

Barara, the Royal City of 15th and Early 16th Century (Ethiopia).
Medieval and Other Early Settlements Between Wechecha
Range and Mt Yerer: Results from a Recent Survey

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Pankhurst Richard, Breternitz Hartwig. Barara, the Royal City of 15th and Early 16th Century (Ethiopia). Medieval and Other Early Settlements Between Wechecha Range and Mt Yerer: Results from a Recent Survey. In: Annales d'Ethiopie. Volume 24, année 2009. pp. 209-249;

doi : 10.3406/ethio.2009.1394

http://www.persee.fr/doc/ethio_0066-2127_2009_num_24_1_1394

Document généré le 08/03/2018

Résumé

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Cet article retrace l'histoire de Barara et d'autres importants établissements de l'Éthiopie du XVe et du début du XVIe siècle, et décrit les résultats de prospections de terrain visant à localiser cette importante capitale du sud-Choa, près d'Addis Abeba. Se basant sur une analyse des sources historiques, l'imagerie satellite, des considérations géographiques et des prospections, les auteurs ont pu identifier de nouveaux sites apparemment antérieurs à l'époque médiévale. Il fut cependant impossible de localiser Barara et d'autres recherches seront par conséquent nécessaires afin d'accroître nos connaissances sur les « cités » médiévales chrétiennes, et de mieux documenter le passé pré-médiéval de cette zone, qui apparaît comme ayant une longue histoire de carrefour de peuples et de cultures.

Abstract

and early 16th century Ethiopia and describes the results of a field survey aimed at locating this important Ethiopian capital in South Shoa, close to Addis Ababa, today Ethiopia's capital. Basing themselves on an analysis of historic sources and satellite imagery, geographic considerations and practical field surveys, the authors identified new sites which seem to reach back to pre-medieval times and demonstrate the long and as yet unknown history of this part of Ethiopia. However, it proved impossible to locate Barara and further research is necessary to improve our knowledge of medieval Christian "cities" in Ethiopia and to unveil the yet unstudied pre-medieval history of this area which formed obviously for long a crossroads for people and cultures.

BARARA, THE ROYAL CITY OF 15TH AND EARLY 16TH CENTURY (ETHIOPIA)

MEDIEVAL AND OTHER EARLY SETTLEMENTS BETWEEN WECHECHA RANGE AND MT YERER – RESULTS FROM A RECENT SURVEY

Hartwig BRETERNITZ & Richard PANKHURST¹

Abstract:

This article retraces the history of Barara and other important settlements of 15th and early 16th century Ethiopia and describes the results of a field survey aimed at locating this important Ethiopian capital in South Shoa, close to Addis Ababa, today Ethiopia's capital. Basing themselves on an analysis of historic sources and satellite imagery, geographic considerations and practical field surveys, the authors identified new sites which seem to reach back to pre-medieval times and demonstrate the long and as yet unknown history of this part of Ethiopia. However, it proved impossible to locate Barara and further research is necessary to improve our knowledge of medieval Christian "cities" in Ethiopia and to unveil the yet unstudied pre-medieval history of this area which formed obviously for long a crossroads for people and cultures.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Shoa, Archaeology, History, Medieval Towns

BARARA, LA CITE ROYALE DU XV^e ET DEBUT DU XVI^e SIECLE (ÉTHIOPIE) SITES ANCIENS ET MEDIEVAUX ENTRE LE WECHECHA RANGE ET LE MONT YERER : RESULTATS DE PROSPECTIONS RECENTES

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Résumé

Cet article retrace l'histoire de Barara et d'autres importants établissements de l'Éthiopie du XV^e et du début du XVI^e siècle, et décrit les résultats de prospections de terrain visant à localiser cette importante capitale du sud-Choa, près d'Addis Abeba. Se basant sur une analyse des sources historiques, l'imagerie satellite, des considérations géographiques et des prospections, les auteurs ont pu identifier de nouveaux sites apparemment antérieurs à l'époque médiévale. Il fut cependant impossible de localiser Barara et d'autres recherches seront par conséquent nécessaires afin d'accroître nos connaissances sur les « cités » médiévales chrétiennes, et de mieux documenter le passé pré-médiéval de cette zone, qui apparaît comme ayant une longue histoire de carrefour de peuples et de cultures.

Mots-clés : Éthiopie, Choa, archéologie, histoire, villes médiévales

A dominating feature of Ethiopian royal tradition was the constant change of the king's residence of which we have a better understanding only as of the beginning of this millennium.² However, "moving capitals" and a number of prominent royal settlements existed, especially in Shoa, which formed – next to Amhara – the centre of the Ethiopian kingdoms of the 13th to early 16th Century.³ One of them, Barara, a settlement in south-east Shoa, appears to have been a capital for close on a century, but remains one of the country's least known – and most enigmatic – of towns, despite its obvious function as political and economic centre of 15th and early 16th century Ethiopia. However, having been destroyed by the Adāl conqueror Amir Ahmed ibn Ibrahim, better known as Grañ, the Left-Handed, in the first half of the 16th century, the city as well as the whole of south Shoa was later inhabited by migrating Oromo, as a result of which knowledge of Barara as well as of the other historic places in south Shoa was lost.

Permanent medieval Muslim cities of considerable size have only recently been discovered and excavated in the region of Ifat.⁴ However, no permanent medieval "cities" have been discovered or studied in the area of the Christian Ethiopian Empire. It was generally assumed that city-like permanent structures were either non-existent or of irrelevance for Ethiopian history. We have therefore no information on the possible features, size and

² B. HIRSCH & B. POISSONNIER (2000).

³ M.-L. DERAT (2003) describes in detail the importance of Amhara and Shoa for Ethiopian kings of the 13th-16th centuries, the role of royal "capitals" as well as the massive founding of churches and monasteries for religious and geo-political reasons. Due to its agricultural resources especially Shoa became the political and economic capital region of Ethiopia of that time (*ibid.*, 45-49).

⁴ F.-X. FAUVELLE-AYMAR *et al.* (2006: 133-175).

importance of these neglected royal settlements. That is in stark contrast to evidence on such cities given in medieval sources. Barara, together with others in the area close to Ethiopia's present-day capital, Addis Abba, obviously played an important role in the development of medieval societies. It is therefore the objective of this survey to enquire into the location of Barara and other royal settlements.

Medieval sources provide important hints regarding the location of Barara, without, however, being particularly precise. At least, there is sufficient evidence to locate it in the area between the Wechecha Range⁵ and the Akaki river in the west, Mt Yerer to the north, Mt Ziqwala and the Awash river to the south and the Mojo river/Debre Zeyt to the east. This is an area of some 50 km² situated roughly south/south east of present-day Addis Ababa which – in its central part – is crossed by the Dukem river roughly in north south direction (see **Fig. 1**).

This paper presents the result of a field survey of this area. It is the objective of this study to identify the location of Barara and other royal settlements in the area. Also, the survey seeks to provide a picture of the historic sites in the area, thus contributing to our knowledge of the medieval landscape before their destruction in the first half of the 16th century.

South-Shoa in the 15th/16th century and related archaeological evidence

Despite a relatively large number of historical sources (chronicles, travellers' reports, etc.) from medieval Ethiopia archaeological evidence from and research on this period is largely lacking. Material evidence of the time between the end of the Aksumite kingdom (ca. 8th century) and the "turning point" of Ethiopian history – the conquest of Abyssinia by Ahmed Grañ in the early 16th century – is very limited.

This is in stark contrast to the importance of Shoa and particularly its southern part had. Medieval archaeology in the region is limited to a relatively small number of sites: the stele cultures in the Soddo region (Tiya), the tradition of crowning Ethiopian kings on Mt Menagesha north of the Wechecha Range believed to date back to medieval times, the royal protection of the Menagesha Forest (western slopes of the Wechecha Range) which started with Zara Ya'eqob (reigned 1434-1468), the monastery on Mt Ziqwala founded in the 12th century, and – last but not least – the network of royal churches (Enselale, Ginbi, Ejersa and others) – many presumably dating back

⁵ We are using in this paper the area and site names provided in the 1:50.000 maps issued by the Ethiopian Mapping Agency (EMA) since 1973.

to the 15th/16th century⁶ – which had been discovered in south Shoa in the 1960s and 1970s as well as recently.⁷

Historical texts also report the existence of king's settlements. Several Ethiopian rulers attempted to establish fixed capitals. These were founded and regularly visited by the king. Particularly in Shoa some of these settlements became famous (Debre Berhan, Barara, Badeqe). Ethiopian kings supported specialised craftsmen in these "cities" (e.g. "king's tailors" in Badeqe). However, despite numerous reports from these times our knowledge on how a medieval Christian "city" in Ethiopia actually looked like is very limited and distorted by European perceptions of cities and capitals.⁸

This lack of knowledge of permanent medieval Christian settlements led to the assumption of a complete absence of fixed capitals in Ethiopia, a theory which was widely accepted by historians.⁹ Recent research has provided us with first archaeological evidence of the likewise enigmatic "moving capitals" of Ethiopian kings,¹⁰ however, physical evidence of permanent royal settlements of the 13th to early 16th centuries remains to be unveiled.

Barara and the south of Shoa in Fra Mauro's 15th century map

The first suggestion of Barara's existence is found in the Venetian cartographer Fra Mauro's famous map of the world, produced in Venice in 1464. The Ethiopian section, based on information gleaned in Europe, seems to reflect the actual geographic situation and indicates a place called "Barara", depicted as the site of a palace or castle. It is situated between the Doco and Auasi rivers, i.e. today's Dukem and Awash: more precisely, west of the

⁶ According to M.-L. DERAT (2003: 209), Ethiopian kings had founded 34 churches and monasteries from the 13th to the 16th century, most of which in the 15th and early 16th centuries.

⁷ F. ANFRAY (1978: 153-169). Only recently locals discovered the ruins of an ancient building in the immediate vicinity of Addis in an eastern direction (Gerji) (8° 59'24"N, 38° 50'60"E): excavating the mound situated on a slope dominating the surrounding area they interpreted the structures (rectangular foundation, ca. 10x10m, masonry work, pottery, bones from burials) as remains of a Christian church. On top of the foundation, a new church, Yerer Selassie, was built. The masonry works applied as well as the artefacts displayed in the vicinity of the church (masonry works, pottery) show similarity with other sites of pre-Grañ Christian churches, indicating that this was indeed one of the churches forming the network of royal religious sites in South-Shoa before the arrival of Grañ.

⁸ M.-L. DERAT (2003, chap. 1).

⁹ R. PANKHURST (1960: 137-142).

¹⁰ The excavated royal camp in Mänz near Debre Berhan dating back to the 15th century displayed the relatively large, but light camp structure obviously typical for "moving capitals" (B. HIRSCH & B. POISSONNIER, 2000: 59-87).

Dukem and north of the Awash.¹¹ Beyond the Dukem river, i.e. further to the south east, the map indicates a mountain called “Xiqwala” which is described as a mountain “on which is a great lake and an abbey of holy monks” – an indisputable reference to today’s Mount Ziqwala with its age-old monastery and lake. It is not clear from whom Fra Mauro took his information, however, the exceptionally exact depiction of the geographical situation seems to hint to Ethiopian pilgrims or monks familiar with Shoa and Mount Ziqwala in particular.

The Akaki river west of the Dukem and also feeding its water into the Awash is obviously not indicated on the map, although it was a much stronger river than the Dukem, the latter drying up completely during most of the year. To the east, however, the map indicates another river flowing from north to south and into the Awash with a city called Mason in its upper reaches. It seems probable that this river can be identified as the Mojo.¹² Another important feature is the mountain indicated west of Barara, the Ambanegst, i.e. the mountain of the king. In the original map of Fra Mauro a note informs us that the Ambanegst is the mountain “where the patriarch resides” (see Fig. 2).

Zorzi’s itineraries and other medieval sources on Barara and other medieval royal “villages” in the region

In 1470, shortly after the appearance of Fra Mauro’s map, Alessandro Zorzi, a Venetian man of letters, met a Italian monk newly returned from Ethiopia. The latter, whose identity is unknown, told him that the “chief city” of the Prester, i.e. Prester John, the name then given in Europe to the Emperors of Ethiopia, was called “Bärara”, and that in a neighbouring province there was “a great store of honey”.¹³

Confirmation of Barara’s importance was recorded shortly afterwards in the itinerary of an Italian traveller, Francesco Suriano.¹⁴ He recalled that he travelled in 1482 from Cairo to what he termed “the court of the great king Prester John, which was in a place called Barar”.

More detailed information on Barara was shortly afterwards collected by the aforesaid author, Alessandro Zorzi, who diligently traced, and

¹¹ The re-plotted map on page 19 shows Barara on the *eastern* side of the Dukem, the insert opposite page 20 on its *western* side, the latter obviously the correct version if comparing with the original map also presented in O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 19-20, circa 1400-1524).

¹² East of the Dukem only the Mojo is flowing in north-south direction to the Awash as indicated in Fra Mauro’s map; further to the east rivers are changing direction and flow sharply towards the north-east, reaching the Awash much further to the north.

¹³ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 127).

¹⁴ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 44).

interviewed, a number of Ethiopian ecclesiastics in Italy, whom he interrogated about their country and its geography. Zorzi was particularly interested in recording the itineraries followed by his Ethiopian informants. It is significant of the importance of Barara that two of his informants (Raphael and Thomas) came from that locality; and that out of the Venetian's six itineraries, three start from there, and one ends there.

Four Ethiopian monks, Brothers Nicholas, Zorgi, Raphael and Thomas, moreover spoke to Zorzi of the "city" of Bärara, albeit briefly. They described it, in almost identical terms, as the principal place of residence of Emperor Lebnä Dengel (reigned 1508-1540) whom Zorzi, terms the Prester, and of the Abun, or Patriarch. Brother Raphael gave the briefest account of the settlement. Zorzi quotes him as speaking of it as the "chief city" of the Prester.¹⁵ Brother Nicholas apparently spoke of it in identical terms, as the "chief city" of the Prester, but adds that it was also the site of a "castle" belonging to the Abun.¹⁶ Brother Zorgi, elaborating a little, referred to Barara as the "the principal city" of the Prester, a "metropolis", and the place where the monarch made his residence "for the greater part of the time". He also spoke of it as a place where the Patriarch had a mountain "castle".¹⁷ Brother Thomas, of Ganget, echoed the above informants. He described Barara as a "great city", and the site of a "great church" belonging to the Patriarch.¹⁸

The above information was supplemented by further data, from the aforesaid Brother Thomas, and another of Zorzi's informants, Brother Antonio.¹⁹ They both state that that Barara enjoyed a "temperate" climate, which would suggest that it was located – like most important Ethiopian settlements – at a site of some elevation. It should however be noted that the important Portuguese traveller, Francisco Alvares, makes no mention of Barara, though in all probability he visited it in order to have an audience with the king.

Barara, because of its location in the south-east of the country, was one of the first settlements to be attacked, and occupied, by the forces of Ahmed ibn Ibrahim. This event, which took place around 1530, is recorded by Grañ's Yemeni chronicler, Arab-Faqih in his *Futuh al-Habasha*, or Conquest of Abyssinia, which confirms the importance of Barara earlier explained by Zorzi's informants.²⁰

¹⁵ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 138-139).

¹⁶ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 110-111, 120-121).

¹⁷ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 132-133).

¹⁸ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 148-149, 156-157).

¹⁹ O.G.S. CRAWFORD (1958: 173-174).

²⁰ Actually, Barara – or Bararah as it is spelled in this source – is only once mentioned in the *Futuh al-Habasha*. However, another royal village which features quite often in the chronicle, Berarah, is likely to be identical with Bararah/Barara (M.-L. DERAT, 2003: 48).

Describing Grañ's campaign in the area, Arab-Faqih reports that Ahmäd, on arriving "above Bärara", came across a rich church, which had belonged to the former Ethiopian Emperor Na'od (reigned 1494-1508). Recalling the church's immense wealth, and how the Muslim soldiers looted it, Arab-Faqih continues:²¹

"When the Muslims reached the church they found it stacked with gold and silver bowls. There was gold plate in the church, gold and silver bowls, and silken furnishings. They [Grañ's men] took vast booty [...]. The Muslims accumulated vast booty [...]. [They] plundered an unaccountable quantity of gold, silver and silk over twenty days [...]. Small and great among the Muslims became wealthy, and there was no longer any poverty among them".

The Adal army shortly afterwards came across – and destroyed – the Patriarchal Church earlier referred to by Zorzi's Ethiopian informants. Arab-Faqih reports: "They burnt down a mighty church that belonged to the patriarch [...]. When the Muslims arrived at the church they took the gold, silver and silk that was in it, and then burnt the church down".²² The above events almost certainly spelt the end of Barara as a royal capital.

The region was not re-captured by Emperor Lebnä Dengel or his successors, and was subsequently more or less permanently occupied by the Oromo. Ethiopian royal capitals were thereafter situated much further to the north and west, and Barara's former existence was largely forgotten.

Another 16th century royal settlement in the vicinity of the Dukem river was Badeqe. This settlement was located, according to Arab-Faqih, two days march north of the Awash river – and is thought by Huntingford to have been 20 miles SSW of modern Sheno.²³ Another hypothesis assumes that the location of Badeqe was at Tullu Dimtu, a small rural settlement and hill-top some 20 km to the east of Mt Yerer.²⁴

Badeqe is also the place of a famous battle which took place in 1528, i.e. one year before the decisive battle of Shembera Kure which ended in disaster for the Christian troops. The battle of Badeqe was one of the last occasions when the Adal army was defeated by Christian troops. The *Futuh al-Habasha* describes in detail the battle which took place at the banks of a river named *Samarma*, a "great river" which was located between the city and the

²¹ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 165-167).

²² P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 167).

²³ G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD (1989: 90-123).

²⁴ L. RICCI (1976: 196). The authors did not yet have the opportunity to identify/visit the places and to verify this hypothesis. However, a fire blazing at these locations quite distant to Mt Yerer could certainly *not* be seen by Grañ's Muslims when camping at the Dukem (see next footnote).

attacking Muslims.²⁵ Badeqe, like many other historic settlements in the region, was finally occupied – and looted – by the forces of Ahmed Grañ, and is mentioned in the *Futuh al-Habasha* on a number of occasions.

The text refers to Badeqe frequently as “the king’s village”²⁶, and describes it as the site of Lebnä Dengel’s residence and church which were located together.²⁷ The church struck him as of particular interest in that it had been “built in a most beautiful fashion” by Lebnä Dengel’s wife Queen Säblä Wängel.²⁸ Describing the destruction of this church, Grañ’s chronicler recalls that when the Muslim force reached Badeqe, the Imam gave his men the order to “Burn the church”, whereupon they “arrived at Badeqe and burned the church down. Its acroterial ornaments were of gold, and the cross above it was of red gold. They stripped it of its gold and burnt it and plundered its furnishings, which the Christians of the village had left behind in three trenches. But as for gold, they found nothing there apart from what they took from the church”.²⁹

Part of the Muslim army meanwhile made their way to another of the Emperor’s settlements. Referred to as Andutna – perhaps his rendering of Entotto³⁰ – it was the site, according to Arab-Faqih, of Lebnä Dengel’s “house”, i.e. palace, which was decorated with paintings: “images of lions, of human beings, of birds, depicted in red, yellow, green and white and other

²⁵ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 60-64). It is not clear where the Samarma river is to be located. G.W.B. HUNTINGFORD (1989: 90, 124) assumes vaguely that it is a northern tributary of the Awash. Another hint to the location of Badeqe is given by P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 162): “When the Muslims reached the river Dukam they noticed a fire in the middle of Badeqe”. If the Dukam of the *Futuh al-Habasha* is identically with the Dukem flowing from Mt Yerer south to reach the Awash close to Mt Ziqwala, Badeqe must be found somewhere south, south-east or south-west of Mt Yerer as otherwise it could not be seen from the Dukem.

²⁶ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 162-163, 168)

²⁷ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 48-49). According to the *Futuh al-Habasha*, Badeqe seems to have been the most important of the king’s villages in the first quarter of the 16th century. It appears that Barara had at that time already lost its dominating function reported from the 15th century.

²⁸ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 71).

²⁹ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 163).

³⁰ Menelik II was referring to Lebnä Dengel’s legendary settlement of Entotto when founding his first imperial capital close to today Addis Ababa; however, historic sources from Lebnä Dengel’s times do not mention Entotto and such a site is in fact difficult to retrace: Antoine D’ABBADIE (1890: 297), during his geographic studies in the area in the 1870s was actually locating an “Antotto” on the Wechecha Range *west* of today Addis Ababa. Menelik II’s Old Entotto was situated on the southern slopes of this range. It seems that only when Menelik II moved his capital to the dominating mountain range *north* of today Addis Ababa this name was transferred to the range which is known since then as the Entotto. However, archaeological evidence on this mountain range north of Addis Ababa is puzzling: while the dominating remains of a fortress and other building and fortification structures around church Ra’quel most likely originate from Menelik II’s times, the trench encircling the hill-top might be of more ancient origin. This seems also to apply for the badly preserved remains of a wall on an elevation just north of church Maryam.

colours”. “The Muslims”, we are told, “entered the house, and were amazed at what was in it; and then burnt it”. Grañ subsequently learnt that many of the treasures from Badeqe had been stored away for safe-keeping. He accordingly sent one of his followers, Wazir ‘Addoli, back to the area, where the latter spent six days plundering, after which he brought the Imam “gold and silver plates, and silk of every hue”.³¹ Badeqe, like Barara, was apparently never recaptured by the Christian army, and probably soon occupied by the Oromo, thereafter disappears from view.

Another settlement indicated on Fra Mauro’s map from 1460 is Mason, a place which is probably identical with Masin, the village mentioned in the *Futuh al-Habasha*. The text tells how Muslim forces came across the settlement the day after having passed the night at the Mojo river and burned down the settlement as well as the king’s church:³²

“So the Muslims set out and stopped at the time of the afternoon prayer by a river called Maju in the land of Fatagar. On this day there was a driving and cold wind, so they passed the night there. When the next day came, they set out, halting only when they came to a place called Masin, the village of Umar Abun. They set fire to it, as they also set fire to the king’s church. [...] Upon the third day they set out, finally arriving in the neighbourhood of Badeqe which was where the king’s houses were and where his treasure was stored”.

This description fits fit well with the location of Mason indicated in Fra Mauro’s map and indicates that Badeqe was less than a one day journey away from Masin/Mason.

Geographic considerations and the medieval road systems

When looking for medieval settlements in south Shoa the geography of the area and its possible medieval road system should be taken into consideration.

The following map illustrates the strategic position of the area west of Mt Yerer and the Dukem river as the hub of an almost water-free road connection between north-eastern with south-western areas as well as with the north-west and the Rift Valley in the south-east. Despite the generally good mobility of traditional means of transport (mules, donkeys, etc.), we believe that the tracing of medieval lines of communication was organised in such a way as to minimize the number of rivers to be crossed. Fords were chosen which allowed a crossing as soon as possible after the rainy season. In this

³¹ P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 187).

³² P.L. STENHOUSE (2003: 60).

regard, the area around Mt Yerer was well placed to link the regions of the Christian empire with the Jimma/Kaffa – Debre Berhan – Red Sea trade route; it connected also perfectly with the northern parts located in the Nile basin, to be reached by crossing the huge mountain range to the north which is today known as Entotto. All this contributed to the importance of south Shoa for the Christian Empire (see **Fig. 3**).

The density of archaeological sites already known in the area seems to confirm the importance of the area: the medieval Menagesha “coronation” hill³³ and the Wechecha Range (Antotto?) in the north-west, display several ruins which possibly formed part of a network of royal churches in South Shoa in the 13th-16th century (Enselale, Ginbi, Goudji-Kidame Mehret, Goutou, Ilala Gada, Ejersa; see **Fig. 3**) and, most prominent, the medieval monastery on Mt Ziqwala in the south. With the exception of Mt Ziqwala, all the sites are situated on the border zone between the lowlands and the highlands, i.e. in an area between 2000 m asl and 2500 m asl, an area with temperate climate, just as described for Barara in Zorzi’s itineraries.

Surveyed area and assumptions

The surveyed area is located between the Wechecha Range and the Akaki river in the west, Mt Yerer to the north, Mt Ziqwala and the Awash river to the south and the Mojo river and Debre Zeyt to the east, an area of some 50 km². The survey was based on the following assumptions:

- Medieval settlements should be located at a *favourable strategic location* – i.e. with good connection to other important regions;
- Royal “cities” should be *located on hill-tops or at least significant elevation*;
- Royal settlements should still provide *evidence in form of walls, trenches* and other structural elements in association with a *particular density of pottery, flint, bone, mill stones* and other remains of at least several decades of permanent inhabitation.

Survey approach and field visits

To carry out field surveys of the area of some 50 km² a combined approach was chosen: (i) the area – and especially hills and elevations – was screened by using Google Earth satellite imagery; and (ii) field trips were carried out to places which seemed to indicate settlement structures. The

³³ Ancient settlement structures, the ruins of a rectangular building quite similar in appearance to the other pre- Grañ churches as well as remarkable quantities of fine pottery and other settlement debris discovered on the top of the Menagesha mountain confirm the ancient importance of this distinguished elevation in the west of Addis Ababa (see F. ANFRAY, 1978: 159).

resolution is in many parts of the surveyed area sufficiently exact and detailed to allow for a “pre-selection” of places. However, east and north of Mt Yerer the quality of the imagery is poor and only physical field surveys can be applied. Also, the correct interpretation of satellite imagery requires some experience. Misinterpretation led more than once to the “discovery” of “ancient” walls which, when visited, turned out to be of natural origin. Hills and mountains, especially those of volcanic origin, frequently evoke features reminiscent of wall structures. In any case satellite imagery can give only a first indication: field visits are always needed to verify identified “suspect” areas. Visual screening in the field – preferably from the top of dominating hills – is without any doubt indispensable. Several field trips were carried out in all parts of the survey area. The following places were surveyed:

- West of the Akaki river: the Wechecha Range and its surrounding slopes and hills including the Menegsha “coronation” hill, Mt Furi and lower hills south of Mt Furi and west of lake Aba Samuel.
- Between the Akaki river and the Dukem river: the hills of Koye, Kora, Gara Bushu, Insilale Tiko, Mt. Guji and Mt. Bilbilo.
- East of the Dukem river and west of the Mojo river: Mt Ziqwala and the volcanic cones leading from Debre Zeyt to Mt. Ziqwala (including the large volcanic crater in the area of Bede Gebabe south of Debre Zeyt), Mt Yerer – particularly the chain of hills leading to the village of Dukem (Chefe Buki, Nucho, Gimashe, Tedecha) – as well as the eastern slopes of Mt. Yerer (Gala Amba, Keteba, Wedecha, Sire, Ichiche); the plain of Hadda between Mt Yerer and Debre Zeyt.
- East of the Mojo river: the village of Rob Gebeya, or Wednesday Market, and its surrounding hills (Hidi, Berora,³⁴ Wofu).

The areas north of Mt Yerer and further east of the Mojo river were not closely surveyed and could not be screened with means of satellite imagery due to its poor quality. These areas have still to be physically surveyed. They are outside the survey area.³⁵ This applies also to the hills west of the Akaki and Lake Abba Samuel, which only selectively had been visited, although these areas could be at least pre-screened using Google Earth imagery.

³⁴ Berora is the name of the area south of the village Rob Gebeya, located some 10 km to the east of Debre Zeyt. There is also a small hill named Berora, which Crawford possibly had in mind when he identified Barara with Mt Borora, a mountain he found on a British war map south-east of Addis close to Debre Zeyt. However, this survey did not find any traces of the medieval city at modern Berora.

³⁵ The area north and north-west of Mt Yerer is predominantly flat and possibly less suitable for a fortified medieval city, however, this might be also a wrong judgement as it is not clear whether Barara was fortified or not.

Results of the Survey

The survey identified three sites which seem to be of early origin. These quite different sites are presented in the following.

(i) The fortification on the Wechecha Range

This fortification is found on the south-eastern side of the Wechecha Range. It dominates on 3200 m asl a remote hill-top only some 2 km from Mt Dämoča (highest peak of the range at 3385 m asl). The distinct hill with the fortification looms – due to its considerable height – as a dominating feature against the sky and can be seen from all directions except from the west.³⁶ (see **Fig. 4**).

The fortification on the remote hill-top lies on one of the hills which formed the crater rim of the Wechecha volcano. With its 3200 m asl, the hill enjoys almost perfect protection by steep cliffs or slopes to the north, east and south. Only on the western side a narrow ridge connects the hill with the adjacent hills (**Picture 1**).

The hill-top comprises a huge flattish area of some 27 ha which is completely encircled by a massive stone wall of 1.7 km length, 3-5 m width and 0.5–1.5 m height. This Outer Wall (OW) follows the ridge where the flattish hill-top area falls to deep cliffs and slopes, by thus utilizing the hill's natural protection (**Pictures 2-4**).

Other important features are a Circle Wall (CW) which measures 60 m in diameter, 2 m in width and 0.5-1 m in height (**Picture 5**), and a Section Wall (SW) of 700 m in length, 3-5 m in width and in parts up to 1.7 m in height (**Picture 6**). Circle Wall and Section Wall are situated close to the fortification's only entrance (E) which is located at its western side towards the flattish ridge connecting the hill with the rest of the Wechecha Range. An almost rectangular wall construction just opposite the entrance was possibly a kind of bastion to protect this most vulnerable part of the site. A spring (S) just next to the assumed bastion was certainly not strong enough to feed the inhabitants; water provision was therefore only possible when descending to the river deep below the fortification (see **Fig. 5**).

The hill-top consists in parts of barren rock. However, most of the 27 ha walled-in area is presently used as land. Apart from the still impressive walls no other stone construction, such as remains of buildings, could be identified. If they had existed, it is possible that the relatively intensive farming activities have destroyed the evidence. Parts of the walls still stand up to 1.7 m high (especially the Section Wall) with stones obviously well set and with

³⁶ Geographical position: 8° 58'30"N, 38° 36'56"E.

some masonry added. It seems that lime was also used to fix stones. However, most parts of the wall systems consist of severely eroded walls, which have turned to rubble. Despite its impressive original width of up to 5 m, the Outer Wall is in some parts eroded to the ground foundations (**Picture 4**). An extended later use of stones from walls, or possibly remains of buildings, seems less probable taking into consideration the remote location of the site – far away from any larger settlements.

The local population on the foothills of the fortification know about the walls and have different explanations for their origin, one of which being that this was the capital of Emperor Zara Ya'eqob, the 15th century Emperor who was reportedly the first ruler to protect the Menagesha Forest on the Western slopes of the Wechecha Range.³⁷

It seems that oral tradition had long pointed to a ruined city of Zara Ya'eqob on the Wechecha Range. D'Abbadie³⁸ reflects this information when he provides relatively precise geographical data on a “ville ruinée de Zar-a Ya'iqob” on top of the range, a location which seems almost perfectly identical with our fortified hill-top.

(ii) The Terraced Hill-Tops at Insilale Tiko, Gara Bushu and Ichichie

Immediately west of Mt Yerer – in an area named Insilale Tiko –, a hill shows particular features: three distinct terraces around the flattish hill-top had been cut into the relatively loose volcanic material (**Picture 7**). These features can already be seen from far, as the hill, with its elevation of 2.375 m asl and its steep slopes dominates the surrounding area, including the nearby ford which leads over the upper Dukem river.³⁹ The terraces are obviously man-made. Considering the loose volcanic material not suitable for building activities they most likely cannot be interpreted as remains of former quarry activities (**Fig. 6**).

On the relatively small hill-top of only some 0.5 ha, stone settings and section walls (W) are clearly man-made and seem to form part of a fortification system. This applies also for the two stone circles (SC) with diameters of 2 and 4 m, respectively, which can be found on the highest point of the hill-top (**Picture 8**). A trench system to the south-east seem to indicate

³⁷ For oral traditions of uncertain validity see F. VON BREITENBACH & J. KEUKOL (1962: 18); and E.F. GILBERT (1970). Both articles cite the ruler as King Yaqob (a 16th and early 17th century monarch with no apparent relationship with the area). The local priest Gragéta Wärqnäḥ on the other hand told the present writers that local tradition attributed medieval development in the area to the more powerful 15th century Emperor Zara Ya'eqob, whose capital was in this part of the country, at Debre Berhan. It is possible that Yaqob, the name cited by the above writers, was a mistake for Zara Ya'eqob as there was no king with the name of Yaqob during this period in this area.

³⁸ A. D'ABBADIE (1890: 297).

³⁹ Geographical position: 8° 52'48"N; 38°54'02"E; the Dukem ford is on 2.230 m asl.

an entrance (E) to the hill-top itself. However, due to the site's generally very low state of preservation no clear indicators such as walls can still be found to establish the matter with certainty. A deep trench (T) in the volcanic material located at the northern side of the hill might have been dug for protection purposes. On the hill-top considerable amounts of pottery can be found, some of it relatively fine ceramic. Also a blue coloured piece of glass was found some 20 cm deep at the foot of one of the walls. Already at that level the natural substratum replaces the layer where some pottery and charcoal can be found. Much better preserved ruins of a small settlement found to the east, just on the other side of the Dukem river on a gentle slope of Mt Yerer are obviously of more recent origin.

Only some 6.8 km to the south-west of the site of Insilale Tiko another fortified hill-top is found on Gara Bushu,⁴⁰ not far from the modern village Dukem. Quite different to Insilale Tiko the site has a relatively vast extension of ca. 5 ha, situated on a plateau which gently descends from the highest point at 2346 m asl. To almost all sites the place is protected by steep slopes or even cliffs. A circle of massive stones (ca. 80 m in diameter) dominates the central place of the site; extensive terraces with walls and wall circles indicating possibly the sites of wooden tukuls (huts) can be found to the north-east and north. A trench of 0,3m x 1,5m on the almost flattish central place produced considerable debris of human settlement (pottery, mill stone, obsidian) up to 0.75m depth. All wall structures are in quite eroded condition, although the general outline of the settlement is still clearly recognizable.⁴¹

Features of a terraced hill-top similar to those observed at Insilale Tiko are also found east of Mt Yerer, close to the site described below. This hill-top is located in an area named *Ichichie* (**Picture 9**). The site has still to be investigated in more detail.

(iii) The “City of Sire” at Mt Yerer

Some 15 km north of Debre Zeyt, mid-way on a secondary road to Chefe Donsa and only some 2 km beyond passing the rural market town of Godino, a remarkable archaeological site has been investigated in detail. The area is locally known as “Sire” and making reference to the archaeological evidence the authors named the site the “City of Sire”. Some 6 km to the north-west of this place are found the medieval ruins of the Church of Ginbi and not far to the west looms Mt Yerer.⁴² Only some 2 km to the north-east the terraced hill-top of Ichichie is located (see **Fig. 7**).

⁴⁰ Geographical position: 8° 50'56"N; 38°50'48"E.

⁴¹ Francois-Xavier FAUVELLE-AYMAR from the CFEE, Addis Ababa visited the site and confirmed its generally ancient appearance.

⁴² Geographic position: 8° 52'24"N; 39°03'04"E.

Already Ricci, in 1973, when passing the site at some 1.5 km distance on his way to the excavation at Ginbi, seems to have sighted the walls on the hill (**Picture 10**). He reports that he had no time for investigations, but was assured by Anfray, the then Head of the French-Ethiopian archaeological mission, that a rapid survey had shortly before shown that "...it was of a total different type than Ginbi".⁴³ Assuming that Anfray and Ricci sighted the "City of Sire", they obviously failed to carry out any in-depth investigation. The site was apparently never excavated and to the best of the authors' knowledge, has never been published.

The "City of Sire" comprises a hill-top (Mt Adere, 2165 m asl) which extends further to the south-west in the form of a gentle slope. The hill, which despite being in many parts relatively flat, dominates the surrounding area: to the south plains gradually extend towards the large Plain of Hadda around Debre Zeyt. To the west the Belbela river provides protection as well as water.⁴⁴ However, just at the "City of Sire" a ford (**Picture 11**) makes the Belbela passable and therefore provides access to the main east-west roads as well as the road to the north to Debre Berhan, without having to pass any other major rivers. Some 15 km further south the Belbela flows into the Mojo river, which is the dominating river of the watershed. Not far away, some 6 km to the north-west, lies the excavated medieval church of Ginbi (ca. 14th-15th century) on the high eastern slopes of Mt Yerer.

The aerial photo (**Fig. 8**) shows the still visible part of the "City of Sire": it is the double wall system on the hill-top. These still considerably high walls made out of stones and earth to a height of up to 1.5 m can be seen from the distance.

However, apart from the wall structure on the hill-top all other still extant structures of the "City of Sire" are much less visible on first sight and only a careful survey of the area reveals them. They form an astonishing ensemble of elements which can only be interpreted as a well planned and differentiated architectural structure extending over the hill-top ("upper city") and its flattish south-western extension ("lower city"). The total area of the "City of Sire" is about 18 ha (**Fig. 9**).

To the north and north-east deep gullies and seemingly man-made trenches (Tr) protect the site where it is most vulnerable: from this direction there extends a huge and lengthy slope of which our hill-top forms the most

⁴³ L. RICCI (1976: 196).

⁴⁴ Even at the end of the dry season in April 2008 the Belbela river had still not dried up, a rare feature in this area! Some 500 m north of the "City of Sire" – just next to the Belbela river – a strong fresh water spring (FWS) is reliably providing drinkable water even during the dry season. For sure a definite advantage in this area where springs and fresh water are generally rare!

southern end. However, the town's main gate (E1) lays exactly here, to the north-east, and connects with the road to Debre Berhan as well as with the Belbela ford (F), and subsequently the road leading to Mt Yerer and Ginbi. The entrance road crossing the strong fortifications on this side is still visible. It might be that the wall structures close by represent the remains of a bastion (B1) to guard the gate – in addition to the massive north-eastern wall-trench system and the steep slope which must have constituted strong protection against attackers.

Approaching the “City of Sire” from the west and having passed the Belbela ford (F), one could either enter the city via the main entrance (E1) or by using a relatively steep path of some 2 m width leading up from the river (**Picture 12**). Without doubt the path is not recent and some efforts were undertaken to cut the path into the rock of the hill. The path was stabilized by walls, particularly at its beginning close to the ford. There were also walls erected to protect this entrance and the ford itself. With the same objective a small terrace (B5) was cut out of the rock some 20 m above the ford and the path entrance, which was fortified by a wall and served as a bastion to protect the entrance as well the ford access.

When reaching the edge of the steep slope leading to the river, one passes a staircase through a door (E2) of some 2 m width (**Picture 13**) which forms part a 2 m wide wall (of which only the foundations can still be seen). After some 10 m the visitor would have to pass through another 2 m wide wall before actually entering the town. The two walls would join towards the north and lead – always following the ridge of the hill-top – to the main entrance (E1). This strong fortification by a double wall system on the side of the Belbela river is on first sight astonishing as one may assume sufficient protection from the river itself. However, during the dry season the river is easily passable and the slope of the hill at this place is not so steep to prevent determined attackers. Only some 70 m further south natural protection is finally provided on to the western side of the “lower city” as the Belbela river – falling down a 10m waterfall – cuts a deep gorge with precipices on both sides of the river (**Picture 14**).

The flattish “lower city” is located on the final S-shaped extension of the main slope and originally ran smoothly towards the southern plains below. To ensure sufficient protection also at this vulnerable side a trench (Tr) was dug deep in the volcanic debris measuring 10m in width and some 4m in depth (picture 15). This trench could possibly also provide access to the city through its the southern entrance (E3). A visitor had to pass by two bastions

(B3 & B4) before passing between parallel running walls: an efficient fortification system which is still well preserved and visible.⁴⁵

From this southern city gate a double wall system on two separated terraces extends to the north-east, strengthened by a bastion (B2) to the south-east and leading up to a special fortification consisting of a tower (I) as well as other wall structures which are located at the central hub of the city where “upper” and “lower city” meet. Most probably this construction was also securing a near-by fourth entrance to the south east where the hill’s slopes are gentler. From this point a single wall runs up to the northern wall-trench system completing the city’s fortification on its eastern side. Generally, the wall fortifications on the eastern side are less impressive than on the northern or southern part. This is due to the fact that in most parts a very steep slope made any attempt on this side of the “City of Sire” difficult.

The central part of the “City of Sire” consists of a still well preserved double wall structure (R) which, due to its preserved height (up to 1.5 m), is visible from far (see **Fig. 8**). Within the inner wall (on some 100 m²) fine masonry work has been applied to construct what can possibly be interpreted as foundations consisting of larger rectangular building blocks (**Picture 16**). Still visible and preserved in situ is a rectangular arrangement of building blocks of around 6 m x 9 m (**Picture 17**). However, the area is partially disturbed – perhaps by local inhabitants looking for building material. All over the place scattered blocks of similar quality provide ample evidence of a former prominent building structure. Excavation is needed to clarify the structure and other archaeological evidence which is likely to emerge at this prominent place.

The area around the double wall structure on the hill-top is densely covered with debris of settlement: pottery, parts of hand-mills and flakes of obsidian.⁴⁶ One exposure delivers charcoal in association with pottery and bone fragments. On the south-western side of the central hill-top, a remarkable finding proves that obviously a larger population inhabited the site: a large stone of volcanic origin had been transformed into a millstone (M) with three separate mills (**Picture 18**). Another impressive feature of the “upper city” is a massive circle wall (CW) placed north east of the hill-top. Huge rocks here form a semi-circle of some 40 m in diameter. They had obviously been extracted from within the circle, thereby creating a flat area.

⁴⁵ At E3 different building and settlement phases can be well observed: foundations of massive wall structure are lying below lighter ones (of some 1 m width), the latter still relatively well preserved and standing up to 1 m height (**Pictures 20, 21**).

⁴⁶ Also some rare obsidian blades can be found which seem to be of the same type and style like the ones found at Late Stone Age site at Lake Ziway (F. BON *et al.*, 2006: 86-129). This may hint to a settlement tradition on this strategically well located hill that reaches far more back in time.

The flattish height on which the “lower city” is located is less spectacular in terms of wall structures. However, this area – although generally providing less archaeological evidence of former settlement (pottery, flakes, etc.) than the central hill-top – reveals a number of structural elements which indicate that also this part of the city was well planned and structured: approaching this part from the southern entrance (E3) one would pass a wall through a doorway or gate (D) of which the foundations are still visible (**Picture 19**). Remains of wall structures on the flanks of the “lower city” (as well as in parts of the “upper city”) may also indicate city structures.

It seems that oral tradition preserved at least some knowledge on the “City of Sire”. The people living next to the hill seem to have little knowledge of the site’s history (apart from a stone on the hill-top associated with Ahmed Grañ). Ricci reported⁴⁷ that the local population around the site of Ginbi (some 6 km to the north-west) believes that not far from the church of Ginbi a royal village was located which is associated with both Zara Ya-eqob and Lebñä Dengel.⁴⁸ It would seem that the “City of Sire” was the settlement recalled in this tradition.

Another interesting hint comes again from d’Abbadie⁴⁹ who reports an “ancienne ville de Zar-a Ya’iqob” located opposite the slave market of Roge on Mt Yerer (“sur le Mt Harrar”), just above the Plain of Hadda.⁵⁰ This description almost perfectly fits the City of Sire.

(iv) Other Sites

Next to the sites presented above this survey explored a number of smaller and less spectacular sites in the surveyed area which seem to be of early origin. In order to provide a complete picture and to allow for future research we list these sites hereafter briefly (most sites can be virtually “visited” using Google Earth):

- Some 3 km north-east from the fortified hill-top on the Wechecha Range and ca. 3 km from Menegasha “coronation” hill: massive rectangular wall of some 150 x 100 m and possibly ruins of towers on an elevated slope (2.860 m asl) dominating the plain between Wechecha and Entotto Ranges (9°00’43.50”N; 38°37’55.38”E).

⁴⁷ L. RICCI (1976: 196).

⁴⁸ Ricci reports that the local population speaks of the “kitchen” of the royal village (“cucine della dimora reale”) not far away from Ginbi and located on a hill-top.

⁴⁹ A. D’ABBADIE (1890: 299).

⁵⁰ According to the local population settling on Mt Yerer a market place with the name of Roge is actually located just north of Mt Yerer and south-west of Hamus Gebeya. This geographic position is in line with data given by d’Abbadie. The Plain of Hadda is the flat area between the Mojo and Dukem rivers. South of hill-top of the “City of Sire” the Plain of Hadda commences.

- Immediately to the east of the before mentioned site: 2.4 km to the east and just above Addis Ababa at 2770 m asl: small hill-top encircled by a very much eroded wall of some 25 m in diameter, with two tumuli (?) (9°00'42.29"N; 38°39'12.60"E).

- Ca. 3 km to the south-east of the fortified hill-top on the Wechecha Range at 2630 m asl: massive wall circle of some 100 m in diameter with some inside wall structures on a relatively flat area (8°57'44.58"N; 38°38'12.33"E).

- South of Mt Yerer on the chain of lower hills towards the village of Dukem at 2100 m asl: ca. 8 massive wall circles of ca. 8 m in diameter, typically with a well established floor lower than the surrounding surface (8°50'08.19"N; 38°55'11.89"E); next to the village of Dukem on an elevated hill-top at 2200 m asl, just above the Hadda Plain: massive ruins of a wall of which only some 15 m are still visible (8°48'42.16"N; 38°55'10.14"E).

- Immediately west of the main peak of Mt. Yerer and close to the source of the Dukem river on an elevated slope at 2635 m asl: ca. 5 massive wall circles of some 10 diameter (8°54'09.48"N; 38°56'11.53"E); just opposite on another hill: intensive debris of settlement (pottery, mill stones) (8°54'10.67"N; 38°56'32.67"E).

- South-east of Debre Zeyt, behind lake Hora Hoda on the south-eastern ridge of a large volcanic crater in the area of Bede Gebabe at 2240 m asl (8°40'32.03"N; 38°57'17.38"E): double walled tower construction (ca. 10 m in diameter) which was recently almost completely destroyed by locals using the stones. Locals believe that both buildings originate from a land lord (*ras*) owning the surrounding area during the reign of Menelik II – an assumption with some credibility considering the good preservation of the building prior to its recent destruction.

- The same can be said for a site immediately east of the Mojo river; on the southern slope of a hill named Wofu at 2000 m asl (8°49'40.05"N; 39°05'51.35"E): encircled by a partially massive wall again a double walled tower with an impressive staircase construction, another round building next by as well as two other buildings with possibly storage function; all structures are still relatively well preserved with walls still standing up to some 6 m, leading to the assumption that this site represents a (military/administrative?) stronghold dating back to the end of the 19th century.⁵¹

⁵¹ Francois-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar from the CFEE visited the site and confirmed the more recent character of the buildings – however, stressing that this is one of the best preserved examples of its time. The massive encircling wall with its seemingly different building phases might, however, hint to a more ancient settlement.

Conclusions

Neither Barara nor Badege could be identified by this survey. None of the located sites can be assumed with certainty to be either of the two cities. The assumptions of this survey (location on hill-tops in association with wall structures) may not have been correct. If such cities were located on a more flattish area, erosion might well have covered the structures with a layer of mud. However, comparison with the 13th century Ifat Muslim cities makes it difficult to believe that more recent building structures from the 14/15th century should not have left significant visible traces. It seems that Christian “cities” of the 15th-16th century did not use wall and stone structures at all but only mud and wood ones which left hardly any traces.

However, there is good reason to still believe that Barara was located between Mt Yerer and the Wechecha Range as indicated in Fra Mauro’s map. The results of this survey confirm that pre-modern settlements in south Shoa were mainly concentrated on hills and plateaus between 2000 and 2700 m asl, in an environment characterized by fertile agricultural land, absence of major diseases, sufficient rainfall and good communication with other regions of Abyssinia. Here, on the vast, moderately hilly plateaus between Entotto, Mt Yerer and the Wechecha Range, also Barara must have been located as Zorzi’s informants speak of Barara’s “temperate” climate.

Having visited almost all major hills and elevations in the surveyed area it seems that Barara was not built on a prominent, well fortified hill-top; it seems much more likely that the “city” was of a relatively modest structure (like the “moving capitals” of the Abyssinian kings?) predominantly built of organic material. In this case, Barara could be found only by chance as field surveys with complete coverage of the area are for the time being not realistic due to lack of resources. In any case, the obvious absence of clearly visible “city” indicators (prominent position, walls, trenches) would make it difficult to provide satisfying prove for the actual location of Barara even if more intensive surveys will be carried out in the future. The “city” will most likely remain an “enigma”.

The fortified hill-top on the *Wechecha Range* was most likely not the location of a medieval city: the absence of building structures and pottery as well as its remote and almost hostile location exclude this possibility. Given its dominating position it is possibly identical with the Ambanegst indicated in Fra Mauro’s map. However, the absence of stone building structures and any other settlement debris speak against this assumption; this evidence could even indicate an early abandonment of the site shortly after the walls had been built. Only excavation can clarify these questions.

Badege, finally, must be found somewhere south or south-east of Mt Yerer. Considering that Muslim warriors had seen the fire in the middle of

Badeqe when camping at the Dukem, and that – according to the same source – the Abyssinian king came from Badeqe out of an *eastern direction* when clashing at Shembera Kure south of Mt. Yerer with Muslim forces coming from the Dukem river in the west,⁵² it seems that this royal settlement could only be located on the southern or south-eastern side of Mt Yerer. Only such a position would have allowed Grañ's troops – while camping at the Dukem river – to see a fire blazing at Badeqe.

The only site discovered by this survey with fortifications, located next to a river and strategically placed in this area south/south-east of Mt Yerer is the “City of Sire”. This place obviously had a long settlement tradition, most likely starting in pre-medieval times: an older, hardly preserved massive fortification system covering a large area was obviously re-used by building the double wall structure on the hill-top and other less strong fortifications on the whole hill site (**Pictures 20/21**). Dense pottery and other debris around the hill-top indicate an intensive settlement period. The constructions on the hill-top as well as a range of seemingly more recent wall structures on the whole hill site might be medieval and could represent the remains of Badeqe. However, the place could be also Masin/Mason. The site's location fits almost perfectly to Fra Mauro's indication of this place in his map. Only excavation can reveal the different phases of settlements and bring more certainty.

Excavating the “City of Sire” would also create a unique opportunity to learn more about possibly pre-medieval fortifications which are reminiscent of their strength of bronze-age traditions in South Arabia. The survey's focus on hill-tops led to the discovery of a number of these obviously pre-medieval strongholds, especially Insilale Tiko, Gara Bushu, Ichichie and possibly also the fortified hill-top on the Wechecha Range: the strength of the fortifications as well as their very limited preservation hint likewise to pre-medieval times. Semitic migration from South Arabia to Ethiopia in the 2nd Millennium BC might have imported these traditions to Ethiopia. However, knowledge about these times is yet not established. An excavation of the “City of Sire” and the other fortified hill-tops could contribute to our knowledge on the early history of Ethiopia, a period of time until now as much neglected as the one of medieval Barara and its contemporary Christian peer “cities”.

⁵² Locals from nearby Debre Zeyt still associate a place known as Shembera Kure with the low hills immediately south of Mt Yerer.

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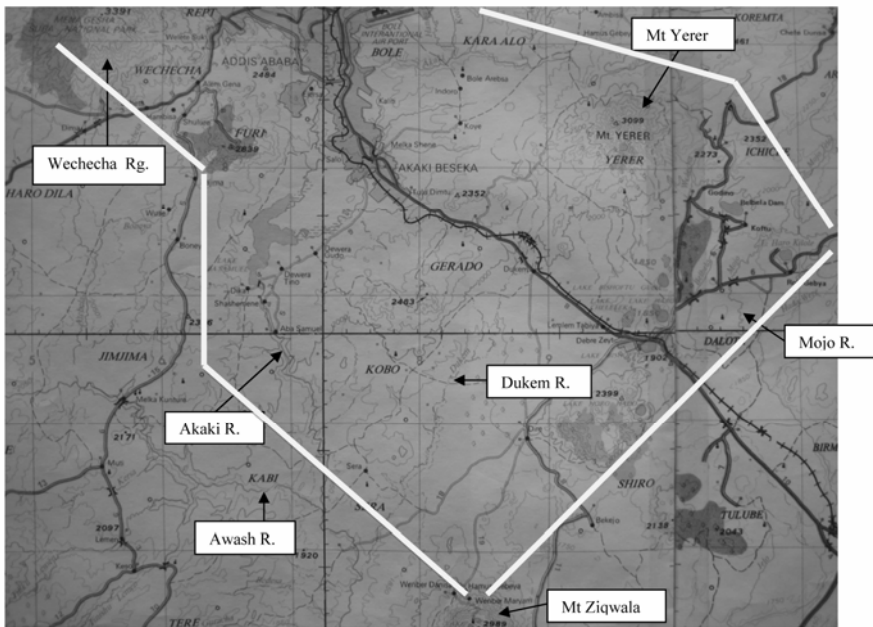


Fig. 1 – Location map (based on Ethiopia 1:250.000, Akaki Beseka/Nazaret, EMA, 1997/1995). White lines: boundaries of surveyed area.



Fig. 2 – Excerpt from Fra Mauro's map, re-plotted by Crawford, redrawn by the authors

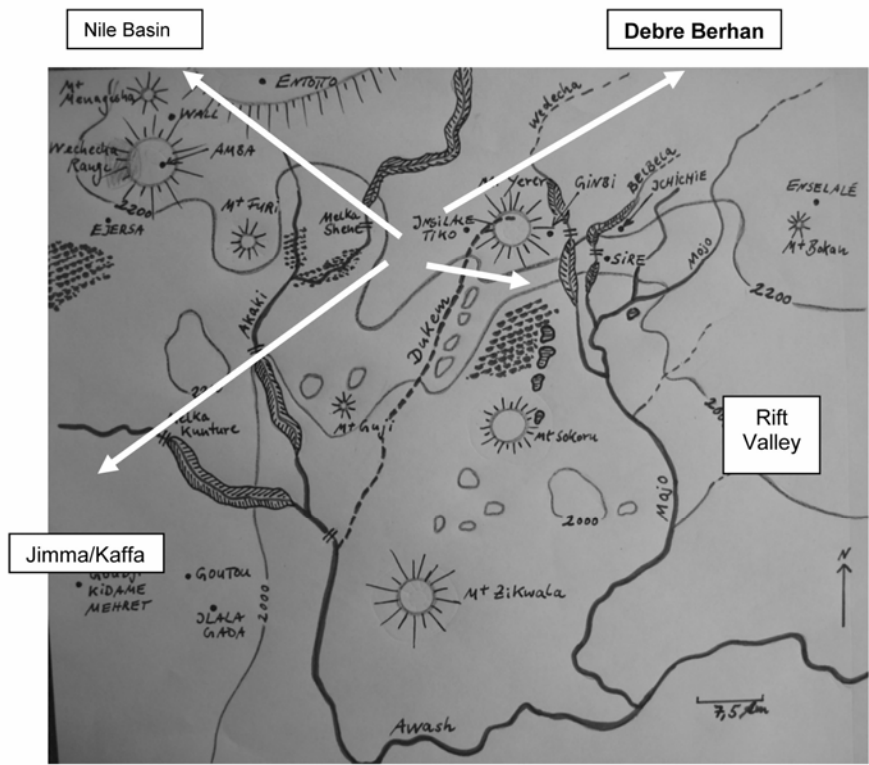


Fig. 3 – The area under consideration as a crossroads, and main archaeological sites known in the area

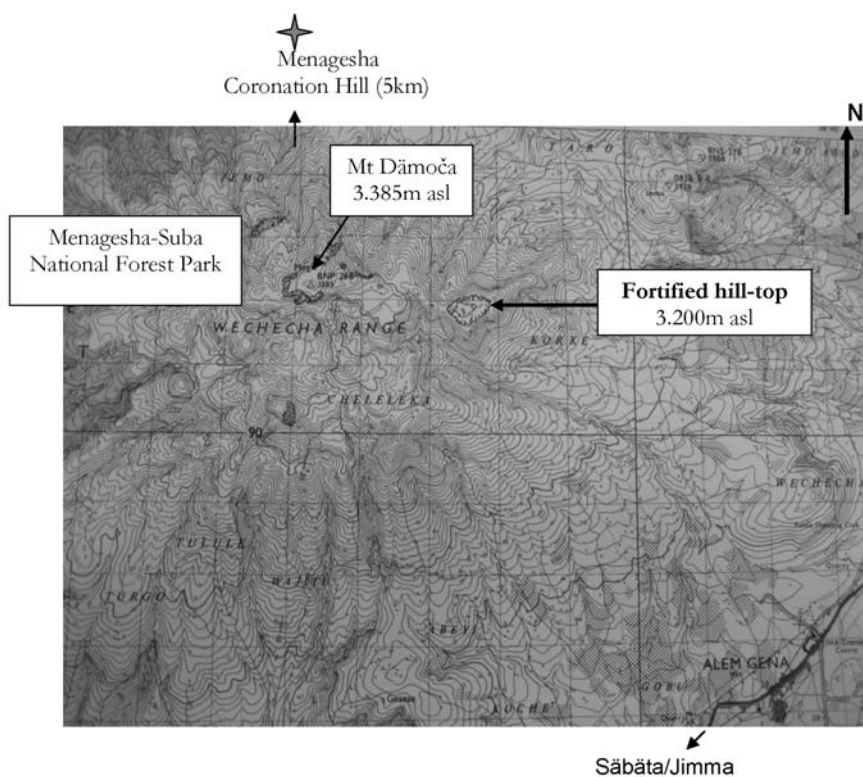


Fig. 4 – Location of the fortification on the Wechecha Range
(based on Ethiopia 1:50.000, Addis Ababa S.W., EMA, 2006)

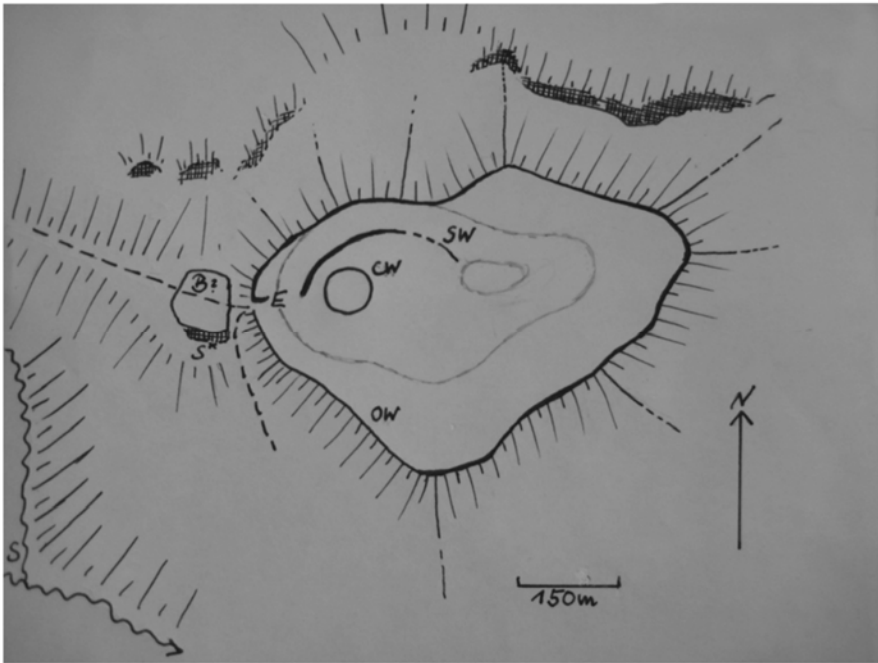


Fig. 5 – The fortification system on Wechecha Range
 (OW = Outer Wall, SW = Section Wall, CW = Circle Wall,
 E = Entrance, B = Bastion, S = Spring)

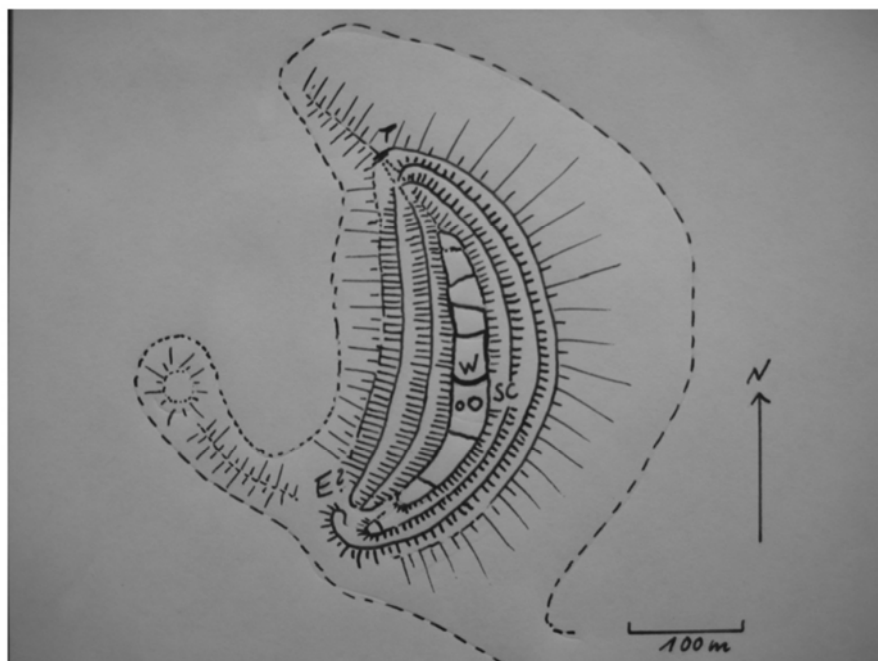


Fig. 6 – The terraced hilltop at Insilale Tiko (E = Entrance,
SC = Stone Circles, W = Section Wall & Outer Wall, T = Trench)

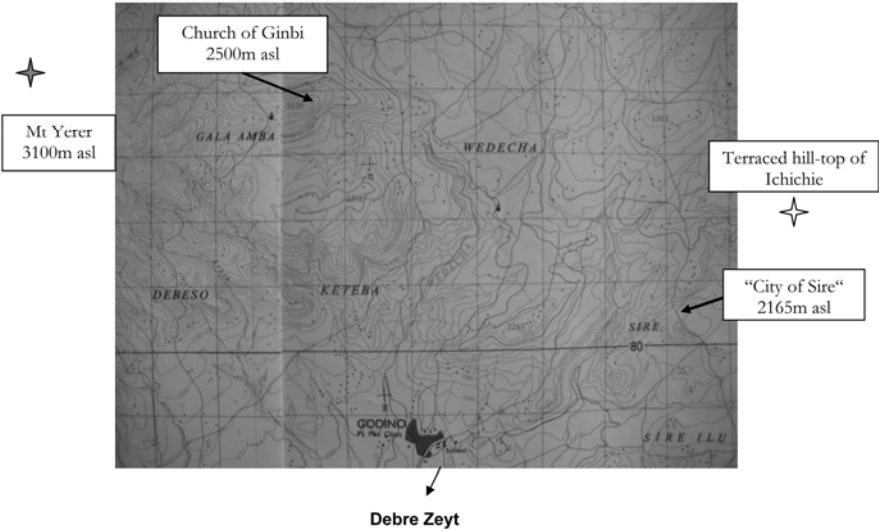


Fig. 7 – The “City of Sire” at Mt Yerer



Fig. 8 – The “City of Sire”. Aerial photo from 1979, Ethiopian Mapping Agency (EMA), enlarged from original: 1:50.000

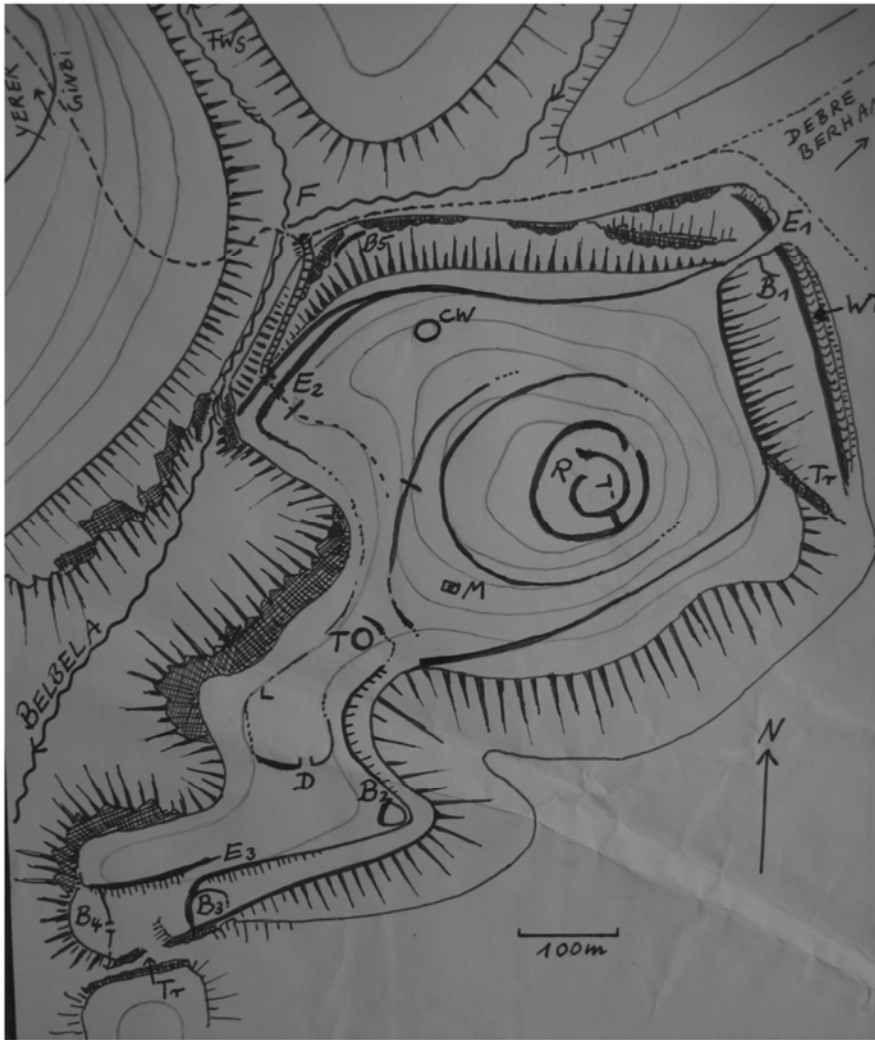


Fig. 9 – The “City of Sire” (E1-E3 City Entrances/Gates; B1-B5 Bastions/Fortifications to protect entrances & heights; R Double Wall structure; CW Circle Wall; T Tower between “upper city” & “lower city”; M Millstone; D Doorway/Gate to Lower City; WT Wall-Trench system; Tr Artificial Trenches; F Ford crossing Belbela river; FWS Fresh Water Spring)



Picture 1 – The dominating fortified hill-top on the Wechecha Range.



Picture 2 – Wechecha Range:
The massive Section Wall
to the north



Picture 3 – Wechecha Range:
Outer Wall (to the south)



Picture 4 – Wechecha Range: Outer Wall (to the west)



Picture 5 – Wechecha Range: The Inner Circle Wall with view of Section Wall



Picture 6 – Wechecha Range: Section Wall with view to and parts of Mt Dämoča (3885m asl)



Picture 7 – Hill-top at Insilale Tiko with “terraces”



Picture 8 – Insilale Tiko: Double stone circle on top of the hill
(background: section wall?)



Picture 9 – Terraced hill-top of Ichichie



Picture 10 – “City of Sire”: View on the hill-top with wall structures from the road to Chefe Donsa



Picture 11 – “City of Sire”: The ford crossing the Belbela river



Picture 12 – “City of Sire”: Path cut into hill rock (middle of picture)



Picture 13 – “City of Sire”: The entrance/door E2 with staircase leading from the ford to entrance E2



Picture 14 – “City of Sire”: Steep precipices protecting the “lower city” to the south (the waterfall is just below)



Picture 15 – “City of Sire”: Artificial trench at the southwestern end of the “lower city” close to entrance B3



Picture 16 – “City of Sire”: Large extracted rectangular building blocks (1.5 x 0.6 x 0.2m) from the hill-top (R)



Picture 17 – “City of Sire”: Stone setting from R, indicating foundations?



Picture 18 – “City of Sire”: Millstone (M)



Picture 19 – “City of Sire”: Doorway/Gate (D) to “lower city”



Picture 20 – “City of Sire”: Foundations of an older massive wall structure close to E4



Picture 21 – “City of Sire”: Lighter wall structures on top of massive ones