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Miscellaneous

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## Queen Təru Wärq's Necklace

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After Emperor Tewodros's suicide at Mäqdäqa on 13 April 1868, his consort Queen Təru Wärq, daughter of *Dägğazmač* Wəbe of Səmen and Təgray, was apprehended by the British C. Austin, The Times correspondent, reported that she was "discovered" by the British advance-guard "during their search for plunder". They at first subjected her to "coarse military humour". When her identity became known a British soldier slapped her on the back, declaring that "Tédros was mahfish" – an Arabic term used by the troops to denote "anything and everything not good". She was later rescued by a former British captive, Henry Blanc, after which Napier took her under his protection.<sup>1</sup>

Təru Wärq was heart-broken by the outcome of the battle, and according to Queen Victoria's envoy Hormuzd Rassam, declared that hers had been "a miserable existence since childhood".<sup>2</sup>

After Tewodros's death she agreed to a British proposal that she should accompany her young son ʿAlämayyāhu to Britain. However her health shortly afterwards collapsed, and she died of an unidentified illness, at the village of "Haik-hallet", near Čäläqot, on 15 May. She was buried at the church of Čäläqot Šəllase, beside the grave of her grand-father *Ras* Wäldä Šəllase.<sup>3</sup> Her funeral is depicted in an engraving in the *Illustrated London News*, reprinted in Acton's *Abyssinian Expedition*.<sup>4</sup>

After her death a remarkable necklace, which had formerly belonged to her, was taken to Britain – together with much loot from Mäqdäqa.

### Beads

Beads – and necklaces – had long played an important role in Ethiopian social life. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century James Bruce had noted that beads could be used in Təgray instead of money – though his might be a "dangerous speculation" for:

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 25 May 1868; DARRELL BATES, *The Abyssinian Difficulty* (London, 1979), p. 205.

<sup>2</sup> HORMUZD RASSAM, *Narrative of the British Mission to Theodore* (London, 1869), II, 346.

<sup>3</sup> RASSAM, II, 346–8; CLEMENTS MARKHAM, *A History of the Abyssinian Expedition* (London, 1869), p. 380.

<sup>4</sup> ROGER ACTON, *The Abyssinian Expedition* (London, 1868), p. 70.

“You lose sometimes every thing or gain more than honestly you should do, for all depends on fashion; and the fancies of a brown, or black beauty, there, gives the ton as decisively as does the example of the fairest in England.”

“To our great disappointment, the person employed to buy our beads at Jidda [Geddah] had not received the last list of fashions ...; so he had bought us a quantity beautifully flowered with red and green, and as big as a large pea; also some large, oval, green and yellow ones; whereas the ton now among the beauties of Tigré were small sky-coloured blue beads, about the size of a small lead shot, or seed pearls; blue bugles and common white bugles, were then in demand, and large yellow glass, flat at the sides ... All our beads were then rejected, by six or seven dozen of the shrillest tongues I ever heard. They decried our merchandize in such a manner, that I thought they meant to condemn them as unsaleable, to be condemned or destroyed.”

However, as soon as blue and white beads were displayed, “a great shout was set up by the women-purchasers and a violent scramble followed”.<sup>5</sup>

Imported beads were thereafter a familiar sight at important Ethiopian markets, notably Adwa, where E.A. de Cosson saw “tawny maidens, with necklaces of blue beads”, and reports that “vendors of blue beads” drove “a brisk trade with the girls from the mountain villages”.<sup>6</sup>

### Necklaces

Necklaces were widely used throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century – by men as well as women; both sexes wore necklaces to which they affixed ear-picks and tweezers.<sup>7</sup> Similar usage was depicted in an early 19<sup>th</sup> century engraving by Henry Salt of an Oromo, wearing a necklace with a padlock attached.<sup>8</sup>

Bead, silver filigree and other necklaces were highly prized by Ethiopian princesses, noblewomen, and all who could afford them. Mansfield Parkyns

<sup>5</sup> JAMES BRUCE, *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* (Edinburgh, 1790), III, 107–09.

<sup>6</sup> EMELIUS ALBERT DE COSSON, *The Cradle of the Blue Nile* (London, 1877), I, 111.

<sup>7</sup> JAMES THEODORE BENT, *The Sacred City of the Ethiopians* (London, 1896), pp. 20–21; ALBERT ALFRED WILFRED GLEICHEN, *With the Mission to Menelik 1897* (London, 1898), p. 223; HERBERT VIVIAN, *Abyssinia* (London, 1901), p. 118; PERCY HORACE GORDON POWELL-COTTON, *A Sporting Trip through Abyssinia* (London, 1902), p. 110; GEORGE MONTANDON, *Au pays Ghimirra* (Paris, 1913), p. 175; LINCOLN DE CASTRO, *Nella terra dei Negus* (Milano, 1915), plate LXXXVIII; DAVID BUXTON, *The Abyssinians* (London, 1970), plate 95B; RICHARD PANKHURST – RITA PANKHURST, “Ethiopian Ear-picks”. *Abbay* (1979), X, 101–110.

<sup>8</sup> HENRY SALT, *A Voyage to Abyssinia* (London, 1814), plate opposite p. 337.

observes that a well-to-do woman of Təgray would “hang three or four sets of amulets about her neck, as well as her blue cord [i.e. mätäb, symbol of Christianity], and a large flat silver case ... ornamented with a lot of silver bells hanging to the bottom edge ..., the whole suspended by four chains of the same metal”.<sup>9</sup> Such necklaces are featured in Parkyns’ drawings reproduced in his autobiography.<sup>10</sup> Similar neck ornaments were reported by Walter



Queen Təru Wärq’s necklace, presented by Robert Napier in 1868 to British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli

Plowden, who states that Ethiopian women wore “half-a-dozen silver chains round the neck, also silver ornaments of various shapes, supposed to contain charms against sorcerers and disease ...”<sup>11</sup>

Silver and other necklaces were likewise worn in Šäwa, where Charles Johnston reports that womenfolk were “exceedingly fond of silver ornaments, and all their riches consist of such stores. [Maria Theresa] dollars are only valued as the means of thus enabling their possessors to adorn themselves or their women, for all the coin of this sort which enters Shoa ultimately finds its way into the crucible, except such as falls into the hands of the King”.<sup>12</sup>

Johnston states that all, who could afford to do so, wore “large necklaces of beads”, and adds: “Those I have seen were made generally by a succession of loops, consisting of seven or eight threads of different coloured seed beads, collected at certain lengths into one string, through a large angular-cut piece of amber. Eight or ten of these loops formed a long negligee,

<sup>9</sup> MANSFIELD PARKYNS, *Life in Abyssinia* (London, 1853), II, 26.

<sup>10</sup> PARKYNS, II, plates opposite pp. 25, 29.

<sup>11</sup> WALTER PLOWDEN, *Travels in Abyssinia* (London, 1868), p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> CHARLES JOHNSTON, *Travels in Southern Abyssinia* (London, 1844), II, 335.

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which, ornamented with a large tassel of small beads, was a present suited even for the acceptance of royalty".<sup>13</sup> Similar necklaces are illustrated in early 19<sup>th</sup> century drawings by William Harris, and Johann Martin Bernatz, and in Cardinal Massaja's memoirs.<sup>14</sup>

Ornate silver filigree necklaces were also known in Ğemma. One, incorporating six miniature shield-like devices, with oblong ovals and triangles, was reproduced by Jules Borelli.<sup>15</sup> Photographs of two later Ethiopian filigree silver necklaces, one belonging to Ətege Ṭaytu, were likewise published by the Duchesne-Fournet mission.<sup>16</sup>

### Queen Ṭəru Wärq's Necklace

Queen Ṭəru Wärq's necklace, to which we turn, came into the possession of Sir Robert Napier in 1868 – how precisely is unknown. Recognizing support received from the then Conservative British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, he presented it to him. The necklace was deposited in Disraeli's country residence, Hughenden Manor, near High Wickham, in Buckinghamshire, England, which was later acquired by the National Trust. The necklace was put on display at the Manor, where it can still be seen. Scrutiny of this piece of jewellery, which has never been described, indicates that it was unique, though in the necklace tradition considered in this article.

Ṭəru Wärq's necklace consists of a silver chain 44.9 cm long, on which are strung ten silver caskets and a dozen imported glass beads. The caskets are each between 2.50 cm and 3.10 cm long, and are decorated with three rows of filigree rings, and in some cases with broader filigree bands. Though conceived in the style of amulet-holders they are sealed, and appear purely decorative. They are attached to the chain by two silver loops, and in the case of the more finely decorated caskets the chain between the loops is encased in a silver tube.

In addition to the caskets the necklace comprises twelve glass beads of various shapes and sizes. Seven, relatively large yellow ones, are wheel-shaped and unequal in size – an eighth, which was clearly part of the design, is missing. Five smaller beads are round. One, the largest, is pale blue, and

<sup>13</sup> JOHNSTON, II, 336.

<sup>14</sup> THE FITZWILLIAM MUSEUM, *Ethiopian Encounters* (Cambridge, 2007), unpagged; JOHANN MARTIN BERNATZ, *Scenes of Ethiopia* (London, 1852), I, 10, II, 11; GUGLIELMO MASSAJA, *I miei trentacinque anni di missione nell'alta Etiopia* (Milano, 1889), VII, 49.

<sup>15</sup> JULES BORELLI, *Éthiopie méridionale* (Paris, 1890), p. 410; see also PIPPO VIGONI, *Abissinia, Giornale di un viaggio* (Rome, 1879), opposite p. 103.

<sup>16</sup> JEAN DUCHESNE-FOURNET, *Mission en Ethiopie (1901–1903)* (Paris, 1909), II, Plate XVI.

more oval in shape. Two are red millefiore beads. Of the two remaining beads, the smallest is opaque, with a floral design; the other is dark with coloured stripes.

If one can imagine the necklace as it was prior to the loss of the missing yellow bead one would be struck by the design's symmetry, complexity and harmony. In the centre-front, in pride of place, is the only blue bead – unique in shape and colour. Between this bead and the fastening at the rear, both caskets and beads are arranged symmetrically, and in roughly descending order of size and sophistication. The central bead is flanked by a double row of wheel-shaped yellow beads, which on each side lead on to the best decorated and some of the largest caskets. The chain is here encased in a silver tube. Next on either side come the most colourful beads – the red millefiore. Next again on either side come less decorated caskets. The chain between the loops of these caskets is no longer encased in a silver tube.

The half-way mark between the necklace's front and back is marked by a yellow bead on each side. The latter half of the necklace is less spectacular. Although the first caskets on either side echo the earlier front caskets in being more decorated, there is no equivalent to the red millefiore.

The last four caskets are smaller than the others, and have fewer filigree bands, and no silver tube. The two last beads besides the fastening are not symmetrical, and lead one to wonder whether one or both were replacements.

Ṭəru Wärq's necklace, we may conclude, was a decorative artifact of some sophistication. It blended together the country's three main traditional types of jewellery: silver caskets, silver filigree, and glass beads. Together they combined to give the ensemble a strikingly original and colourful appearance.<sup>17</sup>

### Summary

The article, which traces the Ethiopian history of beads and necklaces, focuses on an unpublished necklace which belonged to Emperor Tewodros's consort Queen Ṭəru Wärq. Acquired by Robert Napier, apparently after her death in 1868, it was presented by Napier to the then British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli.

The necklace, though unique, is in Ethiopia's necklace tradition; and utilizes the country's three main traditional types of jewellery: silver caskets, silver filigree, and glass beads. A work of some sophistication it is not without artistic, as well as historical interest.

<sup>17</sup>The author is indebted to CHARLES PUGH, of Hughenden Manor, for providing the necklace photograph here reproduced.