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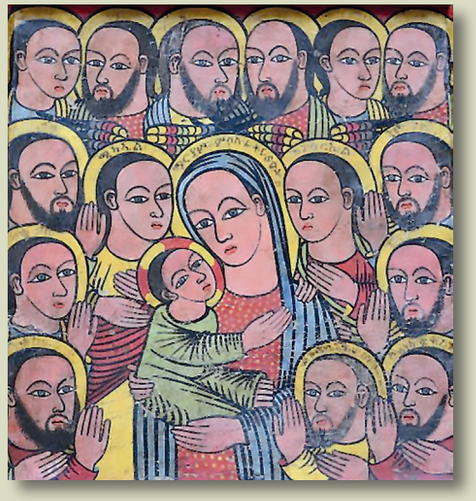

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Cover image: Master of the Amber-Spotted Tunic (mid-fifteenth century), *The Virgin and Child with thirteen Apostles*, tempera on gesso primed wood, 36 by 34 cm (private collection, by courtesy; photo J. Gnisci).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN THE AREA OF AKSUM: L. SEGLAMEN

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Abstract

Between 2010 and 2016 the Italian Archaeological Expedition at Aksum of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" has conducted seven field seasons of investigations at the modern village of Seglamen as part of a broader project aimed at investigating a 100 sq km transect along the May Negus/Haselo river valley. The area has been selected as the river valley represented an important traditional and perhaps also ancient exchange route linking Aksum, and in general the northern Ethiopian highlands, to the Tekeze river in the south-west and, through this, to the internal regions of the northern Horn of Africa. Research activities carried out so far included surface survey, archaeological excavations and geophysical prospection. An overview of the results of such activities are presented in this paper.

Keywords

Aksum – Seglamen - Archaeology of Tigray - Pre-Aksumite period - Aksumite culture.

Introduction

From 2010 to 2016 the Italian Archaeological Expedition at Aksum, Central Tigray, northern Ethiopia, of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" (UNO), Naples, Italy, has conducted seven field seasons of investigations at the modern village of Seglamen.

Research at Seglamen are part of a broader project aimed at investigating a 100 sq km transect along the May Negus/Haselo river valley from the southwestern periphery of Aksum to Adet, with the areas around the centres of Medog^{w}e, Seglamen and Merina, and the southernmost sector of the

study-area as major foci of investigation (Fig. 1). The area has been selected as the May Negus/Haselo river valley represented an important traditional and perhaps also ancient exchange route linking Aksum, and in general the northern Ethiopian highlands, to the Tekeze river in the south-west and, through this, to the internal regions of the northern Horn of Africa (Sernicola, Phillipson 2011: 201; Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 112).[1]

Major goals of the project are: 1) to provide a long-term reconstruction of the population history and cultural/environmental interaction dynamics in this region, and 2) to provide a detailed archaeological map of this area for the cultural heritage management of Central Tigray, to complement the assessment of the archaeological area of Aksum implemented between 2000 and 2008 (Fattovich, Takla Hagos 2006, technical report; Sernicola *et al.* in preparation).[2]

The project is conducted in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management of Aksum University (AU) on the basis of a formal agreement launched in 2009 and aimed at conducting joint research programs and at providing undergraduate students in archaeology with a theoretical and practical training in archaeological survey, excavation procedures and laboratory analysis.[3]

[1] The expedition has been directed by Rodolfo Fattovich between 2010 and 2013, by Andrea Manzo and Luisa Sernicola from 2014 onward.

[2] The project is funded by the Italian Ministery of Foreign Affairs, the University of Naples "L'Orientale", and the ISMEO. Private sponsors – Poliass Srl Marine & General, Naples, Studio Tecnico Navale Romano, Naples, Cambiaso Risso Insurance Brokers, Naples – also contributed.

[3] Members of the expeditions between 2010 and 2016 were: Rodolfo Fattovich, archaeologist and research director, Luisa Sernicola, archaeologist and GIS analyst, Michela Gaudiello, ceramic analyst, Marco Barbarino, surface surveyor, Diego Capra, assistant archaeologist, Gabriella Giovannone, archaeologist and ceramic analyst, Eleonora Minucci, physical anthropologist (UNO, Italy); Laurel Phillipson, lithic analyst (United Kingdom); Bar Kribus, assistant archaeologist (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel); Rachel Moy, ceramic analyst (Universiyt of California Los Angeles, USA); Assefa Getaneh and Tigistu Haile, geophysicists (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia); Alemseged Beldados, paleoethnobotanist (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia).

In July/August 2014, Helina Solomon Woldekyros, archaeozoologist (Washington University in Saint Louis, USA), examined part of the faunal remains collected during the first four seasons of excavations. In 2011, Alfredo Carannante (International Research Institute for Archaeology and Ethnology, Italy) conducted the analysis for the identification of malacolog-

Research activities carried out so far included surface survey, archaeological excavations and geophysical prospection.[4] An overview of the results of such activities will be presented in this paper.[5]

Archaeological Survey

Archaeological surveys have been conducted in the areas of Seglamen, Medog^{w}e, Merina, and in the region between Merina and Adet.

Seglamen

The modern village of Seglamen is located on a remarkably flat terrace at the confluence of Haselo and May Negus rivers, about 10 to 15 kms to the south-west of Aksum, and less than 1 km to the east of the Aksum-Adet road (Fig. 2).

Six archaeological sites have been recorded in this area (SG 1 ~ SG 6) (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 123-24; Sernicola 2014: 480; 2015: 267; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 224). Most of them (SG 2, 3, 4, and 6) are small scatter of eroded ceramics and lithics; two, SG 1 and SG 5, have bigger dimensions and higher concentrations of artifacts.

ical finds. Between 2011 and 2015, Alberto De Bonis carried on archaeometric study on some clay objects and ceramics fragments from site SG 1 in the framework of a collaboration program between University of Naples "L'Orientale" and University of Naples "Federico II".

[4] The author is extremely grateful to: Rodolfo Fattovich and Andrea Manzo, directors of the project, for allowing the publication of this overview; all the members of the first seven seasons of fieldwork for their contribution to the research; all Ethiopian authorities from federal to regional level and staff members of Aksum University for their support and cooperation; all the employed assistants, labourers, students and helpful landowners involved in the field.

[5] This paper provides a comprehensive report of the first seven years (2010-2016) of archaeological investigations conducted at the site of Seglamen, south-west of Aksum. As reflected in the title, it intends to continue the habit of publishing the results of the archaeological investigations conducted at Aksum and its environs by the University of Naples "L'Orientale" in the prestigious issues of the *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*. This tradition, established in 1987 by Lanfranco Ricci (University of Rome "La Sapienza"), who directed the first archaeological researches at Seglamen, has been maintained by Rodolfo Fattovich, co-director with Kathryn A. Bard of the ten-year UNO-BU research project at Beta Giyorgis from 1993 to 2003. It is to the memory of Rodolfo Fattovich, who has passed away recently, that this article, which benefitted of his last comments and suggestions, is dedicated.

SG 1 is located about 11 Km to the south-west of Aksum, about 700 m to the east of the road leading to Adet. The site extends for about 7 hectares at the edge of the western cliff of the Negus river gorge, and encompasses the areas of Amda Tsion and Mogareb, in the eastern sector of the village, where concentrations of pre-Aksumite[6] ceramics (Fattovich 1980), lithics and architectural elements are visible on surface. Intra-site survey conducted at twenty-six *loci* dispersed over the whole area of the site allowed to delimit its extension and to locate different activity areas including the settlement, the cemetery, and some specialized activity areas (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 124-38). At site SG 1 concentrated most of the excavations activities carried out in these years; the results will be presented in the following section.

SG 5 is a large archaeological site covering an area of about 5 hectares situated in the area of Addi Holahul, in the south-eastern part of the village of Seglamen, along the southern edge of the Haselo river, just opposite to site SG 1 (Sernicola 2014: 480; 2015: 267; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 224). The site is characterised by a continuous, dense surface scatter of lithics testifying of a development in stone tools technology; intriguing evidence of modern lithic production is observed in contemporary houses situated within the surveyed area. Archaeological materials recorded at the site consist almost completely of knapped lithics including mostly chert pre-cores, cores, flakes and fragments, but quartz and chalcedony are also attested.

Ceramic is rare and consists of very small and eroded fragments of *Black Fine Ware* (BFW), *Black Topped Red Polished Coarse Ware* (BTRPCW), *Red Orange Coarse Ware* (ROCW) and *Gray Coarse Ware* (GCW).[7] Decorations are incised horizontal lines and notches along the rim. Typological analysis point to a dating to the pre-Aksumite period. The possible contemporaneity of sites SG 1 and SG 5, and their proximity, may suggest that SG 5 was a quarry site exploited by the people living at SG 1 to obtain the materi-

[6] In the absence of a defined alternative shared by the scientific community, in this article the lower-case term pre-Aksumite is used to refer to the chronological interval from ca. 900 to 360 BC although there is general agreement among scholars on its inadequacy (Curtis 2009: 347; Fattovich 2012; Phillipson 2009; Schmidt 2009: 309) for both semantic and historical reasons.

[7] For a detailed description of the fabrics see Fattovich *et al.* (2012: 117-20) and also Gaudiello (2014: 135-45).

als necessary for the production of lithic tools subsequently used at the village. Of course, these are very preliminary interpretations; further investigations including systematic survey and, possibly, test excavations may help to define the general extension and organization of the site, and to obtain information for a more precise chronological/cultural attribution.

Finally, two rectangular sandstone slabs carved but not smoothed, measuring about 1.9 m x 0.3 m x 0.15 m, have been recorded at the entrance of the church of Beta Medhane Alem to the south-west of site SG 1. According to the priest, the slabs were carried there from the area of Amda Tsion at SG 1. No ceramics or other ancient materials have been recorded within the church compound or in its vicinity. Starting from the church, a systematic survey was conducted over an area of about 2.5 sq km along the terrace to the west of May Negus to record possible sites, but no evidence of ancient human activities or occupation has been found in the area.

Medog^{w}e

The small village of Medog^{w}e is located about 3 km to the north-east of Seglamen, approximately 6 km south-west of Aksum, east of the main street leading from Aksum to Adet, in an area characterised by farmlands and eroded hills with sporadic eucalyptus trees along the river banks and few acacia trees. In this area, the presence of an ancient cemetery was recorded in the Fifties by Gezau Hailemaryam (1955: 50-51) and de Contenson (1961: 15-23). On the basis of the archaeological materials described by these scholars, the site was tentatively dated to the Proto-Aksumite (ca. 400 - 50 BC) and Early/Classic Aksumite (ca. 50 BC - AD 350) phases, but the site has never been systematically investigated so far.

Following the general description and the sketches of the area provided by de Contenson, the cemetery was identified in 2012 by members of the expedition of the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and recorded as MDG 1 (Sernicola 2014: 480-81). It is located on top of a small terraced hill along the eastern edge of the Haselo river, and is characterised by a high quantity of ceramics scattered on surface and eroded down along the hillslopes. Broken and displaced of twenty-two syenite stelae, originally marking the burial areas, are also scattered on surface; some of them have been heavily damaged or completely destroyed by modern stone-quarrying activities.

Ceramics include fragments of red, orange and pink coarse and fine ware, and one fragment of *Black Topped Red Coarse Ware* (BTRCW). Main forms are: cups, beakers and bowls with rounded base, straight or slightly everted profile, rounded or slightly flaring rim; pots with rounded base with ring-foot, straight or slightly everted profile, flattened or rounded rim; jars with rounded or flattened base, globular body and everted rim; bottles with rounded base, globular body, short cylindrical neck, rounded rim and vertical handle between the neck and the shoulder; circular basins with slightly everted profile, flattened rim and decorated foot-rest; quadrangular basins; fragments of strainer vessels. Decorations are incised, impressed, molded and painted. Incisions include: one or more horizontal lines running below the rim, lines and triangles on flattened rim, circles on the internal and external surface of bases of open cups, various patterns of oblique and vertical lines on foot-rests. Impressions include dots, circles and notches combined in various patterns on the internal and external surface of open cups. Molded decoration mainly consists of a single short, horizontal strip below the shoulder of globular bottles or below the rim of cups, beakers and bowls. White painted decoration is present only on the internal surface of the fragment of a quadrangular basin.

The observed and recorded ceramics confirm the attribution of the site to the Proto-Aksumite (ca. 400 - 50 BC) and Early/Classic Aksumite (ca. 50 BC - AD 350) phases, and suggest an use of the area also during the Middle Aksumite phase (ca. AD 350 - 550); scanty evidence of pre-Aksumite materials has been also noticed.

Further surveys conducted in the area between 2013 and 2015 allowed to identify the settlement which was associated to the cemetery (Sernicola 2015: 267-68; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 223-24, 2017: 160). There, abundant evidence of collapsed structures is visible on surface, together with lithics, ceramics, beads and a few bricks and grindstones. A copper alloy coin from an anonymous king, dateable to the 5th century AD has been found together with abundant tokens. The ceramics collected during the survey allow to date the settlement from the Proto- to the Middle Aksumite periods (ca. 400 BC - AD 550); evidence of pre-Aksumite materials has been detected at few loci.

Finally, a small test excavation (1 x 1 m) has been conducted at a lithic workshop identified in 2014 (Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 224,

2017: 160). This yielded abundance of yellow chert cores, flakes and fragments associated with few Aksumite ceramics. The detailed study conducted on these materials by Diego Capra as part of his MA dissertation provided significant information on the manufacturing process and suggested intriguing hypothesis on the possibility that arrow or spear points were intensively produced at this workshop (Capra 2015: 171-88, 2016).

Merina/Adet

Systematic archaeological surveys have been conducted between 2010 and 2016 in the southern sector of the study-area, between the modern villages of Adet and Merina. On the whole, thirty-eight sites (AD 1 ~ 32, MER 1, MER 2, MR 2016/01 ~ MR 2016/06) have been detected and documented (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 203-07; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 224, 2017: 160-61).

Almost all sites are characterised exclusively by lithic artefacts, with no evidence of constructed structures or ceramics; only nine of them show traces of stone buildings and ceramics.

Ceramics include typical Aksumite specimens (red and orange medium to coarse wares jars, large basins with internal deep grooves, cups and bowls) and possible local imitations, as suggested by the occurrence of fragments of gray ware with internal and external orange slipping. Evidence of ceramics ascribable to the so-called 'Pre-Aksumite culture' has been recorded at few sites (1 fragment of a *Black Topped Red Ware* bowl or cup, 1 fragment of a possible bowl or pot with a molded horizontal short strip, 1 fragment of *Black Polished Fine Ware* with incised triangles).

Typological analysis conducted on the materials suggest that the sites recorded in this southern area cover a time period ranging from at least the mid-1st millennium BC to the late 1st millennium AD.

Results from the survey in this area provide evidence of a settlement pattern characterised by large temporary settlements probably occupied seasonally by pastoral groups and very few and small permanent dwellings attesting the penetration of the Aksumite polity in this area since at least the mid-1st millennium AD. Future research will provide additional information.

Excavations

Between 2010 and 2016, archaeological excavations concentrated at site SG 1.

The possible occurrence in the area of an archaeological site dating back to the 1st half of the 1st millennium BC was hypothesized in the early Seventies, when a royal inscription (RIÉ 1) in monumental South-Arabic, commemorating the re-erection or restoration of a temple dedicated to the god *HBS*, was found by local farmers at Amda Tsion, in the southeastern sector of the modern village (Bernand, Drewes and Schneider 1991, I: 68, II: pl. 1; Schneider 1976: 81-89). Preliminary excavations aimed at detecting archaeological remains in the area were carried out in 1974 by the University of Rome "La Sapienza", under the direction of Lanfranco Ricci (Ricci, Fattovich 1987). These brought to the light a large Post-Aksumite (ca. AD 800/850-1300) rural house, built on earlier foundations. The actual location of the pre-Aksumite settlement was first suggested in 2006, during the systematic survey of Aksum and its vicinities conducted in the framework of the World Bank *Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project* (Fattovich, Takla Hagos 2006: 24-26; Sernicola *et al.* in preparation), and then confirmed in 2009, after a visit to the site by members of the UNO expedition and representatives from Aksum University and the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Central Zone, Aksum.

Surface reconnaissance conducted at SG 1 in 2010 allowed to assess its dimension, spatial organization and diachronic evolution (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 124-38). On the basis of the surface distribution of archaeological materials, the site resulted to extend over an area of about 7 hectares in the easternmost sector of the modern village, overlooking the river gorge. It encompassed the present areas of Amda Tsion and Mogareb. Density, typology and extension of visible artefacts suggested the occurrence of three major functional areas within the site: a) the settlement, located at Amda Tsion, in the eastern sector of the site, b) a less intensively occupied area, to the west, where specialised activity areas were mainly located, and c) the cemetery, at Mogareb, to the north-west of the settlement.

This preliminary interpretation, based on surface evidence, has been confirmed by archaeological excavations which have been carried out at both the areas of Amda Tsion and Mogareb providing significant information on

the economic and cultural scenario of this region during the 1st millennium BC.

The settlement

Ten 10 x 10 m excavation units have been investigated between 2010 and 2016 in the area of Amda Tsion. These are SEG I, SEG II, SEG V, SEG VI, SEG VIII, SEG IX, SEG X, SEG XII, SEG XIII, and SEG XV.

SEG II, V, VI, VIII, IX, X, XII, XIII (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 148-85; Sernicola 2014: 482-83, 2015: 267; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 225; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 345-52) are adjacent units whose excavation brought to the light the remains of overlapping stone structures belonging to three major architectural phases, all ascribable to the pre-Aksumite period on the basis of ceramics and other materials. These have been classified as Phase I, II, and III from the bottom to the top of the sequence.

Phase I corresponds to the most ancient architectural phase so far documented in the area (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 148-56; Sernicola 2014: 482-83, 2015: 268; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 345-52) (Fig. 3). It is represented by the remains of a rectangular building, 11.50 x 13 m, north-north-east south-south-west oriented, comprising four quadrangular rooms of various sizes arranged in an L shape, with three rooms (Rooms 1, 2, and 3) located one after the other along the north-west south-east axis and the fourth one (Room 4) immediately to the west of the northernmost one. A fifth, rectangular, stone paved living area (Room 5) was located south of Room 4 and west of Rooms 1 and 2. This was accessed by a stepped threshold located on its western side; traces of a possible southern access have been also recorded. Two steps and a stone bench abutted the external face of the wall delimiting Rooms 1 and 2 to the west. The steps gave access to the central room (Room 1) which was connected to the northern one (Room 3) by a threshold. In both Rooms 1 and 3 a big stone, with flattened top and base, was placed on the living floor, probably serving as a support for a pole holding the roof or as a base for large objects such as grindstones or jars. Room 2, the southernmost one, was characterised by an L-shaped stone bench on top of which complete and almost complete pots were preserved. Traces of a stone fence probably delimiting an open-air space to the east of

the building were also recorded. Finally, the remains of a hearth associated to an external living floor and a dump have been recorded about 5 m to the east of the building; these may be related to the exposed structure or to a different one not yet recorded. Walls of the building of Phase I, whose average width measures 0.80 m, were directly built on the bedrock and made of roughly dressed facing stones in a weak mud mortar and rubble infill.

Ceramics associated with this phase consist of fragments of jars, jugs, open bowls, pots, cups and flasks. Decorations are very simple and include incised horizontal, wavy or zag-zig lines almost exclusively made by using a single-point tool; impressed and molded decorations are also present. Predominant fabrics are *Red Polished Fine Ware* (RPFW), *Light Brown Ware* (LBW), *Pink Ware* (PW), *Dark Red Ware* (DRW) and *Light Red Polished Fine Ware* (LRPFW); black topped wares are also present. *Red Orange Fine Ware* (ROFW), which will become predominant in the later phases, is almost completely absent here (Gaudiello 2014: 69-70, 74-75, 83-84). Other materials recorded at this building are grindstones, topstones, handstones and hammerstones, knapped lithics and a variety of other stone tools, fragmented and complete metal objects, stone, bone and glass paste ornaments (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 171-85; Sernicola 2014: 485-90, 2015: 270-71; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 405-07, 413-15; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 227-30). Radiocarbon dating from samples collected in the living floor of this building points to 2740 ± 30 BP [(93.2 %) 940 - 810 BC; (22%) 970 - 950 BC].[8]

Archaeological materials and the general layout of the structure suggest that domestic activities were mainly performed at this building. Nevertheless, an intriguing evidence related to the functional interpretation of the structure is represented by the occurrence of a deposit in the foundation levels of Room 1 (Fig. 4) consisting of two large pots, one of them containing a small ceramic jar, three fragments of a single copper alloy spatula and few bones (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 207, 223; Sernicola 2014: 417, 426).

A fragment of a clay figurine representing a woman holding her left breast with one hand, collected within the soil forming the lower part of the living floor of Room 5, might represent a further evidence in this sense although a different meaning can't be excluded (Sernicola 2014: 484). The

[8] Analysis have been provided by Beta Analytic Inc., Miami (FL).

presence of foundation deposits has never been recorded at any of the pre-Aksumite buildings so far investigated; on the contrary it is widespread in Egypt and Nubia from the 3rd millennium BC, where it is always associated with the foundation of temples or shrines (see among others Bonnet 1990: 57; Wilkinson 2000: 38-39). This might suggest that the structure, although intended for the performance of domestic activities, was part of a wider ritual complex present in the area, or may indicate a so far never attested ritual practice related to the foundation of a secular building (Sernicola 2014: 494).

Phase II is a poorly represented but extremely interesting architectural phase (Fig. 5). Its evidence include a few walls, two semicircular hearths and the remains of a circular furnace as well as part of a circular wall associated with an internal stone bench and to an internal and external living floor (Fattovich *et al*. 2012: 148-57; Sernicola 2014: 482-83, 2015: 268; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 345-52; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 227). These have been interpreted as part of a circular dwelling whose general dimension was of about 7 m in diameter. If confirmed by future investigations, this will be the first evidence of the occurrence of round houses in this region in the 1st millennium BC, so far only suggested by the clay models from late pre-Aksumite levels at the temple of Hawlti (de Contenson 1963: 41-52).

Major changes occur also in the ceramics of this phase. Ceramics assemblages include bowls, cups, bottles, jars and jugs. The decoration techniques include impression, molding and incision, as in the previous phase, incisions are very simple, almost exclusively made by using a single-point tool. *Black Topped Red Polished Fine Ware* (BTRPFW) and *Red Orange Fine Ware* are the dominant fabrics, followed by *Black Polished Fine Ware* (BPFW) and *Reddish Brown Polished Ware* (RBrPW) (Gaudiello, 2014: 66-68, 76-77). A dating to the 8th-7th century BC can be tentatively suggested for this phase.

After four seasons of systematic excavations the complete layout and size of the structure of Phase III have been defined (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 148-57; Sernicola 2014: 483, 2015: 268; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 345-52; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 225). This resulted to be a rectangular building, 15 x 17 m in size, divided into three sections by two internal north-east/south-west oriented walls (Fig. 6). Each section is then sub-divided by north-west/south-east walls into smaller rooms for a total of 10 chambers. The northern and southern sections are not symmetrical

in their internal division, and the two rooms in the central section have unequal length and width. In the north-eastern corner of the building, a square feature, 1.44 m x 1.44 m in size, made of roughly tabular stones and a soil mortar, was erected in the centre of the room on top of a north-east/south-west foundation wall, for supporting a pillar sustaining the roof or, most likely, a stairway giving access to an upper storey as documented in several of the Aksumite buildings recorded at Aksum (Anfray 2012; Littmann, Krencker, von Lüpke 1913, II: 107-21; Phillipson 1997: 93-122). The construction technique represented in this phase employed dressed facing stones laid with roughly clear courses in a mud mortar and a rubble infill. A large cobbled surface with several fragments of schist slabs, probably representing an external yard, has been recorded to the north and to the east of the structure, abutting the external faces of the walls. Unfortunately, the whole structure is very badly preserved and only its foundations are visible; the remains of a stone platform forming the lower part of the living floor, made of small, roughly dressed stones, have been recorded in all rooms.

The most represented ceramic shapes for this phase are bowls and jars. Typical decoration includes the combination of incised and impressed motifs, as well as incised or combed horizontal, wavy and zig-zaging patterns of lines. Dominant fabrics are black topped wares, *Red Orange Fine Ware* (ROFW), followed by *Red Polished Fine Ware* (RPFW) and *Black Polished Fine Ware* (BPFW) (Gaudiello 2014: 65-67, 78, 82). These fabrics are typical of the later phases of the 'Pre-Aksumite' period at Yeha (Fattovich 1980), thence, a dating to the 500/400 BC can be preliminarly proposed for this building. Other materials include grindstones, topstones, handstones and hammerstones, chert, knapped lithics and a variety of other stone tools, fragmented and complete metal objects, stone, bone and glass paste ornaments (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 171-85; Sernicola 2014: 485-91, 2015: 270-71; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 384, 400-04, 413-15; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 227-30).

The remains of three burials, later to the building of Phase III, were also recorded (Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 225). Two of them have been completely exposed and excavated. The bodies, buried in contracted position in very simple shafts with no grave goods, belong to a juvenile female and male individual. Both showed evidence of cranial injuries and maltreatments; the girl had been buried with an iron shackle at her ankles

(Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2017: 162-63) (Fig. 7). Radiocarbon dating on a sample from the latter points to (95.4%) 422 - 574 cal AD (1528 - 1376 cal BP).[9] Further dating and investigations in this area will clarify the nature of this late burial(s) at the site.

To the south of the large building of Phase III described above, another structure ascribable to the same phase on the basis of associated ceramics has been recorded in 2010 during the investigation of excavation unit SEG I (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 138-48). There, the remains of an architectural unit, most likely a rectangular building, heavily disturbed by erosion and ploughing activities have been exposed. On the basis of the fragmentary evidence of the walls, it can be assumed that the original building probably had three rooms, with a larger one to the south. In one of the rooms, large stones with evidence of ashes associated to a great quantity of potsherds, bones, grinding stones were found inside. Two large, flat, horizontal stone slabs, about 0.60 m x 0.90 m in size, were placed beneath this feature. Below the slabs, a heap of chert fragments was recorded whose cultural implications will be discussed at the end of the paper.

Finally, in 2014 excavation unit SEG XV was opened up in the area of Amda Tsion, at the eastern edge of the uppermost cultivated terrace, about 50 m to the east of SEG IX-X, in the proximity and overlooking the area were the Post-Aksumite rural house excavated by Ricci and Fattovich in 1974 was located (Ricci, Fattovich 1987). The excavation was aimed at better understanding the organization and development of the ancient settlement in this area. The area was chosen because surface materials and micromorphological observations suggested the occurrence of a thick archaeological deposit in this sector of the site.

Excavation at SEG XV has uncovered the remains of a large multi-room building so far only partially exposed (Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 225-26). The eastern and western walls of the structure are quite thick (1.32 and 1.07 m respectively) while the others range between 0.70 and 0.98 m. Their construction technique and general orientation are similar to those of the building of Phase III unearthed between 2010 and 2014 at SEG II-V-VI-VIII-IX-X-XII-XIII. The walls delimit five rooms, square or rectangular in plan, of various size and orientation. Evidence of a stairway abutting the

[9] Beta Analytic Inc., Miami (FL).

eastern side of the easternmost NW/SE oriented wall indicate that this was an external wall and that one entrance to the building was at least located on this side.

Only two (Room 1 and Room 2) out of the five rooms identified have been investigated; of these, only one (Room 1) has been entirely excavated up to the bedrock.

Room 1 is a rectangular chamber with its major axis having a NE/SW orientation. Excavations revealed clear evidence of two phases of use of this space, the later one, perhaps occurred after an earlier collapse, showing the re-erection of the southern wall on top of the earliest one. The living floor of the earliest occupation consisted of a thin layer of compacted soil directly placed on top of the bedrock. The few ceramics contained in this layer show fragments of typical pre-Aksumite ceramics (Fattovich 1980) mixed to abundant evidence of a black/gray coarse ware and brown coarse rich in organic inclusions so far undocumented.[10] The same association of ceramic materials results from the removal of the collapse covering the living floor. There, big fragments, complete and almost complete pots were collected together with several grindstones of various size thus suggesting that this was initially intended as a room for food storage and processing. The occurrence of remains of teff, darnel, flax, sorghum and possibly barley from the living floor and from some of the complete pots preserved supports this interpretation. It should be anyhow taken into account that some of the grindstones might result from the collapse of the walls or of an upper floor as they are quite often used as building material. A dating to the 7th-5th century BC is proposed for this earliest phase of use of the room on the basis of radiocarbon analysis.[11]

The thick stones platform resulting from the collapse of the earliest walls was packed and used as a foundation level for the living floor of the second occupation of the room, on top of which another collapse was recorded. The living floor provided small and medium jars (with a predominance of this

[10] A detailed study and classification of this new type of ceramics is ongoing.

[11] Lower level of the collapse 2460 ± 30 BP [(95.4%) 760 - 420 BC]; living floor 2440 ± 30 BP [(61.5%) 600 - 400 BC (23.5%); 760 -680 BC; (10.4%) 670 - 610 BC], Beta Analytic Inc., Miami (FL).

new type black, brown and gray coarse ware), grindstones and related objects, very few lithics and one metal anvil.

Later, the organization of this area of the excavation unit slightly changed. A further use of this space is recorded, but with the erection of four new walls, smaller than the previous ones and with a different construction technique. Two of them are directly erected on top of the earlier one and follow exactly the same orientation, the other two have a slightly different orientation. All these evidences suggest that this represents a phase of re-use of this space after the abandonment of the room (and possibly of the entire building), during which a new, smaller structure was erected on top of the remains of the previous one. This small structure presumably had only one storey, with the roof supported by two wooden poles placed in the northern sector of the chamber. Ceramics assemblage from this context shows the predominance of the new type of black/gray and brown ware associated to very few fragments of red and orange wares.

In Room 2, a rectangular chamber immediately to the north of Room 1 and parallel to it, the remains of a living floor have been recorded. Also in this case, typical pre-Aksumite red and orange ware was associated with abundant fragments of black/gray and brown ware. Orange ware includes fragments of fine, well decorated pots if compared to the ones collected at all levels of Room 1. The fireplace covering and partially cutting this living floor may be contemporary or subsequent to it; in the latter case it may represent an external fireplace associated with the small structure erected on the remains of Room 1.

After the general abandonment of the building, two small structures were erected in the area. This represents a period of light occupation of the area which predates the final collapse of the building.

The cemetery

Six excavation units, SEG III, IV, VII, XI, XIV, and XVI, have been so far opened up in the area of the ancient cemetery, at Mogareb, to the northwest of the settlement (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 185-203; Sernicola 2015: 268-69; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 352-54; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 226; 2017: 161-62). These exposed the remains of 27 tombs which can be grouped into two, or possibly three, different types.

Tombs associated with stela: in this case a sandstone monolith, entirely or partly carved, usually flattened at the top, is erected inside the shaft which can be circular or roughly rectangular. Grave goods generally include pottery – mostly bowls, cups beakers (red or black topped), bottles, jars, pot-stands and incense burners –, knapped lithics (crescents, knifes and various flakes), metal or clay stamp seals, stone, bone, glass, glass paste and copper alloy ornaments (pendants, beads, bangles, ear-rings, rings and lip- or ear-stud). The upper part of a female clay figure (or anthropomorphic pot) representing a pregnant woman with the arms resting on the hips, perforation for an ear-ring on the preserved ear, two holes on the shoulders and a punctuated decoration on the chest, has been recorded in 2010 in the filling of Tomb 1 (Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 191).

Tombs without stela consisting of a roughly rectangular or circular shaft with associated skeletal remains and grave goods. Grave goods from these tombs are similar in terms of typology but not of quantity to the ones recorded in the previous type, which have much more abundant objects; clay models of house and compounds are also attested (Fig. 8). In all tombs, the deceased is laid at the bottom of the grave in contracted position. Evidence of a multiple burial is attested for this type of tomb.

A third type of funerary feature may be represented by a single specimen brought to the light in 2013 and consisting of a roughly rectangular shaft with a standing stela erected in the shaft and a smaller one buried within it. The artefacts assemblage from the filling of the shaft consists of ceramics (mostly black topped beakers, but also incense burners, cups and jars) and one fragment of a hard limestone pendant. No traces of human bones have been detected. This feature may be interpreted as a cenotaph, but further evidence is needed to strengthen this hypothesis. Noteworthy, a similar funerary practice is attested at the cemetery of Ona Enda Aboy Zewge, on the hilltop of Beta Giyorgis, Aksum, since Proto-Aksumite times (ca. 400 - 150 BC) (Fattovich, Bard 1993: 41-71).

Small votive deposits characterised by shallow pits or pockets of soil are often located around the graves, in the proximity of outcropping natural boulders. Associated artefacts include: miniatures of cups and beakers, ornaments and zoomorphic clay figurines.

Further, extensive excavations would allow to better define the typology of funerary features attested in this area and to reconstruct their spatial dis-

tribution within the cemetery. Radiocarbon dating will provide absolute chronological attribution. What can be inferred from the ceramics is that all assemblages from excavated tombs are characterised by the predominance of *Red Orange Fine Ware* and black topped red and orange wares. This tentatively dates the so far investigated sector of the cemetery to the same period of the building of Phase III.

Geophysiscal Prospection

Geophysical survey was conducted in 2014 and 2015 at site SG 1 with the objective of locating intra-site anomalies of potential archaeological interest which could help to better define the actual extension of the site, and to suggest potential areas of interest for future excavations (Assefa Getaneh, Tigistu Haile, Sernicola, in press; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016: 230-31; 2017: 163-64).

The survey, which extended over an area of about 5 hectares, covering almost completely the site, was conducted by complementing magnetic and radiometric (Electrical Resistivity Tomography) methods to locate intra-site anomaly zones.

On the basis of close observation and interpretation of the acquired anomaly features, two sectors of possible archaeological interest, the cemetery and the settlement, have been recognized. The first one is characterised by several low magnetic anomalies similar to those from refilled excavations of graves suggesting the possibility that the cemetery could extend further westwards; the second shows several anomaly features of potential archaeological interest comparable to those shown at refilled excavations.

Test excavations were conducted in 2016 in the area of the settlement with the aim of defining the nature of subsurface anomalies highlighted by the combined results from magnetic method and Electrical Resistivity Tomography. Test excavations were conducted in the northernmost terrace of the settlement and confirmed the presence of ancient structures (walls, wall collapses and paved areas) at a depth of 15-20 cm below the present ploughed top-soil, as suggested by the corresponding imagery.

These results, which confirm the efficiency of the geophysical prospection procedures employed so far, allow to define with a greater detail the lo-

cation of ancient structures and to outline the general extension of the ancient settlement and cemetery.

Overview

To conclude, archaeological investigations conducted during the first seven seasons of field work to the south-west of Aksum, between Medog^{w}e and Adet, provided additional information on the archaeology of this area and generated insights in the population history and human-environmental interaction dynamics of the region. Surface survey carried out between Merina and Adet allowed to recognize remarkable differences in the settlement pattern and land exploitation strategies between the northern/central (from Medog^{w}e to Merina) and the southern (between Merina and Adet) sector of the study area, the latter being characterised by the absence of constructed structures and other indicators of permanent occupation. Further research may help to provide a more precise chronological and cultural framework to this evidence.

Excavations at site SG 1, in the eastern sector of the modern village of Seglamen, identified the remains of an affluent pre-Aksumite centre and allowed to make inferences on some cultural and economic aspects of the communities living in this area during the 1st half of the 1st millennium BC.

Analysis of the material culture and first data from faunal remains and archaeobotany suggest that local economy was mainly agro-pastoral, based on the cultivation and processing of cereal crops, and cattle and sheeps/goats breeding.

A variety of craft and, possibly, industrial activities including cleaning and refining animal skins, wood-, stone-, pearl- and perhaps glass-working were also performed (Phillipson 2012: 509-30, 2013*a*: 380-402, 2013*b*: 283-303).

The occurrence of imported materials from neighbouring regions (e.g. fragments of brown ware dishes with abundant micaceous inclusions and a waved incised decoration along the internal rim and of pots with traces of external scraping/wiping, endemic of Eastern Tigray ceramics tradition; see D'Andrea *et al.* 2008: 161-65) as well as from the Nile Valley and the Red Sea regions (blue glass paste beads and other ornaments, fragments of

Pynctada margaritifora, imported or local 'imitations'[12] of the typical South Arabian *Torpedo-Amphorae* or *Type 4100 jars*; see Glanzman 1994: 308-24; van Beek 1969: 170) suggests that the site was at a certain degree included in an interchange circuit which involved the Nile Valley, the Tigrean highlands and both the African and Arabian regions of the Red Sea, possibly linking these areas to the internal regions of the northern Horn. Its location on a prominent position along a river valley leading to the south-west supports this hypothesis.

The possible presence at the cemetery of a cenotaph with a buried stela replacing the deceased and a standing stela marking the tomb, similar to a tradition attested at the Proto-Aksumite cemetery on the hill-top of Beta Giyorgis (Aksum) (Fattovich, Bard 1993: 41-71), points to a certain degree of continuity of some funerary practices in this area over a period spanning at least throughout the 1st millennium BC and the early 1st millennium AD, with some of the funerary traditions attested at Seglamen anticipating significant aspects of Proto-Aksumite and Aksumite burial practices attested at Aksum. Another cogent example of cultural continuity is represented by the practice, attested both at Seglamen and in the Proto- to Early-Aksumite tombs at Beta Giyorgis, of burying small crescents as part of the grave goods (see e.g. Phillipson, L. 2009). This seems also reflected in knapping techniques and lithic artefacts style, providing a good indication of cultural continuity in this portion of the central Tigrean highland during 1st millennium BC-1st millennium AD (Sernicola 2014: 486-88). In this scenario, the significance of the deep changes occurred in the ceramic tradition between the so-called 'Pre-Aksumite', Proto- and Aksumite cultures, still represents a stimulating aspect for the reconstruction of the population history of this region, made more intriguing by the discovery at SG 1 of a ceramic tradition characterised by black and gray medium to coarse wares dating back at least to the 7th-5th centuries BC. Also in this case, the continuation of the research at this

[12] The Type 4100 jar is a significant chronological and cultural marker, associated with the Sabean expansion during the 8th/7th century BC. Analysis of the fabrics from a sample from the pre-Aksumite temple site of Meqaber Gaʿewa (Weqro, Eastern Tigray) demonstrates that this is probably a Type 4100 jar local 'imitation', as attested in a number of sites in South Arabia, and at Yeha and Matara in the northern Horn of Africa (Wolf, Nowotnik 2010: 206-09). Whether the specimens attested at Seglamen were locally manufactured or imported is yet to determine.

site will contribute to a better understanding of such complex cultural phenomena.

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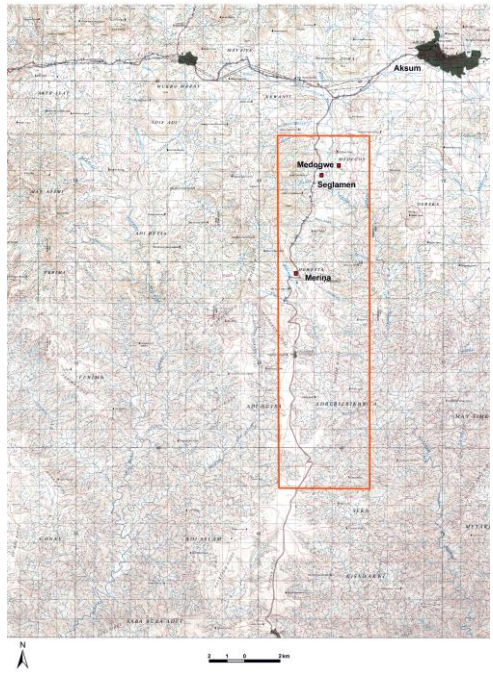

Fig. 1 - Map showing the study-area.

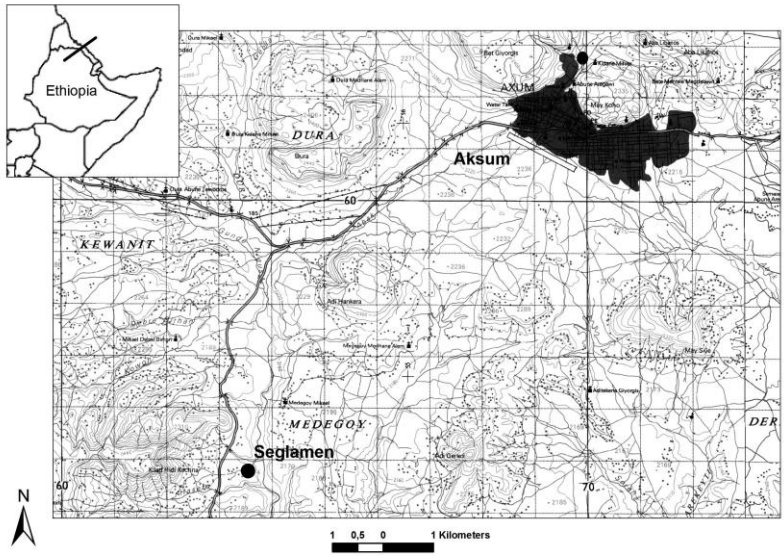

Fig. 2 - Map showing the location of site SG 1 at Seglamen.

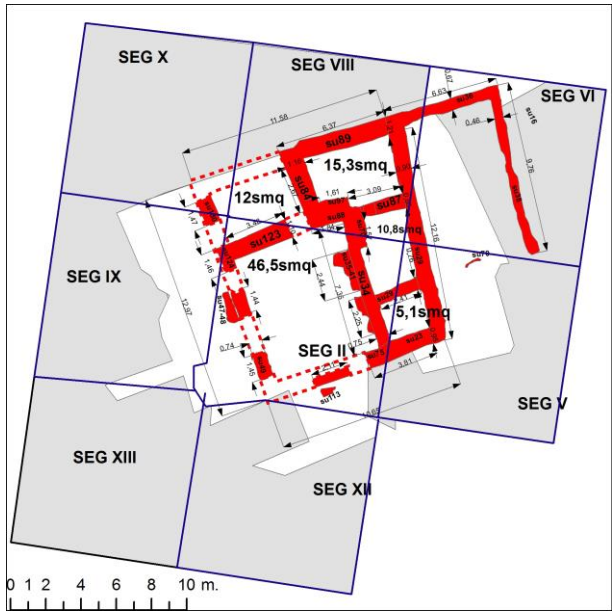

Fig. 3 - General plan of the building of Phase I.

Fig. 4 - Big bowl and small jar from the votive deposit in Room 1, Phase I.

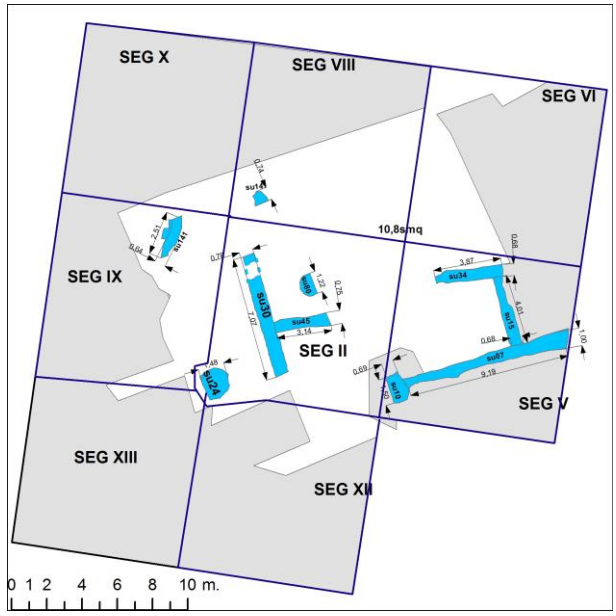

Fig. 5 - General plan of the features of Phase II.

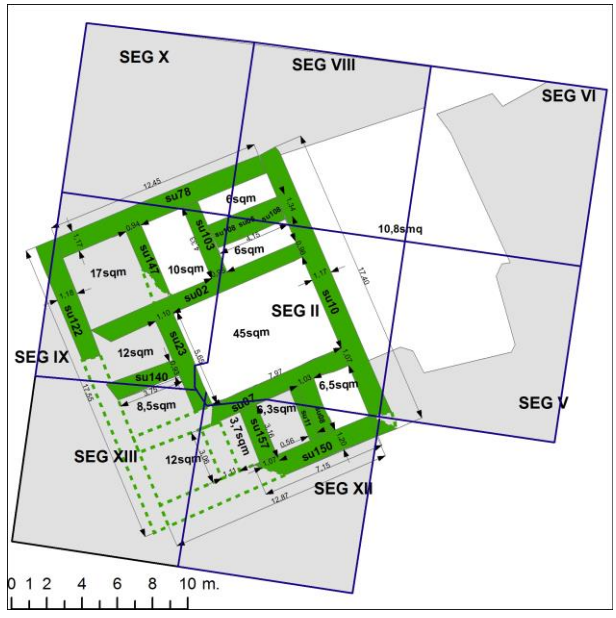

Fig. 6 - General plan of the building of Phase III.

Fig. 7 - Iron shackles around the ankles of an intrusive female juvenile burial in the area of the settlement.

Fig. 8 - Part of a clay model of a compound from Tomb 10.

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cf.: *confer*	**fig./s**.: figure/s	**no./s**.: number/s
ch./s.: chapter/s	**forth**.: forthcoming	**n.p**.: no place
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cp.: compare	**id**.: *idem* (referring to things or men)	**p./pp**.: page/s
ead.: *eadem* (referring to women)	**ibid**.: *ibidem* (referring to the preceding footnote)	**passim**: *passim*
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