

Archaeology and Stone Tool Technology during Early State Development in Northern Ethiopia

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Recent archaeological investigation in Eastern Tigray, Ethiopia, addresses issues of indigenous influence on early state development during the pre-Aksumite period (ca. 800 BC- 440 BC). This multi-scalar and multi-method research team headed by Cathy D'Andrea from Simon Fraser University directs attention to a local archaeological community at the site of Mezber. A broad research goal is to excavate and document the range of ancient behaviors (e.g. food production, animal management, stone tool technology, etc.) of the local inhabitants during a time of incipient social complexity so as to assess what social/environmental mechanism(s) may have contributed to state formation in this area.

Since 2006 the Eastern Tigray Archaeological Project (ETAP) has surveyed large portions of the Eastern Tigray area in Ethiopia, but has only begun to systematically excavate one site.

Although excavations are just scratching the surface of cultural deposits, the project has recovered a wealth of data that show a wide variety of social behaviors were present during this ancient time in Ethiopia and the pre-history of the Horn of Africa.

My goal during the summer of 2010 was to continue the analysis of lithic or stone tool technology recovered from the architecture at Mezber. Past research of lithic material focused on surface and poorly contextualized cultural deposits, so the opportunity to conduct a contextual analysis of the lithic materials was very exciting. Working with Dr. Steven Brandt from the Department of Anthropology at UF, my research addressed which stone tool types were present in the assemblage and which tool types were underrepresented. After cataloguing many of the artifacts, we have begun to understand that assemblages from Mezber show a wealth of raw material variation as well as some tool type standardization. Currently, over 5,000 stone artifacts have been recovered and

the analysis is only in its second year. It is anticipated that artifact typologies for this area will continue to be revised and modified to fit what local variation existed among the ancient inhabitants of Mezber.

During the month I was in northern Ethiopia much of my time was spent analyzing artifacts in a dimly lit hotel room with calipers, scales, and data sheets. This is the less sexy, although critical, side of archaeological fieldwork. We did, however, visit the site of Mezber, which is plowed and cultivated during the growing season. The site is protected during this period from surface disturbances. In going to this site and surrounding areas via 4x4 and on foot, you establish a sense for how the landscape isolates as well as expands your vision. These valleys have steep extreme slopes, which limit mobility, but also have been populated for tens of thousands of years, which expose the wealth of local and foreign knowledge, resource management, and power.

Fieldwork in this area of Africa has shown me that rugged landscapes are not inhospitable places to live and grow. The people of Eastern Tigray, Ethiopia, today are truly a humble and welcoming people as I am sure they were in the ancient past.



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