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VÍCTOR M. FERNÁNDEZ, Universidad Complutense de Madrid –
ANDREU MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER, Universität Hamburg –
JORGE DE TORRES, Universidad Complutense de Madrid –
CARLOS CAÑETE, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid

Article

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by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Archaeology of the Jesuit Missions in the Lake Ṭana Region: Review of the Work in Progress

VÍCTOR M. FERNÁNDEZ, Universidad Complutense de Madrid –
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Introduction

Jesuit missionaries, from the Iberian Peninsula and Italy, were active in Ethiopia since 1557 until their expulsion in 1632. Although the missionaries established their first churches since the beginning of their stay in Ethiopia, their architectonic project only took shape later, under the rule of *aṣe* Susənyos (1607–1632). The period of Jesuit architecture in Ethiopia began in the 1610s and reached its apex in the late 1620s, particularly after 1624, when a technique to locally produce mortar was discovered by the missionaries and their associates.

According to the missionary record, the Jesuits established about twenty residences in Ethiopia, although only eleven of them were inhabited for a substantial period of time. In at least ten residences, with the help of foreign and local masons and within a short span of time, they erected or started to build sophisticated structures, that included ashlar and mortar masonry, barrel vaulted churches boasting sophisticated ornamentation, residences, large underground water cisterns, defensive bulwarks and towers.

Since 2006, a Spanish archaeological team from the Complutense University of Madrid has been carrying out a study of the most important Jesuit architectonic sites in the Lake Ṭana area.¹ Initially, a general field survey of the sites was completed. Following that, the team focused on four sites located in Dämbəya and around the city of Gondär. Particular attention was given to the archaeological complex of Azäzo (Gännätä Iyäsus). Excavations have been carried out at Azäzo from 2007 to 2011. In addition to archaeological field work, a high definition topographical survey and a laser-scanner 3D reconstruction of the four sites was made. Geophysical survey through Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) was used to assist in the finding

¹ Cf. FERNÁNDEZ 2008; FERNÁNDEZ – DE TORRES – ALMANSA 2009; FERNÁNDEZ et al. 2011.

of buried stone structures in Azäzo. Further sites in the same area are projected for excavation. This paper presents the preliminary results.

Historical overview

The Jesuit mission in Ethiopia was active from 1557 to 1632.² The mission extended over two periods. The first period lasted some forty years, from the arrival of the first missionaries at the hand of Bishop Andrés de Oviedo until the end of the 16th century. This phase was characterized by stagnation and estrangement from the Ethiopian court. The second and most successful missionary phase began in 1603 and continued up to 1632.

During the second period, the missionaries befriended influential members of the Ethiopian court, first and foremost the Christian Ethiopian ruler, *nəguś* Susənyos, and his half brother Səʾälä Krəstos. Under the leadership of men like the Spaniard Pedro Páez, the Portuguese António Fernandes and Manoel de Almeida and the Italian Francesco Antonio de Angelis, the Jesuit mission could intensify its activities in the 1610s and 1620s. In the early 1620s, Susənyos declared Catholicism the state religion and in 1625 the Catholic Patriarch, the Jesuit Afonso Mendes, arrived. The success of the mission was, however, short-lived for in 1632, amidst a civil war and a dynastic succession crisis, the missionaries were expelled from the land.

The areas of activity and settlement of the missionaries were, broadly speaking, those of the royal monarchy and its court. Fourteen residences were located in the area surrounding Lake Ṭana and near the royal and provincial capitals, particularly to the north, east and south of the lake, in the provinces of Dämbəya, Bägəmdər and Goğğam, respectively. Since the missionaries depended on the protection and patronage of the monarch and powerful lords, it is also in those areas where they erected their most ambitious constructions.

The exact location of seven Jesuit residences in the area surrounding Lake Ṭana is known (Map 1): Azäzo (also known as Gännätä Iyäsus) and Gorgora “Nova” in Dämbəya; Däbsan (also ʼInfraz) and Dänqäz in Bägəmdər; Särka (also Gəmb Giyorgis and Gəmb Maryam), Qʷälläla (or Qollela; also known as Gəmb Kidanä Məhrät) and Märtulä Maryam (or ʼEnnəbəsse) in Goğğam (Anfray 1980–81; 1988). Further seven sites have not been located yet (Pennec 2003, fig. 8). In the above mentioned sites, as well as in the unlocated site of Ləğğə (or Ləqqə) Nəguś in Damot and in the northern residence of Fəremona in Təgray the missionaries, with the help of

² For a survey of the literature on the Jesuit mission, cf. COHEN – MARTÍNEZ D’ALÒS-MONER 2006.

local and foreign masons, erected churches, palaces and defensive structures using sophisticated building techniques and designs.



Map 1: The Lake Tana area and places mentioned in the text

The purpose of missionary architecture in Ethiopia was manifold. Firstly, the missionaries were looking for structures suitable to the development of their proselytizing and intellectual activities. Secondly, the Europeans were eager to impress their patrons and the local people with sophisticated and grandiose architecture. Last but not least, the Ethiopian patrons, in particular Susänyos and Sə°älä Krəstos, used the building skills of the Jesuits and the masons who came with them to produce an architecture symbolizing their power, ideals for renewal and cultured life-style.

When the Jesuits were expelled from the kingdom in 1632, some of the structures were abandoned and some were reutilized for other purposes. Most of the buildings were ruined through the centuries but some, in particular at the sites of Dänqäz, Däbsan and Särka, managed to preserve their structures remarkably intact.

Jesuit architecture received little attention from the travellers and other foreigners who visited and described the regions around Lake Ṭana at the demise of the mission. Probably overshadowed by the gondärine castles and churches that were constructed during the period that followed the Jesuit mission, these travellers left little accounts on the missionary sites. In the twentieth century, a few surveys were made but no serious archaeological excavation was attempted.³ In the 1970s and 1980s, two surveys focusing on Ethiopia funded by UNESCO had little to comment on these sites.⁴ In the 1970s and 1980s the French archaeologist Francis Anfray attempted the first comprehensive survey of Jesuit and gondärine sites and published a series of important articles with his preliminary findings, which included maps, pictures and some plans of the sites.⁵

Missionary architecture received further attention in two comprehensive doctoral dissertations presented in the last decade by Hervé Pennec and Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner.⁶ Pennec produced a general survey and description of the sites, supporting the historical analysis with archaeological methodology. Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, in his turn, studied the meanings and symbolism of the temples and buildings associated with the Jesuit mission and discussed on its impact.

Archaeological campaigns at the Azäzo complex

One of the best known and most important Jesuit-related sites in Ethiopia was that of Azäzo, also known as Gännätä Iyäsus (12° 32' 36.12" N, 37° 25' 56.05" E). Located some 13 km to the south of the city of Gondär, it served as the temporary residence of *aṣe* Susənyos while the capital of the kingdom was in Dänqäz. According to the missionary record,⁷ a complex was built there between about 1621 and circa 1630, that included several buildings and structures: a Catholic church, which would have been finished in

³ An important legacy from the short-lived Italian colonization of Ethiopia were the photographic surveys done, which included a few historical missionary sites. Today the photographic collections from the Africa Orientale Italiana are preserved at the Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente (ISIAO) in Rome and at the Istituto Agronomico per l'Oltremare in Florence and still remain largely untapped. Unfortunately, the Institute has recently been closed and there is uncertainty about whether it will reopen again. For Italian colonial images relevant to the present topic, see, e.g., PALMA 2005: 212, 465, 470, 638.

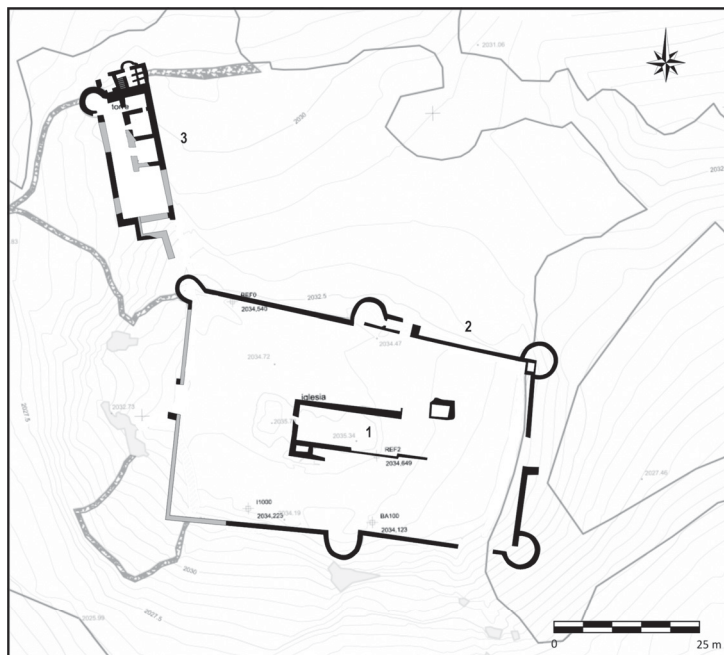
⁴ ANGELINI 1971 and AALUND 1985.

⁵ ANFRAY 1965; 1970; 1980–81; 1988–89.

⁶ PENNEC 2003 and MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER 2009. Another doctoral thesis presented recently on this mission but having a stronger focus on intellectual and theological debates is COHEN 2009.

⁷ BECCARI 1903–17, III: 387; VI: 357, 387–388, 390; XII: 266; Paes 1625: 255v.

1625/26 and was fortified about 1628; a building and garden for Susānyos towards the same years; a residence for the missionaries; and a rectangular pool with a central pavilion.



Map 2: The Azāzo missionary-royal complex: 1) Catholic church; 2) Fortification wall; 3) Royal palace with round tower

The remains of a rectangular building, corresponding to the Catholic church, were visible on the highest part of the site, surrounded by an equally rectangular fortification with round towers (in missionary sources described as *baluartes*) at the corners and centres of the longest stretches.⁸ The church had previously been the object of a trench excavation.⁹

It also bears mention that in the nearby Orthodox church of Täklä Haymanot stone reliefs in the walls are preserved. They display rosettes, fleur-de-lis and vases of flowers, and were probably taken from the Catholic church. The closing wall of the Täklä Haymanot church area, and the two built-on rectangular towers, one of which displays a semicircular vault, are clearly of gondärine style and oral tradition informs that they were erected during the time of Fasilädäs.

⁸ ANFRAY 1988: 13; PENNEC 2003: 188–203, figs. 14–15.

⁹ For a preliminary report of the excavation, cf. TSEGA MICHAEL 1998.

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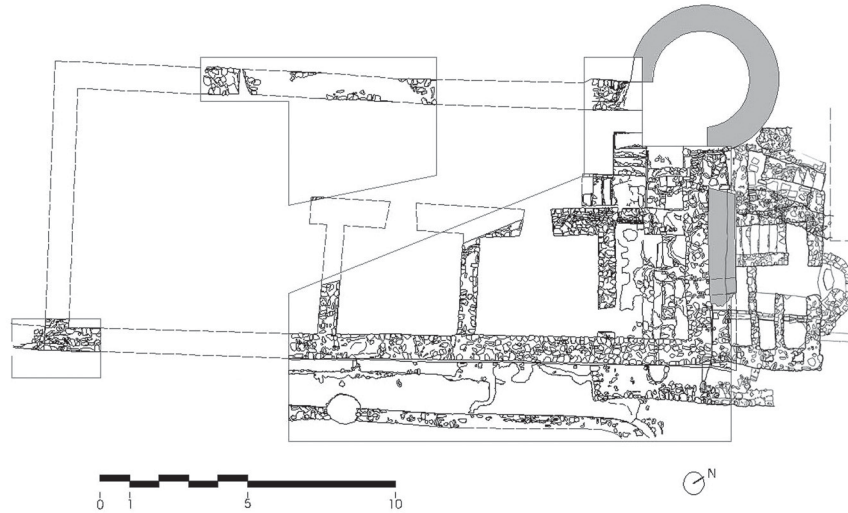


Fig. 1: Plan of the excavated residence of *ase* Susanyos in Azäzo; towards the right the building annexed later with the stairs and the square cubicles; in grey, the extant tower and wall

Archaeological campaigns were undertaken in 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2011. Campaign periods lasted about five weeks on average and were undertaken by a team of Spanish archaeologists from different research and academic centres.¹⁰ In addition, the excavation was supported by archaeological advisors from the local government¹¹ and historians.¹² The workforce – between twenty to forty workers for every campaign – was local, mostly from the area of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot church.

A rectangular building next to the extant round tower and the wall to the North of the Catholic church was excavated (Fig. 1). The building (22.6 x 9.7 m) displayed five or six large rooms on the Eastern side and what seems to be a wide corridor on the West. Excavation of the whole building could not be undertaken due to the tree plantations and a recent wall that covered part of the construction.

¹⁰In alphabetical order: Jaime Almansa, Carlos Cañete, Cristina Charro, Víctor M. Fernández, Jorge de Torres, María Luisa García and the technicians Gianluca Catanzariti and Christian Dietz. The archaeological research was funded by the Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Bienes Culturales (Ministry of Culture, Spain) and the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo (Foreign Office, Spain).

¹¹Abebe Mengistu, Dawit Tibebe and Gashaw Belay.

¹²Andreu Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, Hervé Pennec and Manuel João Ramos.

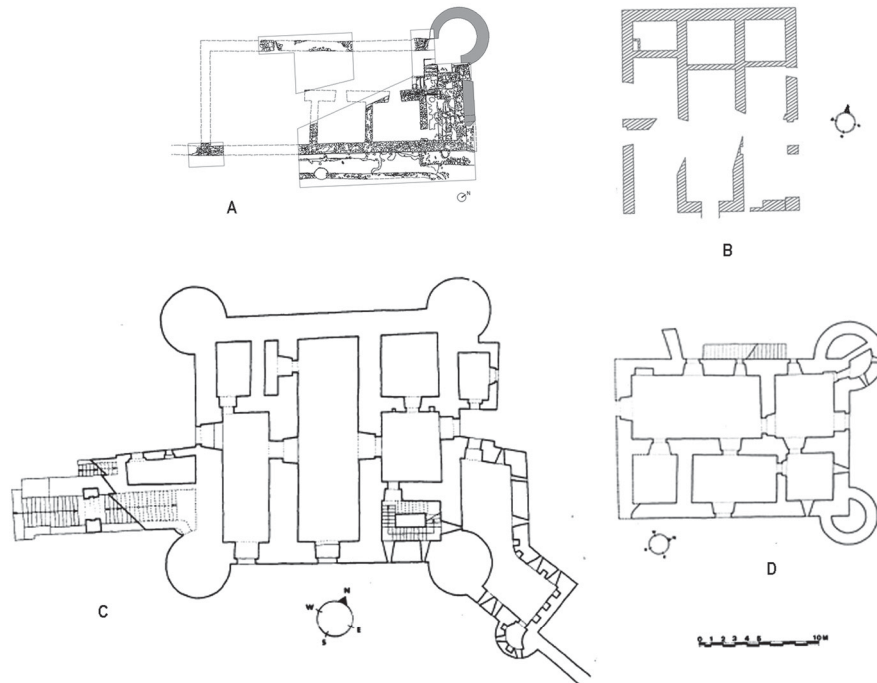


Fig. 2: The plans of the palaces of Azäzo (A), Dänqäz (B), Fasil palace at Gondär (C) and Guzara (D), at the same scale (10 m)

Since the layout of the rectangular building recalled that of the residence of Gorgora Nova and other mission structures around the world, a first hypothesis was raised, that it had served as the house of the Jesuit fathers and their visitors (it is to be noted, however, that Almeida spoke of several “houses” of stone and lime being used by the fathers).¹³ However, findings made during the last archaeological campaign in January 2011 opened the way for another hypothesis, namely that the building might have been the residence-palace the Jesuits erected for Susänyos in ca. 1624. Even if the excavated building is not totally coincident with Almeida’s description of the palace,¹⁴ the large size of the rooms and walls, the complicated system of water circulation, the circular tower still preserved on the north-western corner and the elegant staircases discovered at the northern side of the building, are strong evidence towards the later hypothesis that the site had once been the royal palace. A compari-

¹³ BECCARI 1903–17, VI: 390.

¹⁴ The historical description of a two-storey building does not match the evidence from the excavated remains; cf. *ibid.*

son between the plan of this site and those of other important historical palaces in Gondär area provides additional support (Fig. 2).

In the room at the north-eastern corner, a complex system of entrance and exit of water was found. The structure could have functioned as a latrine and showed great similarities with structures found in many European convents of the Middle Ages and Early Modern period.¹⁵ Shortly after this system was built, a small rectangular building was added on the northern side of the structure. It comprised two parallel staircases in its interior giving access to the main building and three small square cubicles (baths or latrines?) (Fig. 3), more than 3 m deep, where the water coming from the top of the hill came in through a hole in the wall and went out through a big subterranean channel, about 3 m deep and 1 m high, probably conducting the sewage towards a nearby reservoir or the nearby stream. The entrance to the tunnel was framed by a polygonal arch made with squared stones, a technique that was later used in several windows of the Gondär palaces.



Fig. 3: The cubicles and the main staircase of the “palace” in the background, Azäzo, photo 2011

The building technique of this “palace”, based on parallel rows of thin flat stones, was very similar to that from other Jesuit buildings such as Däbsan and Dänqäz and differed from the technique documented at the well-known palaces of Gondär that used stones of irregular shape and size. Of the two extant structures of Azäzo, the round tower and the adjacent wall, the second was erected at a later date using the gondärine technique and, for unknown

¹⁵ E.g. MAGNUSSON 2001, fig. 3.13.



Fig. 4: The extant round tower of Azäzo, photo 2011

reasons, was superimposed directly over the previous palace wall. The 2011 campaign also found evidence that the tower (Fig. 4) was erected at the same time as the original palace building, and was therefore part of the same structure. It is probably one of the two fortified bulwarks (*cubellos ou baluartes*) mentioned by Almeida;¹⁶ however, after the four corners of the building were excavated, no traces of the second tower were found.

The fact that the archaeological materials recovered during the excavation (mostly hand-made pottery of Amhara tradition) are of local origin seems to indicate that the building was reused after the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1633. It was during this later period of use when the water

system was probably closed and the distribution of the interior and exterior doors modified. A local tradition recorded by Ian Campbell informed that the ruins had once been the residence of the *äččäge*, the leader of the Däbrä Libanos community, who had indeed relocated at Azäzo shortly after the fall of the mission.¹⁷

The excavation of the church area carried out in 2009 unearthed the foundations of a rectangular building of 19 x 10 m in dimension, with 2–3 lines of dry masonry of perfectly squared ashlar of blue stones in its base (Fig. 5) and several more superior lines of lime and irregular stones preserved. A feature that confirms the functionality of the building as a church is that it has no internal partition walls. Yet neither the dimensions, that are bigger than those indicated in the chronicle of Susənyos (16 x 5.6 m) and by Almeida (20 x 6.8 m), nor the construction technique, which Almeida clearly indicated was made with mud and stone, is completely coincident with the historical sources.¹⁸

¹⁶ BECCARI 1903–17, VI: 390.

¹⁷ CAMPBELL 2004: 44.

¹⁸ The Chronicle of Susənyos, which specifies that the designer and initiator of the works at the church was the **ማእምር ፡ ሕገጸ** *ma'əməṛ ḥənsa* (i.e. 'expert in buildings')



Fig. 5: The foundations of the Catholic church, Azāzo, photo 2009

The remains of another rectangular building were also discovered. It was made with dry stone without mortar and was erected over the foundations of the church, probably when the Ṭäklä Haymanot order occupied the site after the Jesuits' expulsion. Several trenches excavated inside the church yard revealed that the whole area was used as a graveyard, but whether this use occurred during the Jesuit occupation or thereafter remains obscure.

During the last excavation campaign in January 2011 a thorough cleaning with excavation of several parts was undertaken at the rectangular fortified wall around the church. A door in the middle of the northern side of the wall was discovered, with remains of a very thick mortar floor still extant and two square doors to access the internal area. Already noticed for other Jesuit buildings in the country, here the doors had also been walled up with stones and mortar, probably for defensive purposes.

At the eastern end of the defensive wall, an area where numerous trees hamper the study of the remains, the foundations of two circular towers were discovered through excavations of the outer corners areas (Fig. 6). Only 3–4

“Padri Pay”, i.e. the Jesuit Pedro Páez, provides the following dimensions for the church: the *alicerce* or foundations was 2 *covados* (*codo* in Spanish) i.e. 1.14 m (if *codo real* or *de ribera*, 1 *codo* = 0.57 m); the external dimensions were 56 x 16 *covados*, i.e. 31.92 x 9.12 m; the internal dimensions were 35 x 12 *covados*, i.e. 19.95 x 6.84 m; the height was 15 *covados*, i.e. 8.55 m; PEREIRA 1892–1900, I: 259 and II: 199. Almeida, in his turn, probably referring to the internal dimensions of the church, mentioned 60 x 20 *palmas*, i.e. 13.20 x 4.40 m (1 *palmo* = 0.22 m); BECCARI 1903–17, VI: 387–91. On this issue, cf. also CAMPBELL 2004: 39.



Fig. 6: The remains of the south-east round tower of the church fortification, Azäzo, photo 2011

lines of stones and mortar remained of each of them, but were enough to measure their large diameter, 6 m in the north-eastern tower and 7 m for the south-eastern one. Both constructions were larger in width than the biggest towers of Gondär, those at Fasil’s palace, and together with the extant, and smaller (4.5 m diameter), tower from Susänyos’s “palace” at Azäzo, whose aspect is typically gondärine, could have perfectly acted as models for the so-called gondärine architecture erected in Gondär and elsewhere.

Other archaeological campaigns

In Gorgora Nova¹⁹ (12° 12' 50" N, 37° 12' 36" E) excavations were undertaken in 2011 and 2012. Most of the rooms from the residence were cleared down to the original level, revealing the original floor made with flat stone slabs, the same technique used for the ceilings. All the rooms, as well as the space in the inner yard between the residence and the church, had been used as an extensive graveyard, most probably during the time when an Orthodox church (Maryam Gəmb) was erected with dry stone in the centre of the yard. According to local informants the church was destroyed by the Sudanese Mahdist raids at the end of the 19th century. Inside the eastern tower, under the layer of recent burials a pit occupying the southern half of the room was unearthed, it was near 4 m deep with its walls covered by mortar and the bottom arranged with big squared slabs and sloped towards an eastern-oriented subterranean channel in the same way as the one discovered at Azäzo.

¹⁹ Before the missionaries arrived there, the site of Gorgora Nova had been a settlement of Fälaša or Betä Əsraʾel. Initially known as Qund or Kund Amba, later the missionaries referred to it simply as Gorgora; cf. BECCARI 1904–17, VI: 233; MARTÍNEZ D’ALÒS-MONER 2005. At the demise of the mission it came to be called Maryam Gəmb from the Orthodox church, built in the middle of the courtyard of the Jesuit convent and today it is locally known as Susänyos or Susänyos Gəmb. In tourist maps it is often wrongly described as “Portuguese cathedral”.

Additionally, the thick vegetation occupying the site was removed and 29 decorated ashlar lying on the floor were collected. The stones were conveniently protected and brought to the Cultural and Tourism Office in Gondär for storage. In the same facilities the findings produced during the excavations at Azäzo are stored, in particular plenty of ceramic pieces and human bones.



Fig. 7: The remains of the square building in Gorgora (perhaps a dependency of Gorgora Nova), photo 2011

During the campaign of 2011, on a hill about three kilometres away from Gorgora Nova towards the north-east the team, following information provided by a local guide from the village of Mange, Səṭotaw Sälam, found the ruins of a rectangular building of probable Jesuit-related origin. The building had not been described before and thus seems to have passed unnoticed to travellers and other people who visited the Gorgora peninsula. It was a compact rectangular structure of stone and mortar, of approximately 4 x 6 m, and had at least two storeys. On top of the ruins an imposing *warka* tree (*Ficus Vasta*) has grown. An external stairway on the eastern side served to access the upper level and at some points the elevation of the ruins reached 2 m (Fig. 7). Although the missionary record does not mention such a structure, its location coincides with the distances and topographical references the missionary records provide on the two Gorgora settlements.²⁰ The hypothesis can be raised that this house was a satellite building of the mission of Gorgora Nova (active 1622–32) built near or on the site occupied by Gorgora Velha (active 1607–22). Further studies (measurements, excavation) should be conducted to verify this hypothesis as well as to determine the precise historical period, functionality and authorship (missionary or local) of the site.

²⁰ The Portuguese missionary Luis de Azevedo wrote that the church built by Páez was near (“um tiro de falcão”, about 1 km) the original site of Gorgora Velha, which in its turn was about half a *legoa* (i.e. about 3 km) away from Qund Amba, i.e. Gorgora Nova; BECCARI 1913–17, XI: 414 and also 416, 333, 375. A few years later, his fellow Manoel de Almeida confirmed the same data; ALMEIDA 1627: 423r.

A survey campaign was also launched at Dänqāz (12° 30' 0" N, 37° 39' 22" E). It included a high definition topographical survey and a laser-scanner 3D of the main buildings. An interesting finding was a painting on the wall at the right hand side of the main entrance to the royal palace of Dänqāz showing the profile silhouette in red of two dogs (Fig. 8). The painting had already been described by Anfray,²¹ yet a comprehensive analysis was still missing. Although only partially preserved, it is likely that the painting remained unfinished. The lines of the figures are very accurate and maybe they were meant as an outline to be filled in with the representation of complete bodies. These figures recall a famous painting by the Italian artist Jacopo Bassano (“Two Hunting Dogs Tied to a Tree Stump, ca. 1548–50”, Paris, Musée du Louvre), showing two dogs in an almost identical position. The painting was later copied and imitated by other artists. Several of the Jesuits living in Ethiopia were Italian and it is possible that one of them may have known the painting by Bassano or one of its copies.



Fig. 8: The paintings of two dogs at the palace of Susənyos in Dänqāz, sketch 2011

for hunting, an activity that, in 16th- and, particularly, 17th-century Habsburg Spain, was a noble occupation, to the extent that it came to symbolize the royal family itself.²⁴ Additionally, animals and hunting scenes abound in classical Mughal art. The art historian Ebba Koch thus explained that the six great

Needless to say the style of the painting was very different from past and contemporary visual art in Ethiopia and it did not exert influence later in the country. It is also interesting that the theme chosen were dogs, an animal that in Europe, throughout the Middle Ages, embodied a negative symbolism because it was considered impure;²² in the Renaissance, however, dogs began to be seen by the nobility as a valued pet and an essential complement for its hunting activities.²³ Eventually dogs became a symbol

²¹ ANFRAY 1988: 14.

²² HOBGOOD-OSTER 2008.

²³ BOWRON 2006.

²⁴ The Spanish kings, as in the famous painting by Velázquez of King Felipe IV of Spain, were often shown in the company of their hunting dogs. On this particular, cf. GÁLLEGO 1972: 227–228.

Mughal rulers were all dedicated to *shikār* or hunting and that this activity was viewed as a “a means of self-representation and an instrument of rule”.²⁵ Now, judging by the close ties that the Jesuit Ethiopian mission had with the Jesuit Mughal mission (ca. 1580–1640) and with Mughal India in general, a transfer of Mughal artistic models to Ethiopia might have also occurred.²⁶ The hypothesis emerges that the Jesuits utilized such imagery to elevate the figure of the Ethiopian ruler, thereby placing him on the same level as the European Renaissance princes or the Mughal rulers.

Finally, in May 2011, the team visited the important ruins of Abba Gəṣ Fasil (11° 03' 06.65" N, 37° 18' 56.79" E) (Figure 9). The site is located about 160 km to the south-west of Baḥər Dar and some 20 km to the east of the village of Gəṣ Abbay, where the Blue Nile finds its source. The site had been described earlier by Francis Anfray, who formulated the hypothesis that it could have been the old and still unlocated Jesuit mission of Ləḡḡe Nəḡuś.²⁷ It appears as an imposing fortress erected on a small rocky hill at about 2,720 m A.S.L. Protecting the north-eastern side there is an imposing, about 60 m-long wall with arrow slits, the southern flank remains without any structure due to the natural protection offered by the cliff there. Inside the walls there is a large rectangular structure of mortar masonry of about 22 x 9 m. It includes four two-storey rooms with large windows and is deprived of any decorative elements. Towards the eastern edge of the cliff, down the slope there is a large cistern. It consists of a rectangular structure of 16 x 7 m with a flat external roof. In a perfect state of conservation, the structure appears as one of the most original of its kind in northern Ethiopia: the inner space is divided by a wall that separates two aisles supporting barrel vaults.

According to oral tradition collected in the area, the castle of Abba Gəṣ Fasil was erected by Prince Fasil before the death of his father Susənyos. The intention of the Prince would have been to stay away from his father after a dispute broke out between the two. It bears mention that the main rectangular structure of the complex reminds, at a smaller scale, of the structure of the palace of Susənyos at Dänqāz (two-storied building with high ceilings and windows), and appears almost as a small copy of it but deprived of ornamentation. Be it as it may, neither the building techniques nor the fortified elements and the cistern resemble those found in the Jesuit missionary sites. Moreover, the historical record informs that Ləḡḡe Nəḡuś was situated in the province of Damot, which was south of the site described here.

²⁵ KOCH 1998: 11.

²⁶ On this issue, which still has to be fully investigated, cf. MARTÍNEZ D'ALÒS-MONER 2009: 222–224.

²⁷ ANFRAY 1970: 32–34, pl. III–IV; 1988: 21.

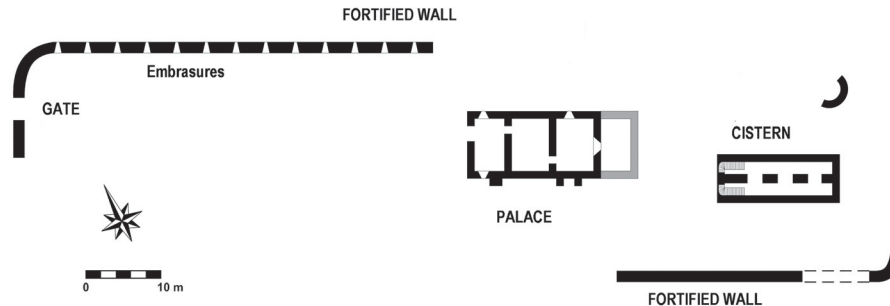


Fig. 9: Sketch plan of the buildings and defence walls of Abba Gəš Fasil, drawing 2011

Concluding Remarks

Archaeological findings, data analysis and scrutinizing the historical record have led us to some new hypothesis and to a reassessment of Jesuit missionary architecture. Archaeological work has thus served to complement and in some cases correct the past and ongoing historiographic investigation on this topic.

Firstly, some important Jesuit sites (Azāzo, Dānqāz and possibly also Sārka/Gəmb Giyorgis – Gəmb Maryam) were observed to share the same spatial settlement model: a church, very often with an annexed residence or college building, was erected at a close distance (a few hundred meters) of a building – be it a palace or a fortress – belonging to the royalty or nobility. In some cases (Giyorgis – Maryam) both compounds were located on two small hills separated by a little valley or streambed. The case of Gorgora Nova diverges slightly from this pattern, because there Jesuit mission buildings were erected (from 1625 onwards) after the site had long been abandoned by the royal court (around 1614).²⁸

It is to be noted that a similar spatial model can be observed with the Orthodox churches but for a significant difference. Whilst the Orthodox churches tended to be built near but not too close to the royal palaces, the Jesuit missions were erected at the same elevation and very close to the royal compounds (at varying distances but not further than 300 m). As already observed by the French historian Hervé Pennec,²⁹ this spatial pattern emphasizes the symbiosis between the Jesuit mission and the Ethiopian state, between the religious and the political power. It also agrees with the preference of the Jesuit order to attract members of the elites and the higher strata, both in the mission field and in Europe.³⁰

²⁸ See PANKHURST 2004: 6–8; BERRY 2004: 19–23; ANGELINI 2006: 48–55.

²⁹ PENNEC 2003: 203–220.

³⁰ LUCAS 1997.

Secondly, the archaeological excavations have led to a reassessment of the uses and functions of architecture within the Ethiopian state. Prior to the seventeenth century the Ethiopian monarchy was peripatetic, changing the location of the *kätäma* or royal camps every few years.³¹ Although this has often been explained with ecological factors (search for a healthy place, rapid depletion of resources), the nomadic life of the court can also be explained by the need of controlling the territory, including the regional lords and the clergy. Missionary architecture seems to have offered a compromise between the need to establish durable capitals and the traditional nomadism of the powerful.

So, on the one hand, throughout the rules of Susənyos and Fasilädäs the court changed from Qoga to Dəḵana, from Dəḵana to Gorgora Nova, from Gorgora Nova to Azäzo and Dänqäz, to be finally installed in Gondär.³² On the other hand, the architectural projects related to the Jesuit mission and to the political power emphasized the erection of durable stone-buildings on upper, commanding places and closely associated with the residences and palaces of political rulers. Architecture, thus, served to establish permanent symbols of power over the Ethiopian landscape. Moreover, the practice initiated by the Jesuits in such places like Azäzo and Dänqäz had a lasting impact in the Christian monarchy. In fact, it was immediately after the Jesuits' expulsion that Fasilädäs decided to establish a true and fixed capital in Gondär, with its famous stone palaces and institutions.

Thirdly, the archaeological excavations have confirmed the importance of the new techniques introduced during the Jesuit mission, a fact already attested by missionary records and scholarship.³³ Archaeological data supports the pre-eminence played by mortar in the erection and diffusion of missionary architecture. The Jesuit records state very clearly that modern stone buildings began to be erected in Ethiopia thanks to the introduction of lime mortar by Manoel Magro, a skilled mason brought by the missionaries from India in 1624.³⁴ Before that date, stone constructions were made using freestone bonded with a sort of clay or with straw and cow's dung (known in Amharic as *čəqa*) and consequently the buildings did not endure for a long time.

It is to be noted, however, that some researchers have pointed to the existence of a mortar-building tradition prior to the mission. Accordingly, they

³¹ TADDESSE TAMRAT 1972: 103–106 (§ “The Royal Court”).

³² PENNEC 2003, fig. 16.

³³ ANFRAY 1988: 24; PENNEC 2003: 175; PANKHURST 2004: 7–8. It must be added that oral sources from Gondär recorded by LaVerle Berry in the 1970s also attributed the introduction of this technique to the Jesuits; cf. BERRY 1976: 377. The same author, however, did not mention any of these facts in his review article on Gondärine architecture: BERRY 2005: 843–845.

³⁴ BECCARI 1903–177, VI: 389–390.

have argued that mortar construction was used in the Aksumite period in Eritrea and Northern Ethiopia, though this is only attested in very few cases.³⁵ Additionally, they have taken local oral sources at face value to sustain the rather implausible idea that the construction of the Guzara palace, which used mortar and is an almost exact copy of the palace of Fasil in Gondär, was erected during the kingdom of Šäršä Dəngäl (1563–97) and thus would pre-date the alleged introduction of mortar building by the Jesuits.³⁶

Last but not least, archaeological surveys have shown that most of the Jesuit buildings were reutilized for the Orthodox cult or for private uses after the expulsion. This had already been attested by the scant travellers who visited the sites and by local sources. Thus, data collected by the British traveller Charles Beke in 1842 informed that a small circular church was found inside the Jesuit church of Märṭulä Maryam.³⁷ Similarly, Ethiopian texts indicate that the site of Azäzo/Gännätä Iyäsus (and thus, probably the original Jesuit buildings) were used until the time of Yoḥannəs I (1667–82) by the *nəgus* himself and by the nobility. Then at some point during the rule of Yoḥannəs I, the buildings would have been destroyed because they were considered heretical constructions.³⁸ In Gorgora Nova, as pointed out above, in the middle of the interior yard of the residence, there are remains of an Orthodox church, Maryam Gəmb, built in freestone that was used until the time of Mənilək II: a square *mäqdäs* and the circular outer aisle or *qəne maḅlet* can be easily observed. Another feature associated with the fate of Jesuit architecture is the systematic reutilization in Orthodox buildings of pieces of ashlar’s masonry and decorative stones from the missionary buildings. Such phenomena can be observed at the same church of Maryam Gəmb at Gorgora Nova, at the *qəne maḅlet* of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot church and even at the important monastery of Narga Šəllase.³⁹

The pending tasks the archaeological mission has are, on the one hand, to carry out intensive excavations at the site of Gorgora Nova. On the other hand, the team intends to continue with field trips in the Goḡḡam region in order to better describe the archaeological sites already known and to try to find those still lost. In addition, the Jesuit and Portuguese settlement of Fəremona should be surveyed and described.

³⁵ PHILLIPSON 2009: 17.

³⁶ E.g. MERID WOLDE AREGAY 1984; 1998; FASIL GIORGHIS 2004; BERRY 2004.

³⁷ BEKE 1847.

³⁸ Yoḥannəs established his camp at Azäzo on several occasions. In 1674, works on the new church of Azäzo Täklä Haymanot had been completed, which could indicate the moment when the Jesuit building was either abandoned or destroyed; cf. GUIDI 1901: 17, 154, 244.

³⁹ DI SALVO 1999: 113, 118–19.

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Summary

The Jesuit mission in Ethiopia, which extended from 1557 to 1632, produced important architectonic constructions. Most of these constructions were erected in the provinces of Dämbəya, Bägəmdər and Goğgam, to the north, east and south of Lake Ṭana. Since 2006, a Spanish archaeological team from the Complutense University of Madrid has been doing surveys and excavations at the most important Jesuit architectonic sites in the Lake Ṭana area. The paper reviews the work done during the previous excavations as well as the work in progress and presents the preliminary results.