

The Archaeology of Complexity and Cosmopolitanism in Medieval Ethiopia. An Introduction

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Abstract

Archaeology is increasingly attesting the complex and cosmopolitan nature of societies in medieval or 'feudal' Ethiopia (c. seventh to early eighteenth centuries). Although not negating the existence of relations of dominance and periods of isolation, pluralism and interaction are key themes that emerge. Four religious traditions are relevant to exploring this; Islam, Judaism, Christianity, and indigenous religions. Archaeologically, Christianity has been the most investigated, and Judaism still awaits study. The temporality of cosmopolitanism appears significant, episodic rather than continuous, and this should be the focus of further archaeological research in Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Introduction

Located in the Horn of Africa (**Figure 1**), Ethiopia is remarkably varied both environmentally, and topographically. It is also ethnically and culturally diverse and is home to followers of three major World religions, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, as well as adherents of various African indigenous religions (Quirin 1998; Insoll 2003; Phillipson 2009). This environmental, topographic, ethnic, and cultural diversity has moulded a rich history that has included, for instance, periodic Ethiopian interaction with South Arabia (e.g. mid-first millennium BC [Finneran 2007: 121-122]), and the growth of the Late Classical kingdom of Aksum (c. first century AD [e.g. Phillipson 2012]), prior to the medieval period (c. seventh to early eighteenth centuries), the focus here. Yet, the medieval archaeology, and to a lesser extent the late Classical archaeology of Ethiopia, are much less well-known than the prehistory of the country, particularly in relation to hominin origins, and as a posited cradle of humanity (cf. Pennisi 2008).

Perhaps, from a European perspective, this was partly because Ethiopia was sometimes viewed as isolated, the mountainous land of the legendary Christian king Prester John (Nowell 1953: 437; Axelson 1973: 33-34), surrounded by antagonistic Muslim sultanates and barbarous 'pagans'. Although such views are discredited, archaeology has been somewhat tardy in adding material texture to the often fragmentary and minimal historical sources that exist, and in archaeologically linking medieval Ethiopia to the rest of Africa and beyond. Biases in research were also evident with a focus on Christian sites and monuments and, respectively, an absence of investigation of Islamic archaeology (cf. Insoll 2003). The reasons for this were varied, partly because the Imperial Ethiopian narrative of history was focused around Orthodox Christianity, partly as Islam was viewed as foreign, partly because of disinterest (cf. Ahmed 1992). Similar neglect of the archaeology of Jewish and indigenous religious communities was also apparent, for similar reasons, and because the focus of research was elsewhere; hominins, prehistory, and proto-Aksumite and Aksumite archaeology.

This has begun to change, with a range of research focusing on varied communities, particularly Islamic, as apparent in this section, and highlighting the complex nature of societies and their relations in medieval Ethiopia. Cosmopolitanism, defined as "a willingness to engage with the other" (Hannerz 1990: 239) is manifest through material evidence (trade goods, images, coins, architecture, epigraphy, burial) that are increasingly demonstrating extensive commercial, religious, social, and cultural interaction. These reflect the existence of more fluid heterogeneous entities, rather than rigourously bounded ones based on a "hard-edged" religious or cultural identity, and that instead, "overlap and mingle" (Hannerz 1990: 239). Thus, to adapt the words of Abbink (2008: 119), medieval Ethiopia is "best studied and understood as one whole", rather than as disparate elements. Within this, varied societies were periodically entangled in a range of networks operating at different scales through long-distance Indian Ocean and Red Sea maritime networks, regional land routes crossing the Horn of Africa, and local connections operating over short distances, all serving to move goods, ideas, and people, and in so doing constructing a cosmopolitan milieu.

This introduction will contextualise the papers in relation to the relevant historical background, with a particular emphasis upon religions, as well as previous archaeological research (and absence thereof). Whilst there has been a critical readjustment in archaeological research themes in Ethiopia to those exploring diverse medieval societies, acknowledging this, and the existence of cosmopolitanism within these societies, is not to negate the existence of relations of dominance, of one group over another over time, or of struggle between groups, or of periods

of isolation. Muslim relations with Orthodox Christian Ethiopia society were, for example, punctuated by periods of conflict over the medieval period; with two of particular significance, the wars between Emperor Amda Siyon and the Sultanates of eastern Ethiopia in the first half of the fourteenth century (Tamrat 1972: 132-136), and the *jihad* of Aḥmad Gragn in the first half of the sixteenth century (Beckingham and Huntingford 1954: 105; Huntingford 1989: 120; Kapteijns 2000: 229-230; Abbink 2008: 119). Such events could directly impact cosmopolitanism, leading to its decline or disappearance, temporarily or more permanently, associated with the construction of more rigid territorial, ethnic, and religious boundaries.

It is also apparent that this section is written by scholars from outside Ethiopia. This is unfortunate, but reflects the current situation in Ethiopia where prehistory, and to a lesser extent Aksumite archaeology, is more popular, again for varied reasons, such as availability of scholarships and job opportunities. With few exceptions (e.g. Worku 2018; Woldekiros 2019), medieval/historical archaeology has been neglected by Ethiopian scholars. However, this is beginning to change with a growth in interest in Islamic archaeology, and active capacity building initiatives embedded in, for example, two of the projects included in this section (Loiseau et al.; Insoll et al.). Should such a collection as this be published a decade from now it is likely that this imbalance would rightly have disappeared.

Finally, two terminological clarifications are also required. First, the use of the term ‘medieval’ in the Ethiopian context is justified for it is a “dead metaphor” and as such can be used outside its “original frame of reference” (Morales Farias 2003: xxiii). Second, Ethiopia is here defined as the land within the modern borders (**Figure 1**), but these did not take shape until the late nineteenth century (Phillipson 2009: 3), and archaeology indicates that these borders are arbitrary and interaction extended far beyond to elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, as well as the Nile Valley and Mediterranean, Red Sea, Western Indian Ocean, and Persian Gulf.

Islam and Muslim Polities

Links between Ethiopia and Islam began from the very start of the religion. The first Muslim contacts with Ethiopia were peaceful with, according to tradition, the Prophet Muhammad sending small groups of his followers to the court of the *Negus*, probably the Christian ruler of the Aksumite kingdom in 615 (all dates are AD unless otherwise specified), in what is known as the first *hijra* (Arabic = migration) (Lapidus 1988: 25; O’Fahey 2003: xviii). Whether any of these early Muslims stayed in Ethiopia is not known (see Loiseau et al., this volume), but by the tenth century Islam had become better established (Ahmed 1992: 16), and Islamic conversion and Islamisation appear to have been achieved through varied agents and mechanisms including trade, preaching, and missionary activity. Muslim polities also developed. The state of Shewa, c.896/897-1285, was centred northeast of contemporary Addis Ababa (Huntingford 1989: 76). It was absorbed by Ifāt, which gave way to the Sultanate of Adal in 1420, the powerbase of Ahmad Gragn until his death in 1543 (Kapteijns 2000: 228-229).

Archaeology is an important tool in exploring medieval Islamic Ethiopia, as the Arabic historical sources concerned with the interior of Ethiopia are limited prior to the seventeenth century (cf. Ahmed 1992), with notable texts being by al-‘Umarī (1301-49), whose information was gained from informants (Ahmed et al. 2003: 19-20), rather than first-hand experience, and the *Futuh al-Habasha*, the chronicle of Aḥmad Gragn’s *jihad* written by Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad

or *'Arab Faqīh*, in the early sixteenth century (Stenhouse 2003). Until recently the place of Islamic Ethiopia in the medieval Islamic World was largely unknown beyond the limited textual references to sultanates and kingdoms such as Ifāt and Adal (e.g. Trimingham 1952), the recognition of the city of Harar as an important Islamic centre (e.g. Insoll and Zekaria 2019) (**Figures 1 and 2**), some Arabic epigraphic studies (e.g. Schneider 1967, 1969, 1970), and acknowledgement that the coastal ports in what is now Eritrea and Somaliland were active participants in Western Indian Ocean and Red Sea trade (e.g. Anfray 1990: 154-159).

Archaeology has begun to substantially expand knowledge. Although surveys of relevant sites had occurred from the early twentieth century, starting with pioneers such as Azaïs and Chambard (1931), excavation was limited (cf. Insoll 2003: 58-73). Within the past 20 years the situation has begun to change, beginning with important contributions made by the French Centre for Ethiopian Studies (e.g. Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar 2002; Fauvelle-Aymar et al. 2006; Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2010, 2011; Fauvelle et al. 2017). At Nora in north-eastern Shewa, a settlement was investigated, with the mosque dated to between the mid-twelfth and late thirteenth centuries (Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2010: 36). At Fäqi Däbbis, also in Shewa, another mosque was dated to between the early fourteenth and mid-fifteenth centuries (Poissonnier et al. 2011: 135), and at Awfāt a large town and cemetery were recorded which might be identified with the capital of the sultanate of Ifāt, occupied by the Walasma' dynasty (1285-1376) (Fauvelle et al. 2017: 278-279) (**Figure 1**). Subsequently, excavations in Harar have excavated a range of settlement and mosque sites dating from between the late fifteenth and nineteenth centuries (Insoll 2017; Insoll and Zekaria 2019). However, much remains to be done and excavations in Harlaa and Tigray (Insoll et al.; Loiseau et al., this volume) are attesting the potential of archaeology both for reconstructing medieval Islamic life and the complexity and cosmopolitanism it was defined by.

A strong regional Islamic identity developed in Ethiopia, the result of “original intellectual elaboration”, challenging an image of passive reception (Fani 2016: 114), and akin to the processes that created a unique Ethiopian indigenous Orthodox Christian tradition (Mercier 2001; Phillipson 2009). Sufism was popular from the eleventh century (Abbink 2008: 12), Harar grew as a centre of Islamic scholarship (Santelli 2008; Insoll and Zekaria 2019). Indigenous pilgrimage traditions also developed focused on the Sheikh Hussein shrine in Bale (**Figure 1**), possibly founded in the twelfth century (Østebø 2012: 52), and providing a substitute for *hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage) for those without means (Braukämper 2004: 144). There was also the continuity of a manuscript culture much longer in Islamic Ethiopia, than Islamic Egypt or in the Ethiopian Orthodox church, for example, where printed books were largely adopted from the mid-nineteenth century. Continuing to the present, handwritten manuscripts carried prestige and were considered more reliable for teaching and learning (Fani 2016: 120), providing continuity of medieval manuscript culture.

Aspects of Ethiopian Islamic practice were also influenced by Christian traditions indicating a cosmopolitan ethos. The “deeply monastic” traditions of Ethiopian Christianity (Mulugetta 2015: 184) affected the development of Ethiopian Muslim monasticism. Although male inhabited monastery-like structures, often with a military function, e.g. *tekke*, *ribāt*, *dergāh*, *khānqāh*, are found elsewhere in the Muslim world (Abbink 2008: 122; Hillenbrand 1994: 44), uniquely in eastern Ethiopia female monasticism in nunneries developed, as Abbink (2008: 124) has described, where devotees lived in poverty and celibacy. Shifts in Islamic identities can be seen over time, from the disappearance of Shi'ism, apparently present in medieval Harlaa and Bilet (see Insoll et al., Loiseau et al., this volume), to the contemporary decline in Sufism (Østebø 2012), with its supposed connotations of *bid'a* (Arabic = unwarranted

innovations) under the influence of Salafist Islam (Abbink 2008: 121, 131), and the move toward a less heterogeneous Islamic practice and belief.

Judaism

The complex, cosmopolitan nature of medieval Ethiopian society was further enhanced by the Jewish community. Formerly known by the derogatory term, ‘Falasha’, the ‘Beta-Israel’ lived within the primarily Christian north-western regions of Wollo, Gondar, and Tigray. Their origins have been debated, whether a lost tribe from Israel, elements from South Arabia who travelled to Aksum in the second/third centuries (**Figure 1**), or a group who emerged from a Christian schism in the fifteenth century (Kaplan 1992: 32; Quirin 1998: 198; Salamon 1999: 126). Ethnographically, it has been shown how the Beta-Israel were inter-linked with their Christian neighbours from whom they were physically and linguistically indistinguishable. Material culture production and spatial demarcation served to maintain boundaries.

Beta-Israel were specialist smiths and weavers (men) and potters (women), producing tools and ceramics vital to Christian life, but via crafts neither practiced or esteemed by them. Christians could help bury Jewish dead, but could not eat meat slaughtered by the Beta-Israel (Mulugetta 2015: 184), or enter their houses, defining what Salamon (1999: 118) has described as “religious separation” and “connectedness”. Beta-Israel identity, however, was mutable, as the limited historical sources indicate (Kaplan 1992; Quirin 1998), with the blacksmith/potter/weaver activity becoming prominent after Beta-Israel land was appropriated in the fifteenth century, and a firmer ‘caste’ identity ascribed from the mid-eighteenth century which was also associated with their being labelled *budā*, or people with an evil eye (Quirin 1998: 202, 208-209). An ambiguous relationship was thus maintained, as ethnography (Salamon 1999), and history (Kaplan 1982; Quirin 1998) attest, but missing is the archaeological dimension, due to an absence of research in Ethiopia. Where investigation is occurring, in neighbouring Somaliland for example (**Figure 1**), evidence is emerging suggesting a Jewish presence in the Horn of Africa was more extensive in the medieval period, as attested by two gravestones engraved with the Star of David recorded in the Dhubato area, and (Mire 2020: 28-29). Alternatively, the Star of David might be another instance of the use of the ‘Seal of Solomon’, found in Islamic funerary iconography (see Loiseau et al., this volume). However, Christian gravestones were also found nearby (Mire *ibid.*), implying that the Horn of Africa was more cosmopolitan than it is today.

Christianity and the Christian Kingdoms

As previously noted, Christianity has tended to dominate narratives of medieval Ethiopia because of its long history, and links with the Solomonic dynasty which reigned from the late-thirteenth century until Haile Selassie was overthrown by the Marxist *Derg* regime in 1974 (Ahmed 1992; Anfray 1990; Lepage and Mercier 2005). A further factor was its unique character, for Ethiopian Christianity developed its own distinctive indigenous traditions that attracted attention (Phillipson 2009: 198). Ethiopian contacts with Christianity were early. Tradition records that the conversion of the Aksumite ruler, Ezana, occurred in the 330s as he was impressed by the piety of a Syrian shipwrecked on the Red Sea who was brought to him. This individual, Frumentius, then travelled north to Alexandria, and was ordained bishop of Ethiopia, achieving Ezana’s conversion on his return (Finneran 2007: 181; Phillipson 2009: 29). In this first phase, material indicators of Christianity are restricted to stone inscriptions

and changes in coinage (Phillipson 2009: 49, 2012: 99). This soon changed, as from its urban origins, with a heartland focused on Aksum (Finneran and Tribe 2004: 65), the franchise of Christianity was extended into the countryside in the late fifth century by the arrival of monks, again from the eastern Mediterranean (Tamrat 1972: 24). These ‘Nine Saints’ also introduced monastic tradition into Ethiopian Christianity (Lepage and Mercier 2005: 170), which was to have a lasting legacy through monasteries such as Debra Dāmo in northern Tigray (**Figure 1**), founded in the sixth century (Finneran and Tribe 2004: 65-66). It is also in this century that churches of rectangular basilica form with a central longitudinal space appear (Phillipson 2009: 50, 204).

Yet archaeologically, Medieval Christianity in Ethiopia has remained relatively unexplored (Finneran and Tribe 2004; Finneran 2005, 2007; Phillipson 2009, 2012), where research emphasis has tended to be art historical (e.g. Mercier 2001), architectural (e.g. Lepage and Mercier 2005; Phillipson 2009), or based on historical sources (e.g. Tamrat 1972). In the earliest Christian period, Late Aksumite ceramics (sixth century) indicate the use of varied forms of the cross as a decorative symbol (Phillipson 2009: 31). Aksumite-period churches have also been surveyed and some excavation completed at, for example, Maryam TSION, Beta Giyorgis, Wuchate Golo, Melazo, and Enda Kaleb in Aksum and its surrounding region, as well as at Yeha, 37 km northeast (cf. Phillipson 2009: 32-44, 2012: 126-132) (**Figure 1**). Most recently a basilica of tripartite Syriac plan built during the fourth century was excavated at Beta Samati in northern Tigray. An assemblage of 49 ceramic bucrania and zoomorphic figurines in the church suggested the mixing of early Christian and indigenous religious elements (Harrower et al. 2019). Although medieval Ethiopian monasticism has not received the same archaeological attention as contemporary traditions in Nubia and Egypt (Finneran 2005: 24, 2012a: 252), where research has been completed, this suggests connectivity and not isolation. A fragment of white cloth with an embroidered red silk inscription bearing the name of the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu‘tamid (891/278) was found in a storeroom in the Debra Dāmo monastery in Tigray. Coin finds in the surroundings of the monastery also included Islamic Umayyad and Abbasid issues dating from between 78 and 331 AH (Mordini 1957: 75-77). This material is important in suggesting economic and other relations between Muslims and Christians, of cosmopolitanism, rather than “the existence of mutually incompatible blocs of Islam and Christianity” (Insoll 2003: 59).

Archaeology has also had a largely under-utilised role in illuminating the “dark age” (Finneran 2007: 207) of Christian Ethiopia between the ninth and twelfth centuries. This period saw the emergence of the Zagwe dynasty sometime between the late tenth and mid-twelfth century, accompanied by the foundation of the capital at Roha, or as it is known today, Lalibela, (Phillipson 2009: 123, 197) (**Figure 1**). This was a significant event as it signalled a shift from Semitic speaking rulers to what were, originally at least, Cushitic speakers (Phillipson 2012: 227). Until recently, research at Lalibela had been largely focused on the rock-cut, hypogaeum, churches (Gerster 1970; Phillipson 2009: 123; Mercier and Lepage 2012) (**Figure 3**). Archaeological focus has recently shifted, attested, for instance, by research aimed at looking at the longer term evolution of the churches, their stratigraphy, and the possible original non-religious role of some of the structures (Phillipson 2007, 2012: 231-235; Finneran 2009: 421-422, 2012a: 266; Fauvelle-Aymar et al. 2010), examining the churches in their landscape setting (Bosc-Tiessé et al. 2014), placing Lalibela within its wider geographical context (Finneran 2012b), and excavation of a cemetery at Qademt, 500m north of the churches (Gleize et al. 2015). The latter is particularly significant in thinking about cosmopolitanism, as changes were evident in funerary practices over three phases between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries, with burial pit orientations varying from north-south, to northeast-southwest, and

east-west, raising the question if all burials were Christian (ibid: 250). The east-west and northeast-southwest orientations and the use of stone slabs to cover some of the grave pits precisely mirror the practices recorded in the Muslim cemetery at Harlaa (see Insoll et al., this volume), perhaps indicating that Muslim-Christian interaction was occurring at Lalibela, though the presence of ceramics in some graves (Derat et al., this volume), presumably as grave goods, not usually found in Islamic contexts (Insoll 1999: 172), would indicate greater complexity.

It has been suggested that the Zagwe re-aligned Ethiopian Christian culture away from the Red Sea and eastern Mediterranean (Finneran 2007: 225). More recent archaeological research in eastern Ethiopia is suggesting such a shift did not occur, this relationship was maintained, interaction with Muslim neighbours occurred (see Insoll et al., Loiseau et al., this volume), and an expansion of international contacts may have taken place. This might also be represented by one of the paintings in the eleventh-twelfth century church of Debra-Salam in Tigray where a realistic image of an elephant led by two mahouts is depicted (cf. Lepage and Mercier 2005: 101), reflecting knowledge of, or contacts with, South Asia, as also evident at Harlaa. Yet there were also manifest differences, the types of imported objects; glass, glazed ceramics, glass and agate beads etc., found in large quantities at Harlaa (see Insoll et al., this volume), and more selectively at various funerary monuments associated with indigenous religions (see below), are absent in centres such as Lalibela and almost entirely across the highland Christian sites. With the defeat of the Zagwe in 1270, the Solomonic line was restored, Semitic language speakers (Amhara), were in power again, and to whom most of the historical sources referring to the Zagwe are also attributed (Phillipson 2009: 22, 2012: 229). This emphasises, again, the important role for archaeology where historical sources are partial, and where those that exist might record events from a particular ethnic or religious perspective.

A notable consequence of the change in power was a shift in settlement, the royal court became mobile, and monasteries provided the fixed socio-economic, as well as religious centres in the landscape (Finneran 2007: 237, 259). The mobile royal camps or *katama*, evolved standard elements, such as different areas for aides, officials, soldiers, livestock, and the royal family, and access to semi-permanent churches, or use of nearby permanent churches. Palisades could also separate different areas in the camps (Tamrat 1972: 269-274; Pankhurst 1979: 3-4; Finneran 2007: 255-257). A possible royal camp has been investigated at Gännätä Maryam where it appears to have been located on the plain below the monastery (Finneran and Tribe 2004: 68) (**Figure 1**). Another possible royal camp at Manz, c.320 km north of Addis Ababa, in north-eastern Shoa, and built during the reign of Ba'eda Māryām (1448-1478), has also been explored (Hirsch and Poissonnier 2000). Excavation of an associated church, Meshāla Māryām Raphael, attested two main periods involving initial construction and use (mid-fifteenth-sixteenth centuries), and destruction and re-use as a cemetery (sixteenth-seventeenth centuries) (Hirsch and Fauvelle-Aymar 2002: 328; Derat and Jouquand 2012; de Torres Rodríguez 2017: 244; **Figure 4**). Mobile royal camps existed until the early seventeenth century, when Gondär, north of Lake Tana (**Figure 1**), was established as a semi-permanent capital (Finneran 2007: 260, 263), occupied between c.1632-1769. Archaeological research at Gondär has been minimal with emphasis instead placed on architectural and historical investigation of the churches, and castles/palaces built there (Pankhurst 1979: 5; de Torres Rodríguez 2017: 225). These were influenced by Indian and Ottoman architecture (Fernández et al. 2017: 469-470), producing castle-like structures of unique form, with the earliest built by Emperor Fasiladas (1632-1667) (Wordekhal 1985: 119).

European contact is also a factor in the medieval period. Initially, what have been described as, “precarious, but none the less continuous” (Tamrat 1972: 267) relations were established between Ethiopia and Europe from the first half of the fifteenth century, and following an Ethiopian appeal for help during the jihad of Ahmad Gragn, a small Portuguese force arrived under the leadership of Cristovão da Gama in 1541 (Huntingford 1989: 134). A correlate of the Portuguese presence was the co-appearance of the Jesuits (Finneran 2007: 260) who for a short period between the 1610s and 1620s lived in the Lake Tana region and introduced their own architectural traditions. Three Jesuit sites in the Gondär region have been investigated; Gorgora Nova, Särka, and Gännätä Iyasus (de Torres Rodríguez 2017; Fernández et al. 2017) (**Figures 1 and 5**). Interestingly, nothing specifically relating to the Jesuits was found, probably due to their short residence, and subsequent re-use of the sites, with material all post-dating their occupation (de Torres Rodríguez 2017: 227-228; Fernández et al. 2017: 158-159; 288). However, an indirect marker of the former Jesuit presence was apparent at Gännätä Iyasus in changes in ceramic forms illustrating a shift from communal to more individual patterns of food consumption in the mid-seventeenth century. This was interpreted as showing elite strategies of social differentiation and the legacy of Jesuit influences over foodways which also included the consumption of pork, forbidden to Ethiopian orthodox Christians (de Torres Rodríguez 2017: 246). This Jesuit encounter was also, ultimately, to lead to the self-imposed closure of the Christian kingdom in the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (see González-Ruibal, this volume), a decline in cosmopolitanism, and the end of the narrative described here.

Indigenous Religions

Interacting with Muslim, Jewish, and Christian populations and polities were followers of indigenous religions. This is manifest through archaeological evidence indicating trade and exchange, such as the glass beads found in various medieval non-Muslim and Christian contexts (see Insoll et al., this volume). Complexity and diversity of indigenous religious belief and practice is also archaeologically evident, primarily through funerary monuments. Various circular chambered stone tombs were being constructed and used between the eighth-twelfth centuries in the Tchercher Mountains, for example. Some of the grave goods recovered were coming from Red Sea focused trade, the source of *Cypraea annulus* cowry shells, *Oliva ericea linne* shells and large numbers of small blue, green, red, and yellow glass beads (cf. Joussaume 1980: Pl. XII-XIV; Insoll et al., this volume). Diverse burial monuments, some again containing imported materials and artifacts, were also found in the area of the Shay culture of Shoa and south-east Wallo at sites such as Tätär Gur (**Figure 1**). These included tumuli, chamber tombs, and dolmen graves dated to between the tenth to fourteenth centuries, when Islam and Christianity were both well-established elsewhere in Ethiopia (Fauvelle and Poissonnier 2016), as described.

Megaliths were also erected in the medieval period in a region extending south of Addis Ababa and west of the Rift Valley Lakes (Finneran 2007: 243). These are of varied forms; phallic, figurative, undecorated, singularly and in groups (Joussaume 1995: 102-3; Joussaume 2007; Derara 2011). At Tiya, 50km south of Addis (**Figure 1**), for example, many of the rhyolite standing stones of between two to five metre height were carved with sword or lance-head symbols, or ‘Y’-shapes that might depict genitalia or scarification marks, and reference gender, ancestry and personhood, or be a symbol of a wooden headrest (Derara 2011: 72; Insoll 2015: 173; **Figure 6**). These are possibly from the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries based on dates from an associated cemetery (Joussaume 1995: 148-52, 286). This megalithic diversity and the practices they represent lasted until the fifteenth century when they disappeared, perhaps due

to population displacement as an effect of the migration of the Oromo ethno-linguistic group into parts of Ethiopia (Finneran 2007: 248).

Conclusions - The Papers

The research presented in the following section clearly indicates the power of archaeology in expanding knowledge of medieval Ethiopia and attesting its complexity and cosmopolitanism. At Lalibela, the chronology has been stretched back in time and the Christian origins of the site have been challenged through the identification of what is referred to as a ‘troglodytic’ culture, manifest also at Washa Mika’el where pre-Christian iconography and space was appropriated and transformed creating the extant church (Derat et al., this volume). In the western Ethiopian borderlands “vernacular cosmopolitanism” (González-Ruibal, this volume) was evident, with awareness of other religious systems, material worlds, and cultural traditions, but within a framework of marginality, and one which changed over time. In medieval Harlaa, multiple strands contributed to a cosmopolitan urban culture with Islamic heterogeneity apparent, religious plurality probable, and trade and other networks operating that expanded far beyond eastern Ethiopia incorporating people, ideas, and trade goods, directly and indirectly. In eastern Tigray, excavation of an Islamic cemetery has indicated the deep roots of a Muslim community within the Christian highlands, back to the late tenth century and in use for a subsequent 300 years, attesting both toleration and co-existence. Moreover, a community using iconographic traditions suggesting wide-spread connections (Loiseau et al., this volume).

As research increases, the temporality of cosmopolitanism in medieval Ethiopia will become better refined. This is likely to be episodic rather than continuous, reflecting shifts inside Ethiopia but also in the world beyond, as dynasties changed, trade routes shifted, commodities were exhausted, migrations occurred, wars took place, and religious rivalries and alliances came and went. It is perhaps this notion of cosmopolitanism as something that can be transitory, that needed to be supported rather than assumed, which could be further explored in other archaeological contexts, and which might provide insights for sustaining the cosmopolitan world of today.

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Figure Captions

1. Map of the main sites mentioned (prepared by N. Khalaf)
2. Badri Bari, one of the five original gates in the Harar city wall, the *djugel* (photo. T. Insoll)
3. Church of Beta Amanuel, Lalibela (photo. M-L. Derat, Mission Lalibela 2009)
4. Amba Māryām, Meshāla Māryām (photo. M-L. Derat, Mission Meshāla Māryām 1997)
5. Church roof vault at Gorgora Nova, since collapsed (photo. A. González-Ruibal)
6. Standing stones at Tiya carved with swords or lance-heads and ‘Y’-shapes, perhaps wooden head rests (photo. T. Insoll)