

Preliminary report on the archaeological survey carried out in Debreqal, Central Tigray, Ethiopia

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Introduction

In 2018, an archaeological survey was carried out in Debreqal *t'abiya*, La^celay May Ch'ew district, Central Tigray administrative zone. This survey resulted in the discovery of three pre-Aksumite archaeological sites that have the potential to enhance our understanding of the Ethio-Sabaeon presence in the region. This preliminary report presents these three pre-Aksumite sites and associated findings documented during the field work. It is planned to deepen research on the sites in cooperation with the ethnohistorian Wolbert Smidt of Jena University, Germany.

1. The archaeological site of Mezbir (14^o08'.08" N and 038^o19'.840" E)

The archaeological site of Mezbir in May Sye is found within the Central administrative zone, La^cilay May Ch'ew district, at the locality of Debreqal, about 10 km to the south of Aksum.



Figure 1: Physical location of the archaeological site of Mezbir, May Sye (photo by the author, 2018)

This site is known by local peasants for its various findings that indicate ancient human presence, with evidence for an ancient settlement (see fig. 1).

Concentrated stone building rubbles, pot sherds and some worked jasper that can tentatively be dated to the pre-Aksumite period are among the main findings that were identified and documented from the site.

Circular stone slabs with an approximate circumference of 1m by 0.05m, grinding stones of various sizes and partially visible and demarcated abandoned wall structures have been also frequently identified from this site (see fig. 2).



Figure 2: Findings from the archaeological site of Mezbir in May Sye (a) Circular stone slab (b and c) evidences of ruined buildings/walls (d&e) grinding stones (e) pot sherds (photo by the author, 2018).

2. The archaeological site of May Da'iro (14°45'.12" N and 038°8'.53" E)

This site is located about five kilometers to the east of the Mezbir archaeological site and lies in a flat table land in which the eastern part is, however, cut by a river that drains from north to south.

Dressed rectangular stones, ruined wall structures, grinding stones, rock pits and rock-carved boards that might have been used for traditional game boards (*gebet'a*) were some of the main findings documented at the site. Many of the well-dressed objects were removed from their primary context and reused for constructional purposes. As we can see in the figure below, some well-dressed rectangular stones of various sizes (some ranges up to 2m long) are visible at the entrance of the recent built houses. The site also preserves complete and broken grinding stones

of various sizes. Moreover, members of the local community informed the author that a stone with an inscription in an unknown language (stone inscription) had been identified by them and was later incorporated into a modern house during construction.



Figure 3: Geographical location of the archaeological site of May Da^ciro (photo by the author, 2018)



Figure 4: Findings from the archaeological site of May Da^ciro (a) rectangular dressed stone incorporated into the entrance wall of a local residential house (b) exposed evidences of wall structures (c) dressed corner stone (d) grinding stone (photos by the author, 2018)

3. The archaeological site of ʿAddi Beraḥ (14°08'.08" N and 038°19'.840"E)

The archaeological site of ʿAddi Beraḥ is located about three kilometers to the north of the Mezbir archaeological site.



Figure 5: Geographical location of the archaeological site of ʿAddi Beraḥ viewed from the southern direction (photo by the author, 2018)

ʿAddi Beraḥ is another pre-Aksumite site documented during this survey, characterized by a considerable number of artefacts. Various types of cups of pottery which are significantly distinct in size, morphology and colors, small and large bracelets, metal objects and two bronze seals with varieties of shapes and sizes which are all kept in the local community's houses have been identified from this site. The two bronze seals are particularly interesting, as they are based on the South-Arabian script and therefore suggest the presence of Ethio-Sabaeen settlements.

The site also revealed an Aksumite period pounding stone, which has a length of 1m and width of 50cm at its apex and other worked stone objects such as a stone with engraved cross which are all curved from the locally unavailable granite rock type. All these stone-worked objects are currently housed in the church of St. George which is located near the site.



Figure 6: Objects from the archaeological site of *‘Addi Berah*: (a) a variety of pottery cups in different sizes and shapes, (b) bracelets, (c) metal objects, (d) pounding stone, (e) stone with an engraved cross, and (f&g) two Ethio-Sabaeen bronze seals (photo by the author, 2018).

A publication of the report, together with a description and transliteration of the two Ethio-Sabaeen seals, in cooperation with the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena are in preparation.

About the author

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