



The Azazo Project: Archaeology and the Community in Ethiopia

Jaime Almansa, Gashaw Belay, Dawit Tibebu, Víctor Fernández, Jorge de Torres, Cristina Charro & Carlos Cañete

To cite this article: Jaime Almansa, Gashaw Belay, Dawit Tibebu, Víctor Fernández, Jorge de Torres, Cristina Charro & Carlos Cañete (2011) The Azazo Project: Archaeology and the Community in Ethiopia, *Public Archaeology*, 10:3, 159-179, DOI: [10.1179/175355311X13149692332358](https://doi.org/10.1179/175355311X13149692332358)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1179/175355311X13149692332358>



Published online: 19 Jul 2013.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 164



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Azazo Project: Archaeology and the Community in Ethiopia

JAIME ALMANSA

JAS Arqueología SLU, Spain

GASHAW BELAY

Amhara National Regional Culture, Tourism and Parks Bureau, Ethiopia

DAWIT TIBEBU

Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, Ethiopia

VÍCTOR FERNÁNDEZ, JORGE DE TORRES and

CRISTINA CHARRO

Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Spain

CARLOS CAÑETE

Consej. Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Spain

In this article we discuss the motivations, aims, and preliminary results of working with a local community in Ethiopia. Trying to escape from the (neo)colonial archaeology that is still practised in Africa, this project aims to achieve a cooperative and participative archaeology. This work with the community has been one of our main priorities in our last seasons, and although we have focused on elementary school and university students, we have opened up a number of different paths to follow in future years. The experience has been very positive, and engagement with local people has helped us to create awareness about the importance of cultural heritage, hopefully ensuring the future protection of the sites.

KEYWORDS Public archaeology, community engagement, Ethiopia, Gondar, Azazo Project

Introduction

This article presents the public aspects of a project that aims to have a strong impact on Ethiopian archaeology: the Azazo Project. A recent book asked if archaeologists

can save the world (Stottman, 2011a): with this project we are trying to have a positive impact on the community and, perhaps, the region and the country. We are also trying to bypass current (neo)colonial dynamics in foreign intervention and practising a public archaeology that engages with every level of interest and participation in the management of the site.

Focusing on the actions taken in the second field season of 2008, it is possible to show how, starting from almost nothing, the use of public archaeology and interaction with the communities can be a real benefit for every stakeholder. Moreover, public archaeology provided us with a postcolonial approach that seems to be effective in a country that is already able to appropriate its heritage.

Raiders of the lost Jesuits

The project is directed by Prof. Víctor M. Fernández (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Culture;¹ it began in 2006 with the search for several Jesuit sites in the Lake Tana area of Ethiopia. First of all, we conducted a survey to locate and assess the archaeological potential of the buildings that the Jesuits built during the first decades of the seventeenth century (Pennec, 2003). The result was up to fifteen compounds, some of them amazing, not only for their archaeological and historical value, but also for their presence and beauty (Figure 1). Excavations are focusing on Azazo, one of the most significant sites (Fernández, 2008; Fernández *et al.*, 2009, 2011). In 2008, after assessing the potential of the sites, we started to design a strategy to develop a public archaeology programme framed in the project. The first steps took place during February, but the main actions were deployed, together with the excavation, throughout the second field season in November and December at Azazo.

What were the Jesuits doing in Ethiopia?

The historical background to the sites took place during the decline of the Solomonic Dynasty in the early seventeenth century. After 400 Portuguese musketeers disembarked in Ethiopia in 1541 to answer the claims of the Emperor Lebna Dengel (reigned 1508–1540) the Catholic-Orthodox contact started. Some Catholic priests had taken part in the expedition, and their work took effect when, sixty years later, Emperor Za Dengel (reigned 1603–1604) converted to Catholicism. Emperor Susenyos (reigned 1607–1632) replaced him, and his aim of allying with the Western Christians led him to Pedro Páez, the senior Spanish Jesuit in Ethiopia (Marcus, 2002; Páez, 2009). For some scholars the reason why this group of missionaries was sent by the Spanish king Felipe III was to ensure commercial relations with East Africa (Caraman, 1985), while for others the real reason was to establish an alliance with Prester John against a rising Islam (Da Costa, 1966). In less than thirty years the missionaries were able to build a Catholic infrastructure that included several impressive buildings (Figure 2). With some of these buildings still to be finished, the change of strategy conducted by Alfonso Mendes after Pedro Páez's death (1622) ended in the riots that overthrew Susenyos and expelled the Jesuits from the country (Cohen, 2009).

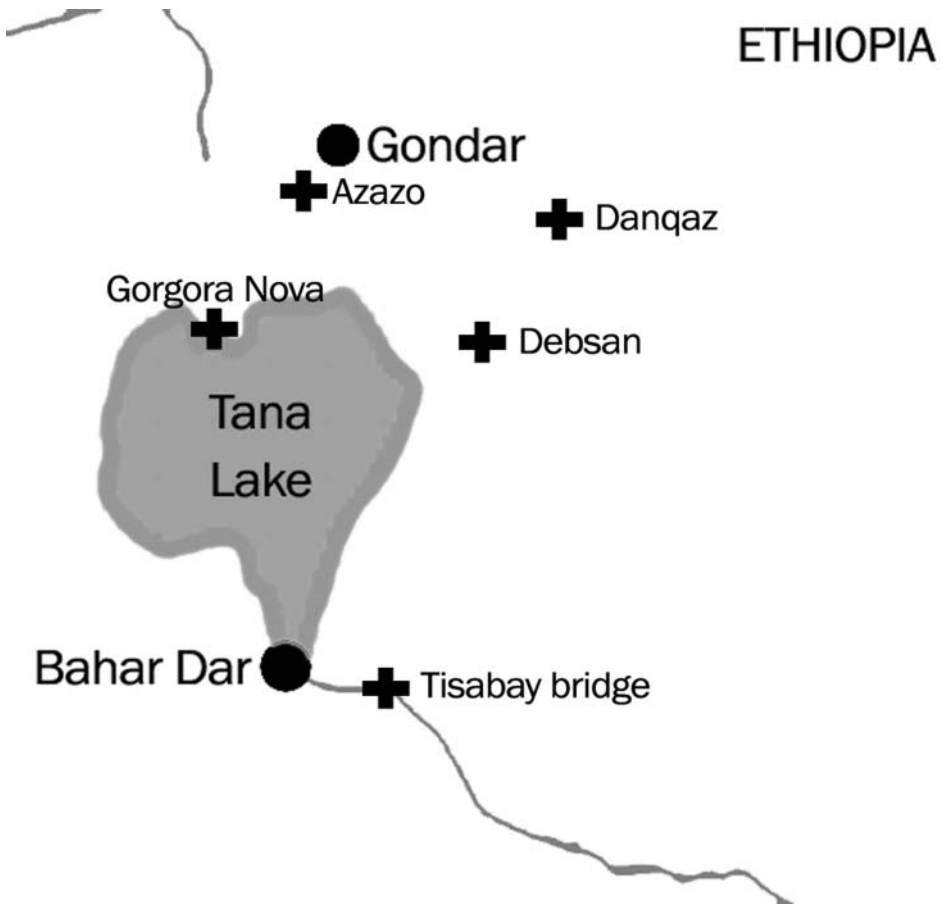


FIGURE 1 Main sites located in Gondar region.

One of the main compounds built by the Jesuit mission was Azazo, near Gondar (Figure 3). The compound was located at a strategic point that the Italians also used during their presence in Ethiopia, and we believe that the occupation continued after Susenyos times with different improvements to the buildings. According to the texts (mainly the writings of Pedro Páez, Jerónimo Lobo, and Manuel de Almeida, three of the missionaries), Azazo was built during the 1620s. The palatial compound is composed of a Catholic church (Gannata Iyesus, built in 1621–1623) surrounded by a wall (1627–1628), the residence of the Jesuits (1625–1628), the royal palace of Susenyos (1622–1624) with the water pool (1627–1628), which was later copied by Fasilidas in the famous Gondar Bath, and the royal gardens (1624?). In total, Azazo covers an area of almost four hectares of buildings, gardens, and facilities including the ‘old *warka*’, a tree where Emperor Susenyos used to mete out justice.

The political/religious problems that emerged after the overthrow of Susenyos led his son and heir Fasilidas to build a brand new palatial compound in Gondar (Fasil Ghimb), where today we have one of the most visited sites in Ethiopia (also a World Heritage Site). We believe Fasilidas demolished Azazo and made his own palace look



FIGURE 2 Some of the main sites: 1 Gorgora; 2 Mertula Mariam; 3 Danqaz Palace; 4 Danqaz Church.

Jaime Almansa.

larger and more grandiose to show his power over the foreigners after returning to the 'faith of their fathers', but what is certain is that the Catholic church was razed to the ground, and its materials reused in the nearby Orthodox one.

(Public) archaeology in Ethiopia?

Archaeology in Ethiopia is not new: from Lucy to Axum, the projects and teams working there have been significant. In January 2010, Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional y Desarrollo (AECID) organized a national workshop on the management of heritage sites for representatives of all regions (Beyene, 2010), leading to significant conclusions about the emancipation from an archaeology (and heritage management) 'ruled' by foreign teams and UNESCO. In our attempt to practise effectively a real postcolonial and inclusive archaeology, we designed a strategy based



FIGURE 3 Aerial view of Azazo compound with the different buildings already located.
 From Google Earth, © 2007, Google, Digital Globe and Europa Technologies.

on the foundations of public archaeology in its current definition (Almansa, 2010; Ascherson, 2000; Matsuda, 2004; Moshenska, 2009; Schadla-Hall, 1999) and in some way slightly different to other African initiatives (e.g. Eze-Uzomaka, 2000). As the project started to take shape, a constant self-criticism developed to try to improve our way of doing things. The project had to overcome some initial setbacks, but finally prevailed over them.

But the question here is how can you do public archaeology in Ethiopia? At first we were worried about the possibility of working effectively with the community and at an institutional level, but we soon realized how trouble-free it was. Both people and institutions in Ethiopia were more pleased to collaborate than we had expected. In fact, the experience was much more pleasant than similar efforts had been in Spain, where, far from being accepted, public archaeology remains a minority concern (Almansa, 2011; Sanz, 2009).

According to the organization of foreign archaeological missions in Ethiopia, the Spanish team had had to work since the beginning with a local officer from the Ministry of Culture (Dawit Tibebe). From the 2008 field season a new officer, Gashaw Belay, arrived from the Department of Tourism and Culture in the Amhara region and also joined the team. Local officers usually play the role of 'observer' in such projects. However, that was something that we all agreed not to follow, and Dawit Tibebe has conducted his own research at some of the sites for his MA, while Gashaw Belay is a central figure in the public archaeology project and other parallel institutional initiatives.

The two main factors that we had to take into account were the concern about cultural heritage, and the religious and social conflict that the project could cause. On the one hand, besides the period itself and some of the sites, there is little knowledge among the local community. In the case of Azazo, even some of the teachers in the nearby school were unaware of its existence. Furthermore, the value of archaeological heritage in local communities is not something they are really concerned about. On the other hand, after a first contact with the site and realizing some of its values, the concern for cultural heritage in these communities appeared to become much greater. Then, a major issue of conflict appeared: religion. As in Susenyos times, the presence of Catholicism in a radical Orthodox environment makes the discourse about the sites problematic. For some locals, admitting the presence and power of an external Catholic group is still hard, even when it is part of their own history, a history that 'they won'. Issues as controversial as the first use of mortar or the use and origins of different buildings lose objectivity in favour of an 'Orthodox' point of view (Campbell, 2004; Hespeler-Boulton, 2011). There are two priests actively working on the site during the excavations, and recent events in the Catholic Church have shown a local concern for its conservation. Dealing with these and other related issues has been, and still is, one of the main concerns of the project.

Strongly related to the public archaeology strategy, the issue of postcolonialism emerged (González-Ruibal *et al.*, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Fernández, 2006: 175; Zurinaga *et al.*, 2006). In reviewing issues and attitudes towards postcolonial approaches in Africa (see Lane, 2011), the role of the 'foreigner' (*faranyi* in Amharic) has taken on a new topicality. A Pandora's box has been opened, with discussion around how 'post' colonial archaeology had become (e.g. Gosden, 2001; Pagán-Jiménez, 2004). As Nicholas and Hollowell have pointed out (2007: 59), while trying to practise an equitable archaeology, the scientific power remains in 'colonial' terms. The perception of losing control over knowledge stimulates a reactionary interaction with locals (Nicholas & Bannister, 2004). Either by silencing or imposition, colonial ways of archaeology persist in Africa (Schmidt, 2009: 3), some of them violent (Munene & Schmidt, 2010: 328–29) and others promoted by transnational institutions such as UNESCO or the World Bank that are hardly contested (Breen, 2007; Rowlands, 2009; Arazi, 2011). As modern archaeology grew up in an occidental (mainly Eurocentric) environment, the 'colonial' role it played has persisted (Lane, 2011: 8). In sum, practising an inclusive archaeology among equals in the local context, taking care of every stakeholder and position, seems to be positive for a correct and real postcolonial practice. Doing public archaeology is a step forward in postcolonial archaeology.

Archaeology and the community in Azazo

One of the problems resulting from working with a limited funding source, is a latent worry about the future. You never know for certain if you will be back again. That is why our first efforts have gone to the community and the different administrations involved. There are dozens of actions that can be taken on the site, but as there were some rumours of danger for Azazo, we decided to focus on the protection of the site as we continued the archaeological work. Because of that, we prefer to call these first initiatives 'community archaeology' (Marshall, 2009; Moshenska, 2008; Simpson, 2008; Tully, 2007) and, as will be shown here, the results appear to be excellent.

Locals

We consider ‘locals’ to be a group of around twenty families living next to the site, mainly related to the church of Tekle Haymanot. They are the people who sow the fields where the site is and, since we first arrived in 2006, they are also the ones who work on the site. The authority of the church in the community is very important, and that is why one of the relationships we must attend to is that with the church itself. We make a partly forced contribution to the church, and at the same time we have a good relationship with some of the priests who are free to participate whenever they want (two of them are full-time workers at the site). As we have commented before, one of the difficult issues relates to the interpretation of the excavations. What for us is a Jesuit-related site, for them is a dark episode of their history that in any case has to be related to the emperor and not to the Jesuits. Some of the works of the Portuguese anthropologist Manuel Joao Ramos (a former partner in our project) go in this direction and, through interviews and meetings, he is trying to reconstruct the memory of the sites and their history of this moment (Ramos, 2006, 2008).

Besides the church, the local community was the first group we intended to approach in order to raise awareness of the site in Azazo. Since our arrival in 2006 we have employed a small group of young workers from the nearby community who have started to learn what archaeology is. During our field season in 2008 we employed on a daily basis fifteen workers from the community and up to twenty-five in the closing days. In 2009 the number doubled due to the ‘family and study’ facilities we practised, and in 2010 remained stable, with attempts to promote contracts for women (Figure 4). Besides a fair salary and an open schedule, compatible with



FIGURE 4 Group photo of the team in 2009.
Birara Mogesh.

school and other jobs, we also explained the project to them in detail and trained them in archaeology. Today we have an impressive group of workers, motivated, concerned about the site, and highly skilled.

Our role as employers is not the only one we play at the site. We have tried to become part of the community, participating in their life and letting them participate in ours. One of our challenges in 2008 was to protect the site and the community from new urban developments in the area, which we believe has been achieved. Almost all the fields in Ethiopia belong to the government, not the people, and this is a threat for the future of the community. We want them to be an active part in the future of Azazo: they want to be, and this is the only way to preserve their place.

Elementary school

There is a small stone wall right next to the site. It separates the fields that the local community work around Azazo from the main elementary school in the town. There, around 1300 children, from five to more than twenty years old, complete their elementary studies before going to secondary school. During the 2008 field season, we focused on this school, trying to encourage interest in the work that we were doing at the site, as well as trying to raise concern about cultural heritage and history. Ethiopia is one of the youngest countries in the world, with 42 per cent of the population between 15 and 24 years old (CSA and IFC Macro, 2011). For us, working with children is one of the best ways to protect the site and make it known and understandable to people in the region (Dhanjal, 2008: 54). Also, using the excavation as a frame gave us the opportunity to make a greater impression on the public (Holtorf, 2007: 54–58). In five days in 2008, 982 students visited the site and carried out the activities we had prepared for them (Figure 5). Our main aim with these groups was to show them the site (because the vast majority of them did not know of its existence), but we also tried to discuss other issues such as identity, development, and culture, especially with the oldest students.

The experience was successful, but we had some problems mainly concerning language (the limited knowledge of Amharic of Jaime Almansa, as coordinator of the activities) and the size of the groups (normally around a hundred students). Thanks to Ato Dawit and Ato Gashaw, as well as the inestimable help of the teachers, the results were very good, in line with Högberg's experience in Scandinavia (Högberg, 2006: 44). The activities we did with the students followed three steps:

1. **Preliminary talk.** Either in the school or at our first stop on the site we gave a talk about archaeology, explaining what archaeology does and the importance of cultural heritage as a tool to reinforce identity and to develop local economy through tourism. The message varied depending on the age range, but the main idea that we wanted to transmit remained the importance of preserving and protecting this heritage. Besides that, we gave an introduction to the history of Susenyos times, as it is the most important moment in the history of Azazo.
2. **Visit.** Sometimes done from the swimming pool to the excavation, or, if the talk is in the school, the other way round. During the visit we showed them the stables of the Italian camp, the swimming pool, the cistern (and water system), the remains of the Catholic church (Gannata Iyesus), and the excavation (residence/palace). We



FIGURE 5 During the visit (Jaime Almansa).

explained the different buildings and continued talking about the history of Pregondarine Ethiopia. With the last groups of the day, if the sun was too hot, we used to stop in the shadows of the swimming pool and the excavation, plus a couple of minutes in the church to see the views. The visit finished with a final explanation of the excavation and the site given by one of our Ethiopian colleagues, and a last round of questions.

3. **Draw and write.** The students were given a piece of paper, and asked to draw and write whatever they felt about the site. This exercise was useful to clarify their ideas (and show us if we were communicating successfully) (Figure 6).

Jaime Almansa conducted the visits and general explanations with the help of the teachers, while Ato Gashaw or Ato Dawit gave the final talk on the excavation in Amharic. We were able to transmit much more information than we had expected, as all the other explanations during the visit were extremely basic due to our lack of Amharic.

Our principal aim for the visits was accomplished by walking around the site and explaining it, but we wanted to go further, and that is why we decided to analyse the perception that the children had of the site through their drawings and comments. The regular analysis helped us to recognize the weakest parts of the activity and the ways to improve it. It was the first time we had faced a public formed by children speaking a different language, and initially we did not know exactly how to act. During the first three groups we designed three different tracks highlighting various aspects of the site. As they were the youngest children, the effects on the message would be minor, as the main aspects were treated the same. As a result, we saw how

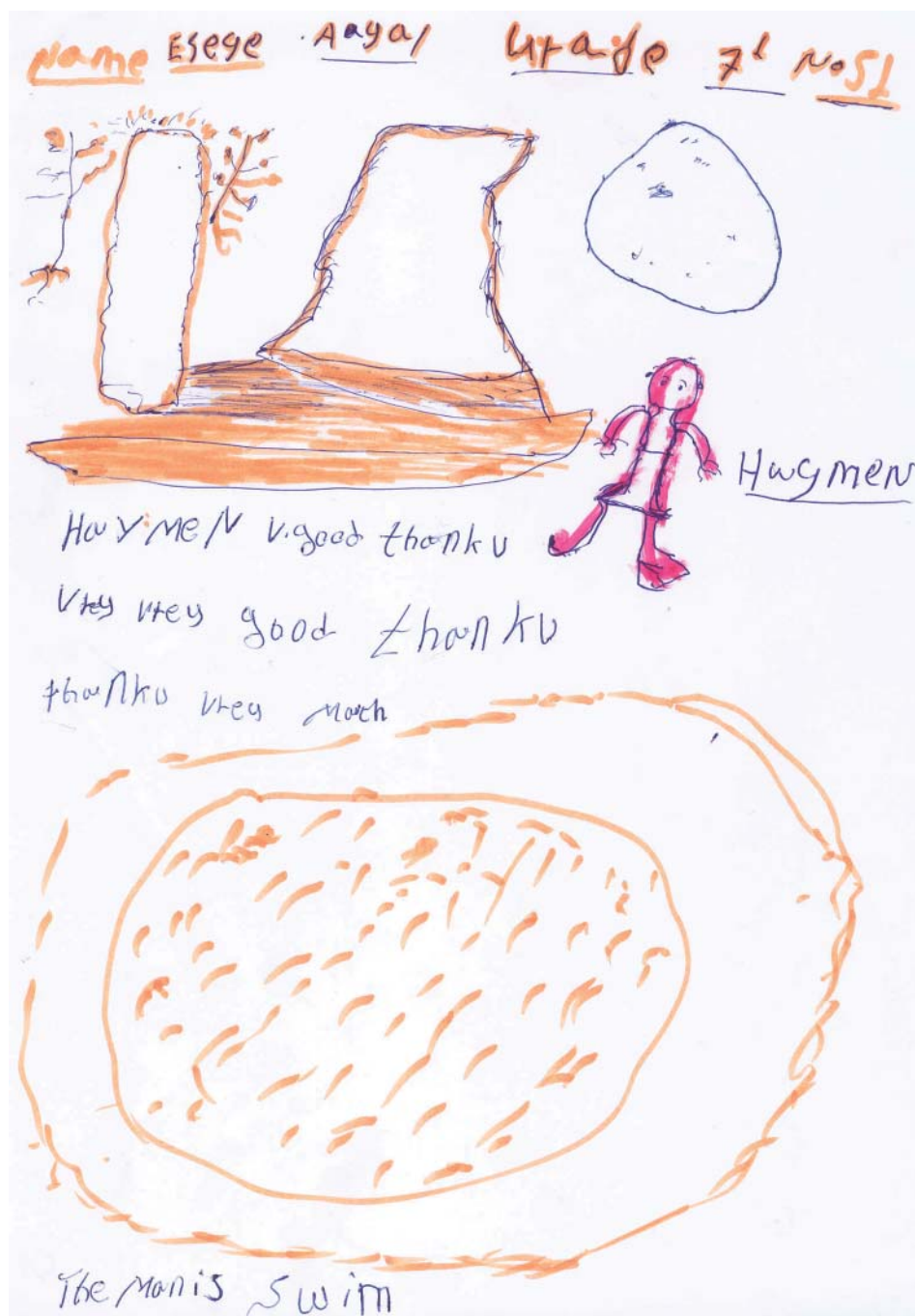


FIGURE 6 Example of a drawing (Esege Ayal, grade 3).

they remembered only the points that we highlighted and not that much about the other comments we made during the visit. We could see this most clearly in the contrast between groups 1 and 2. On the one hand, group 1 made the ‘normal’ visit (from the swimming pool to the excavation) and only 1 out of a total of 96 children drew the pool. On the other hand, group 2 made the visit the other way round and only 8 children (from 95) drew the tower or the excavation beneath (group 3 focused on people and the old *warka*). After that we were able to Clarify the concept of the site as a coherent whole — a compound — and the numbers became more commensurate.

After evaluating the visits with the teachers we are satisfied with the experience and will try to maintain the connection with the school to develop new activities for the students. Some of them (those who dared to write in English) also gave a very interesting image of the site. Here are some of their responses:

‘I saw to this place some farangee archaeology and ethiopian archaeology. This archaeology is digging the ground. When this archaeology is get under the ground it gets some pieces of human body, animals body and it gets the past persons material. This thing is very important to know the techniques building they build. To know the evident person use made and I saw this picture from this place.’

‘I see a building. This building very very important. I see swim, the floor proportion. It was from Susenyos Fassil. It was from 400 years before. It is very very important. Ethiopia is rich country. And thank you. My idea finish.’

‘I see some materials and sometimes I things understand to Susenyos. Thank you Jaime. Archaeology is a beautiful job so keep up.’

‘I see stones and material. It is good material. I see pot and building. I see a very ancient material. 400 years ago.’

‘Getachew Assafa. Teacher. To give suggestions about this site of Susenyos place. I admitted the archaeologist team that find Historical place in Ethiopia specially in Azazo, I was no aware of it before. But know it will good site for tourist in come for Ethiopia. Mr Jaime told us about everything studied it will keep until money good. I ask Spanish archaeologist not only study but also propose project for the last results. Even I admit as group member as Mr Jaime gives good information about the site. Thank you.’

‘Just I wanted to write the Archaeology work as for me is very important work after work because when we make this work we know any natural and Historical places that means when we start this work just we are know and visit besides we know many unknown things. I think this work very fantastic work so still by unknown material and think so when we know this material and things we have more talent the archaeology. When I see some things in the last I would like to explain I see a good building under the ground. When I see this really I am admire you. Keep it up. Thank you so much by this.’

‘This place many things lived. So the people made many things long year lives in this place. Now this place new picture the elementary school student visit so students get new knowledge.’

‘Ok my idea is a very nice idea because this research use us for Ethiopian Historical development. This palace is a historical palace so we thanks Spanish archaeologists and Ethiopian archaeologists for this reason. The Susenyos palace was Historical palace for the following also we use a historical custom.’

‘I live here around Tekle Haymanot. For about this site I have a good idea because this work is very important work to introduce about Ethiopia historical place, and for me if it continous still finishing time I think it is very good for Ethiopia and other country. As you told us it will can the touristic place. Because tourism is one of the important thing for Ethiopia after this. I will have promise to your work means to keep it. To introduce other people means to know other and I will help you as can I. To transmit this work idea to others. I love forever all of this workers.’

Secondary school

Due to lack of time we could not replicate the same level of engagement with the secondary school as there were around 3600 students, but we wanted to approach them too, so we tried to design something for them as a starting point for future years. In December 2008 we arranged a visit for twenty-three teachers who were able to come and we had a very interesting talk full of ideas and questions. Finally, we decided to invite students from the Social Sciences and the Ethics and Environment Clubs.

The first to come were the Social Science students. They came with their history teacher, the director and the vice-director. The visit was compulsory for them and we had 153 students (mostly grade 12). The visit started at the site with an explanation by Ato Dawit and Ato Gashaw and a round of questions. After that, Jaime Almansa took the teachers up to the swimming pool where there was a debate about the importance of cultural heritage for the development of the region, the ethics of tourism, and sustainability. According to the comments of the students and the teachers, it was a very interesting activity and the primary objective of interesting the students in the site and the importance of protecting cultural heritage was achieved.

After that, the visits for the students from the Ethics and Environment Clubs were voluntary. For the Ethics Club we had two groups: a first group in the morning, of forty-seven students, and a second one in the afternoon, with only eight students. The visit followed the same format as for the elementary school students, but with a debate about the role of foreign and local archaeologists in the study of Ethiopian heritage, and the suitability and sustainability of tourism in the region.

But with the last club (Environment), the situation was worse and we had only twenty students spread in very small groups throughout the day. That forced us to change the format of the visits and we only gave an explanation of the site, the findings and interpretations, and a short talk about the repercussion of local development in environmental issues. Although we only got around 6 per cent of the students in secondary school, the experience was very positive and the director is open to continuing this link with more activities in the classes and more visits. Unfortunately, circumstances have prevented us from continuing with a stable programme, although informal visits have continued on a daily basis.

University

We made contact with Gondar University in February 2008 to talk about a new project, the Cultural Tourism Research Unit (CTRU), that was starting to take shape as a link for the research and management of cultural resources in the region. It had the support of the local administration and the different stakeholders taking part (including our project), but at the same time there was no money to set it up. These contacts allowed us to meet teachers from the departments of tourism management and anthropology. During the 2008 field season time was a problem and we could not dedicate as much attention as we would have liked to carrying out activities with them. However, we were able to organize two activities, one for the department of tourism and another for students of anthropology.

Firstly, Jaime Almansa conducted a workshop for the students in the last year of the tourism management course (Figure 7). The title was 'Cultural Heritage and Sustainable Tourism (Azazo Project and the CTRU)' and it focused on sustainable tourism management with special attention to the cultural tourism of the region. The workshop lasted more than four hours and both participation and conclusions were excellent. We tried to establish a work route for the year in order to improve the management of tourism in Gondar and highlighted several interesting actions to carry out, like the creation of an association of tourism professionals (later established in 2010) and a campaign for internal tourism (less than a quarter of



FIGURE 7 Jaime Almansa with Tourism Management students after a workshop in 2008 (Ananth Tamilmaniarasu).

tourism students had visited the World Heritage Site of Fasil Ghebi in Gondar which is less than fifteen minutes from the campus).

We wanted to organize another workshop for the students in the anthropology department, but the working situation made it impossible in 2008. Instead we organized a series of visits during which we received more than 200 anthropology students (Figure 8). We could not run a formal workshop, but the discussions and comments during the visits were productive and we were able to talk about different issues. In 2009 Jorge de Torres ran a workshop for them on 'Archaeology: Azazo Project'. As there was not a specific module on archaeology in their degree, it covered every aspect of the discipline using the example of our work at Azazo.

Although it is difficult to keep the contact with Spain due to IT problems and staff shifts, we are formalizing a cooperation agreement between Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Gondar University to be able to delve into different issues with new funding opportunities. Various members of the team, including the topographer Eduardo Agúndez, have started new projects in which this collaboration continues.

Politicians

The threat that has surrounded the site since 2007 made us focus even more on our relations with local politicians in order to preserve it. Construction is a major issue now in Ethiopia, and Gondar has grown a lot in the last few years. The site is a strategic point for development, as it lies right next to the airport and the road to Addis Ababa and Bahar Dar (the regional capital). There is a military camp nearby and the construction of an industrial estate started on the other side of the road in 2008.



FIGURE 8 Anthropology students visiting the site in 2009 (Jaime Almansa).

One of our most important achievements in 2008 was the protection of the site, after the approval of the protection plan that we presented to the local council. An action like this should have been made with the collaboration of the stakeholders affected, but in this case the urgency of the situation forced us to act, alongside the local officers. The contracts had already been signed and there was not much time. We prepared a protection plan, which included the local community and the church, in order to preserve not only the site but also the fields surrounding it. The Regional Office agreed it, so we presented it to the local council.

Our relations with the different institutions have always been close. We also have contacts with higher-level politicians on a regional and local scale. Although there was already a willingness to cooperate in the conservation of the site, we believed that visiting the site and understanding its values was a better strategy. That is why, prior to the presentation of the protection plan, we organized a visit to the site. By the end, their main worry was the total number of hectares affected and not the protection of the site.

Our protection plan was a preliminary action to protect the area where the site lies from construction developments. It consisted of three protection zones with different activities permitted on them (Figure 9). The first level of protection (5729 sq. m) represents the area of the known buildings, from the tower to Tekle Haymanot church. We encouraged the prohibition of any crop in this area, leaving it for grazing. The second level (Zone 2, 37041 sq. m) contained what we think is the actual site (the whole compound), and we recommended not growing any kind of tree, as it was an



FIGURE 9 Protection areas on the site.

From Google Earth, © 2007 Google, Digital Globe and Europa Technologies.

area of archaeological interest. Finally, the third level represented a huge area (buffer zone), from the road to Bahar Dar to the road to the airport, and from the elementary school to Tekle Haymanot. This area would be used to carry out two of the objectives of this plan: first of all, to maintain the landscape with the old *warka* and the amazing views to the south, and second, to protect the local community as a current and active part of the site, including the creation of jobs related to the protection and conservation of the site. Finally, we planned a fence to mark and protect the site. The fence included a similar area to Zone 2, and although we still do not have a date there is an agreement to do this, as well as to build a cover for the building we are excavating now, in order to create, in the medium term, an archaeological park related to the World Heritage Site of Gondar.

The plan was preliminarily accepted by the local council but the first houses built, right on the limit of Zone 2, have not respected the buffer zone (Figure 10). Further contact with the mayor's office and Ato Gethaun, councillor for culture and tourism, have ensured their commitment to protecting the site. The Regional Office is also monitoring events around the site. There have been additional problems with the relocation of farmers in the area, and the field with the Catholic church was given to an outsider who ploughed it. The positive point of all this, besides the minimal impact on the site, was the action of the locals, who protected the site and informed the new farmer about its importance and the need to preserve it.

In the end we were able to establish an interesting network of institutional relations, from the different levels of the administration (local and national) to the university and the church. By opening channels of communication at a political level



FIGURE 10 New buildings at the limits of Azazo.
Jaime Almansa.

we were able to agree basic issues such as the retention of the recovered materials in Gondar (instead of taking them to the National Museum in Addis Ababa), and the consideration at every level of the protection plan. Besides this, the site has been included in the new Gondar masterplan with other heritage attractions of the city.

The media

Closely linked to the ‘politics’ of the project was the interest we received from the local and national media. The news is controlled by a government agency, and gaining their attention was necessary for us to reach people through television and newspapers. Our first action was to send out a press release in English and Amharic announcing the beginning of our field season in 2008 and the open days to visit the site. Due to some difficulties in transmission, the impact of the note was minimal but we arranged a visit for the last digging day. During this visit, representatives of the local and national government and a television crew came to the site (Figure 11). We explained the project with interviews and a long recording that was shown a week later on the news and in a special twenty-minute show.

Now the project is starting to mature we are trying to expand our media impact with other initiatives. First of all we have gained a web presence with more than 200 images and videos on YouTube, Flickr, and Panoramio, and we are about to launch our new web page for the project. We will try to promote the project in the Spanish media (V́ctor Ferńndez and Jaime Almansa have already done so in 2009 and 2010). As the project is extended to other sites we are considering new communication



FIGURE 11 Television interviewing Ato Gethaun, Head of the Culture and Tourism Bureau in Gondar Council (Jaime Almansa).

initiatives. Unfortunately, one of the main problems we find is the IT infrastructure, which impedes live coverage of our fieldwork.

Discussion

We have a very limited budget and not a very long time, but now we have opened this new way of working, we have great expectations and we are full of new ideas for the future. Throughout this paper we have not just tried to explain our actions during our field seasons: there was also a hidden agenda, the possibility of taking archaeology further. Our team comes from an environment where archaeology has become increasingly 'private', veiled behind public administration, companies, and fences. Furthermore, working on a temporary basis with a mostly foreign team, makes the excavation our primary concern by necessity. With our experience we have shown that community archaeology does not demand a huge team, a huge budget, or a long period of time. Community archaeology can be practised daily, with little or no impact on the excavation but a huge impact on the local community. After three weeks of work in 2008, we effectively reached around 2000 people directly. The majority of the people in the town know us now, and so know and value the site, which is something that could never have happened without our work within the community.

We are conscious of our limitations, and the main objective is still the excavation in the short term, but the relation that Azazo has with the Fassil Ghimb has made us start working in Gondar too. For this reason we have started to cooperate with the university and tourism sector. Traditional archaeology aside, our community work touches on other issues including sustainable development, cultural tourism, and cooperation. Since 2009 we have worked on conservation projects for various buildings. Also, members of the team are starting new related projects based on cartography and tourism development. Meanwhile, we are continuously developing new ideas towards a more inclusive archaeology.

If we examine the results of our community-based work, the first reaction is that we have done almost nothing so far: there is still a lot of work to do. Second, what we have done so far is having a positive impact on both the community and the heritage. We believe that by following this path our original goals of doing real post-colonial archaeology and building a strong public archaeology programme for the project are well supported. It is difficult to foresee the future but as far as funding allows we expect this project to be an example of archaeological practice.

Stottman raised the idea of a responsive archaeology able to change the world (Stottman, 2011b: 15). Changing the world might be a utopian ideal, but building a responsive archaeology is already a victory. As Barbara Little pointed out in the same volume, 'perhaps it is the world of archaeology which needs to be changed in order to be saved' (Little, 2011: 154–55).

Note

¹ This project was developed thanks to the 'Proyectos arqueológicos en el exterior' programme of the Spanish Ministry of Culture.

Bibliography

- Almansa, J. 2010. Editorial: Towards a Public Archaeology. *AP: Online Journal in Public Archaeology* [online] volume 0, 1–3 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://www.arqueologiapublica.es>>
- Almansa, J. 2011. Arqueología para todos los públicos: Hacia una definición de la Arqueología Pública ‘a la española’. *ArqueoWeb* [online] 13: 87–107 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://www.ucm.es/info/arqueoweb/>>
- Arazi, N. 2011. Safeguarding Archaeological Cultural Resources in Africa — Policies, Methods and Issues of (non)compliance. *African Archaeological Review*, 28(1): 27–38.
- Ascherson, N. 2000. Editorial. *Public Archaeology*, 1(1): 1–4.
- Beyene, Y. 2010. *Proceedings of the Workshop on the Preparation of Management Plan for Cultural Heritage (Addis Ababa, 13–16 January 2010)*. Addis Ababa: Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage — Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional y Desarrollo (ARCCCH-AECID).
- Breen, C. 2007. Advocacy, International Development and World Heritage Sites in Sub-Saharan Africa. *World Archaeology*, 39(3): 355–70.
- Campbell, I. 2004. Portuguese and Indian Influences on the Architecture of the Lake Tana Region: An Inquiry into the Role of Gānātā Iyāsus. In: M. Ramos and I. Boavida, eds. *The Indigenous and the Foreign in Christian Ethiopian Art: On Portuguese-Ethiopian Contacts in the Sixteenth–Seventeenth Centuries. Papers from the Fifth International Conference in the History of Ethiopian Art (Arrábida, 26–30 November 1999)*. Hants: Ashgate, pp. 37–47.
- Caraman, Ph. 1985. *The Lost Empire: The History of the Jesuits in Ethiopia 1555–1634*. London: Sidgwick & Jackson.
- Cohen, L. 2009. *The Missionary Strategies of the Jesuits in Ethiopia (1555–1632)*. Aethiopische Forschungen 70. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag.
- CSA (Central Statistical Agency) and ICF Macro 2011. *Ethiopia: Demographic and Health Survey 2011*. Addis Ababa and Calverton: Central Statistical Agency and ICF Marco.
- Da Costa, M. G. 1966. Jeronimo Lobo Reveals Ethiopia to Europe in the Middle of the XVIth Century. *Proceedings of the Third International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa, April 1963*. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Haile Selassie I University, pp. 123–30.
- Dhanjal, S. 2008. Archaeological Sites and Informal Education: Appreciating the Archaeological Process. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 10(1): 52–63.
- Eze-Uzomaka, P.I. 2000. *Museums, Archaeologists and Indigenous People: Archaeology and the Public in Nigeria*. BAR International Series 904. Oxford: Archaeopress.
- Fernández, V. 2006. *Una Arqueología Crítica: Ciencia, ética y política en la construcción del pasado*. Barcelona: Crítica.
- Fernández, V. 2008. Arqueología de las misiones jesuítas ibéricas en Etiopía (1614–1633). *Informes y Trabajos* [online] 1: 39–44 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <http://www.mcu.es/patrimonio/docs/MC/IPHE/Publicaciones/IT/N1/04-Etiopia_Misiones_Jesuitas_Informes_Trabajos.pdf>
- Fernández, V. et al. 2009. Arqueología de las misiones jesuítas ibéricas del siglo XVII en la region del lago Tana (Etiopía). Informe preliminar sobre las excavaciones de 2008 en el yacimiento de Azāzō (Gondar, Estado Regional Amhara). *Informes y Trabajos* [online] 3: 45–52 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <http://www.mcu.es/patrimonio/docs/MC/IPHE/Publicaciones/IT/N3/2_lago_tana.pdf>
- Fernández, V. et al. 2011. Arqueología de las misiones jesuítas ibéricas del siglo XVII en la region del Lago Tana (Etiopía, estado regional Amhara). Informe preliminar sobre las excavaciones de 2009 en el yacimiento de Azāzō. *Informes y Trabajos* [online] 5: 78–91 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://www.calameo.com/read/000075335f538f748c84a>>
- González-Ruibal, A. et al. 2009. Arqueología de los pueblos nilóticos: una prospección arqueológica y etnoarqueológica de la región de Gambela (Etiopía Occidental). *Informes y Trabajos* [online] 3: 53–62 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <http://www.mcu.es/patrimonio/docs/MC/IPHE/Publicaciones/IT/N3/3_gambela.pdf>
- Gonzalez-Ruibal, A. et al. 2011a. A Social Archaeology of Colonial War in Ethiopia. *World Archaeology*, 43(1): 40–65.
- González-Ruibal, A. et al. 2011b. Prospección arqueológica y etnoarqueológica de Gambella y Anfillo (Etiopía occidental). *Informes y Trabajos* [online] 5: 68–77 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://www.calameo.com/read/000075335f538f748c84a>>

- Gosden, C. 2001. Postcolonial Archaeology: Issues of Culture, Identity and Knowledge. In: I. Hooper, ed. *Archaeological Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 241–61.
- Hespeler-Boulton, J. 2011. *A Story in Stones: Portugal's Influence on Culture and Architecture in the Highlands of Ethiopia 1493–1634*, 2nd edn. British Columbia: CCB Publishing.
- Högberg, A. 2006. The Past is the Present — Prehistory and Preservation from a Children's Point of View. *Public Archaeology*, 6(1): 28–46.
- Holtorf, C. 2007. *Archaeology is a Brand: The Meaning of Archaeology in Contemporary Popular Culture*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press.
- Holtorf, C. 2009. A European Perspective on Indigenous and Immigrant Archaeologies. *World Archaeology*, 41(4): 672–81.
- Lane, P. 2011. Possibilities for a Postcolonial Archaeology in Sub-Saharan Africa: Indigenous and Usable Pasts. *World Archaeology*, 43(1): 7–25.
- Little, B. 2011. Epilogue: Changing the World with Archaeology. In: J. Stottman, ed. *Archaeologists as Activists: Can Archaeologists Change the World?* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, pp. 154–58.
- Marcus, H. G. 2002. *A History of Ethiopia*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Marshall, Y. 2009. Community Archaeology. In: B. Cunliffe, C. Gosden & R.A. Joyce, eds. *Oxford Handbook of Archaeology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Matsuda, A. 2004. The Concept of 'the Public' and the Aims of Public Archaeology. *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology* [online] 15: 66–76 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://pia-journal.co.uk/index.php/pia/article/view/pia.224/138>>
- Moshenska, G. 2008. Community Archaeology from Below: A Response to Tully. *Public Archaeology*, 7(1): 51–52.
- Moshenska, G. 2009. What is Public Archaeology? *Present Pasts* [online] 1: 46–48 [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://presentpasts.info/index.php/pp/article/view/pp.7/9>>
- Munene, K. & Schmidt, P. 2010. Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa: Breaking the Silence. *African Archaeological Review*, 27(4): 323–37.
- Nicholas, G. & Bannister, K. 2004. Copyrighting the Past? Emerging Intellectual Property Rights Issues in Archaeology. *Current Anthropology*, 45: 327–50.
- Nicholas, G. & Hollowell, J. 2007. Ethical Challenges to a Postcolonial Archaeology: The Legacy of Scientific Colonialism. In: Y. Hamilakis and Ph. Duke, eds. *Archaeology and Capitalism: From Ethics to Politics*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, pp. 59–82.
- Páez, P. 2009. *Historia de Etiopía*. Granada: El Legado Andalusi [first Spanish edition of the original text].
- Pagán-Jiménez, J. 2004. Is all Archaeology a Postcolonial one? Constructive Answers from an Eccentric Point of View. *Journal of Social Archaeology* 4(2): 200–13.
- Pennec, H. 2003. *Des Jésuites au royaume du Prêtre Jean (Éthiopie): Stratégies, recontres et tentatives d'implantation 1495–1633*. Paris: Centre Culturel Calouste Gulbenkian.
- Ramos, M.J. 2006. *Essays in Christian Mythology: The Metamorphoses of Prester John*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- Ramos, M.J. 2008. *The Azazo Mischief* [online] [accessed 18 June 2011]. Available at: <<http://youtu.be/5iROngABlhm>>
- Rowlands, M. 2009. Africa on Display: Curating Postcolonial Pasts in the Cameroon Grassfields. In: P. Schmidt, ed. *Postcolonial Archaeologies in Africa*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, pp. 149–62.
- Sanz, C. 2009. Las ruedas de Pintia. Rehabilitar la necrópolis, recuperar la memoria: O por qué me he comprado un cementerio. *Vaccea*, 2: 62–66.
- Schadla-Hall, T. 1999. Editorial: Public Archaeology. *European Journal of Archaeology*, 2(2): 147–58.
- Schmidt, P. 2009. *Postcolonial archaeologies in Africa*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press.
- Simpson, F. 2008. Community Archaeology under Scrutiny. *Conservation and Management of Archaeological Sites*, 10(1): 3–16.
- Stottman, J. ed. 2011a. *Archaeologists as Activists: Can Archaeologists Change the World?* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press.
- Stottman, J. 2011b. Introduction: Archaeologists as Activists. In: J. Stottman, ed. *Archaeologists as Activists: Can Archaeologists Change the World?* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, pp. 1–16.

- Tully, G. 2007. Community Archaeology: General Methods and Standards of Practice. *Public Archaeology* 6(3): 155–87.
- Zurinaga, S. et al. 2006. Cooperación cultural en la era post-colonial: Un museo para Benishangul (Etiopía). In: R. Hernández and J.A. Alonso, coords. *Congreso Universidad y Cooperación al Desarrollo: Ponencias y Comunicaciones Volumen 1*. Madrid: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, pp. 470–89.

Notes on contributors

Jaime Almansa is the founder and manager of JAS Arqueología S.L.U., the first Spanish company to focus on public archaeology projects. His undergraduate studies were undertaken at Universidad Complutense de Madrid and he obtained an MA in Public Archaeology from University College London.

Correspondence to: Jaime Almansa Sánchez, Plaza de Mondariz 6, 3º I. 28029, Madrid, Spain. Email: almansasanchez@gmail.com

Dr Gashaw Belay works as an archaeologist in the Amhara National Regional State Culture, Tourism and Parks Development Bureau. He got his PhD in Moscow during the Derj regime and has been working as a secondary education teacher and archaeologist since then.

Dawit Tibebe is senior curator at the Authority for the Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (Ministry of Culture), Ethiopia. His undergraduate and graduate studies were undertaken at Addis Ababa University and he is currently working on various international projects in Ethiopia.

Dr Víctor Fernández is senior lecturer at the Department of Prehistory, Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He has been working in Africa for nearly forty years, going up the Nile River from Sudan to Lake Tana with different research projects. He is also the author of the main bestselling handbooks on archaeology in Spain.

Jorge de Torres is a PhD candidate at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. He works on the Iron Age of central Spain but has a strong relation with Africa from the projects in Ethiopia and Morocco.

Cristina Charro is a PhD candidate at Universidad Complutense de Madrid. She also works on the Iron Age of central Spain and has been working in Ethiopia with projects in Benishangul and Amhara region.

Dr Carlos Cañete is currently a freelance archaeologist and researcher. His research interests focus on critical historiography and African studies. He has been working for several years in Lixus (Morocco) and Ethiopia.