

Colour and Dye Recipes of Ethiopia

Patricia Irwin Tournerie



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In 1968 Patricia Tournerie started to collect information concerning traditional colour recipes used in Ethiopia, with the intention of providing students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Addis Ababa with a simple handbook on locally available materials for use in provincial schools. The students themselves - the majority of whom were already practising teachers and who came from all the Provinces were the first to be asked. In all, several hundreds of students, over a period of four or five years, were asked about dye plants. Most professed ignorance, but others were very helpful in bringing specimens and obtaining further information from their families when they went home for vacations. Priests, market traders and scholars were also interviewed about their knowledge of colour recipes. The University Herbarium was used to help identify plants and to check botanical names. Patricia left Ethiopia in 1973 and returned to England where she continued to carry out more painstaking, thorough research. Historical notes, where appropriate, were inserted in the recipes to give an indication of the long-standing use of a dye and at times they seem to show that a dye or its traditional use had already been forgotten. Chapters on the history of dyestuffs, painters and painting, and the traditional significance of the individual colours were written. In 1986 she published Colour and Dye Recipes of Ethiopia, still the most comprehensive source of information on traditional colours used in Ethiopia. Patricia died in June 2005. She would have been delighted and touched that her original privately printed volume is being reprinted. Even more she would have been heartened by the continued research and interest shown in the subject.

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