

ETHIOPIAN OBJECTS AT THE VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM

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The Victoria and Albert Museum, or V&A, is a museum of art, design and performance based in South Kensington, London. It was established in 1852, following on from the 1851 “Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations” spearheaded by Prince Albert. The museum’s collections today number over 2.7 million objects, amassed over the past 150 years through active collecting. Amongst them is a small but very significant collection of Ethiopian material, which tells a story about the complex relationship between Britain and Ethiopia during the 19th century, as well as prompting much discussion about how African collections and objects associated with military expeditions are displayed and interpreted by UK museums today.

The V&A’s African collections

The V&A has traditionally divided objects into sub-collections according to material, such as Textiles and Fashion, Metalwork, or Furniture and Woodwork, each of which is looked after by a dedicated department of curators. While the museum does have an Asian department, which cares for the museum’s collections from South, South East and East Asia and the Middle East, it does not currently have a specific department, curator or gallery dedicated to collecting, studying or displaying African objects. This is partly due to a historic distinction between the perceived remit of the V&A and the British Museum. Nevertheless, the museum is today thought to have around 4,500 objects in its collections either from Africa, or related to the African Diaspora. This figure was first established in 2008 by African Research Fellow Helen Mears, as one of the outcomes of the African Diaspora Research Project.¹

Over the past decade, there have been a number of projects which have brought the V&A’s African collections into greater focus and drawn the public’s attention to this previously underappreciated part of the collection. This is also reflected in recent changes to the museum’s Collections Development Policy (Stylianou, 2015 p. 93), partly resulting from the aforementioned African Diaspora Research Project. The current iteration of the policy states that “Ideally the African collections would have independent status within the Museum, with dedicated, professionally experienced curators. Until this situation can be achieved, collecting African and Africa-related materials is integrated into the collection plans of the existing departments.” (V&A, 2015 p. 66). This is a significant departure from previous versions of the policy, which simply stated

that “The Museum does not collect historic material from Oceania and Africa south of the Sahara” (V&A, 2010 p. 68).

Ethiopian objects in the V&A collections

The Ethiopian collections in the V&A number around 100 objects in total. These fall under the remit of four different departments at the museum: Metalwork; Prints and Drawings; Textiles and Fashion, and the National Art Library. Of these objects, around 66 are either known or thought to have come into the museum’s possession via the 1867-8 British Expedition to Abyssinia (Ethiopia). This was the culmination of a large-scale military expedition to Ethiopia to rescue British captives being held hostage by Emperor Tewodros II, ruler of Ethiopia at the time, who had imprisoned around thirty European diplomats and missionaries in 1863. He had taken this action after his attempts to form an alliance with Queen Victoria, in the hope of securing military support to safeguard his somewhat precarious position as King, had gone unanswered. The brutal battle quickly ended in a decisive victory for the British, who overwhelmed the Ethiopian forces with enormous firepower. As the fortress at Maqdala was captured, Tewodros killed himself with a pistol once given to him as a gift from Queen Victoria. On the orders of General Sir Robert Napier, leader of the expedition, the city was then ransacked and burned by British troops, and many of the objects taken were brought back to Britain.

The most famous of the Ethiopian objects in the V&A collection are a gold crown (Fig. 1) and chalice which were taken from Tewodros’s treasury. The crown, of a style worn by priests in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, is constructed of an inner raised and domed cylinder surrounded by three pierced tiers, decorated with embossed and chased images of the apostles and evangelists. The large solid gold chalice bears an inscription stating that it was given to the Church of Our Lady of Qwesqwam, near Gondar. It was a gift from King Iyyasu II (ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳሱ 2ኛ), who ruled from 1730 to 1755, and his mother Empress Mentewwab (እቴጌ ምኅንዳብ). A signature on the base of the chalice also identifies its maker as “Wäldä-Giyorgis”. The crown is thought to have been given to the same church as part of the same dedication.²



Fig. 1 Crown, probably made in Gondar, Ethiopia, around 1740. Museum no. M.27-2005. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In addition to the crown and chalice, the largest number of Ethiopian objects in the V&A collection can be found in the museum's Metalwork collection, which has eleven items of arms and armour, thirty pieces of jewellery, three cups, a fly whisk, fourteen processional and hand crosses, two censers, and two sacramental spoons. The Prints and Drawings section cares for eight Ethiopian drawings, one of which is thought to have come from Maqdala. The National Art Library has four sacred texts, while the Textiles and Fashion collection includes a priest's vestment and three items of women's clothing. These once belonged to Tewodros' second wife Queen Terunesh, or Empress Tiruwork Wube.

In addition to these Ethiopian cultural objects, the V&A also has a number of photographs which relate to Maqdala. The museum's photography collections include several photographs taken by the Royal Engineers, a corps of the British Army who accompanied the expedition to Ethiopia and who were responsible for documenting the exhibition and the surrounding landscape through photography (Ryan, 1997 p. 74). The Abyssinia campaign was one of the earliest expeditions to be recorded in this way. Today digital copies of these photographs, along with images of all the Ethiopian objects in the V&A collection, can be found on the museum's online Search the Collections database.³

Also in the photography collection are a number of images of the famous young Ethiopian prince, Alemayehu. The son of Tewodros and his second wife Queen Terunesh, Alemayehu was orphaned at seven years old when his mother died

of lung disease just one month after his father's suicide, while she and her son were being escorted through Ethiopia by Napier's troops. Alemayehu was placed into the care of a British army officer, Captain Tristram Charles Sawyer Speedy, and brought to England, where the government assumed responsibility for him until his death in Leeds aged 18. The most famous portraits of Alemayehu in the V&A collection were taken by the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, during a visit to Queen Victoria's Isle of Wight residence, Osborne House. Further portraits and cartes-de-visites of Alemayehu in the collection include those produced by Mr Jabez Hughes, the Queen's official photographer, and the London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company.

Two images of Tewodros himself can also be found in the V&A collection. A carte de visite by the Paris studio Neurdein features a much-reproduced print of the emperor holding a spear and shield (Fig. 2). Another more gruesome carte de visite made by the London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company reproduces an image of Tewodros sketched shortly after his death. This sketch was made by Richard Holmes, an Assistant Curator in the Manuscripts section of the British Museum, who accompanied the expedition and was instrumental in bringing many precious objects from Maqdala to the UK.⁴



Fig. 2 Carte de visite depicting Emperor Tewodros II, 19th century. Museum no. 2894-1934. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

From Maqdala to South Kensington

Objects from Maqdala arrived in the V&A collection through a variety of different routes, and over the course of several decades. Of the objects either thought to have been looted at Maqdala, or otherwise connected with the expedition in some way, 32 came from government offices or officials including the Treasury, the Admiralty, the Foreign Office and the Secretary of State for India. Twenty-seven objects came from private individuals or dealers: twelve as gifts or bequests to the museum, and fifteen as purchases. A further seven objects arrived in the museum as transfers from the India Museum.

The earliest objects to arrive in the South Kensington Museum – as the V&A was then known – were four pieces given by the Foreign Office, which were accessioned into the collection in July 1868, just three months after the fall of Maqdala. While undoubtedly connected with the expedition, these objects were not taken as loot, but were gifts given to the British civil servant Hormuzd Rassam during his time in Ethiopia. Rassam had been sent to deliver letters from Queen Victoria to Tewodros, hoping to secure the release of the hostages, but found himself also taken captive. One arm defence was a personal gift to Rassam from Tewodros himself, while a fly whisk, coffee cup holder and cup were given to him by Abuna Salama III, the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and another of Tewodros's captives.

A selection of textiles and jewellery belonging to Queen Terunesh (Fig. 3) were next to arrive in the museum, accessioned in 1869. These were given by the Secretary of State for India, who took charge of these objects following the Queen's death. As with the gifts given to Rassam, these objects relate very clearly to the events at Maqdala, and yet they are not usually viewed as loot in the strictest sense: "Not technically war booty, but clearly in the possession of the British as a result of military action, the clothes have an ambiguous status" (Stylianou, 2015).



Fig. 3 Dress belonging to Queen Terunesh, around 1860, Ethiopia. Museum no. 399-1869. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The story of the crown and chalice is rather more complicated. While the earliest acquisitions from Maqdala were being placed into the South Kensington Museum, the fate of these most prized objects was still being determined. Early on, the crown and chalice had been identified as particularly important and valuable objects, “worthy things to be placed in a niche of the British Museum” (Stanley, 1876 p. 458). All spoils from Maqdala were placed under the care of a “committee for prizes”, to ensure the careful administration of the sale of these objects in order to recoup money for the army’s prize fund. In his diary, an officer named Colonel Milward recalls his somewhat grudging appointment to this committee on 14 April 1868 (quoted Chojnacki and Marshall, 1969 p. 107), and his subsequent journey back to Britain with a “box of valuables” (*ibid.*, p. 112).

It is unclear whether the crown and chalice themselves were in this box, but after their arrival in the UK, they were first placed by Milward into the care of the British Museum. However, they were not accessioned into the museum’s collection, and still had not yet been purchased from the prize committee (Hansard, 1871 col. 939). Richard Holmes, the British Museum curator who had previously made the sketch of Tewodros after his death, had hoped to secure the very best treasures for the museum. However, there appears to have been a prolonged disagreement about whether or not the treasures would in fact be purchased from the army by the government. This was the subject of a parlia-

mentary debate in 1871, where Prime Minister William Gladstone famously argued that the objects should not even have been taken from Ethiopia.⁵

Eventually, it was decided that the government would indeed purchase the objects, but that they would be deposited in the South Kensington Museum rather than the British Museum. It was also understood that these items would be deposited in the museum as loans from the Treasury, rather than accessioned into the collection. With all of this agreed, Colonel Milward was instructed to deliver them to the South Kensington Museum,⁶ where they finally arrived on 2 April 1872.

Objects from Ethiopia continued to arrive at the museum over the next few decades. In 1879, five 'shotel' swords and a dagger were transferred to the South Kensington Museum from the India Museum. The India Museum had been the repository of the collections of the East India Company, and had become part of the new India Office in 1858 when the Company became defunct. A resolution passed in 1879 then transferred a large portion of its collections to the South Kensington Museum. There is very little information in the V&A archives about the provenance of these objects prior to their acquisition by the India Museum, but it is possible that they could have come to Britain as a result of the 1867-8 expedition.

Of the other Ethiopian objects donated by or purchased from private individuals, two processional crosses and a small selection of jewellery were purchased in 1868 from a "Major Holland". This may have been Major Trevenen James Holland who, along with Sir Henry Montague Hozier, published the only official account of the expedition in 1870. Another noteworthy acquisition was made in 1905 when Mrs M. E. Simpson donated two hand crosses collected in Ethiopia by her late husband William Simpson, a war artist who had accompanied the expedition to produce sketches for the *Illustrated London News*. In his diary, Simpson recalls purchasing one of the crosses for three dollars, from a priest in Chelicut (Simpson, 1868 p. 116). The museum also has in its collection an album of sketches compiled by Simpson on the subject of The Cross. This album includes an illustration of an Ethiopian processional cross (D.118-1906) from 1868, thereby dating it to the artist's time documenting the campaign.

Another significant collection of Ethiopian objects, including two crosses and a few pieces of jewelery, came from the collection of Captain Speedy, the officer who had first been tasked with caring for the young Prince Alemayehu. Speedy died in 1911, and these objects were donated to the museum in 1936 by his goddaughter, Mrs Ida S. Perrin. It is unknown exactly where or when Speedy acquired these objects for his personal collection, but he is known to have spent a great deal of time in Ethiopia prior to the events of 1868.

A few other Ethiopian objects, either known or believed not to have come from Maqdala, were also added to the V&A collections over the course of the 21st century. These include a series of drawings of the battle between Allied and Italian troops during the Second World War, given to the museum by Mr D. Molesworth in 1947, and a small assortment of crosses purchased from a Mr Goodall in 1980, part of a larger collection of crosses from around the world. The Searight Collection, acquired by the V&A in 1985, contains two original drawings from an abridged 1812 one-volume edition documenting the 18th Century travels of James Bruce of Kinnaird, and two coloured aquatints showing views of Ethiopia which were produced for an 1809 illustrated publication by Henry Salt.

Early displays of Ethiopian material at the South Kensington Museum

The first display of Ethiopian objects at the South Kensington Museum opened in 1868. It was titled “Abyssinian objects from the Emperor Theodore, lent by the Queen, the Admiralty and others” (James, 1997 p. 520). An article in the Buckingham Express documented that this display initially consisted of “two robes, two crowns, a pair of slippers, and three seals” (Buckingham Express, Saturday 11 July 1868. p. 3), but also noted that “there are several articles which were obtained by Mr. Holmes for the British Museum, and which have yet to be displayed. Among them is the Royal shield, some silver chalices, &c.” (*ibid.*).

A month later, an article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* in August 1868 also commented on the display in South Kensington, noting the addition of Holmes' infamous sketch of Tewodros's head (*Gentleman's Magazine*, 1868 p. 381). This inclusion is rather telling about the purpose of such displays, which “made no contribution to the museum's original mission in relation to design and social reform but rather offered the Victorian public the spectacle of the remains of a defeated enemy whose perceived status as a racial and cultural inferior was implicit in the mode of display” (Barringer, 1998 p. 21). However, the museum's director Henry Cole also spoke positively about the skill of Ethiopian art and the lessons that Europeans could learn from it.⁷

Towards the end of the 19th century the objects appear to have been placed on permanent display in the South Arcade of the museum, with an 1894 guide to the museum recording the inclusion of clothing, books, jewellery, crosses, the gold crown and the chalice in this area, and noting that “some of them were captured during the Abyssinian Campaign under Lord Napier of Magdala” (1894 p. 25). These Ethiopian objects were displayed alongside “Moorish Saddles”, Ashanti gold jewellery, a collection of objects from South African and an “ethnological collection” from New Guinea (*ibid.*).

While the V&A collected a small number of Ethiopian objects during the early 20th century – including those donated by Speedy's goddaughter – in the 1920s

and 30s it also began to deaccession a number of these objects from its collections. The most famous of these occurred in 1925, when the museum returned a silver crown from its collections to Ethiopia, offering it to the Queen Zawditu during a diplomatic visit by *Ras* Tafari, then Crown Prince and Regent of Ethiopia (Mercier, 2006 p. 48). This crown had previously been one of the objects accessioned into the collection on 30 March 1869, part of the gift from the Secretary of State for India.

In the ensuing decade, some objects were also deaccessioned and transferred to other UK collections – including the British Museum and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge – “because the museum did not see collecting African art and design as part of its role” (Collecting Policy, 2010 p. 66). The disposal of a number of Ethiopian textiles in 1933 has been thoroughly explored by Stylianou, who notes that the disposal came about partly as a result of African objects being viewed as “ethnographic” and therefore not relevant to the V&A’s collections (Stylianou, 2015 p. 92).

Ethiopian collections at the V&A in the late 20th and early 21st century

The exact locations in which specific Ethiopian objects were displayed during the early and mid 20th century is currently unclear, but some objects – particularly the gold crown and chalice – seem to have been on display in the museum’s permanent galleries for much of this time. A 1956 guide to the museum, for example, makes reference to Ethiopian “religious metalwork” being displayed in the “Brass and Bronze-work” gallery, alongside Byzantine Greek, Russian and Jewish metalwork (V&A, 1956 p. 70). From 1972 the famous crown and chalice, along with a gold ring, were displayed in the V&A’s Jewellery Gallery.

In 1983 the National Heritage Act was passed, transferring ownership of government-loaned objects over to the museums in which these objects were held. The museum initially resisted accessioning the objects, recognising that a formal request for restitution might in due course be made by the Ethiopian Government and that accessioning them would raise an obstacle to their return, if that were the recommended outcome. However, under the instructions of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the crown and chalice, along with a shield and a large processional cross on loan from the Ministry of Defence, were eventually formally accessioned into the V&A collection in 2005. Meanwhile, the organisation AFROMET (Association for the Return of the Maqdala Ethiopian Treasures) continued to campaign for the return of these objects to Ethiopia.

In 2005 the Crown and Chalice, along with the large processional cross, a censer and a sacramental spoon, were installed in the V&A’s refurbished Sacred Silver and Stained Glass galleries (galleries 83 and 84). In these new

galleries, the objects were displayed in a case titled “The Eastern Churches” along with objects from the Greek, Armenian and Russian Orthodox churches. The labels did not mention Maqdala, focusing instead on the significance of these objects within the Ethiopian church. While developing the new displays, curators met with the Head of the Ethiopian Church in London, and representatives of the Church attended the opening of the galleries.

Cultural connections: a renewed focus

2005 also marked the start of the Heritage Lottery Funded project ‘Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership’, leading – as mentioned at the start of this article – to a renewed focus on African objects in the V&A collections. The project’s African Research Fellow, Helen Mears, notes that the cross-collection remit of the project allowed curators to explore and identify the connections between material in different collections across the V&A, including photographs, manuscripts, metalwork and textiles, connections which “are crucial in asserting a collections identity for material which can otherwise seem disparate, given the large time periods and geographical areas involved” (Mears, 2009 p. 121).

The project led to two temporary displays of Ethiopian material in the V&A galleries. The first of these was the display *Ethiopian Sacred Art*, which was installed in the main entrance to the Sackler Centre, the V&A’s Learning Centre. The display was curated by Louise Hofman from the museum’s Metalwork department. The display, open from March - September 2010, featured six Ethiopian crosses, drawings and manuscripts. The next temporary display to feature the V&A’s Ethiopian collections was *Exploring Hidden Histories* (Fig. 4). This significantly larger display, across two rooms of the V&A’s Studio Galleries, ran from November 2012 – February 2013. It was curated by Zoe Whitley and Nicola Stylianou, and was significantly informed by Stylianou’s PhD research (Stylianou, 2015 p. 93). The display featured around 100 objects from across the V&A’s African Collections, and examined “the V&A’s role in acquiring and representing the cultural assets of African peoples since the Museum’s founding in 1852” (V&A, 2012).



Fig. 4 *Exploring Hidden Histories* display at the V&A, November 2012 – February 2013. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In a case dedicated solely to Ethiopian objects, *Exploring Hidden Histories* included a dress belonging to Queen Terunesh along with a selection of jewellery, Hormuzd Rassam's fly whisk, and images of Prince Alemayehu and Captain Speedy. The introductory text for this case was open about the origins of the collections and briefly outlined the stories of Maqdalā, Tewodros, Terunesh and Alemayehu, as well as explaining Speedy's role. The display described the objects' stories as "the personal and public narratives of conflict" (V&A 2012).

A selection of the V&A's Ethiopian objects were again brought out of storage – this time very briefly – in August 2016, for the evening event *The Book Liberator: Plunder, Presence, Perpetuity* coordinated by Janet Browne, the museum's Programme Manager for African and Caribbean Heritage and Culture. The event was jointly organised with the Black Cultural Archives (BCA) for the exhibition *Rastafari in Motion*, in collaboration with Rastafari the Majesty and the Movement UK. This event commemorated five key epochs in the Ethiopian and Rastafarian calendars, including the 100th Anniversary of Haile Selassie's coronation and the 120th Anniversary of the Battle of Adwa. For this event, a small temporary display was installed in the V&A's Silver Galleries by curators from the V&A's Metalwork section, and visitors were offered tours of the display as part of the programme for the evening. The display presented a selection of Ethiopian metalwork objects from the collection including professional and hand crosses, arm defences, and several of the Queen's items of jewellery.

150 years later: *Maqdala 1868*

In 2017, with the 150th anniversary of the events at Maqdala approaching, the V&A held discussions with the Ethiopian Embassy in London about the best way to mark this occasion. The anniversary was recognised as an important opportunity to promote awareness of the Ethiopian objects in the V&A's collection, and to rethink the ways that these objects, and the stories of their acquisition, are presented to the public. A large display case in the V&A's silver galleries was chosen as the location for this, a space typically used for temporary displays of silver objects. However, as with the displays *Exploring Hidden Histories and Ethiopian Sacred Art*, this was once again an opportunity to bring together material from several different collections across the V&A, incorporating not only metalwork, but also textiles, paper and photography.

While the earlier displays had been open about the provenance of these objects and included references to the Abyssinian Expedition, this display focused explicitly on this aspect of the objects' stories, a focus which was reflected in the title: *Maqdala 1868*. In order to tell this story as clearly as possible, the display included some of the Royal Engineers' military photography of the expedition: photographs which had not previously been included in any of the earlier displays. The key aims of the display were to present the history behind these objects as openly and transparently as possible, acknowledging the controversy surrounding their place in the museum, while also improving the V&A's links with the Ethiopian community in London and beyond.

As the curator responsible for delivering this display, working as Assistant Curator in the Metalwork section, I worked closely with the V&A's Interpretation team to incorporate a range of voices and perspectives from outside the museum into the project. A focus group in January 2018 brought together historians, community leaders and activists from the Ethiopian and Rastafarian communities, some of whom had previously worked with the museum on the 2016 Book Liberator event. I then invited members of this group, along with other contacts I had made during the course of researching the display, to contribute labels sharing their personal responses, thoughts and expertise about the objects.⁸ In their contributions, several participants shared the memories and emotions that seeing the objects prompted, with one expressing his sadness at the number of precious objects lost from Ethiopia due to looting. Excerpts from several primary sources were also included in the display, including a quote from Gladstone's speech at the 1871 debate. By including this quote, the display highlighted the fact that the provenance of these objects has been contested ever since their arrival in Britain.

This interpretation strategy differed quite radically from the V&A's typical approach to display labelling, and resulted in far more text than would normally be typical for a display of this size. The V&A's Design team therefore developed a distinct colour scheme to help differentiate between the three dif-

ferent types of label, and to ensure that the complex narrative was presented as clearly as possible. However, to avoid the suggestion of any kind of hierarchy of information or expertise, all labels were printed at the same size, in the same font, and placed side-by-side in the case. A timeline running along the bottom of the case also highlighted key events in the story, from Tewodros becoming king in 1855 to the death of Alemayehu in 1879.

The display opened on 5 April 2018 (Fig. 5) and received a great deal of attention in the press, both in the UK and in Ethiopia. Much of the press coverage centred on the contested status of the objects and the question of whether they should be returned to Ethiopia, responding in particular to a statement by V&A Director Tristram Hunt raising the possibility of a long-term loan of the objects to Ethiopia.⁹ Due to legal restrictions imposed by the 1983 National Heritage Act, it is not currently possible for national museums to permanently deaccession objects from their collections. Therefore, the V&A remains in an ongoing dialogue with the Ethiopian government regarding the possibility for a long-term loan of these objects to an institution in Ethiopia.



Fig. 5 Maqdala 1868 display at the V&A, 5 April 2018 – 30 June 2019. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Maqdala 1868 was deinstalled on 1st July 2019. Most of the objects on display returned to storage, which was partly necessary due to the light-sensitive nature of the photographs, textiles and paper objects. The crown and chalice, however, returned to the Sacred Silver and Stained Glass gallery, in a new case separate from the 'Eastern Churches' display in which they had previously resided. The new display, in a more prominent location immediately visible to visitors upon entering the gallery, incorporates elements of the interpre-

tation from *Maqdala 1868* including the timeline of events, Gladstone's 1871 quote, and an introductory panel which outlines the history of the objects and acknowledges their contested status. The Eastern churches case, in which the Ethiopian censer, spoon and processional cross still remain on display, has also been updated with new labels which more clearly explain the provenance of these objects.

Conclusion

While the V&A's collection of objects from Ethiopia makes up only a very small portion of the museum's vast holdings, it is a collection of great significance, and one in which there has always been a great deal of interest – interest which only looks set to grow over the coming years. These objects have been the subjects of numerous displays during their time at the V&A, particularly over the last ten years, and the museum's approach has evolved over the past century-and-a-half from celebrating them as trophies of war, to acknowledging their problematic provenance and recognising the need for openness and transparency when displaying objects of this nature. While temporary displays can help to shed light on these crucial conversations, it is also important that museums continually re-examine and build on this work, ensuring that these efforts are seen in the long-term as opportunities to inform broader museum policies and practices.

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Notes

¹ The African Diaspora Research project was an extensive research project which took place from 2005-2008, led by African Research Fellow Helen Mears. It was part of a wider project on *Capacity Building and Cultural Ownership* undertaken with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (V&A, 2009). Mears was able to establish that around 4,300 objects in the V&A collection were thought to be from Africa or related to African diaspora (Mears, 2008 p. 118), a figure which is now estimated by V&A curators to have grown to around 4,500.

² The crown and chalice were the subject of a 2009 *Apollo* magazine article by Jacques Mercier, which sought to place these objects in the wider context of the history of Ethiopian art. Mercier carried out a thorough investigation into the date of the crown, concluding that it is “almost certainly a sacerdotal crown ordered in 1740 by Queen Mentewwab for the church of Qwesqwam in Gondar”, given to the church at the same time as the chalice (Mercier, 2006 p. 52).

³ <https://collections.vam.ac.uk>.

⁴ The caption on the front of the card states “THEODORE / TAKEN AT MAGDALA ¼ OF AN HOUR AFTER HIS DEATH - BY MR R.R. HOLMES / ‘An admirable likeness of him’ Times Correspondent”, but there are also some fascinating handwritten notes on the back of the card. The original notes identify Tewodros as the “Heroic King of Abyssinia./ Murdered by the British Army under the Command of Sir / Robert Napier on 13 April 1868”, but these appear to have been amended in 1901 to remove the “heroic” and the mention of murder, instead stating that Tewodros “committed suicide on the taking of Magdala by the British Army”.

⁵ “He (Mr Gladstone) deeply regretted that those articles were ever brought from Abyssinia, and could not conceive why they were so brought. They were never at war with the people or the churches of Abyssinia ... and he deeply lamented, for the sake of the country, and for the sake of all concerned, that those articles, to us insignificant, though probably to the Abyssinians sacred and imposing symbols ... were thought fit to be brought away by a British Army.” William Gladstone, Hansard HC, 20 June 1871, vol. 207, 949.

⁶ Letter from Charles W. Stronge, Treasury Chambers, to Vice President of the Council (Education), 11 March 1872, transcribed in V&A: 96/213, part 1.

⁷ See Henry Cole’s 1870 speech “Abyssinian Art especially, as well as upon the Art of Savage Nations and People considered Uncivilised” (*Journal of the Society of Arts*, 1870 p. 183). This speech coincided with a Manchester Missionary exhibition to which the South Kensington Museum had lent a number of objects (Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser, 18 December 1869, p. 1).

⁸ Labels were provided by the following people:

- Shango Baku Rastafari actor, writer and activist
- Samuel Berhanu, Artist and member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church
- Judith van Helden, Addis Fine Art and Ethiopian Heritage Fund

- Avril Horsford, V&A African Heritage Guide
- Dr Robbie Shilliam, Professor in International Relations at QMUL and member of the Rastafari faith
- Almaz Tesfaye, V&A Estates Services staff and member of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Historian, writer and translator and Ethiopian Community Leader Teklamariam Kifelu; Chair of the Nyahbinghi National Council UK. Liveth Powell; and John Mellors from the Anglo-Ethiopian Society also provided advice and feedback during the development of the display.

⁹ See, for example, Brown, M. (2018) 'Ethiopian treasures could be on their way home after V&A offers long-term loan', *The Guardian* (Wednesday 4 April 2018) p. 3. See also <http://www.tadias.com/04/22/2018/the-battle-over-ethiopia-meqdela-treasures-heats-up>.