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Original article

Medieval Town and Royal Island in Dära wäräda: Qorata and Bétä-Mänzo Sites from Historic-Archaeology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Ruined historic archaeological sites offer snapshots of times and places and are mostly discovered through document analysis, the interpretation of material remains, and oral traditions. The goal of this research article was to conduct historic-archaeological investigations and reconstruct the history of Qorata and Bétä-Mänzo sites in Dära wäräda. The study used a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design. Key informant interviews, field observation, document analysis, and photographic documentation were methods of data gathering, and the collected data was thematically interpreted and qualitatively analyzed. The study, thus, found that the Lake Ťana area is endowed with numerous islands located across its various parts. The sites were among the Royal Islands and historic towns of the area during the medieval period. Since the Gondärine period, Qorata has been one of the Lake Ťana areas' commercial heartlands as well as a long-distance trade center in Northwestern Ethiopia. Human material remains attest to the two sites' significance during medieval Ethiopia, as they include a wide variety of archaeological ruins bearing evidence of numerous architectural styles, metal items with iron slag, potteries, and grinding stones. The stakeholders' ignorance causes the sites destruction and transformation into ruins. All in all, the findings enable the researchers to conclude that the Bétä-Mänzo site was a legacy of the 16th century and the town of Qorata was active from the 16th to the 19th centuries.

Keywords: Medieval Town, Royal Island, Historic-Archaeology, Qorata and Bétä-Mänzo

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1. INTRODUCTION

Archaeological heritage encompasses not only immobile cultural artifacts but also all traces of human habitation, including abandoned buildings and remnants of all kinds. The term "archaeological remains" refers to things like "worked tools, weapons, domestic utensils, clothing, ornaments, settlements, fortifications, ancient hydraulic structures, ancient agricultural fields, roads, mining pits, and workshops, ancient burial grounds, various burial and religious structures, drawings and inscriptions carved into specific stones and cliffs, architectural monuments, and sunken ships and cargoes" (Mendes, 2020). Archaeological heritage, as defined by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (1990), consists of the materials that keep people's collective memory alive. As Comer (2010) and Diara and Rinaudo (2020) point out, archaeological sites and landscapes are cultural resources that require special care to protect their scientific and historical worth. Therefore, such archaeological artifacts demand an interdisciplinary approach to their study and reconstruction.

In the course of their research, archaeologists may come across signs of past human habitation or other surface activity, including as landforms, structures, and transportable artifacts. Archaeological methodologies and procedures are necessary for reconstructing human history from the artifacts, eco-facts, and features or constructions that have survived from the past (Nusslein, 2019). These artifacts transferred from the past need to be studied in depth because they reveal information about the past. These artifacts are frequently unearthed in the same spot where the original settlement stood. According to Watkinson (2008), archaeological sites are places where remnants of prehistoric human material cultures have been uncovered, and these sites are the subject of ongoing archaeological research in an effort to reconstruct these civilizations. When a place gains historical significance, historians send in archaeologists to learn more about it through a combination of material interpretation and the translation of ancient texts (Henson, 2010). Given this, it's not surprising that large sites (both pre-historic and historic) can still be found all around the Lake 'ana region of Northwest Ethiopia and Dära district is the part of this broader context.

As informants and the researchers' previous experience proved that, the district is the repository of various aged and irreplaceable heritage resources. These heritage sites are a record of the historical events that took place in different time periods. For example, potential prehistoric sites, as well as numerous ancient and early medieval sites, are scattered throughout the district. Sites dating back to the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries

can be found in abundance in the area, and they still bear witness to the area's zenith in the past. However, these outstay and archaeologically potential sites are ignored by researchers or less studied, and some are totally unknown by the academic community, like the sites selected for this study.

As far as the researchers' knowledge is concerned, the only academic research made in this aspect is Eyosias's work conducted in 2020,aimed at investigating the 16th and 17th century Gondärine monuments in Dära and other districts of the south Gondar zone. In his thesis, he did not say anything about the historic town of Qorata and gave little emphasis to Bétä-Mänzo. He described the Bétä-Mänzo site simply as one of the Gondärine monuments, and he did not raise any different assumptions or historical evidence aboutthe history of the site. Thus, except for this work and reports by the culture and tourism office of the district, researchers cannot find other detailed historic-archaeological research conducted in Dära in general and on the sites in particular. Based on this, the two potential sites were selected for this study, and a preliminary archaeological survey, detailed historical documents, and current status analysis have been conducted and analyzed. Thematically, this research article has focused on the identification of the archaeological potentials of the sites, analyzing the historical events that took place in the sites, interpreting the importance of the sites in the history of the area during the medieval and post-medieval periods, and identifying the current challenges that the sites are facing.

2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

2.1. Study Area Description

Dära where the study sites are found is located in the Amhara regional state, Northwest Ethiopia and is one of the districts of the South Gondar administrative zone (Figure 1). It is bounded to the south by the Abäy River (which separates it from the Gojjäm to the east), to the west by Lake Ťana, to the north by Fogerä, and to the east by Este. Däradistrict includes Ambäsämè, Arb Gäbäya, Hämusit, and the historic Qorata towns (Kjeld, 2011). The majority of the area is flat and is one of the wäräds that surround Lake Ťana. Due to its strategiclocation, Dära where the selected sites found is a historical area and this is the reason why plenty of historic and prehistoric resources are housed in it. The climate of the wäräda is mainly in the temperate and tropical categories, with an average rainfall amount of 1,228.29mm. The agro-climatic regime of Dära is distinguished by an average growing period ranging from 120-240 days per year (Melkie, 2016). Historically, the district has been one of the known administrative centers in Northwest Ethiopia since the early medieval period. Its strategic

geographic location made Dära popular, and various kings camped there and different historical events took place. For example, in the 16th century, king Gälawdewäs had been in Dära for some time, making his mobile capital there. By the same token, later, King Susnyos and Yaēqob had a serious war confrontation in Dära at a specific place called Mänta Däbir. All these historical events, together with the history reconstructed from the sites studied through this research, show the historical heyday of the district in particular and the area in general. The two sites, namely Bétä-Mänzo and Qorata, are historical archaeological sites of the district, which are located in the Northwest of the district and on the eastern shore of Lake Ťana.

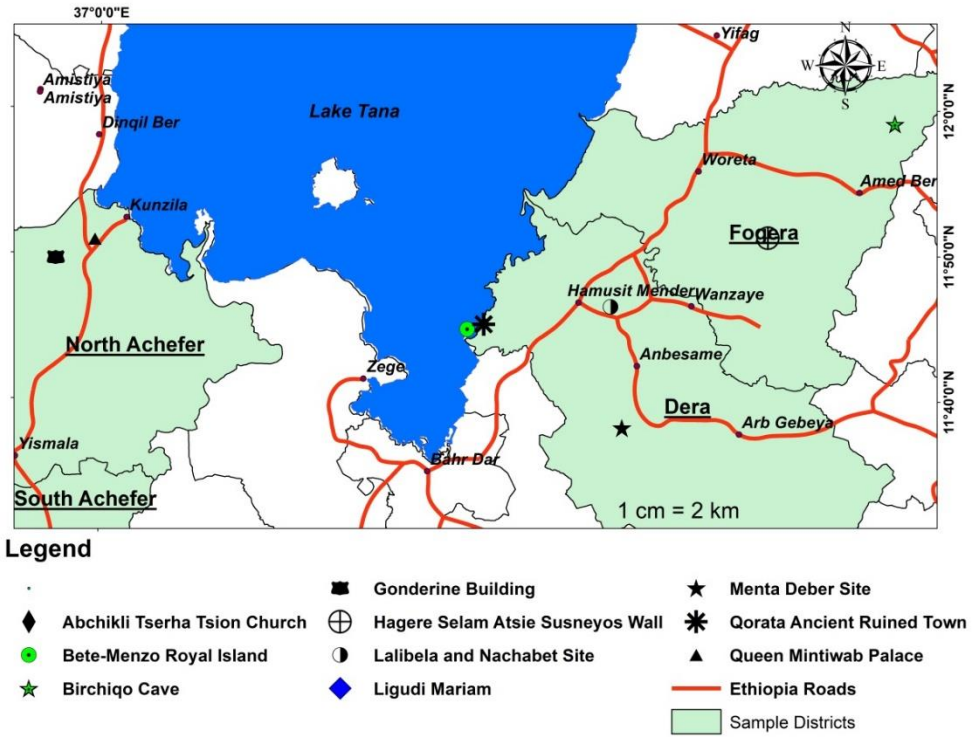


Figure 1. A map which shows the location of the archaeological sites in some selected districts of Northwestern Ethiopia developed by the researchers.

2.2 Method

This research employed qualitative method using key-informant interviews and archeological fieldwork. This is because qualitative research techniques are essential in exploring peoples' values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors (Kothari 2004; Lietz and Zayas 2010) and archeological fieldwork could help researchers to provide a sense of time as artifacts are dated (Hester *et al*., 2009). This finally would complement other sources of data. Document analysis was also used to corroborate the interview and field observation results.

A. Procedures and Methods of Data Collection

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design depending

upon the nature of the data used in its entire part. It is to mean that the data that helped researchers to compile this research article has been examined through a qualitative research approach, and the overall design was descriptive.

The search for, location, and description of archaeological sites are the first steps in any archaeological research. Usually, it is split into two sections: pre-field assessments and fieldwork (Alexandre, 2017). In this study, primary and secondary sources were used, and the data was collected through pre-field and on-field procedures. In the pre-field data collection stage, the researchers have gathered data from documentary sources. At this stage, the archaeological researchers are expected to assess published studies, archaeological records, archives, literary sources, and historical maps, which can all be used to indicate an area's archaeological potential (Alexandre, 2017). Accordingly, in this research, archaeological and historical literature was analyzed and interpreted, including books, journal articles, traveler accounts, hagiographies, and unpublished heritage-related reports. The sites' historic maps were also analyzed.

During field work stage, researchers have collected primary data on the field with the aid of information gathered in the pre-field stage. It was gathered through key-informant interviews (10 peoples were interviewed), field survey (it was conducted from January to February, 2021), and photographic documentation data gathering instruments. A key informant interview has been held with South Gondar Zone tourism office workers, locals, the elderly and related infrastructural office workers. First, the researchers conducted interviews with the South Gondar Zone tourism office workers about the archaeological potential of the region/area, the woräda in general, and the sites in particular. By considering the nature of the study, researchers have selected informants through a purposive sampling method. The basic criteria for selecting informants for key-informant interviews wereknowledge of the past, age, and experience of discovering archaeological artifacts accidentally(e.g., while plowing).

Aerial, pedestrian, surface, and sub-surface surveys can all be used in archaeological fieldwork. The researchers, however, preferred and used the pedestrian or surface survey method to successfully achieve the study's goal. It has been selected due to its simplicity and cost-effective nature. Through this method, the researchers conducted a simple field walk over the targeted sites, which helped to confirm the existence of archaeological remains and understand the distribution, density, and potential of the archaeological sites within the study area. Furthermore, it is also helped to assess the degree and status of conservation and deterioration agents on the sites. As Drewett (2001) stated that any

archaeological site documentation must include photographic evidence and take photographs of the landscape, archaeological features, and key-holes cut into the landscape, such as natural riverbank sections that may expose archaeological layers. Based on this fact, a compact photographic kit is advisable for archaeological fieldwork. Similarly, in this study, the researchers photographed all of the relevant artifacts, features, and the overall related surroundings.

B. Methods of Data Analysis

In order to determine the chronology of the sites under study, material remains recovered during fieldwork were categorized based on their typological and historical contexts and analyzed accordingly. Images taken from the sites, archaeological remains, and any linked symbolic artifacts were treated differently during the analysis of the acquired data, and documentary sources were also carefully examined. Initially, researchers meticulously measured, described, and recorded using GPS (Global Positioning System) and photographed them. The researchers were able to form a relative chronology of the sites. Just as oral traditions have been obtained from locals and rigorously evaluated, so too have written primary and secondary sources been analyzed to better understand the places' histories. All of the data was pooled and categorized qualitatively after being analyzed thematically i.e., archaeological and historical data were analyzed separately and interpreted in combined.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Bétä-Mänzo Royal Island

As the researchers' archaeological field observation proved, the royal island that is shown in Figure 2 lies near the ruined village of Qorata (which is mentioned on the next pages) and is a place where features of a large ruined church structure are still found. In keeping with this, Crummey (1999) and Berry (1976) also explained that it was served as a royal island or a place where kings and their families were lived at different times, most certainly in the 16th and 17th centuries. The island is surrounded by a massive stone wall that almost reaches the water's edge, and its entire area is only about 200 square meters.

This royal island was one of the most sought-after and suitable locations for kings and royal families to retreat from public life in the 17th and 18th centuries. King Täkle Häimanot and Iyasu I (r. 1682-1706) were involved in a power struggle that began in 1706, according to Berry (1976, 144). Iyasu I was ill at the time, and he was staying on Däq Island.

Unfortunately, he had to be transferred from Däq to Bétä-Mänzo due to a health scare. Eyosias (2020) also mentioned that the sad demise of king Iyassu I occurred on this island. Despite this, the church was renovated during the reigns of Iyasu I (1688-1706) and Kibran Negäst, as documented by Berry. There are documents that mention the name Bétä-Mänzo interchangeably with Ćäqlä-Mänzo. However, according to the researchers' field observation and key informant interview data, the two islands are totally different, and the later one is found Northeast of Bétä-Mänzo, near *Guangut* Island.



Figure 2. A view of Bétä-Mänzo Royal Island from east to west (photo by the authors, 2020).

According to the hagiography of St. Wälätä Péťros, in the beginning of the 17th century, Wälätä Péťros again reconstructed the church on the island and stayed there until it was completed. The point that we should keep in mind from these statements is that the work done on the church on the island was a reconstruction of the existing church. And it is certainly possible to conclude that it existed before the 17th century. In other words, there is an oral tradition that states the churchwas destroyed by the war between the Muslim sultanate of Adal and the Christian highland kingdom during the middle of the 16th century (Informants). If St. Wälätä Péťros and king Eyasu I had done reconstruction work, the church would have been destroyed, most likely by the war mentioned earlier, as oral sources proved. Similarly, according to Anfray (1988), who visited the site, it is one of the Gondörine monuments of the Lake Ťana area. He described the building as "Iyasu's building" and concluded that it belonged to king Eyasu I. Thus, the two sources commonly assure that the church was already there before the above-mentioned time; probably in the early 16th or late 15th century AD.

In support of the above argument, Crummey also tried to show the location of the popular

and worshipful churches in the country duringthe early Gondärine period andBétä-Mänzo is mentioned as one of the famous churches of the time with its endowments on his map. That means the churches mentioned on the map were the notable churches during the early period of the 17th century, and this indicates that their years of establishment must be prior to the time that they were influential. Thus, it could certainly be clear that they were established before the 17th century, most probably in the 16th century. Hence, this enables us to conclude that the church of Bétä-Mänzo was, built before the 17th century and it was among the Pre-Gondärine monuments found in the Lake Ťana areas.



Figure 3. The ruin of the church in the form of a mound or the accumulated ruins over the foundation of the church (Photo by the authors, 2021)

The mound that the researchers identified through archaeological field observation has four circular layers and stands 95 cm tall. The wrecked mound or circular building is obviously quite large, as its total area is 20 square meters. Archaeologically speaking, mounds are elevated structures that might have a flat top, a low, rounded top, or a tall, conical top (Figure 3). They can be created from human leftovers like stone, shell, or dirt. According to the researchers observation the mound found in Bétä-Mänzo is an elevated structure with rounded top and its exposed areas are particularly rich in lime mortar, and the stones' arrangement evokes Gondärine architecture. Therefore, this strengthens the case that the Royal Island of Bétä-Mänzo was built in the 16th century and belongs to the pre-Gondar architectural style, as previously argued. The ashy dirt and other burnt materials found in the mound may shed light on when and who may have done it. But, for the meantime, these ashy dirt and burnet materials support the oral tradition that says the church was burned in the early 16th century, as stated above. A smaller circular enclosure stands about five meter from the larger one, both on the same mound. The enclosure was built using only loose

stones, no mortar or other fixings. Their aesthetic and approach to arranging stones is also crude. Its height is close to two meters, and its thickness is equally impressive.



Figure 4. The outer part or enclosure of the main church: (*a*) the general view of the structure and (*b*) the zoomed view of the ruin (Photo by the authors, 2021).

As the observation data depicts that the building has been abandoned and is in disrepair, with trees now growing all over the roof. Figure 4 is a proof of that. This demonstrates that those with a vested interest in the status quo and the building's survival are unconcerned. On top of the aforementioned ruin, the locals are planning to construct a church. However, even the office culture and tourism is aware about the plan to demolish the old church and replace it with a modern structure. This indicates the stakeholders' general disregard for the site.

During the researchers' field work on the site, several pieces of pottery, including broken griddles, pots, casseroles, and undetermined items, were identified and subjected to interpretation. Pottery, if it is provided with a range of shapes and sizes, is the ideal human artifact to reconstruct the past. Our collection of pottery spans a wide range of sizes and shapes, each representing a unique creative expression, method of production, form, and mark that can be used to piece together past social behaviors. Similarly, these relics leave physical and chemical residues that can be used to infer intended vessel function, and these can be uncovered and analyzed using a range of methods. It leaves traces that can be utilized to infer actual ceramic function and other reuse and recycling activities (Skibo, 2013), and it may even be plausible evidence for activities that occurred after manufacture. Therefore, studying pottery artifacts can tell us about historical human activities by revealing information about their sizes, shapes, building methods, uses, and recycling practices. In comparison, prehistoric sites called Lälibäla and Näćäbét found in Dära district provide abundant pottery evidence dating back to the upper Paleolithic. The geographical nearness of these sites enables us to say that the area (East of Lake Ťana) has a long

tradition of pottery production and use. The potteries of the Bétä-Mänzo site, which date back to the early medieval period, are part of this tradition and show the continuity of the tradition since the aforementioned time.

Aside from the pottery shards scattered over the surface of the site, it is also interesting that iron ore and a smelting area were identified on the site through the archaeological survey. Having in mind this finding, according to Phillipson (1993), iron working evidence in the Horn of Africa in general, and Ethiopia in particular, is inadequate. However, it is not the evidence that is insufficient; rather, there has not been enough research done or this aspect hasn't obtained enough attention in Ethiopia. Conversely, several Neolithic sites including this island in Ethiopia provide evidence of the working and use of metal implements. As a result, along with its golden history as a royal island during Ethiopian Medieval time, this place is one of the iron use and production sites in the period.

3.2. Qorata Ruined Historical Town

There are two assumptions about the etymological derivation of the word Qorata. First, it is associated with the Amharic word "Qoṙṫe" (ቆረጠ), meaning "encircled or cut off," which refers to the location of the town, which is mostly encircled by the lake. Second, it derives again from the Amharic word "Qoṙṫua" (ቆራጢ), meaning "bravery or courage," which refers to "the bravery or courage of Nun St. Wälätä Péṫros" and it is believed that the name was derived from her bravery. However, according to her hagiography, the town was already established before she came to Qorata and established her community. Due to this reason, the first assumption is more persuasive for us.

Qorata is the name of a place, a settlement, a church, and a monastery on the eastern shore of Lake Ṫana that became famous as the residence of the St. Wälätä Péṫros community. According to Arno Deabade, who has been in Qorata in the 1830s and 1840s, the town is located on a small hilleast of Lake Ṫana, with more than 12,000 dwellers. He continued by saying it was a wonderful town and one of the best places to live in all of Ethiopia. The town's idyllic location between the rivers and the hills around the lake makes it a desirable place to live. He also stressed the town's residents' warm hospitality. Wälätä Péros sought refuge from Ras Sahle Kréstos at the turn of the 17th century. A church already existed when she ran into it, thus she couldn't be considered its creator (Wion, 2010). Sergew (1978, 158) highlighted that Qorata was one of the most well-known locations in the 17th century because it was the site of numerous pivotal occurrences. According to him *"ቆራጻ፥ ጣና ባህርዳር የምትገኝ ስትሆን፥ እምነ ወለተ ጴጥሮስ በተሀርሞ የኖረችበትና በስሟም ቤተ-ክርስቲያን የታነጸበት ቦታ ነው። በ17ኛው*

ምዕተ-ዓመት ይካሄድ በነበረው የተዋህዶችና የቅበዓቶች የሀይማኖት ክርክር የእዚህ ደሴት ካህናት ተካፋይ ሁነዋል”።
Meaning, "Qorata is located on the shores of Lake Ťana and was a place where Nun Emnä Wälätä Pét’ros lived in sanctity, and a church was built in her honor."

According the documentary sources, there was a religious argument between *Qibat* and Täwahido fanatics in the 17th century, and the church fathers of Qorata were there to take part in it. For this reason, the settlement predates the 17th century, just like Béte-Mänzo Royal Island. The church of Qorata was the only Täwahido-affiliated religious center on Lake Ťana (Crummey, 1999). During the reign of king Iyasu I, Qorata participated on his side in two synods, in 1693 and 1699. It was also protected by Etége Mentewab (Berhän Mogasa) and even her chronicle opens with a prophecy attributed to Wälätä Pét’ros and immediately after ascending the throne, the queenendowed the church of Qorata with gold and re-distributed its *gult*[1]-lands (Wion, 2010). After king Susnyos declared Catholicism the official state religion at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries, intense anti-Catholic resistance arose in Qorata, as recorded by Berry (1976). In other words, the 16th century saw the rise of notable figures from Qorata, and the locals offered insightful critiques and analyses of national issues. Crummey (1999) compiled a list of churches with *gult* rights describe the historic town of Qorata in concomitance with the aforementioned thesis. As it is mentioned in his chronicle, Gälawdewos granted Mäkana Sämaét a*gult* right over the territories from Qorata on the shore of Lake Ťana eastward as far as the Bäśilo river. Furthermore, Crummey created the map, which he attempted to show prominent towns in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. As a result, Qorata was one of the important places located on his map at the time.

It's worth noting that starting in the early 18th century; Qorata functioned as a place of asylum for those who needed it. The right to asylum is defined in several ways across various writings, chronicles, and archives with Qorata as a model (Wion, 2020). De'abadi (1980) claims that the town's then-king (perhaps one of the Gondarine kings) provided asylum to anyone who had political grievances against the governor. Since he or she has asked for asylum and settled in the community, no one has made any attempts to catch them as criminals. In contrast, the town cannot serve as an asylum for those who have committed serious crimes such as bribery of government resources, embezzlement, or the murder of

[1] A gult is a type of land-related administrative right. The word "gult" is derived from the verb "guelete," which literally means "to put someone or something close to another." It shows the doer's power or authority, and the recipient is known as the “balegult” (gult owner). The concept goes beyond being a land right; it is also described as a right to manage the labor force of the peasants who live on the land. Thus, churches had their own gulf rights over specific land.

close family members. The person who asked for asylum is called "Däway"[2] by the locals. In support of this, Berry (1976) stated that king Bakaffa confined *Qibat* extremists to Qorata. In the same token, the British contingent in the mid-19th century also had a stay in Qorata:

"For a month starting on February 14, 1866, the group accompanying the British consul Hormuzd Rassam, joined by the foreign missionaries and artisans who arrivedfrom Gafat, waited at Qorata for the release of Emperor Téwodros II's prisoners from Meqdäla. Duncan Cameron and others were released and arrived at Qorata on March 10. They left the town a month later. Berry 1976: 314). "In March 1867, Téwodros tried to raid Qorata, but was prevented by the peasants"

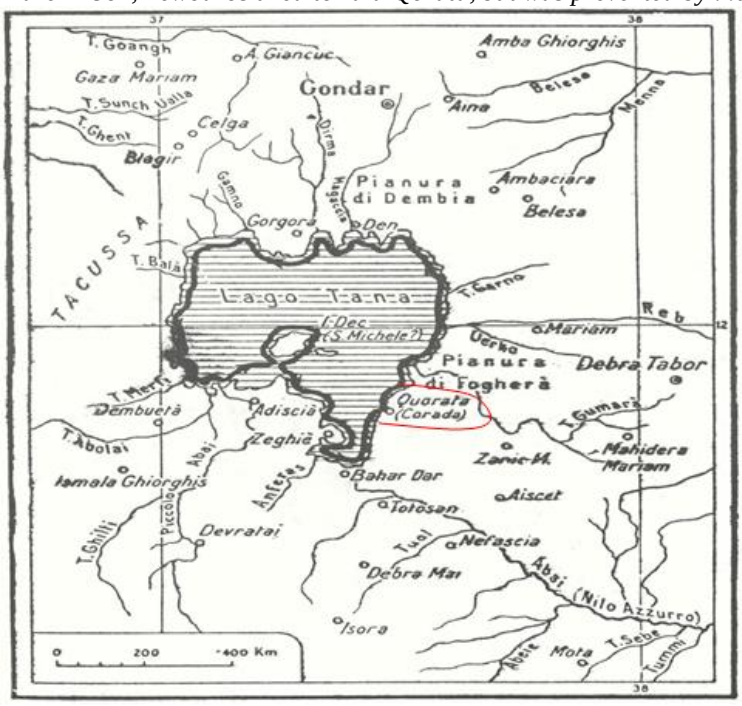


Figure 5. The map developed by CarloPiaggia in 1875 and he boldly indicated Qorata on the map in his travel account and displayed here as an evidence.

As it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Qorata was used as a place of asylum in the nineteenth century as well. In religious terms, however, Qorata was a formidable competitor to *Qiba*t in the 16th century, and it was the center of Täwahidos (Wion, 2020). So, how could the Qibat extremists confine themselves to the same area as the opposing Täwahido extremists? Though more research is needed, it is most likely that there was a specific location in the town for the *Qibats*. Those entire pieces of documentary data, together with oral sources, proved that the town was among the finger counted asylum centers in Northwestern Ethiopia during the medieval period. Though this aspect is less researched and requires wide-ranging historical investigation, such centers have witnessed

[2] Literary: Däway is the guy who rang the bell to request asylum.

the tradition.

A. The Ruins in the Center of Town

During the researchers' field work, they found a large amount of ruin in vast areas of the site, which was the town's leftover dating back to the 16th century, as confirmed by the documentary sources. According to Crummey (1999) stated that this ruined center was served as a major trade centers during the Gondarine period. He mentioned that Qorata had given rise to a town due to the trade centered on it. Thus, due to its importance as a trade center, it was one of the town centers at the time, and more interestingly, if the town rise due to the existence of trade and other sources also affirmed that the town was established at least in the 16th century, it was also a trade center prior to the 17th century. In the 19th century, the town was also the center of research for natural history. For example, an Italian traveler and natural history researcher named Carlo Piaggia stayed in Qorata from 1873 to 1875, and it was his center for his naturalist collections (Wion 2010). His travel account was translated from Italian to English and published by Romitti in 1986. He described Qorata as follows and sketched the village:

On the 19th December 1973, he arrived at Gorada (Qorata, on Lake Ťana). [Qorata] isa village to the South East of Lake Ťana (Figure 5). There are very few houses there which do not have their own grove of coffee plants within the compound and the surrounding vegetation is luxurious. In the thorny bush there are [immense] hyenas, leopards, cheetahs and other felines. The inhabitants are Christian, although there are alsoMuslims and Israelites, but in smaller numbers (p.4).

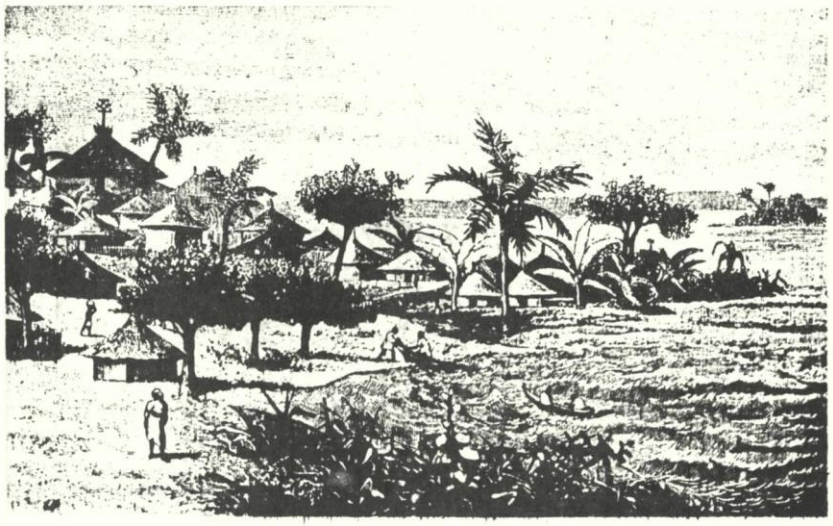


Figure 6. A hand sketch by Carlo Piaggia in 1973, immediately after he arrived at Qorata (a sketch taken from Romitti, 1986)

Piaggia's travel account has details about the town and house distribution (Figure 6), mainly focusing on the customs and ways of life ofthe people living in Qorata. According to him, the people had practiced weaving and producing different kinds of souvenirs, and they

considered it their economic basis, together with trade, agriculture, and livestock. He stressed that the place was knownfor souvenir products in the region. Qorata had served as a research center for Achille Raffray in the 1870s (Wion, 2010). Thus, the town was the center of natural history research and souvenir products in the 19th century, as well. During the time of emperor Tèwodros II (1855–1869), it was one of his destinations, along with Däbrä Tabor, Zägè Peninsula, and Mäqdäla, and the missionaries were confined there for some time. Due to this, a separate village was established for foreigners in the town (Marsden, 2007)(Figure 7). He further stated that the wives of the missionaries and diplomats dressed eloquently and wonderfully in the traditional clothing, and their children enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere of the town and antics in the field.



Figure 7. A sketch shows Emperor Tèwodros II conversing with British missionaries at Qorta (from Marsden's 2007 book, entitled "The Barefoot Emperor").

Large amounts of ruins, such as doweled houses, foundations, burnet-structures, semi-buried structures in the form of mounds, large fences, and houses covered by trees, were discovered during the researchers' field work, which covered a large area of the historical town, with the Wälätä Pét'ros church in the center. Pankhurst (1969), in his discussion of Gondarine architecture, says "a German traveler, Heuglin, one of several later nineteenth-century observers, described the building as namely that the red sandstone used around the windows, arches, and gates came, to the best of his knowledge, from Qorata on the southern shore of Lake Tana". In supporting this, the dowel houses in Qorata resembled Gondarine architecture as Arno, De'abade, observed in 1830s. In support of this, the ruined structures situated there are still witnessing the Gondarine architectural style as it was observed during the archaeological field work. Accordingly, it is possible to say the ruined structures

resembled Gondarine architecture which was common since late 16th century. According to informants, approximately 7,000 people lived in the town at the time. The commoners numbered roughly 6,000, while the clergy and monks numbered nearly a thousand. The commoners were first centered on the northern and eastern sides, while the clergy and monks were focused on the eastern and southern sides. However, over time, the separate settlements were mixed up, and the town grew. Later, when Arno De'abade came to Qorata (at the beginning of the19th century), he witnessed that the town was occupied by more than 12,000 dwellers which was increased through time. The dwelling houses of this number of dwellers varied from time to time and are currently in ruin as it is shown in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Some ruined structures in the center of Qorata town (Photo by the authors, 2021)

The ruined town is vast, and touring it all in all its details takes a full day. According to the head of the monastery, the general area that the ruins cover is around two and a half gašä[3] which is equivalent to 100 hectares = 1,000,000 m2 = 1 km^2. For church fathers and elders, the town had risen and fallen at least three times. First, due to a severe cholera pandemic, the dwellerswere forced to leave the place, and the town was abandoned. According to Wälätä Pét'ros's hagiography, the area was frequently affected by pandemics, and it is not hard to estimate the former informants' narration is part of this. Second, the Italian Invasion (1935–1941) targeted to burn and destruct the prominent towns of the country. Qorata and Mahdärä Maryam near Däbere Tabor faced this fate and became ruined. As informants added on this issue, there was a strong anti-Fascist resistance in the Qorata area, and the patriots

[3] gašä is a unit of measurement and 1 gašä equivalent to 40 hectares.

who led this resistance were centered in the historical town. Later, the Italians targeted and almost totally destroyed the historical houses. Thirdly, Därg regime (1974–1991) villagization and resettlement program[4] also ended its existence. Some descendants of the earlier settlers who claimed ownership of the land have recently reentered and are now living there.

The ruined structures distributed over the large area of the historic town are composed of different architectural styles. Architecturally speaking, they grouped into three types of vernacular architectural styles. These are Esatä-Käla (እሳተ-ከላ), a house with floors or none (ምድርና ፎቅ) and circular and rectangular (ክብና-ማዕዘን). According to informants, Esatä-Käla is an indigenous architectural style used in theconstruction technique of the roof. They used mud on the roof before the grass covered it. As the name indicates, its purpose is to protect against fire accidents, and it is believed that such houses belong to wealthy people. Besides, there are also houses constructed with and without floors. Again, in this, we can understand the economic hierarchies in the houses. Economically strong people construct their houses with two or three stories, whereas poor people build their houses without stories or ground plus floors. Thirdly, the circular and rectangular classifications are just based on the needs of the owner, and sometimes the space they have may determine the shape. Besides the diverse vernacular architecture, there are also structures constructed with lime mortar. However, it is uncommon to construct doweling houses with lime. So, it needs further archaeological excavation and confirmation, as well as developing a new narration. In the meantime, we hypothesize that the existence of structures constructed with lime is associated with the greatness of the town. The royal houses that belonged to the royal families at the time might have been constructed with lime to show the hierarchy. In general, thecenter of the historic town is full of historical structures, and it could be a good tourist attraction site.

B. The Market and Trade Center

In addition to the historic town with its ruins, it was a famous market center. Wion (2010) affirmed that in the mid-19th century, Qorata was described as a rich commercial town and a

[4] The Derg regime promoted socialism as a national ideology, which was put into practice through state-run farms, resettlement, villagization, and production cooperatives. Resettlement and villagization were the two key cornerstones of the regime's social engineering strategy. Although both programs aimed to provide much-needed social services, the resettlement program stood out because its people regularly moved great distances within one region. In contrast, those who participated in the villagization program typically only relocated to larger or more recent settlements close to their original places of origin (Holm, 2016). Thus, the revived settlement of Qorata was ended by this program.

place of asylum where numerous notable people where housed to assure their protection in case they needed shelter. However, as historical evidences show that it was one of the few trade centers in Northwestern Ethiopia before the 19th century, for example, Crummey (1999), in his book entitled “Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia from the Thirteenth to Twentieth Century," stated the major trade routes and major trade centers during the 17th century, and he mentioned Qorata as one of the Gondärine Ethiopia’s commercial heartlands. He narrates that "from Qorata, trade moved to Gondar and then either westward into the Sudan or northward to Adwa, Mässäwä, and the Red Sea." Besides, as Arno De'abade stated in the beginning of the 19th century in his personal observation, Qorata was a meeting point for traders from Gojjäm, Mèchä, Dämot, and Agäw who came with cattle, butter and honey, and it was the only town in the country that could feed its population fish on a daily basis. The locals nearby provide cereals, horses, and mules for the market. Besides goods imported from Central Africa, India and Arabians also found in the of Qorata. Many traders who came from different parts of the world lived permanently in the town. There are also groups of traders passing through Qorata from Mässäwa and the country of Elmä Ormäs. All these historical data show that the place was a market center and the researchers’ field work also proved as there is a specific area in the town where exchange of goods and services took place. In line with this, the specific market place in the southeast part of the town was named"Fasilädäs market," which is directly associated with king Fasilädäs (r. 1632–1667), probably the market established during the time of king Fasilädäs. This makes the market center historical and dated back to early 17th century. There is also a separate place for the sale of meat, and the butchery site which is still visible. These divisions in the market uphold that the market was huge and accommodated many peoples per week. During the archaeological field work of the researchers, traces are still visible in the market named Fasilädäs and a big mound is situated in the place where buying and sealing of meat conducted. Thus, all these sources could suffice to conclude that Qorata was a famous commercial center from the 17th to the 19th century. The market center is located some meters away from the center of the town in the east direction.

C. The Port with Megalithic

This place is located south of the historical town's hub, near the market center, where a megalithic stone is standing still and the locals call it "Wäläté Dengay." According to legend, it is said to be the praying stone of a nun named Wälätä Péros. As interviewee added, comparable stones with similar traditions are buried inside the lake and become

visible as the lake's water level decreases. Thus, the stone's name is linked to this tradition. The stone is four-sided and one-meter-tall, with a breadth of 63 cm. Another legend associated with this megalithic is that when EmperorTéwodros' mule approached it, she was bowed to the stone. The data from the interviewees also says, "People who tried to target the stone with gun, died instantly,". According to informants, the town was holy, and no one was allowed to enter with shoes; even the kings must have taken off their mule and entered with bare feet. Thus, it was at this place that everybody took off their shoes and entered the town of Qorata. The stone is extremely treasured and has a meaning for the people, albeit more anthropological research is needed. Despite this, Emperor Téwodros II initiated Ethiopia's first navy at this place and the port or navy was located near the megalithic discussed previously. As it is already said, the location was one of the medieval trading centers, and the port was located close to the market center.

In a nutshell, as all the data sources commonly affirmed that Qorata was one of Ethiopia's medieval town centers from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Besides, from the 18th to the 20th centuries, it served as a trade and natural history research center, and foreigners selectively came to the place and conducted natural history research. Again, in the 17th century, it was primarily used as a venue for theological debates. The archaeological evidence also witnesses the heyday of Qorata as a historic town from the medieval to the twentieth centuries. Ruined dwellings with a variety of vernacular architecture that stood in the medieval town's heart, the megalithic, the historic church of Wälätä Péṫros, the market center, and related household material remains are among the archaeological evidence that proves its heyday in the past. In spite of this, since the sites are historical tourist attractions, they can be the best tourist destinations and encourage the economic development of the area in particular and the country at large.

3.3. The Current Status of the Sites

Unfortunately, the status of Qorata and Bétä-Mänzo sites is often disregarded. As per the researchers' observation, all the problems at the sites are associated with a lack of attention and awareness. Whether due to malicious intent, a lack of awareness, a lack of management resources, or any other issue, ignorance is the greatest threat to archaeological heritage and sites. Negligence occurs when necessary maintenance on cultural buildings, objects, or sites is not completed, when appropriate legislation is not developed, when inconsistencies between statutory measures or policies are not noticed, and when preventative and corrective measures are not taken (Alawneh, 2012). To elaborate, "ignorance" is an

umbrella term for problems that arise from generalized misunderstandings of cultural heritage. The locations selected for this study are not immune to these sorts of issues. The Bétä-Mänzo has been reduced to rubble, and now just a mound remains. The old, deserted town of Qorata suffered similar destruction due to lack of knowledge and ignorance. According to the researchers' observation, the sites are facing a number of problems, some of which are listed below.

- **Destructive Human Activities**: unplanned human activities in and around heritage resources become destructive and worsen the resources sustainability. As the researchers' field observation proved that houses are constructed over the historic structures, irrigation with some agricultural activities is carried out, and grazing over the sites and re-using of historic houses are some of the human activities challenging the survival of the historic structures at Qorata. Similarly, the attempt to reconstruct a new church on the oldone is worrying and questioned about the future of Bétä-Mänzo site.
- **The Absence of Preservation Work**: There has been no preservation work or any trial to protect the places that were chosen for this study. The concerned bodies (mainly the cultural and tourism offices, hierarchically from federal to district levels) have failed to save the sites from damage. Both of the research sites are facing serious problems as a result of this act of negligence. The ruins in the historic town of Qorata require at least preventive conservation like cleaning, fencing, delineating the zones (core and buffer) and in some case sheltering also needed. In Bétä-Mänzo case a reconstruction work is required in the ruin at the center and the collapsing fence also needs repairing work. However, no preservation work has done so far due to the lack of awareness about the importance of preserving and sustaining the sites to the future generations.
- **Lack of Documentation Work:** Due to a lack of proper documentation work, much of the archaeological heritage in different parts of the world has been lost forever. If archaeological heritage sites are not effectively documented, they may be destroyed as a result of various developmental activities as well as other human and natural factors. As a result of this circumstance, in the case of these sites, people have become ignorant of the sites, which may lead to complete annihilation. No one has made a documentation work and the stakeholders don't know how much resources stored there, current status and challenge, and even how much of it are losing.

  Plant Overgrowth: The overgrown and encroaching trees and shrubs over a structure are one of the significant threats facilitating the total demolition of heritage resources. The growth of roots and branches of the plants on and around a building can crackdown,

break and loosen stones and large fragments of wall due to their physical and mechanical impacts (Lisci *et al*. 2002). In line with this fact, Qorata and Bétä-Mänzo sites are vulnerable to this problem. If we go to Qorata, shrubs and large trees are grown over the structures, and the heritage is tautenedby the roots of the plants grown over the historical structures (Figure 9). This situation is serious and will continue to challenge the sites because the nucleus of the historic town is now very conducive to coffee plantations and related agricultural activities. Therefore, the locals living there are more attracted by the economic gains from the coffee than by the preservation of their heritage.



Figure 9. Plants grown over the historic structure at Qorata (both a and b) (photo by the authors, 2021)

- **Lack of Awareness**: The community's awareness about the archaeological heritages in general is the crucial aspect of a proper heritage management. Because the community holds the resources primarily, they should be aware of the nature of archaeological heritage and how to protect them. In contrast, the people living in the vicinity of the sites are now unconcerned about their valuable resources. Clearly, this is the result of the community's lack of awareness about the sites' unrestricted use and management techniques. Instead, they propose avoiding the ancient church by building a new one in Bétä-Mänzo. It also highly challenging the heritage resources in the ruined historical town of Qorata. The coffee plantation and the economic benefits it creates attract the attention of the inhabitants living near and in the sites, and they are planting coffee, and

other related plants over the ruins of the historical town. Beside from this, there are people who have reentered the old houses and are still living inside. This reuse of historical houses in the town becomes a problem for the town's resources. Because the residents replace the heritage structures with new constructions, and even in some cases, they totally demolish and change the structures to coffee and related plantations. All these problems originate from a lack of awareness about heritage and its importance in the socio-economic sector.

4. CONCLUSION

The sites are an archaeological and historical in nature, with various human material remains of the past. The buried structure at the Bétä- Mänzo site provides a new clue in the areas of architecture, construction, and art history, as well as the related social history of the region. For example the construction materials (the use of lime), techniques,and styles show that the structure is certainly the fingerprint of the Gondaraine period. As the historical sources prove that the place was used as Royal Island for different kings and their families. Chronologically, as the careful scrutiny of historical sources and archaeological evidence shows, the Bétä-Mänzo site was a legacy of the 16th century and constructed during the reign of king Gälawdeyos (r.1540–1559). Similarly, the ruined houses including Wälätä Péros's church, that still stand in the hub of the historic town of Qorata also display the architectural and socio-cultural achievements of the region since the 16th century, blossoming during the medieval period. The variety in the houses' styles, sizes, naming, and the added elements in the roofs of the houses are some of the architectural attributions from the ruined structures of the town. As the historical and archaeological data confirm in common that Qorata was flourished as a town from the 16th to the 19th century, and that it was established some years before the time of an influential Nun of the century called *St*. Wälätä Péros. In that time, it mainly served as a religious center in the 17th century. The people of Qorata were active participants in the nationwide religious debates between the *Qibät* and Täwahido groups. Likewise, it was a center of long-distance trade, which was passedto Gondar and zoological research by foreigners who came to Qorata selectively from different part of the world. Later, in the mid- nineteenth century, Emperor Tèwodros II proposed the first navy project in Ethiopia at this place. These historical events that took place on the sites are part of the history of the region as a whole. Royal towns and islands were common in the medieval history of the Lake Ťana region, and these sites are the tangible aspect of this golden history of the time. However, many forms of deterioration are

now posing a threat to these evidence-rich places, including destructive human activities, negligence to preserve and document the sites, plant overgrowth, weather change, and a lack of awareness.

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