

GESELLSCHAFT ZUR FÖRDERUNG VON MUSEEN IN ÄTHIOPIEN E.V. (GFMÄ)

REPORT ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL FIELD TRIP TO ETHIOPIA

10th-20th OCTOBER 2016



Ethiopian-German Expedition to Wuqro

Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts

Orientabteilung

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1. Introduction

The *Ethiopian-German Expedition to Wuqro* is a cooperation project between the *Culture and Tourism Bureau of Tigray* (TCTB) (Mekelle), the *Orientabteilung* of the *Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* (DAI) (Berlin), and *Lehrstuhl für Semitische Philologie und Islamwissenschaft der Friedrich-Schiller-Universität* (Jena), and has been engaged in archaeological investigations of the Wuqro region since 2008.

The project has focused on investigating a number of early sites in the region of Addi Akaweh (Figure 1), which lies just southwest of Wuqro. This has included the excavation and reconstruction of a large religious complex at Meqaber Ga'ewa (Figure 2), the excavation of a contemporary elite residential building at Ziban Adi (Figure 3), and a preliminary survey of the wider landscape. The sites so far investigated by the project all date to the first half of the 1st millennium BC, demonstrate important links to the ancient pre-Aksumite capital at Yeha, and reveal evidence of Sabaeen influence from southwest Arabia.

During the course of these excavations, the project has continued to receive the generous support and cooperation of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V.*

In early 2016, the TCTB advised that the main church building of the village of Abuna Garima had suffered considerable subsidence, with large cracks appearing in a number of the walls. As a consequence, the local community was committed to rebuilding the church. This church is positioned atop a low mound on the southern edge of the village, which is situated on a flat hilltop on the edge of a plateau (Figure 1). The village lies between the site of Ziban Adi, some 250m to the south, and Meqaber Ga'ewa, some 700m to the north. It therefore occupies a prominent position in both the contemporary and ancient landscape. Moreover, stored inside the main church building are three pre-Aksumite stone incense burners (Figure 4), replete with Sabaeen inscriptions. The fragmented remains of a pre-Aksumite stone altar, also in a Sabaeen style, can also be seen incorporated into the walls of the church (Figure 5), whilst a further large fragment is also stored inside. These altar fragments are similar to the complete altar found at Meqaber Ga'ewa (Figure 6), which is now on display in the Wukro Museum.

With the generous support of a grant from the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V.*, a member of the project (S. Matthews) was able to travel to Ethiopia in order to undertake a preliminary survey of Abuna Garima, in order to search for vital archaeological evidence of past activity around the site of the church and discern suitable locations for the placement of excavation trenches, as well as ascertain the broader archaeological potential of the village as a focus for future investigation.

2. Survey

The purpose of the survey was to identify concentrations of surface finds, such as pottery, and traces of sub-surface structures, such as the remains of in situ walls. The intention was to undertake an intensive survey of the church compound, so as to help determine the best locations for the placement of test trenches around the main church building, and a preliminary survey of the public areas of the village, so as to ascertain its potential for further archaeological investigation.

On the basis of this survey, which was aided by Giday Gebreegziabher, a representative of the TCTB, four main areas of archaeological interest were identified (Figure 7). These included the remains of several ancient and possibly even prehistoric walls surviving around the village (Figures 8-9), as well as a possible Aksumite site positioned just outside the village. Detailed documentation of the

condition of the main church building was undertaken (Figure 10) and several suitable areas for the positioning of test trenches were identified. A tour of the church and these areas of archaeological was then provided to representatives of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V.*

As part of the survey, it was also possible to undertake an inspection of the site of Meqaber Ga'ewa, to ensure that the open air museum, which features a reconstruction of the temple that once stood on the site, and its shelter, were being maintained. A similar inspection of Ziban Adi was done as well, to ensure the backfilling of the trenches from the 2015 excavations on the site was intact.

3. Wukro Museum

After completion of the field survey, it was possible to provide assistance to representatives of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V* during the course of their visit to the Wukro Museum. Help was first provided to colleagues from the TCTB in reorganising the museum's magazine (Figure 11), used by several different archaeological missions working in the western Tigray region to store finds, and to ensure that it was secure. Assistance was then provided in maintaining some of the displays in the museum (Figure 12).

4. Site visit to Yeha

During the time of the field trip, excavation and conservation work was also being undertaken by a further joint Ethiopian-German mission at Yeha, some 80km to the north of Wuqro. With the kind support of the DAI project at Yeha it was possible to also visit the site for several days. This was particularly beneficial in providing an opportunity to observe the projects conservation teams (Figure 13), which will prove useful in the case of future archaeological investigations in the Wuqro region, and in facilitating closer relations between the two projects.

5. Ethiopia National Museum

Finally, upon returning to Addis Ababa, it was possible with the kind assistance of Mesganaw Gebremichael, a representative of the ARCCH, to gain access to the archives of the National Museum of Ethiopia to make a brief study of their pre-Aksumite finds (Figure 14).

6. Summary

Thanks to the generous support of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V.*, the undertaking of a preliminary survey of the village Abuna Garima provided essential archaeological and logistical information in order to plan test excavations in the area of the main church building. These investigations are currently planned for early 2017. The wider survey of the village has also significantly contributed to knowledge of the extent of archaeological remains in the Addi Akawah region.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the generous support of the *Gesellschaft zur Förderung von Museen in Äthiopien e.V.*, and in particular the personal assistance of Kerstin Volker-Saad, Konrad Melchers and Nina Melchers, in the undertaking of this field trip. The additional trip to Yeha would not have been possible without the kind assistance of Iris Gerlach and colleagues from the DAI project at Yeha. Pawel Wolf and Saskia Büchner were also instrumental in encouraging and helping to organise the trip. We were also kindly assisted by colleagues from both the TCTB and ARCCH.

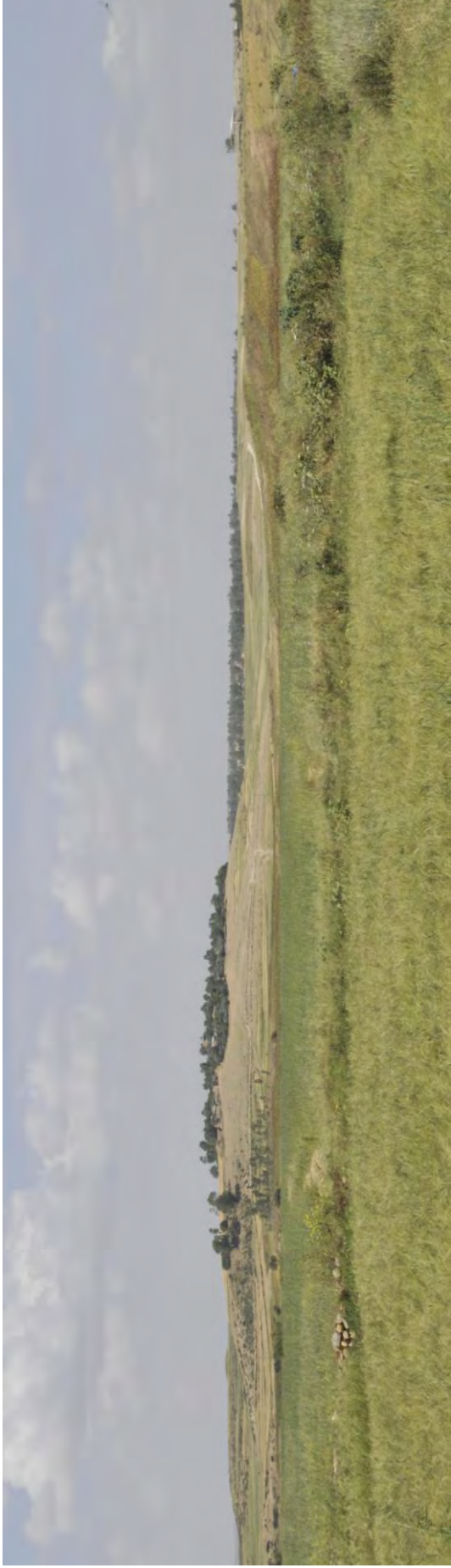


Figure 1: the landscape of Addi Akawah.



Figure 2: the pre-Aksumite religious complex at Meqaber Ga'ewa, with its temple dedicated to the Sabaean deity Almaqah, now reconstructed as an open air museum with protective shelter.



Figure 3: the pre-Aksumite residential building at Ziban Adi, during excavation in 2015.



Figure 4: the pre-Aksumite Sabaean stone incense burners. currently stored inside the main church building at Abuna Garima.



Figure 5 remains of a pre-Aksumite Sabaean altar, now incorporated into the window of the west wall of the main church building at Abuna Garima.



Figure 6: the pre-Aksumite Sabaeen altar from Meqaber Ga'ewa, now on display in the Wukro Museum.

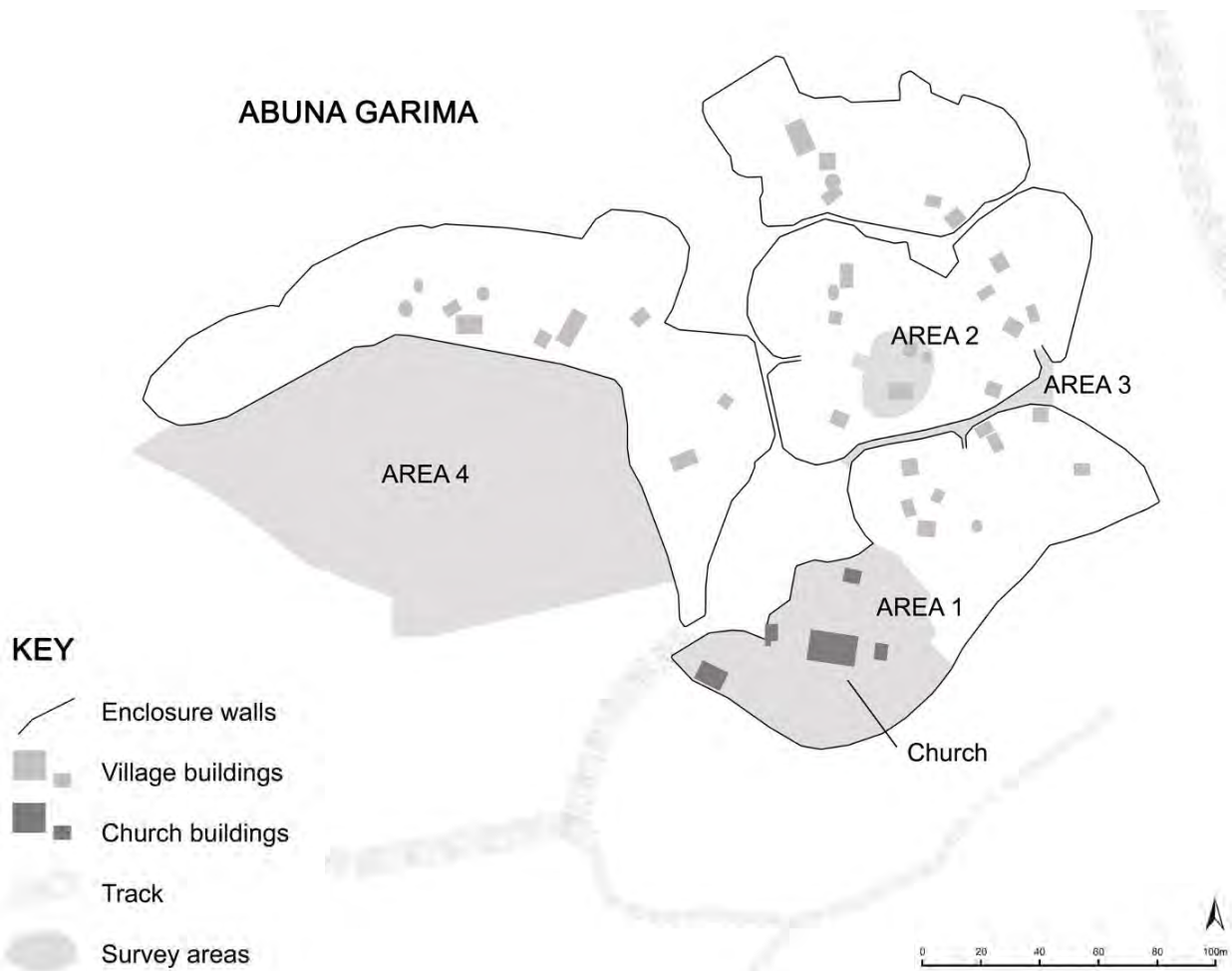


Figure 7: map of Abuna Garima, showing areas of archaeological significance



Figure 8: the structural remains of the corner of a building identified in Area 3 of the survey of Abuna Garima.



Figure 9: the remains of one of three identical stone walls identified in Area 3 of the survey of Abuna Garima.



Figure 10: the main church building of Abuna Garima.



Figure 11: reorganising the archaeology magazine and advising on its use at the Wukro Museum.



Figure 12: helping to restore some of the displays in the Wukro Museum.



Figure 13: villagers from Yeha employed to assist with the conservation work on the Grat Be'al Gebri in Yeha.



Figure 14: artefacts of the pre-Aksumite period in the archive of the National Museum of Ethiopia in Addis Ababa.