Mansfield Parkyns and his Drawings: Glimpses of Northern Ethiopia Half a Century Prior to Enno Littmann's Visit

Richard Pankhurst

The British traveller Mansfield Parkyns (1823-1894) (fig. 1) who lived in northern Ethiopia from 1843 to 1846, was a perceptive and discerning observer, a competent artist, and an able writer.[1] During his three years' residence in the country he produced several dozen drawings of the country and its people. No fewer than thirty engravings based on them appeared in his two-volume work *Life in Abyssinia,* which was published in London by John Murray in 1853.

Parkyns, the artist, has, until recently, been known only through these engravings which, inevitably, give only a rough idea of his original works. Many of the latter have never been published. Three caches of them have, however, come to light, in the possession of his descendants in Britain: Mrs Barbara Potter of Kensington; Mrs Aileen Armstrong of Kingsbridge, Devon; and Mrs Barbara Lodge, of South Brent, also in Devon.[2]

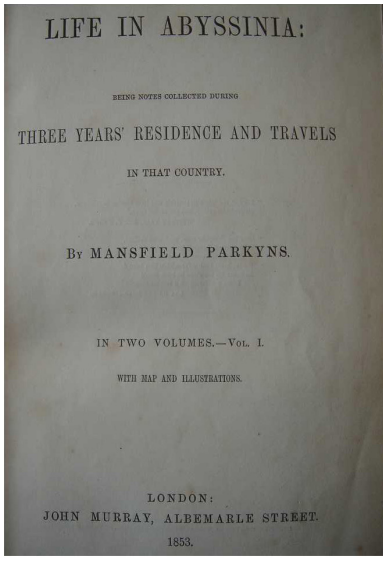
These pictures warrant attention for they constitute a rich store of visual documentation on early nineteenth century Ethiopia - half a century prior to Enno Littmann's historic visit to Tigray and well before the advent of photography in the area. They are interesting also in that they depict not a few incidents and situations described by Parkyns in his book (fig. 2) - and afford unique information on the housing, clothing weapons and social life of the period.

The object of the present study is to introduce Parkyns' Ethiopian drawings, as far as possible chronologically, and to relate them to his writings on the country and people he loved.

1 On the biography of Mansfield Parkyns see D. Cumming, *The Gentleman Savage. The Life of Mansfield Parkyns 1823-1894* (London, 1987). Reviews of Parkyns' Life in Ethiopia appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1854), Volume 75; the Dublin University Magazine (1854), Volume 43; and Frazer's Magazine (1855), Volume 51. Excerpts from the book translated into German were published in *Ausland* (1854), Volume 27.

2 The Barbara Potter collection comprises the items here designated as Figs. 8, 9, 19, 23, 25, 33, 37, 39, 43 & 48; that of Barbara Lodge, figs. 10, 11 & 21; and the remainder to Aileen Armstrong.

Fig. 1 (Left): Mansfield Parkyns, as portrayed in later life, after his return to Britain from Ethiopia.



LIFE IN ABYSSINIA:

BEING NOTES COLLECTED DURING

THREE YEARS' RESIDENCE AND TRAVELS

IN THAT COUNTRY.

By MANSFIELD PARKYNS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—Vol. I.

WITH MAP AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.
1853.

Fig. 2 (Right): Title-page of *Life in Abyssinia*.

1. ʿAylet

Having landed at the Red Sea port of Massawa early in 1843, Parkyns proceeded inland to ʿAylet, site of the famous hot springs. There he obtained his first glimpse of traditional Ethiopian life when he witnessed a peasant's funeral. The grave, which was located at some distance from the deceased's village, was, he recalls, "very shallow"- so that although stones were placed over it, there was "no tranquillity for the dead". Explaining this remark, he comments: "The African resurrectionists, the laughing hyenas, work the body out of the tomb in no time" (Parkyns, I, 108). He illustrates this theme in a sketch of two hyenas and their feast (fig. 3), which, perhaps because of its lugubrious character, was not included in his memoirs.

While in ʿAylet he spent several weeks shooting wild animals, and collecting natural history specimens, not a few of which are preserved in the British Museum's Zoological Museum, at Tring in Bedfordshire, England. His "sole companion" was, he says, a little boy who carried one of the traveller's two rifles. The youngster's "sharp eyes" were, he adds, "better accustomed to the glare" of the African sun than his own, and thus served "as well as a setter's nose".

Describing how they together stalked wild boars, Parkyns recalls that it was often necessary to crawl on his belly from one cover to another, and that he had to do this for "perhaps a good half-hour before you reach a safe shooting distance"

(Parkyns, I, 112-13). He drew a drawing of this (fig. 4) which was apparently his first Ethiopian sketch to form the basis of a subsequent engraving, (fig. 5; Parkyns, opposite I, 112).

Fig. 3: Ethiopian hyenas at work (drawing).

Fig. 4: Parkyns boar-hunting (drawing).

Fig. 5: Parkyns boar-hunting (engraving).

2. The Shohos

Parkyns, like most other travellers of his time, made his way inland by way of the country of the "Shoho", i.e., Saho, a Muslim nomadic and pastoral people located between the Red Sea coast and the Ethiopian highlands. Fascinated by their co-existence with the "Abyssinians", i.e., Christians of Tigray, he wrote:

> "Although hostile in religion to their Christian neighbours, the Abyssinians, there exists between them a most perfect *entente cordiale*, which is highly advantageous to both parties; for the Abyssinians being entirely agricultural, the rich owners of oxen among them intrust these animals, after their services at the plough are no longer required, to the care of the Shoho, who pastures them for the remainder of the year, receiving in payment a quantity of corn on their safe return. On the other hand, rich Shohos, owners of vast herds, lend out their oxen to poor Christians who cannot afford to purchase any for themselves. The Abyssinian, owner of the land, has the entire labour and management of the crop, while the Shoho, owner of the oxen, has a share of the harvest" (Parkyns, I, 125-6).

Parkyns duly visited a Shoho camp, which consisted, he says, of "huts rather than tents", but was otherwise a typically nomadic establishment, "only remaining in one spot as long there is good pasture for their cattle" (Parkyns, I, 124). Visiting one such camp he drew a graphic picture (fig. 6; Parkyns, opposite I, 124) which consists of a score of huts on a plain, with half a dozen cattle in the foreground.

The artist was cordially received by a Shoho chief, *sheikh* Suliman, who, we are told, was "only distinguishable from his subjects by his carrying a lance and mace [i.e., club], both of which, even to the handles, were entirely of iron". Doubtless feeling it presumptuous to portray the *sheikh* himself our traveller produced a sketch (fig. 7; Parkyns, opposite I, 127) of two of the latter's subjects: a warrior holding long spear and shield, and a female companion.

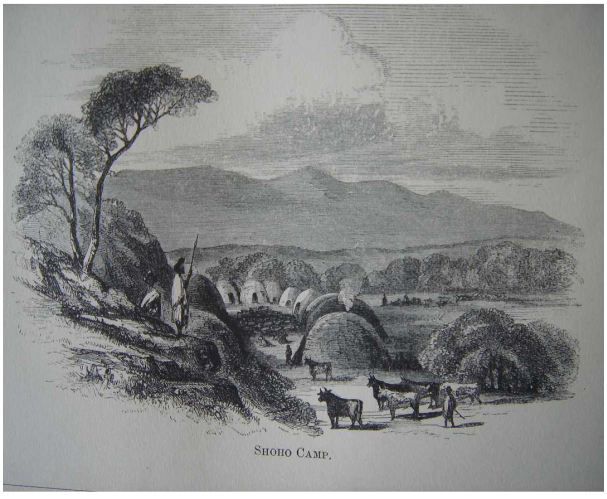


Fig. 6: A Shoho camp (engraving).

Fig. 7: Two Shohos (engraving).

Neither of these Shoho drawings have thus far been traced, but these two ethnographically interesting engravings based on them are preserved in *Life in Abyssinia*.

3. Ḥamasén

Not long after completing the above sketches Parkyns made his way further inland toward the cool highlands of Ḥamasén. He halted at the village of "Addy Killawita", which was "very prettily situated on rising ground, and surrounded by remarkably picturesque scenery". There he obtained his first sight of the Quolqual, or Euphorbia tree, which grew "like a cactus, the leaves and branches being both of a fleshy substance, and contains a large quantity of milky sap" (Parkyns, I, 137). It was possibly around this time that he drew a picture of typical Ethiopian highland scenery (fig. 8) with mountains in the distance, and a large and small euphorbia tree, left. The picture, though characteristic of this countryside, was not included in the published work.

Fig. 8: Typical Ethiopian highland scenery, with euphorbia tree (drawing).

4. A Dispute in Sarayé

From Ḥamasén, Parkyns proceeded inland to Serayé, where he stopped at the "large village" of "Addi Hay Hay", near Gundet. There he and his companions were

invited, as was often the case, into the house of the local chief. It was soon "filled with a succession of visitors", who were for the most part very civil". One man, however, asked one of the traveller's servants for some snuff in "so imperious a manner" that that the boy refused him. Insults were then exchanged, and it was not long before words came to blows, whereupon the man made his escape, only to return with a crowd of friends armed with clubs. Parkyns and his companions soon succeeded in quietening the mob, but failed to silence the trouble-maker.

Describing this stage of the quarrel, Parkyns recalls:

> "The man who began the fray amused me much. He was a big powerful fellow, above six feet high, but evidently a great coward, though a blustering bully. During the row he pretended to be most anxious for an attack, even after we had in a measure pacified the others; but a youth of about half his size and weight held him, while he made a show as if frantically struggling to get away and rush at his enemy" (Parkyns, I, 145).

The dispute, Parkyns insists, was but a trivial affair. The captive, he claims, would have been "much annoyed had he been taken at his word and let loose", while his friends after five minutes were chatting with the travellers "in the most friendly manner".

The momentary quarrel nevertheless appealed to the imagination of Parkyns, who produced a drawing of it (fig. 9) entitled, "The man who w[oul]d not be pacified". This picture, which is set in a village with typical thatched huts in the background, captures the excitement of the moment. The angry man (centre), with a typical Ethiopian curved sword and brandishing a characteristic club in the air, has been immobilised by one of his opponents whose powerful hand grips him by the waist. Another disputant (left), also armed with a curved sword, his hand outstretched, reasons with him. A turbaned priest (right) chatacteristically depicted with a rosary, fly-whisk and parasol, looks on despairingly, while a woman (far-left) holds up her hands in excitement. Though successful in recording the village atmosphere, Parkyns was not fully satisfied with the sketch, for beneath it he wrote, "NB. I see I've made the principal figure rather too tall". For this, or other reason, the picture was not included in *Life in Abyssinia*.

5. Abba Ṗanṭaléwon

Some months later Parkyns visited the old monastery of Abba Ṗanṭaléwon, which was situated on the summit on a steep mountain near Aksum (Parkyns, I, 206)- and reports that the establishment was then "very poor". He drew a painting of the ascent (fig. 10), which, though eminently suitable for reproduction, was not included in his book.

Fig. 9: "The man who could not be pacified" (drawing).

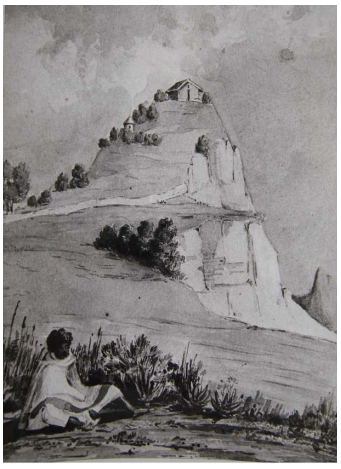


Fig. 10: Abba Pantaléwon (drawing).

6. The *Abba Goumba,* or Abyssinian Hornbill

While in the vicinity of the monastery, Parkyns caught his first glimpse of a bird which was to interest him greatly. He recalls:

> "We saw several specimens of the 'Abba Goumba' (Buzaros Abyssinicus), or Abyssinian hornbill, a quaint-looking bird, nearly the size of a turkey. It is black, the wings containing a few white feathers. The beak is thick, rather long, and curved downwards, while over it, and attached to it, protrudes a hornlike substance, the front of which is hollow, and the edges rough, as if broken, The bird's throat is finished with red and blue wattles, like a turkey-cock, and the sides of the beak with a pair of black moustaches, which would do credit to a hussar. The feet also are not unlike a turkey's" (Parkyns, I, 206-7).

Parkyns, who prided himself on being a good hunter, fired at one of these birds with his rifle, and broke its wing, so that the poor animal "unable to fly":

> "took to his heels, and afforded us a good run of an hour, when he took cover in some bushes, out of which, however, we soon started him: but he had become weak from fatigue and loss of blood, and after a short chase, one of the servants, coming up to him, cut off his head with a sword, and so spoilt the specimen. The head, however, I kept, and was not long in procuring another entire skin" (Parkyns, I, 207).

Much interested in these birds, Parkyns later drew a pair of them, a cock and hen, standing face to face, with a succulent aloes plant between them (fig. 11). Engravings of these two birds (figs. 12 & 13) were later reproduced, separately, in *Life in Abyssinia* (Parkyns opposite I, 206, and opposite II, 204).

Fig. 11: The *"Abba Goumba"*: cock and hen (drawing).

Fig. 12: The *"Abba Goumba"*: cock (engraving).

Fig. 13: The *"Abba Goumba"*: hen (engraving).

7. Aksum

Parkyns duly visited the ancient city of Aksum, where he was impressed, like so many other foreign travellers, by its "beautiful obelisk and splendid sycamore tree". Describing these familiar landmarks, he observes:

> "The obelisk and tree are both of great height, but the latter is remarkable for the extraordinary circumference of its trunk and the great spread of its branches, which cast their dark shade over such a space of ground as would be sufficient for the camp of the largest caravan. The principal obelisk is carved..., as if to represent a door, windows, cornices etc., while under the protecting shade of the venerable tree stand five or six smaller ones, without ornament, most of which have considerably deviated from the perpendicular..." (Parkyns, I, 208).

Parkyns produced a fine oil painting of the sycamore and adjacent obelisk, probably the first such picture extant, with mountains to the rear (fig. 14), but this once again did not find its way into his book. Instead he reproduced a charming "View of the Church from near our lodging" (fig. 15; Parkyns, opposite I, 212) which illustrates an earlier passage in the text where he notes that the renowned place of worship was "prettily situated among large trees, and surrounded by rustic but neatly built huts" (Parkyns, I, 207-8).

As for the ordinary dwellings of the city Parkyns states that: "The better houses of Axum are round, the form, in all probability, used by the grandees of the country previous to the introduction of the square ones... which appear to me to be a modern innovation... Circular Abyssinian dwellings are of various descriptions, from the little wicker and straw gojjo (a wigwam) to the large and commodious huts used by rich men, and often to be met with in Axum and Adoua. These latter may be from 20 to 30 feet in diameter, and by a clever contrivance are often divided off so as to form several rooms".

Fig. 14: Aksum: obelisk and sycamore tree (painting). Fig. 15: Aksum: the Church of St. Mary (engraving).

Explaining how this was effected he observes that the rooms were separated "by an inner wall being raised at a distance of about 5 feet from the outer one and parallel to it. The passage between them is then divided by cross walls, so as to form two medebs (or mud benches for sleeping on)" (Parkyns, I, 210).

The arrangement of such structures is illustrated in three accompanying diagrams in the book (fig. 16; Parkyns,I, 211). They show that the house had two entrances, on either side of which were open spaces (indicated as "a"). These areas were used for grinding grain, as well as a kitchen, bakery, and complex of store-rooms. "The residence of a rich man", he explains, could generally be known by "the number of jars for beer, mead, corn etc." which they contained. Each of the two medebs are indicated as the letter "b" (Parkyns, I, 211-12).

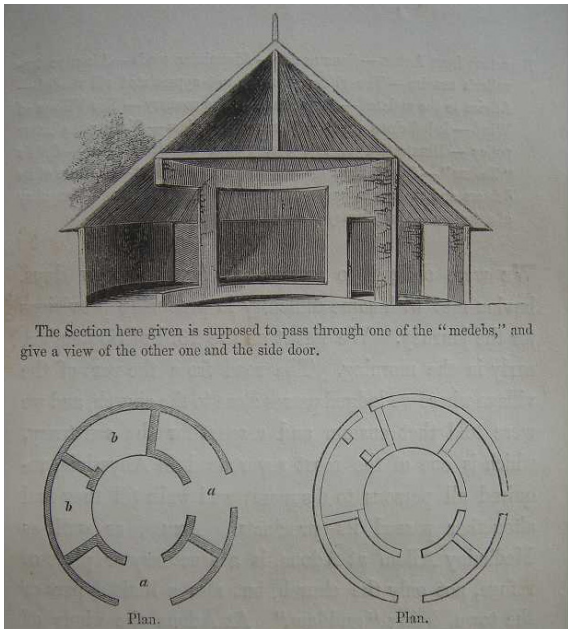


Fig. 16: Aksum house: plan (published diagram).

8. Visitors in Addaro

Parkyns journeyed next to the village of Addaro in the district of ʿAddi Abbo, where he was "treated with the utmost kindness and civility by the inhabitants, more especially by their chief, Aito Marratch" [*ato* Marach']. Our traveller was allotted a house where, he was, however, "continually bothered by visitors" (Parkyns, I, 251-2). Having, however, a good sense of humour, as well as a friendly disposition, he often joked with them. A meeting might thus begin, he says, with the visitors giving him "a good stare, then an unmeasuring smile, then, 'How do you do?', with the answer, 'God be thanked'. Then, the visitors might exclaim, in an under-tone, 'Curious!', after which the following exchanges might take place:

> "Qu. 'Is there any rain in your country?' An. 'No'. Qu. 'Is there any grass?' An. 'No'. Qu. 'Corn?' An. 'No'. Qu. 'Are there any cattle?'. An. 'No'. Qu. 'Then what do you eat?' An. 'Air'. At this answer they stare a little, and one or two laugh. Some of the wiser, understanding the joke, take it as such; but the others may go away persuaded that we have plenty of dollars but no corn" (Parkyns, I, 253).

While at Addaro, uttering such pleasantries, Parkyns appears to have drawn the interior of a "country house", only an engraving of which (fig. 17; Parkyns, opposite I, 253) seems extant. Entitled "Visitors, eternal visitors", it depicts a typical scene inside a thatched hut. The traveller, seated on the right, is conversing with the visitors, while his servants are cooking on the left. The walls are decorated, as was customary throughout much of Ethiopia, with shields and spears, while a couple of chickens strut or peck in the foreground.

Fig. 17: "Visitors, eternal visitors": the "Interior of a Country House" (engraving).

9. ʿAddi Harisho and Rohabeita

Not long after this Parkyns made his way over "rough, but highly picturesque" country to the "pretty little hamlet of Addi Harisho", in the district of Rohabeita, which was reached by "climbing a very steep hill, the ascent of which was by means of a semi-natural, semi-artificial staircase a mile or so long" (Parkyns, I, 258-9). It was there that he met the local chief, Waddy-Hil, or Wuddi-Hill, a sketch of whose house and compound, set at the foot of a hill, he reproduces in his book (fig. 18; Parkyns, I, 273) - and whose daughter Kassach he was soon to marry.

Our traveller, who was able to obtain funding from home, claims to have gained considerable friendship and popular support, in the area, for he writes:

> "During my whole stay in Rohabaita I was looked on by the people as a chief, or man of importance among them (be it known we were in a state of semi-rebellion), and consulted on all most important occasions. I, for my part, felt myself as one of them. And entered with the greatest sympathy and zeal into all their proceedings. At a feast no one enjoyed the dance and song more than I did. I had the most guns discharged at a funeral. No hunting party or foraging expedition but I was in it" (Parkyns, I, 271).

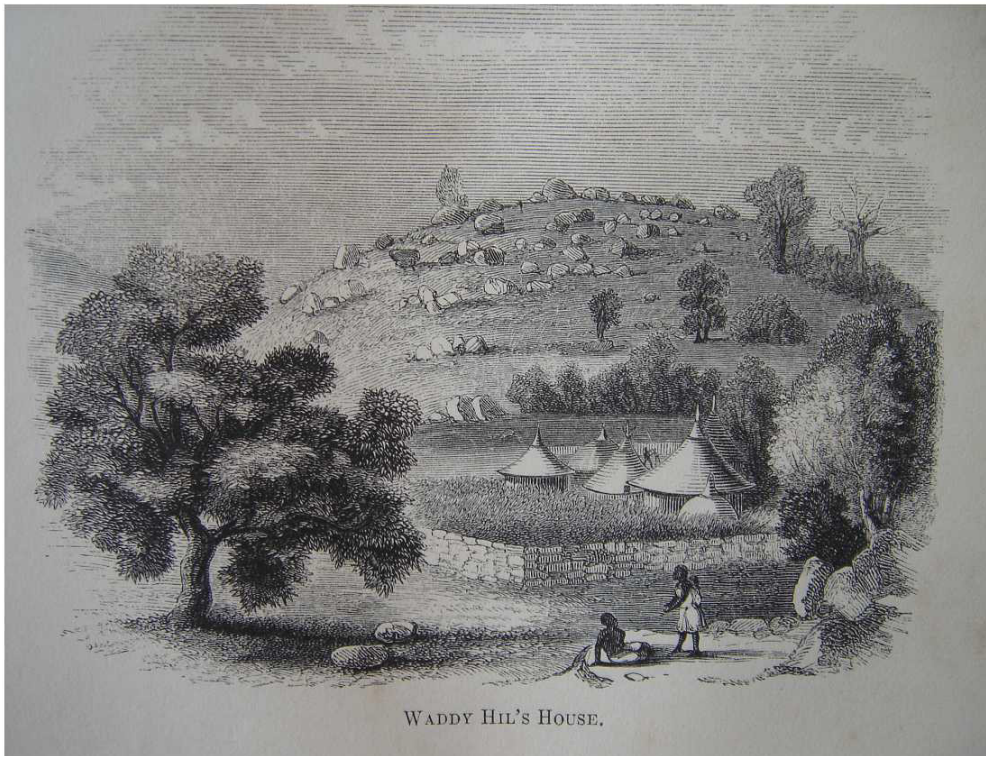


Fig. 18: Rohabeita:.Waddy-Hill's house and compound (engraving).

10. Buffalo-hunting

During his' stay in Addaro, the local chief organised a large-scale hunt for the entertainment of his foreign visitor, "Many traces of buffalo" were discovered, whereupon it was arranged that Parkyns and his companions should station themselves in various defiles where the animals were most likely to pass, while horsemen endeavoured to drive them in the direction of the hunters.

Describing his ensuing encounter with the animals the author relates:

> "I and several others took our position in the most likely place, and awaited their coming with some anxiety. After nearly half an hour's patience, we were on the point of deciding that the project had failed, when a distant sound was heard as of a squadron of horse artillery charging, and presently part of the herd passed close to where we were concealed. Not a lance was thrown by any one of the spearmen; all appeared anxious to get as much out of the way as possible. Out of six guns, the explosion of two huge elephant matchlocks only was heard, for they entirely drowned the paltry crack of an ounce rifle which played them a tenor accompaniment. Two bulls fell; and each of the Abyssinians who had fired rushed forward to claim his" (Parkyns, I, 331).

These events were recaptured by Parkyns in a drawing (fig. 19). This he annotated with the following comments, which incidentally reveal that he had placed himself in the picture (left- centre):

> "This sketch in common with many others of mine, needs some explanation. In the distance hills, middle d[itt]o a lovely plain over which bushes are occasionally scattered. In this appear 3 or 4 horsemen who are driving before then a herd of buffaloes... which in the foreground are entering a rocky & bushy pass, on the left hand are 3 or 4 gunners (about to pop at them) in the Abyssinian costume, one rather whiter than the rest with a European rifle & the others with heavy match-locks - also a party of Abyssinians, with shields and spears".

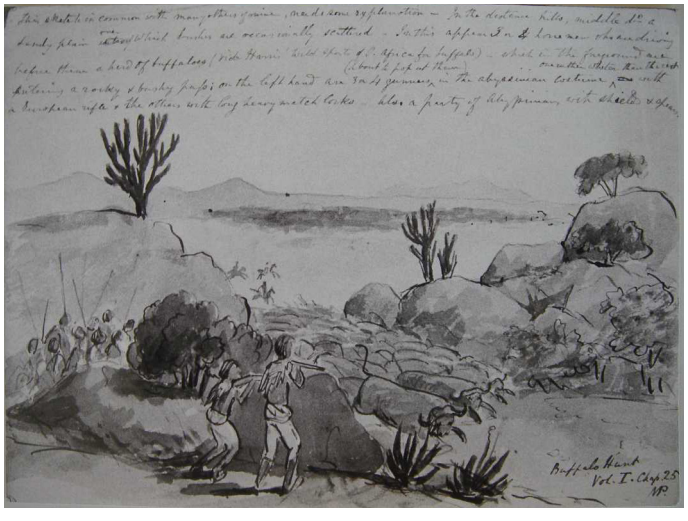


Fig. 19: Buffalo-hunting in ʿAddi Abbo (drawing).

From this drawing an engraving (fig. 20) was later produced. (Parkyns, opposite, I, 331).

Fig. 20: Buffalo-hunting in ʿAddi Abbo (engraving).

The two versions of the picture differ significantly in several details. Parkyns and the other marksmen, who in the original are shooting from a standing position, are made in the engraving to lean on a rock. The horsemen, who are plainly visible in the drawing (rear-centre) can scarcely be seen in the published work from which most of the spearmen (left) have been omitted.

11. The *Dima*, or Baobab Fruit

Parkyns, always a keen observer, took a lively interest in Ethiopian plants. One of those which particularly fascinated him was the *dima* or baobab (Adansonii digitata), the fruit of which, he explains, "though not very solid as a food, yet adds much to the flavour of cuisine". Describing this fruit he observes:

> "It has a large greenish shell (as it might be called): inside of it are a large number of seeds, attached to which by fibres is a quantity of yellowish white cakey powder, having a sweetish acid taste, and when mixed with water forming an agreeable beverage, something resembling lemonade. The Abyssinians make a paste of this mixing it with red pepper, and salt, and eat it with the 'gogo' bread" (Parkyns, I, 295). He duly produced a sketch of this fruit (fig. 21) which was the basis of the engraving (fig. 22) later appearing in his book (Parkyns, I, 295).

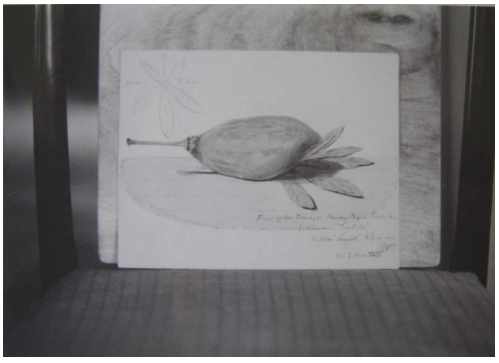


Fig. 21: The baobab fruit (drawing).

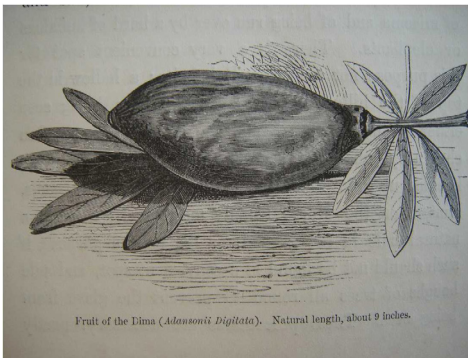


Fig. 22: The baobab fruit (engraving).

12. *Blatta* Sahlé's House

In the Summer of 1844 Parkyns established himself in ʿAdwa, then the emporium of northern Ethiopia, where he resided in the house of a prominent nobleman, *blatta* Sahlé. Unlike the round-houses described at ʿAdwa it was a "square or oblong" building; and was situated in the Muslim quarter of the town - and was fairy typical of the houses of the well-to-do. (It may be recalled that three-quarters of a century earlier James Bruce, the Scottish "explorer", had likewise lived in Gondar's Islamic quarter).

Describing this structure in considerable detail, Parkyns states that when, as in his house, it was "so large as to render it difficult to find a sufficient number of good beams to reach across it", a plan was adopted "which might be advantageously employed under similar circumstances" in Europe, namely:

> "The four corners are cut off by small beams laid across them, leaving an aperture in the middle, round which is built a wall about four or five feet high; this serves at once to heighten the room and lessen the width to be covered in" (Parkyns, I, 356).

On the walls, he continues:

> "is placed the roof, which consists of boughs of trees laid crosswise over the beams; those of the date palm, or Arkai (a sort of bamboo), are preferable: the latter especially are sometimes laid very neatly, and have a good appearance, but are little used, from their scarcity, in the mountain country. Some smaller boughs, with their leaves, are laid over these to fill up the crevices between them; and over the hole is spread a layer of earth or shingle, or pebbles, which is trodden, and sometimes sprinkled with water, to render it more solid; but every year it has to be renewed, just before the periodical rains. Wood-ashes are often added, as they are considered useful in rendering the whole water-tight... Flag stones... found in the bed of the Assam, a brook flowing close to Adoua, not only cover, but project considerably beyond the wall, so as to protect its being affected by any droppings or soakings from the roof" (Parkyns, I, 356-7).

The above architectural features are well illustrated in one of Parkyns' drawings (fig. 23), which also gives a feeling of domestic life within the compound.

Fig. 23: ʿAdwa: *Blatta* Sahlé's house (drawing).

In the published engraving (fig. 24; Parkyns, I, 355) derived from this picture the house has been made taller, and the two women (centre) - perhaps the artist's wife or principal female servant - and a monkey sitting on the bed (centre-right) have disappeared. The traveller's two dogs have, however, been retained.

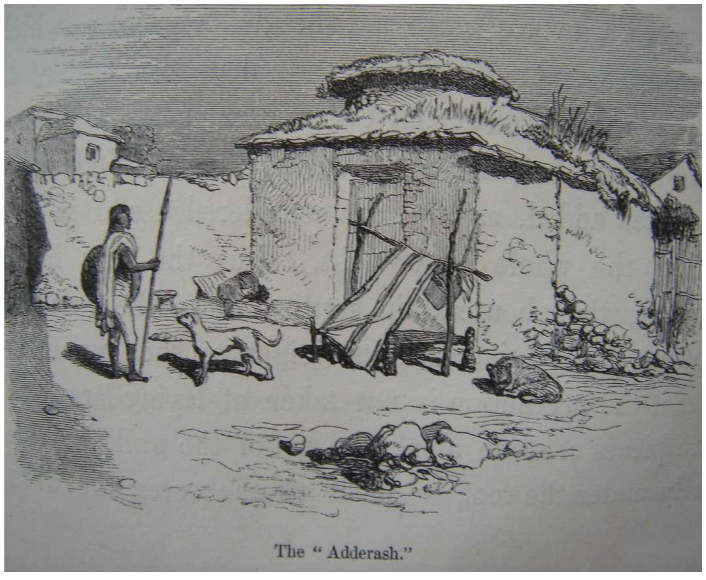


Fig. 24: ʿAdwa: *Blatta* Sahlé's house (engraving).

All three animals are known to us from Parkyn's memoirs. The monkey, he says, would "sit and watch" whatever he did, "with an expression of great intelligence",

and would constantly endeavour to imitate him - on one occasion even pretending to read a book (Parkyns, I, 234). The traveller's favourite dog, lying on the right, was "Maychal Boggo" - a canine name still common over a century later. A faithful animal, with long and coarse fur, it later accompanied Parkyns on his departure to the Sudan when it insisted on sharing its master's bed from which as often as fifty times a night it would jump up barking whenever a hyena was heard. The second dog, standing on the left, was "Elfin", a half-English, half-Arab greyhound bitch bred in Cairo by a British resident Dr. Abbot (Parkyns, II, 299, 341 and p, 415 of the 1868 edition).

Parkyns also drew a plan of the house's interior (fig. 25). This picture is not reproduced in his book, but admirably illustrates his statement in it that the dwelling consisted of "three divisions", namely:

1. "The apartment occupied by myself, in which I sleep, eat, and receive visitors.
2. The stable where my mules are kept, and which opens into my room, there not being even a door to separate us. The mules stand with their heads towards me, and when I am eating make eyes at me to throw them bits of bread.

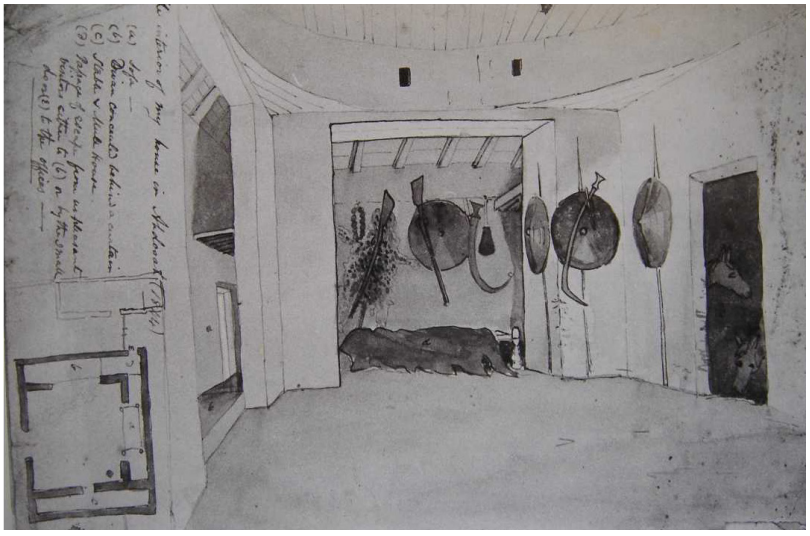


Fig. 25: Adwa: *Blatta* Sahlé's house; interior (drawing).

3. The 'Madeb' a sort of couch, made of stones and plastered over with mud. I dignify it with the name of couch, though in reality it is nothing more than a part of the floor raised a step higher than the remainder, and extending the whole length of the room, and about five feet broad. This is separated from my apartment by a partition wall, in which is an opening of about eight feet broad. Should the house belong to a married man, this aperture is closed by a curtain drawn across it. The 'medeb' is used by the ladies as a withdrawing room; and from behind this curtain they peep at all that goes on in the reception hall upon festive occasions. On entering my apartment the stable is on the right hand, and the 'medeb' on the left. In the front is the 'arat' or couch of the master of

the house, placed in a sort of alcove like the 'medeb', from which a small door passes to the left, opening into a private passage, by which the master can pass unobserved to the 'medab', or can effect his escape by a small door ('helfinia') to the back yard, which he often finds convenient for avoiding disagreeable visitors" (Parkyns, I, 357-8).

Turning to the walls of the room, which are also depicted in the drawing, he observes:

> "Around the room cows' horns are fixed to serve as hooks to which are suspended as ornaments shields, lances, guns, swords, skins, and other trophies of the chase. The shields have holes bored all around the edge, and the loop by which they are hung is changed occasionally from one to the other of these, especially during the damp weather, to prevent the shield's losing its shape. The lances are kept in sheaths called 'shiffaf', at the point of which is a loop, by which they are slung, The lances, like the shield, should swing free of the wall to keep them perfectly straight" (Parkyns, I, 360-1).

To the left of the above-mentioned sketch is a small diagram with the caption, "The interior of my house in Adhooah (1844)". It further illustrates the arrangement of the room as described in the book, by indicating the exact location of the following:

"(a) Sofa.

"(b) Divan concealed behind a curtain.

"(c) Stable and Mule House.

"(d) Passage of escape from unpleasant visitors either to (b) or by the small door (e) to the offices".

An additional diagram (fig. 26), entitled "Plan of my house in Adooah. During the rains of 1844" indicates that the "Principal Room was "about 14 ft. wide", and had a "Serrerr or Sofa" at one end, and the "Front Door" at the other, while a "Divan with Curtains" lay at one side, and the "Stable" at the other.

These and other details were later incorporated in a more extensive plan of the house and surrounding compound (fig. 27), which is reproduced in the book (Parkyns, I, 354).

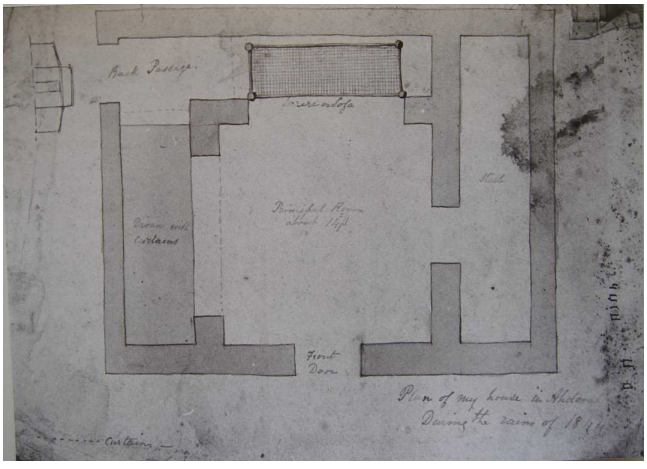


Fig. 26: Adwa: Blatta Sahlé's house (unpublished plan).

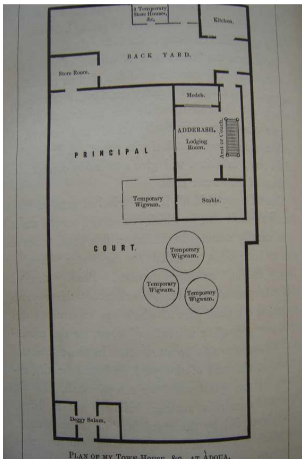


Fig. 27: Adwa: Blatta Sahlé's house and compound (published plan).

Instead of the sketch of the interior of his house the book reproduces an engraving (fig. 28), of "A Dinner Party at Adoua" (Parkyns, I, frontispiece), the original drawing of which has not been traced. This meal, to judge from the arrangement of the rooms - and the two horses in the stable - may well have been held in the artist's own house.

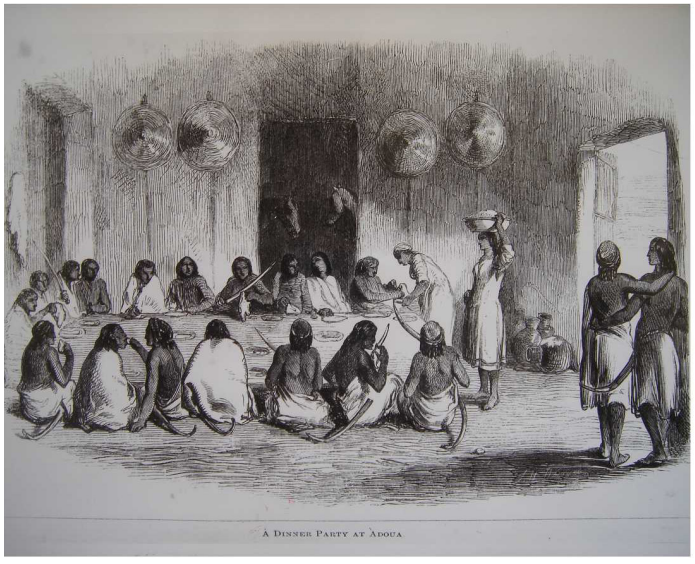


Fig. 28: Adwa: "A Dinner Party" (engraving).

The engraving illustrates Parkyns's description of a typical Ethiopian banquet in which the guests sit on the floor, which was spread for the occasion with fresh grass, while bread - doubtless enjera (i.e., pancake-like bread) - "was brought by servants in large baskets carried on their backs" (Parkyns, I, 385). Also depicted is the practice, adopted in the case of a distinguished personage or honoured guest (left) whereby, as Parkyns writes with humour:

"your two neighbours, one on each side, cram into your mouth...large and peppery proofs of their esteem so quickly one after another, that long before you can chew and swallow the one, you are obliged to make room for the next" (Parkyns, I, 387).

Another engraving (fig. 29), the original of which has likewise not been found, shows a diner (Parkyns, I, 388) using his sword - perhaps in the absence of a knife - to cut a chunk of raw meat from the shoulder of beef held for him by a servant. Parkyns, who describes this custom in his book, explains that the guest, as shown in the picture: "takes hold of the meat with his left hand, and with his sword or knife cuts a strip a foot or fifteen inches long from the part which appears the nicest and tenderest" (Parkyns, I, 388-9). The other guests, he adds, "help themselves in like manner". Conceding that the idea of eating raw meat might at first be "rather disagreeable to foreigners the author declares that "one gets accustomed to it", and that it would be "preferred to cooked meat by a man who from childhood had been accustomed to it" (Parkyns, I, 372).

Fig. 29 (Right): A diner cuts raw meat with sword (engraving).

The artist evidently produced at least one other household scene, for his book contains an engraving (fig. 30) of his "Kitchen-yard" (Parkyns, I, 362), the original of which has also not been traced.

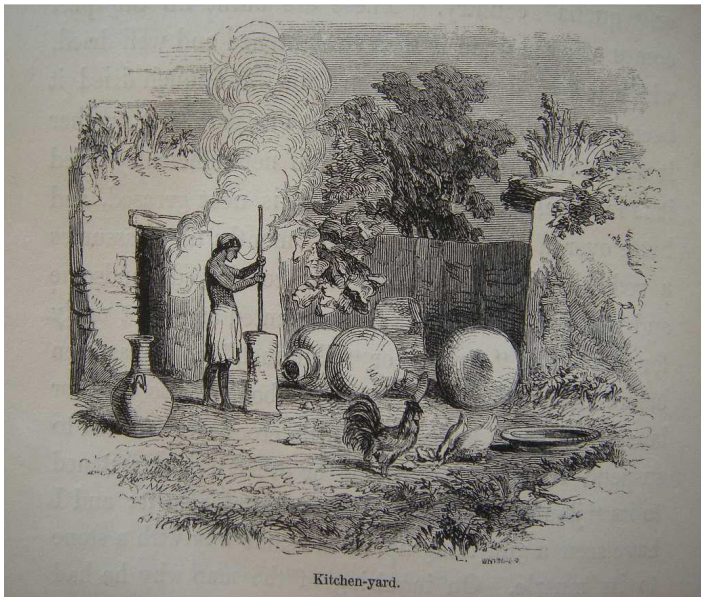


Fig. 30: ʿAdwa: kitchen-yard (engraving).

Parkyns also records, with diagrams, the existence of two kitchen utensils:

Firstly, the magogo, or oven (fig. 31; Parkyns, I, 364) which was an oblong structure, "three feet by four, and about a foot high". It was "constructed of clay and small stones, with a space in the interior for a fire". The whole was "covered with a circular slab [indicated as A] of a sort of pottery work...polished on the upper surface", and "slightly concave... to receive more easily the liquid dough for the bread". At the back was a hole [B] to allow smoke to escape, and in the front [C] another hole through which the fire was lighted, and which, being placed opposite the kitchen door, usually benefited from a draught. The whole contraption was covered with a clay cover [D] which exactly fitted the above-mentioned circular slab, thus retaining heat while excluding smoke and dirt.

Secondly, two grinding-stones (fig. 32; Parkyns, I, 366). These consisted of a "mouthan", or piece of hard stone, designated as A in the diagram, measuring two feet long by one foot wide. It was placed on a foundation of small stones mixed with clay, at about level with the hips of the person who used it, and sloping gradually downwards to allow grain placed in a hollow, marked as "c", to slide downwards as it was ground into flour, after which it would fall into a hole, designated as C. The other stone was the "mudid", or "grinder", a much smaller piece of stone, indicated as "b", which was kept constantly in motion, as it was pushed up and down to grind the grain into flour.

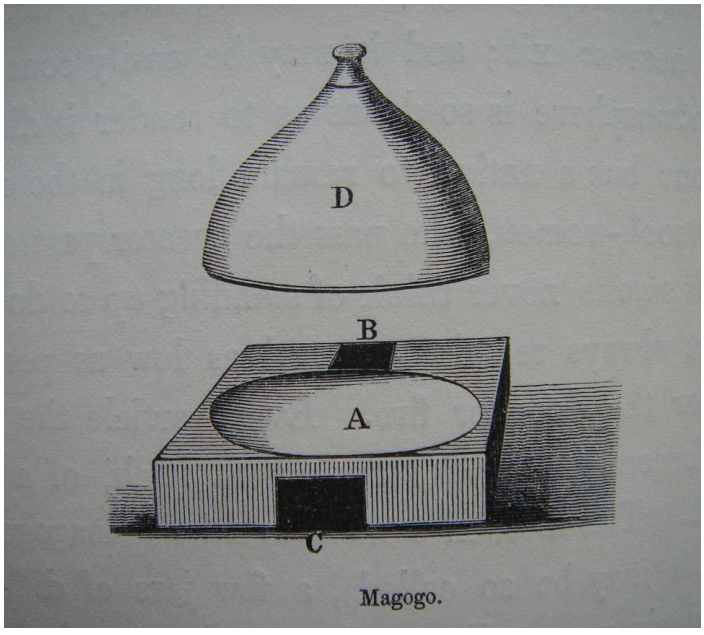


Fig. 31: Traditional oven (published diagram).

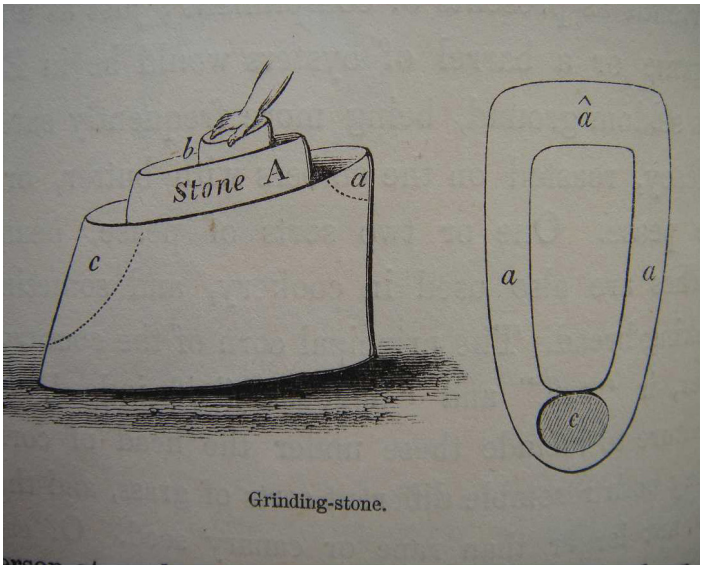


Fig. 32: Traditional grinding stone (published diagram).

3. Clothing: Warriors, and their Dress

During his residence in Tigray and adjacent country, Parkyns had many opportunities to see, draw and describe Ethiopian warriors, as well as their dress and arms.

As for clothing, the menfolk, he notes, wore "a pair of tight cotton inexpessibles, i.e., trousers, "a large belt, and a "quarry", or toga, both of the same material. The dress of the soldiers and the peasantry was "nearly alike", but that of the former was "of a more stylish cut" - as in Europe where "the 'citadini [i.e., town-dwellers] are distinguishable from the 'contadini' [i.e., peasants] by the cut of their cloth" (Parkyns, II, 5). Trousers were made of "a soft-textured but rather coarse cotton stuff, made in the country", and were of two sorts; one was called 'callis', the other 'coumta'". The former reached "half-way down the calf of the leg, the latter to about three or four inches above the knee". Both, if the wearer was a dandy, were skin-tight. Elaborating on the changes of fashion which he had himself witnessed - and even, he claims, helped to influence, he declares:

> "One year it may be the fashion to have the seam at the side of the 'calliss', below the knee, of about two inches only, before it branches off on the thigh; while another year it will be lengthened to six or eight inches. The last was the measure at which I left it. This, however, was considered so very ultra fashionable that, except Dejatch Shetou [Eshetu], myself, and one or two others, few dared attempt it. It was I and my friend Shetou who first introduced the habit of allowing the sword to swing perpendicularly from the side, instead of sticking out horizontally, like a dog's tail; as well as of wearing the belt over the hips, instead of round the waist and up to the armpits, as it was worn when I first arrived. These, with the increased

> length of the trousers, reaching as we wore them nearly to the ankle, and so tight below that it took an hour to draw them over the heel, gave a very 'fast' look, and were very much patronised by 'Young Abyssinia', though invariably decried by respectable elderly gentlemen" (Parkyns, II, 6-7).

Belts, Parkyns explains, varied from 15 to 60 yards in length, and were about a yard in width. The one he himself wore was about 35 yards long, while those of some of the great chiefs, who liked "giving themselves the trouble of turning round and round for a few minutes" every time they put them on or took them off, could be as much as 60 yard long (Parkyns, II, 7).

The "quarry" was made in three pieces of cotton cloth, each three feet broad by fifteen long, with a red stripe, five or six inches broad, at each end, carefully sewn together" (Parkyns, II, 8).

Great warriors, Parkyns explains, also wore lion or black panther skins, particularly on battle days, reviews or other pageants, as well as velvet mantles "often profusely decorated with stars, crosses, and other appropriate devices, in silver and silver-gilt" (Parkyns, II, 12).

Parkyns also wrote a detailed account of the principal Ethiopian weapons of his day: the spear, the sword, and the shield - all of which he was to depict. The Ethiopian spear in this period had not yet been superseded by the rifle, and "many" Ethiopians, he records, were still "tolerably expert" at throwing it. A good soldier could strike "with precision" at a target 30 or 50 metres away while two individuals were reputed to have hurled a lance over the tall standing obelisk at Aksum (Parkyns, II, 21) - which stands 24 metres high!

It was customary, Parkyns explains, for soldiers, especially horsemen, when in action, to carry two spears, one of which was thrown at a distance, while the other was retained for close encounters. Elaborating on this he adds:

> "The Abyssinians throw the lance with the hand raised as high as the shoulder; while the Turks seldom raise the elbow when casting the 'jerrid'. In using the heavier spear, it is often allowed to slide through the hand as far as the butt, though never to leave the hand altogether" (Parkyns, II, 22).

A "good blow" from a lance would, he avers, "sometimes pierce the toughest shield, and kill or wound the owner, if the shield be held square to receive the point". An experienced soldier, skilful in the use of his arms, would therefore "always endeavour to receive it as obliquely as possible", and would, if he could, "avoid the point altogether, allowing it to come very near, without actual contact, and then throwing it off by a quick movement of the shield, striking the lance's side instead of its point" (Parkyns, II, 22).

Parkyns provides a careful description of the spears then used in Ethiopia. They were, he says:

> "for the most part, very neatly made, and often even tastefully ornamented. Their usual length is 6 feet 6 inches, including the staff; of this, perhaps 2 feet are head, and 6 inches butt. They use, however, lighter ones, principally for throwing; and now and then one meets with spear-heads much longer in proportion than those I have described. I had one, of which the staff and the head were equal. Most good

> spears are four-cornered - either diamond-shaped (that is to say broader than they are deep) or perfectly square: the latter are, however, not so common as the former. In either case they have the sides grooved from the neck to within a few inches of the point; partly for lightness, and partly for ornament" (Parkyns, II, 20-1).

As for swords, the type then most general in Tigray was, Parkyns records, "an awkward-looking weapon. Some, if straight, would be nearly four feet long", and were "two-edged, and curved to a semi-circle, like a reaper's sickle". They were "principally used to strike the point downwards over the guard of the adversary", and for this the "long curved shape" was "admirably adapted".

Cheap European swords were also used, but, being apt to break, were not highly regarded. Most Ethiopians preferred those made of soft iron in their own country, which were liable to bend under stress, but, "in defence of this failing their owners say that, if a sword breaks, who is to mend it? - while, if it bends, you have only to sit on its and it gets straight again" (Parkyns, II, 19).

Shields were "round, and nearly a yard in diameter". They were usually "very neatly made out of buffalo's hide, and of the form most calculated to throw off a lance-point; namely, falling back gradually from the boss or centre (which protrudes) to the edges". At the centre, in the inside, was fixed a solid handle, by which the shield was held in the hand when fighting, or through which the arm was passed to the elbow, for convenience of carrying on a journey.

As for shield decoration:

> "Some [shields] have simply a narrow strip of lion's skin on each side of the boss, but crossing each other above and below it, the lower ends being allowed to hang at some length; others have a broad strip of mane down the centre of the shield, and hanging several inches below it... others to this add a lion's paw or tail, fastened on the left side of the mane, and often highly adorned with silver. The beautiful long black and white fur of a sort of monkey, called 'goreza', occasionally supplies the place of that of the nobler yet scarcely so beautiful animal. A shield, almost completely covered with plates and bosses of silver, is usually the mark of the chief of some district" (Parkyns, II, 17-18).

Several of Parkyns' drawings illustrate the above-described clothing and weapons of the Ethiopian soldiery of the day.

One of these pictures (fig. 33) depicts a group of some half a dozen horsemen, several with spears and shields. The artist drew these warriors somewhere in the highlands, as evident from the mountains in the background.

The above drawing was the basis of a simplified engraving (fig. 34; Parkyns, II, 31). Entitled "Abyssinian Horsemen", it depicts two stationary figures, primarily, it would appear, to show their dress and horses' accoutrements, with two other riders in the background (Parkyns, II, 32).

A second drawing (fig. 35) illustrates various aspects of Ethiopian life. The picture shows two standing warriors with spears and shields (right), together with sitting and riding priests (left). The figures in the picture were later reproduced in an engraving (fig. 36) from which the priests have, however, been omitted, and another seated personage substituted (Parkyns, opposite II, 7). The principal

warrior, according to a caption, is carrying Parkyn's own remarkably fine silver-decorated shield, while a woman is seated by a hut, left.

Fig. 33: Ethiopian horsemen (drawing).

Fig. 34: Horsemen (engraving).

Fig. 35: Ethiopians in different walks of life (drawing).

Fig. 36: "Abyssinian warriors" (engraving).

Another painting, of an Ethiopian soldier holding a spear, as if ready to hurl it, with a characteristic sword attached to his waist (fig. 37), does not appear in Parkyns' published work.

Cavalry themes are illustrated in two other drawings not reproduced on Life in Abyssinia. One, of a riding horseman (fig. 38), shows a stallion, centre, being put through its paces, with further cavalry and other soldiers with spears and shields in the rear and left foreground. The other drawing, (fig. 39), depicts a rider, possibly an Arab, holding a spear in a dramatic charge, with a tent, left.

Fig. 37: Warrior with spear and sword (painting).

Fig. 38: Horseman riding (drawing).

Another drawing, known only by an engraving (fig. 40), is entitled "Abyssinian Travelling" (Parkyns, II, frontispiece). It depicts a rider followed characteristically by his servants armed with shields and spears.

One further - fairly detailed - engraving (fig. 41; Parkyns, opposite II, 18) depicts a shield with lion's mane and tail, and a sword ornamented with silver plates.

Fig. 39: Horseman, possibly Arab, charging (drawing).

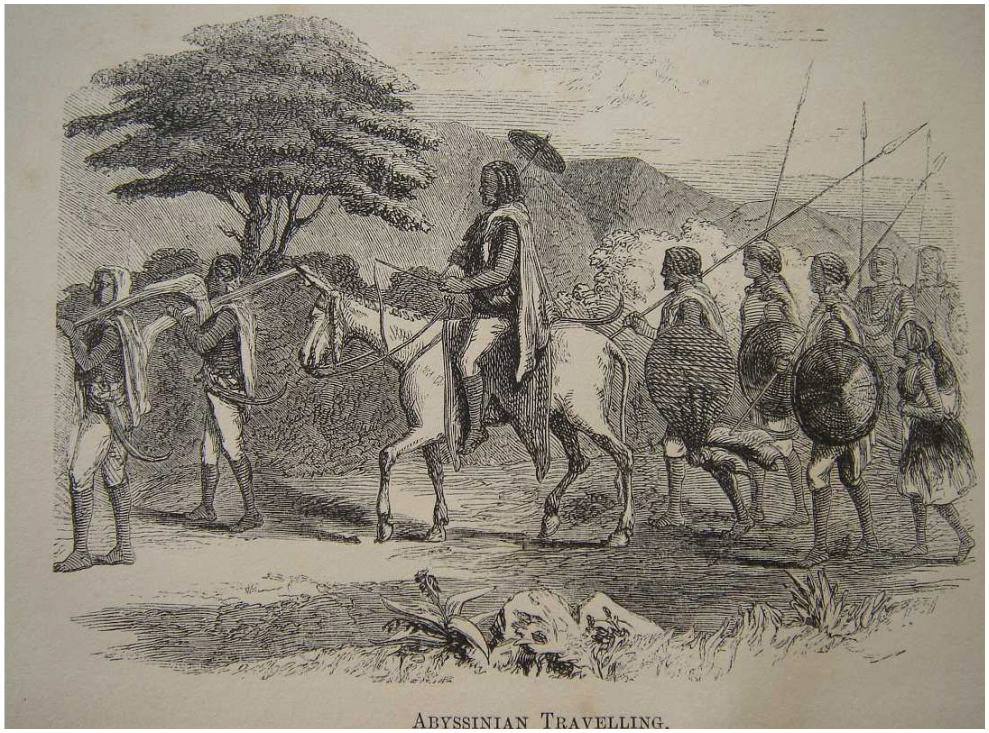


Fig. 40: Ethiopians traveling (engraving).

Fig. 41: An ornate shield (engraving).

14. Dancing Priests

Another interesting picture, which exists only as an engraving (fig. 42; Parkyns, opposite I, 317), gives the artist's impression of a group of five Ethiopian priests performing a characteristic religious dance - with a sixth, to the left, significantly, being served with beer. The picture was drawn at the end of a festival to please Parkyns, who had doubtless paid the dancers well for their help- they were so drunk, he affirms, that "few of them appeared to be in a state even to walk, much less to dance. I never shall forget", he adds, "their ludicrous efforts to appear graceful, at the same time staggering every step; while the expression of devotion they affected to assume was reduced to a languid smile and thickening eyelids, expressive of nothing but liquor. A hiccup or two occasionally interfered with the solemn words they were chanting; and the stately movements they had begun with, changed gradually to a merry tune, and by degrees the dance became a reel,

or rather a reeling movement, the words only which accompanied it remained solemn. At last an old priest (no doubt lost in fervour), suddenly forgetting the original chant, changed its words to those of a jovial ditty: don't you stop the liquor, and I will dance for ever" (Parkyns, I, 317).

Fig. 42: Dance of Ethiopian priests (engraving).

15. Women's Dress, Jewellery - and Tattooing

Besides describing the dress, and weapons, of the menfolk, Parkyns interested himself in women's clothing, jewellery, and tattooing, which were the subject of two further drawings, the originals of which have not been traced but were published as engravings.

In his account of the dress of a typical "fine lady" of Tigray, he states that she would wear a splendid "quarry", or toga, and a shirt of Manchester calico, "richly-embroidered in silk of divers colours and various patterns round the neck, and down the front, and on the cuffs", as well as trousers, also of calico, "rather loose, but getting gradually tighter at the ankle, where they are embroidered like a shirt" (Parkyns, I, 25).

Ethiopian women, he explains, often wore "a profusion of silver, in the shape of chains, bracelets, etc... a well-dressed lady will hang three or four sets of amulets about her neck, as well as her blue cord [i.e., matab, or symbol of Christianity], and a large flat silver case (purporting to contain a talisman, but more often than not some scented cotton), ornamented with a lot of little bells hanging to the bottom of it, and the whole suspended by four chains of the same metal. Three

pairs of massive silver and gilt bracelets are on her wrist, and a similar number of 'bangles' on her ankles; while over her insteps and to her heels are a quantity of silver ornaments, strung like beads on a silk cord. Her fingers (even the upper joints) are covered with plain rings, often alternatively of silver and silver-gilt; and a silver hair-pin, something like those now worn by English ladies completes her decoration" (Parkyns, II, 26-7).

The above account coincides closely, and may owe much, to a portrait of a woman (fig. 43), in traditional costume, an engraving of which (fig. 44) was reproduced as an engraving (Parkyns, opposite II, 250). The subject of this portrait, in the opinion of Parkyns' Ethiopian great-grandson Ambayé Gezaheyn, a resident in London, was none other than the artist's wife and Ambayé's grandmother *weyzero* Kassach. *Basha* John, or Yohannes, her son by Parkyns (fig. 45), was to play a major role in Ethiopian affairs in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Fig. 43: Woman's portrait, reportedly of the traveller's Ethiopian wife Kassach (drawing).

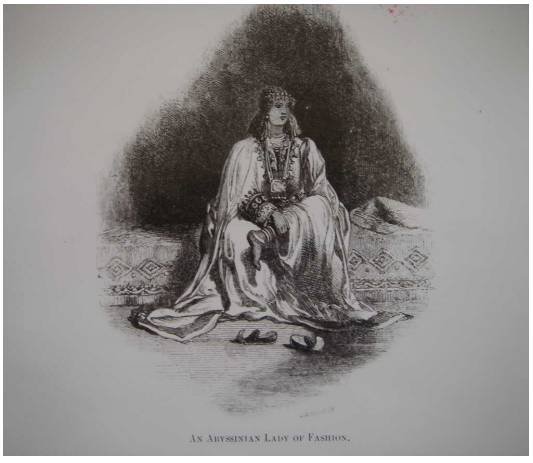


Fig. 44 (Right): "An Abyssinian lady of Fashionî (engraving).

The women of Tigray, and even some men, were also accustomed, according to Parkyns, to have themselves tattooed. The author records that it was not uncommon in his day for women to cover "nearly the whole of their bodies with stars, lines, and crosses, often rather tastefully arranged. I may well say", he adds, that "nearly the whole of their persons, for they mark the neck, shoulders, breasts, and arms, down to the fingers, which are enriched with little lines to imitate rings, nearly to the nails. The feet, ankles, and calves of the leg are similarly adorned, and even the gums are by some pricked entirely blue and the natural pink" (Parkyns, II, 29).

A good idea of this form of decoration - which has since fallen out of fashion - can be seen from another of the artist's drawings (fig. 46). It was the basis of an engraving (fig. 47; Parkyns, opposite, II, 29). A detail of women's hair-pins is also published in Parkyns's book (fig. 48; Parkyns, II, 26).

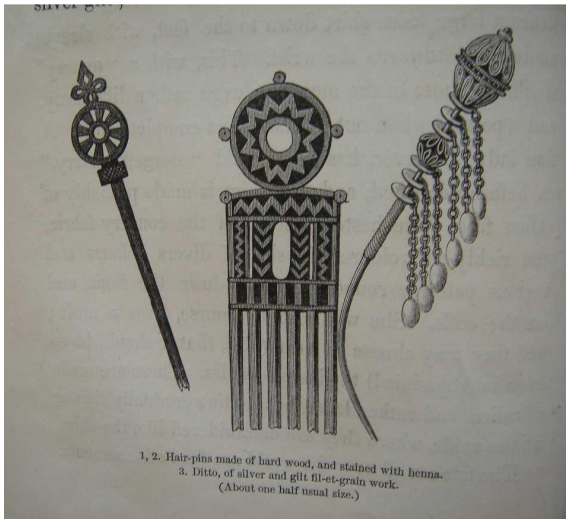


Fig. 45: Hair-pins (engraving).

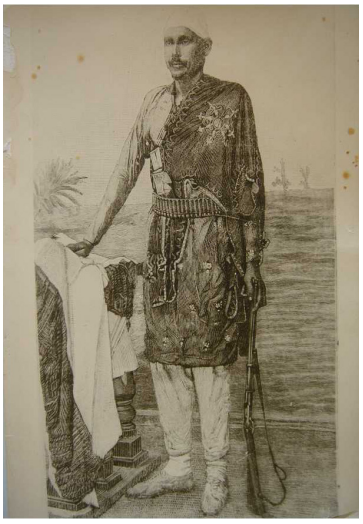


Fig. 46: Manfield Parkyn's Ethiopian son *basha* John.

Fig. 47: Tattooed woman (drawing).

Fig. 48: Tattooed woman (engraving).

16. Litigation

During his residence in Tigray, Parkyns had an opportunity to learn something about the traditional system of justice. Disputes were often decided, he says, with the aid of "a sort of self-taught counsellor... called a 'magwatch', but who is usually neither educated for his profession nor called to the bar, being indeed only an ordinary man, with an extraordinary gift of the gab. These men are sometimes employed by the disputants in serious cases, but not invariably, as everyone in the country is more or less gifted. If two persons have a dispute on any subject, however trifling, one of them getting heated, proposes to refer it to the chief, or 'dainya', as he is termed. A servant of his is sent for, whose business it is to conduct the disputants before his master. He first ties the corners of their garments together in a knot, holding which in his hand, he adjures them by the back of Oubi [i.e., *dejazmach* Webé, the ruler of Tigray], and by that of the chief, that neither of them should presume to speak while on their way" (Parkyns, II, 184).

The disputants, thus tied together, were then taken before the judge. One such case, depicted by Parkyns, forms the basis of a revealing engraving, in which we

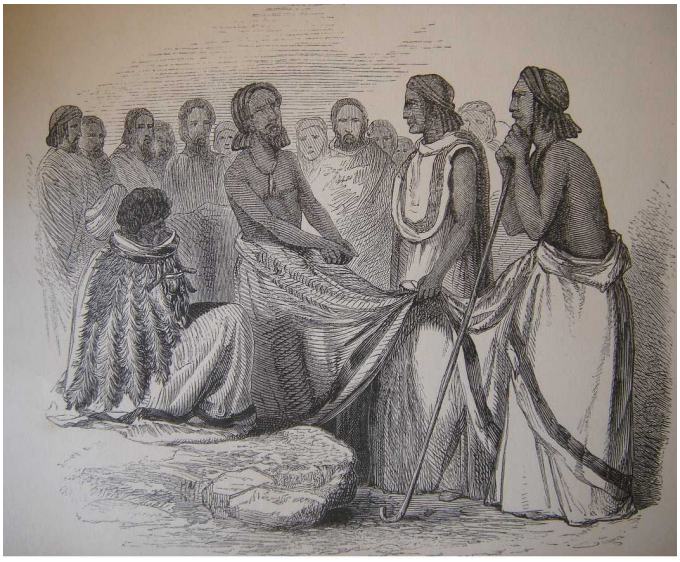


Fig. 49: Litigation (engraving).

see the judge proudly dressed, with the two disputants bare-breasted as supplicants (fig. 49; Parkyns, opposite II, 184).

17. Fording the Zarrima River – and Departure

On his departure from Tigray, Parkyns travelled westwards by way of Waldebba to the Sudan - on his way home to England. On reaching the Zarrima river, a tributary of the Tekkezé, he and his companions found it a "deep rapid river" (Parkyns, I, 331). Those who could not swim, the artist himself included, crossed with the aid of an inflated goat-skin and a faggot of wood.[3] Describing this procedure, which was then by no means uncommon 3, he says that the guide:

> "Having packed it, he proceeded to blow it full, and secured the mouth with a string; it was next tied to one end of the faggot, and the whole machine placed on the edge of a rock, the top of which was about nine inches under water. Two lads, who could not swim, and yet volunteered to accompany me, got down and held it, one on each side; I mounted straddle-legs, with the bag in front of me, the guide holding by a rope which was to lead us: he would not put the rope round his shoulder, as is customary, lest, as he afterwards explained, we coming to grief, should drag him with us. The other two swimmers followed behind to give us an additional push when necessary. In this order of procession we dropped into the stream, and away we went" (Parkyns, II, 334).

This incident is recorded in apparently the last of Parkyn's Ethiopian drawings (fig. 50), entitled "Swimming a torrent - the Zarrima". In it the artist is seen in the water (left-centre) astride the goatskin, and hence a good head and shoulders above his companions.

An engraving (fig. 51) based on this picture was subsequently published (Parkyns, opposite II, 334). It varies from then original drawing, in that Parkyns is made to appear much paler than the rest of the party, has been given a kind of turban lacking in the original, and is welcomed on the opposite bank by a standing figure not earlier depicted. He seems to have been inserted, perhaps by the engraver, to illustrate the author's observation that while crossing the river they "passed the man who had first swam across, and was awaiting our arrival at the spot where we had expected to land" (Parkyns, II, 334).

The remainder of Parkyns' known drawings deal with his passage through the Sudan[4], and are hence outside the scope of the present study.

3 On such river-crossings see R. Pankhurst, *An Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia* (London, 1961), p. 273-4. See also ilustration in *ibid*, *Economic History of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1968). p. 295

4 On the artist's subsequent plan to write on the Sudan see G.O. Whitehead, "Mansfield Parkyns and his Projected History of the Sudan", *Sudan Notes and Records* (1940), XXIII, Part 1, pp. 131-8.

Fig. 50: Crossing the Zarrima river (drawing).

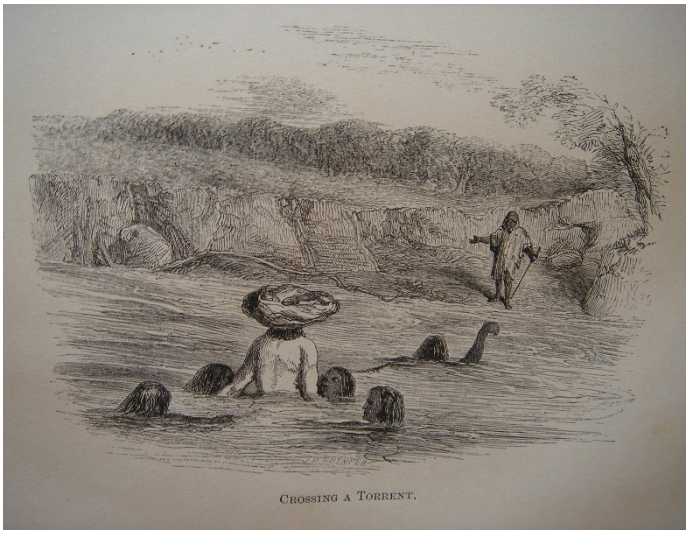


Fig. 50 (Left): Crossing the Zarrima river (drawing).