: 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 lion's cage. But, the possibility is less for the fact that lions 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 missionary had two gunsmiths, but, both died on their way. The emperor treated the missionary kindly and established them at Gafat.<sup>2</sup>

The emperor had asked them politely if they were willing to help him in introducing modern technology in the country. A French metal- caster, Aaquin, agreed to make if 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).

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 go 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 here 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 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 Teresa and luxuries 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 to another in identifying the exact sites where the school was constructed and other activities took place. On top of that, all the land in the compound is occupied and cultivated and it is difficult to identify where these activities took place and 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 residents of the Europeans. This confirmed, therefore, that the furnace to melt the metal was constructed here.





**Figure 7: The place where the bricks and piece of parchment were discovered (in 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 thrust 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 brought by Emperor Tewodros himself from Dabra Birhan Sellassie church in Gondar and 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 four localities namely: Aferawanat, Deray(Delina), Enqulay (in Farta), and at a place near Semernaha (semera); and water from the near by river, Zufil or *Gong Wuha*. Out of these localities, we were able to visit only Enqulay which is about seven kilometers away from Dabra Tabor on the way to Wereta.

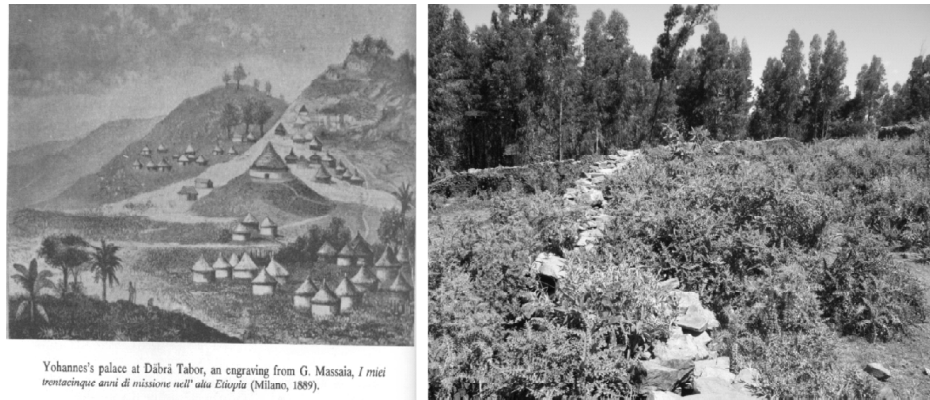


**Figure 9: Soil of Enqulay**

### **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 1991E.C), the palace was known as summer palace. This indicates the emperor might have spent rainy seasons here. 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 here. 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 with its original compound.

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



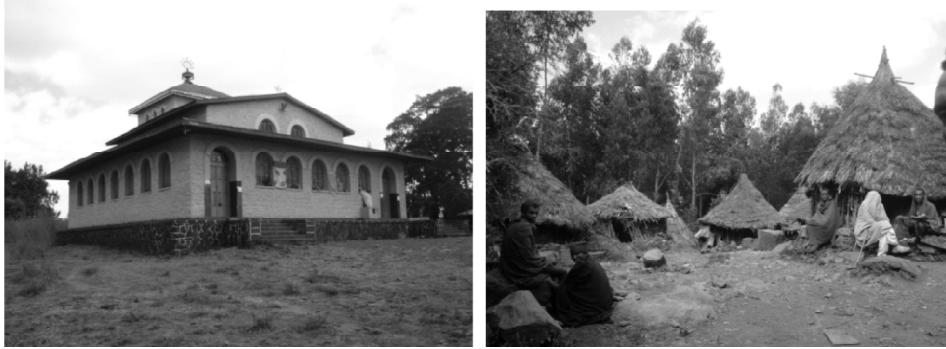
**Figure 10: Scketch of Yohannes IV' palace at Semera(A. from Kasa and Kasa) and ruins of the same palace taken in 2010(B)**

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 indication to study the history of the Ethiopian flag, particularly on the origin of the color 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 E.C: 118); and local informants suggest that the hilly site in Dabra Tabor is the site of the present Medhanealem Church.



**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 Gagn Ahimed and renovated in the 1810s by Ras Gugsa of the Yeju Dynasty. The present church was built by Ras Gugsa Wale. The church possesses significant relics and is known for its church education in Aquaquam (Church chanting).



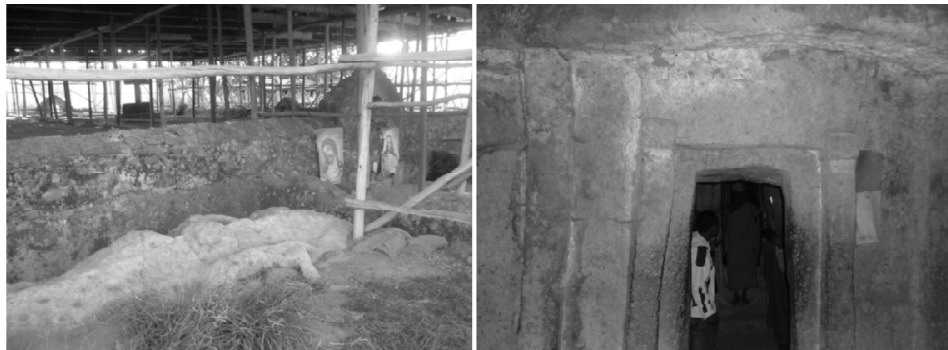
**Figure 13: Dabra Tabor Eyesus Church**

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

Rock hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem, at 37 km from Dabra Tabor is believed to have been curved by king Lalibela.



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



**Figure 15: Rock hewn church of Wukro Medhane Alem**

### **Dragging the Cannon from Gafat to Maqdala**

In our fieldwork in 2009, we left Gafat on April 12 afternoon and drove across smaller towns and villages such as Kimir Dingay, Sali, Wogo, Nefas Meucha, Checheho Medhanealem<sup>3</sup>, Dabra Zebit, Kokit, Agrit and spent that night at Flankit, capital of Meket Wereda, in northern Wallo administrative zone. Flankit is about 113 kms away to east of Dabra Tabor and 145 kms to west of Weldia. The total distance from Gafat to Maqdala is about 270 kms but it took us three days for we stopped here and there as the topography caught the eyes of the geologists now and then. When geologists examined the formation and the nature of rocks and took GPS data to mark potential billboard setup sites, historians and archaeologists gathered historical data,

and tourism and development professionals collected full information relevant for the product development and economic analysis and infrastructure expansion at each stop, and all together speculated to trace the route of the mortar.

The cannon is said to have been dragged from Gafat along the present Debre Tabor Waldia road, at least to Meket Wereda in Northern Wallo 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 right<sup>4</sup> 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 Wallo 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 serving.



**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 km (10 km descending and 16 kms ascending after we cross the river) and Beshelo about 57 kms (22km descending and 35 ascending (after we cross on the longest bridge (352. 1m) over the river. We reached Tenta at about sun set. Tenta is situated at the edge of the gorge of Beshelo, about 253 kms from Dabra Tabor and the historic site of Maqdla is about 17 kms from Tenta.

From the interview 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 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." Alaqa 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 down hill while they were pulling it uphill they fixed a mechanical brake to it".

Blanc listed in his account the villages and rivers crossed by the route of the cannon. Accordingly, the emperor started his journey dragging 14 mortars and cannons (the biggest weighed 15,000 to 16,000 pound) by people and back animals on wheels, spent few days at place called Ayibna Kab, near Kimer Dingay, reached at Checheho on November 22, 1867 and Zebit [Dabra Zebit] on 14 December, spent few days here, reached at 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 at 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 (1991E.C: 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, European prisoners of Tewodros 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 Jida<sup>5</sup> 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 village<sup>6</sup> in the gorge, they crossed Beshelo river early in the following morning, reached at 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, 1985E.C)<sup>7</sup>. This information too does not mention the villages and streams (Kone, Delango, Gurba, Chehore, Senbelet and Workwuha) mentioned by our informants.

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 six months to make that five 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 three or four places on their surface; these holes were then filled with English powder (i.e gun powder and a wick was attached...the wick was then lit and...after the explosion, 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).

Henry Blanc witnessed that the mortar reached Selamgie on April 2, 1868 (Dagnachew 1985 E.C., 244). According to Robenson (1966: 82 and 88), the mortar "... reached Meqdala 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 (may be 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 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 five miles. The whole army 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, load. Thus, the first modern road was constructed from Gafat to Zula.

### **Maqdala and Its Surroundings**

Our field work 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 Eroge, 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 hero. On the other hand, Fantahun (2000 E.C.:331) believes that, Gabreye's body was buried at Maqdala Medhanealem Church on the same day he died (April 10, 1868).

Maqdala Amba is divided by precipice in two, 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.



**Figure 17: Gabreye's burial**

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, local people are said to have been cut off one of its legs 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 has 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 E.C, 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 entrance, namely Kokit Ber (Kokit Gate) from the west and Kafir Ber ((Kafir Gate) from the east. In our visit, however, the only functional 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(out of the compound), during the time of Tewodros and the root for Kafir is not known for the time being.

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



**Figure 20: Maqdala mountain from different view**

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 here**

Next come the ruins of Medhanealem Church and the palace to the north east, and the burial site of the emperor to the southeast. The burial site of the emperor is commemorated by a monument and another new monument is 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 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 emperor was buried here 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 to grind the wheat for the mass.



A.

B.

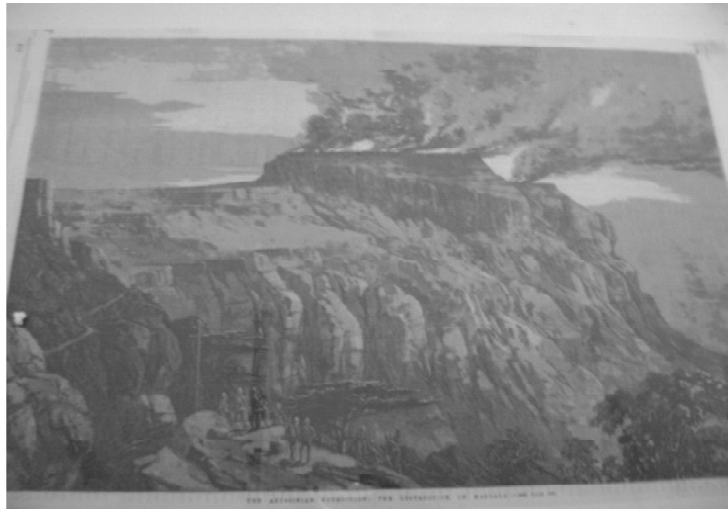
**Figure 22: Tewodros's burial at Maqdala (A) and supposed to be the last burial at Mahebere Sellassie (B)**

There are a number of ruins of buildings 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 Alaqa 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!'" (Pankhrst, 1967: 149). In the words of Richard Pankhrst(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,7mortars, 11.063 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 strained shirt and his long hair by which he had been identified, to about 1300 preachment 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

### **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 less. Even though there are very 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 opportunity.

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 others. It needs further study to look for the fate of the remaining mortars and cannons. Efforts shall be made for possible ways to cope with the challenges to heritage managements in the area and to motivate the community to keep their material and spiritual culture and history.

### *Notes*

1. Associate Professor in the Department of History and Heritage Management, University of Gondar, Ethiopia
2. Blankcs account indicates that there were about twenty five Europeans in Ethiopia in 1845 E.C, about three years before Tewodros came two power (Dagnachew, 1985: 44-45).
3. Checheho Medhanealem Chuch is also known by the name Bekilo Agit (meaning ,Mule sequester ) and the derivation of this name is related to Emperor Tewodros. The priests of the church told us that on his campaign agaist a rebels in Wallo, Emperor Tewodros passed along the church andis said to have vowed to give his mule to Checheho Medhanealme 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 Chechecho Medhanealem Church. Tewodros gave his mule to the church as a fulfilment of the vow. Thus the name Bekilo Agit derived from the above event.

According to the same priests, the name Checheho is also said to have been derived from an event occurred at the same locality. The area was known for bandits and once up on a time bride and bridegroom passed along that road with the attendants of the wedding, some one said 'Chiche bel' (meaning, be quite ), not to be notified by bandits and then said 'Ho bel' ( play) when they reach at a safety place and the name of the locality is said to have been derived from the combination of the two word, 'Chich' and 'Ho' and gradually corrupted in to 'Checheho'.

The priests of the church also told us that the Checheho Medhanealem is also called 'Zingero Aschebchib', literally meaning, 'Monkey Clamber,' 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 been abandoned the area due 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 church by climbing their hands.

4. When it is said to the right and left, directions for this report are taken while we were driving from Gafat to Maqdala.
5. For the name of Jita 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.
6. The name of this village is not mentioned.
7. Note that they traveled for five days from Dabra Tabor to Maqdala.

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