Introduction

In July-August 2014 surveys and test excavations were completed in Harari Regional State in eastern Ethiopia. The primary aim of the fieldwork was to begin to reconstruct a chronology and ceramics typology for the city of Harar and outlying settlements such as Ganda Harla and Koromi (cf. Insoll 2003: 78). A secondary aim was to start to assess the myths and legends linked with some settlements and populations in the region – be it Arab origins for the Argobba (cf. Asfaw 2000: 174-175), or great physical stature for the Harla (cf. Chekroun et al. 2011: 79; Joussame 1976: 32). Added to this is the archaeological evaluation, where possible, of narratives centred on Islamic power and authority connected with jihad and focal figures such as Ahmad Gragn, ‘Ahmad the left handed’ who used the city of Harar as a base during his campaigns between 1529 and death in 1543 (cf. Braukämper 2004: 31-32; Burton 1894a: 10-12). Tertiary objectives included evaluating material culture ‘markers’ of cultural identity, trade, and Islamisation. Timothy Insoll directed the fieldwork, assisted by Habtamu Tesfaye of the ARCCH and Malik Saako who was seconded from the GMMB.

Survey in Harar

A reconnaissance survey of key sites previously identified in Harar by Habtamu Tesfaye (2011) was undertaken. Five locations were visited – four outside the city walls, at Badro Bari and Suqutat Bari refuse dumps, Guduf ‘trash site’, and the Aw Riqa/Warika shrine, and one within the walls at Shagnila Toya. It was evident that archaeological material pre-dating the 19th century, should it exist, was largely buried underneath modern refuse and more recent occupation sites. Only occasionally, as at Shagnila Toya, was what appeared to be earlier material visible, and this site was made the focus of excavation. Three further locations were subsequently identified within the city walls for excavation, at Hamburti, the Amir Nur shrine, and at one of the Amir’s palaces. This was supplemented by three excavations at further sites identified by field survey in the wider region, at Ganda Harla, a burial tumulus at Sofi, and Tulu-Korefta or ‘old’ Koromi outside the city.

Test Excavations in Harar

1. HAM 14 (A). Burton (1894a: 40) describes Gay Hamburti as “the historic rock upon which Saint Nur held converse with the prophet Khizr”. Hamburti, as the ‘navel’ of Harar is also a significant location in the foundation history of the city. Hence it was hoped that excavating in one of the compounds in this part of Harar might provide a significant occupation sequence. To assess this a 2x2 m test excavation was completed in the courtyard of Mukhtar’s compound north of the main market street (N09.31010˚ E042.13721˚). All deposits encountered were modern and/or contaminated with plastic as a result of the fact that the focus of excavation, unbeknown at the start, was a disused latrine and adjacent toilet pit which when disused was filled with rubbish. This was described as not in use when the houses that surrounded the
courtyard on its northern and southern sides were built. When these were constructed was not certain but they were small and of poor quality and did not look much more than 10 years old. No indication of the anticipated earlier occupation was found in this location.

2. AMNUR 14 (A). Amir Nur and Shaikh Abadir are the two most revered saints in Harar (Trimingham 1952: 24), and their shrines the most important Muslim sites in the city. Burton (1894a: 12) describes the Amir Nur shrine in January 1855, with the saint buried “under a little dome near the Jami Mosque”. The location and description are the same today and south of the shrine complex a low mound of maximum 100-120cm in height, sloping downwards to the north was recorded. This forms part of the cemetery adjacent to the shrine and at the eastern end of the mound where there were no surface indications of graves a 2x2m unit was excavated (N09.31010° E042.13721°).

Although surface evidence for burial was lacking, a sequence of Muslim burials was represented in the excavation and the trench area was adjusted accordingly to cause minimal disturbance to the burials whilst at the same time obtaining material for dating and a ceramics assemblage from the 220cm depth of deposits that were excavated (Figure 1). It was evident that the area in which the excavation took place was part of what had been a much more extensive cemetery but was now truncated by the modern road and hospital buildings east of the boundary wall of the shrine.

Figure 1: AMNUR 14 (A), base of level (10). Upper Muslim burial, left, and stones associated with lower burial in trench wall on right (photo. T. Insoll).
3. SHA 14 (A). The presence of large quantities of slag on the surface of Shagnila Toya suggested the area had been used for iron production and a 2x2m unit was excavated on one of the slag concentrations (N09.30903˚ E042.13492˚). A range of features connected with iron working were identified including a slag pit connected to a channel that seemed to have been used to hold a tuyère once inserted into the furnace as represented by the slag pit itself. The former existence of a shelter that had been erected over part of the area was suggested by the presence of three postholes (Figure 2). Six hundred and forty-four grams of mixed tap, expanded and vitrified slag were recorded in association with these features. The relatively steep slope of Shagnila Toya appears to have been deliberately exploited with the furnace set on a small terrace perhaps chosen to benefit from natural draughts thus facilitating iron smelting.

4. PAL 14 (A). Burton (1894b: 205) described the palace of Amir Ahmed bin Abu Bakr (the ruler at the time of his visit) as “a mere shed, a long, single storied, windowless barn of rough stone and reddish clay, with no other insignia but a thin coat of whitewash over the door” This is a description that could equally apply to the building in front of which a 2x2m unit was excavated (Figure 3). This building was described as the palace of Amir Abdur Shakur and of early 19th century date but whether this attribution is correct is unclear.

The features excavated, occupation, waste disposal, and drainage, represented multiple uses.
In one half of the unit a series of linear east to west features, possibly where mats or reed screens had been erected, and three postholes were found. These were seemingly the remains of ephemeral architectural features such as shelters and enclosures perhaps erected for attendants or visitors to the Amir or for the use of servants or guards. In the other half of the unit was a pit into which a drain, formed of two low walls, emptied. It would seem that the architectural features represented by the postholes and linear features were unconnected with the drain, and that the pit was filled with waste (not modern) after the drain had ceased to be used.

Test Excavations outside Harar

1. GAN 14 (A). The abandoned stone walled site of Ganda Harla is situated on a hill west of the contemporary village of Sofi and 12.5km southeast of Harar. It is linked with the legendary Harla (cf. Chekroun et al. 2011), who in local tradition have been described as constituting one of the main components of Ahmad Gragn’s army (Tesfaye, Solomon and Abdu 2013: 3). The Harla are also considered the original inhabitants of the Harari region (Chekroun et al. 2011: 79). The potential linkage with Gragn and the Harla tradition provided the primary research objective for investigating this site.

Contrary to within Harar, where no excavation had previously been completed, limited archaeological investigation had taken place at Ganda Harla. This was composed of a partial site survey (Chekroun et al. 2011: 78-79), an unlicensed excavation left un-backfilled, and two 1x1m test pits excavated by the ARCCH (Tesfaye, Solomon and
Abdu 2013). Ganda Harla is composed of an upper core of earlier settlement bounded to the north by an extensive dry stone defensive wall running down the hill. The other parts of this defensive wall were less easy to demarcate as disturbance has occurred as a correlate of more recent (though also abandoned) occupation of the eastern part of the site.

A unit of approximately 220x120cm (N09.25815˚ E042.14353˚) was excavated inside a dry stone walled building (Figure 4). This building was approximately square in plan (700cm x 670cm) with a central stone pillar that would have supported a roof. To the south there was possibly a semi-circular extension but the precise form was difficult to reconstruct because of the density of bushes and rubble. Plaster fragments found and the fact that some of the masonry had been worked suggested the building had potentially been of importance. What its function was is uncertain (e.g., residential, military, storeroom), but it seems to have been partially destroyed as suggested by a layer of ash, charcoal, stone rubble and plaster fragments encountered.

2. TUM 14 (A). As a correlate of the excavation at Ganda Harla, a burial tumulus approximately 1000m south was identified. This was partially excavated to obtain a ceramics assemblage to compare with Ganda Harla and to assess the tumulus construction. The tumulus measured 13m southeast to northwest by 14.2m northeast to southwest and was about 150cm in height (N09.26004˚ E042.14605˚). It was divided into four based on the cardinal points and the northern quadrant was partially excavated (Figure 5). The tumulus was essentially a heap of stones that, excluding the outer

Figure 4: GAN 14 (A), eastern dry stone wall of building excavated (photo. T. Insoll).
layer where the stones were smaller, did not appear to have been selected or arranged according to size, or oriented in any particular way. The centre of the tumulus was not reached as, because of time pressures, the excavation was halted before completion and will be resumed in the 2015 season.

3. TUL 14 (A). Tulu-Korefta is 17km south-east of Harar and was identified following survey in the Koromi area. According to local tradition Tulu-Korefta was the original settlement of the Argobba who took the site over from the Harla following their migration from Ifat (cf. Asfaw 2000), and who brought Islam to the region and built a mosque. No date was ascribed to this migration but the move to Koromi was described as occurring three to four generations ago (Ahmed Yusuf, personal communication 1/8/14). If correct, it is possible that the settlement shift occurred as a consequence of the expansion of Ethiopian power into the region under Emperor Menelik II between 1883-1890 (cf. Trimingham 1952: 126, 129). Tulu-Korefta is situated in a defensible position, following patterns noted for Argobba villages elsewhere (Asfaw 2000: 180), on a hilltop about 1.5km west of Koromi.

Survey recorded various site components including occupation areas, Muslim graves, non-Muslim graves (robbed and intact tumuli and a grave demarcated by a circle of stones), a defensive wall, and a stone building described as a mosque. A 2x2m unit was excavated in the latter structure. Very little material was recovered, only 38 potsherds for example. This absence of material would theoretically concur with the recognition of the structure as a mosque (cf. Insoll 1999: 26-59).

Figure 5: TUM 14 (A), base of level 2, indicating the excavated strip and stepped method used (photo. T. Insoll).
However, the absence of a mihrab does not permit a satisfactory identification. A human burial was also partially exposed within the building. The orientation of the skeleton (i.e., whether it followed Muslim burial norms of east to west noted in the Amir Nur shrine) is unknown, as it was not disturbed by full excavation. The building differed architecturally from those at Ganda Harla. Although also built of dry-stone, the blocks were arranged not laid in courses but fitted together according to their shapes. Coralline limestone was also used instead of granite as at Ganda Harla. These differences could possibly be linked with the traditions of Argobba identity ascribed this building as opposed to a Harla one.

**Chronologies, Pottery, and Small Finds**

The chronologies of the units excavated are as yet unclear pending the processing of the AMS C14 charcoal samples obtained from AMNUR 14 (A) and PAL 14 (A) in Harar, and GAN 14 (A) and TUL 14 (A) outside the city. A ceramics sample was also taken from TUM 14 (A) for TL dating because of the paucity of bone and charcoal at this site. However, preliminary indications are that there are differences apparent in the pottery assemblages recovered from the sites in Harar and those from outside the city. The latter also differed intra-regionally. This suggests different chronologies. For example, TUM 14 (A) lacked the slipped wares found at other sites and the brown and black burnished wares found in Harar itself. Decoration was restricted to impressed finger marks or incised dots on the exterior or vertical incisions of the rim. Fabrics were frequently coarse and rim types indicate a predominance of bowls with simple everted straight or slightly out-turned rims, and handles suggest jars were used (Figure 6).

In contrast, the pottery from TUL 14 (A) though few in number were much finer, and included red, brown, and black slipped wares with a largely fine or medium grade fabric. Rim forms included a flat profile everted rim, and an everted straight rim. Bowls and jars again appear to be represented. The GAN 14 (A) pottery assemblage also differed. Red, black, and brown slipped sherds were present with extensive horizontal smoothing impressions on the exterior of a couple of sherds, and vertical incisions on the rim of a couple of others, the latter similar to those from TUM 14 (A). Rim forms included, commonly, tapering everted and also quite frequently thickened in-turned forms from closed bowls.

Absent from the sites outside Harar were various characteristic types recovered from the city sites. At AMNUR 14 (A), for instance, from upper levels these types included the burnished black wares still in use, as with a spout from a coffee pot, a sherd from a cooking pot, and a neck of a bottle, jar or part of a tobacco pipe bowl, as well as a large flat plate-like sherd of coarse fabric from a vessel of the type used to cook *injera* pancakes. Older sherds from this site included brown, black, and red slipped wares with tapering everted and slightly in-turned or thickened in-turned rim forms present. Black burnished wares were also present at SHA 14 (A) and vessels forms included open and closed bowls, jars, and a flask or bottle.

Black, brown, and red slipped, and black and brown burnished wares were represented in the assemblage from PAL 14 (A), as well as undecorated rim sherds. Rim types included straight rims from bowls, a simple in-turned slightly tapering rim from a bowl, everted and slightly everted rounded rims from bowls, everted flat rims, and a unique in-turned rim of 9cm diameter in fine light brown fabric from a collared neck jar. An *injera* plate sherd was also recorded.

Finds other than pottery, slag, and bone (not considered here as they are pending analysis), were rare. The only material indicative of participation in long distance trade was recovered from Harar. This was composed of two sherds of glazed pottery, one off white (PAL 14 [A]) and the other blue and white (SHA 14 [A]). The red fabric of both suggests a Near or Middle Eastern rather than a Far Eastern origin. A thin green glass bottle or flask neck was also found (PAL 14 [A]).
Conclusions

The differences in the ceramic assemblages suggest, as noted, different chronologies but also, by inference, the past existence of different cultural identities as well. Inter-regional differences are becoming apparent as indicated by the architectural variation evident at Ganda Harla and Tulu-Korefta. The mythic quality of the narratives surrounding the Harla and the Argobba is acknowledged, but there are material culture differences that again support interpretations invoking cultural pluralism rather than homogeneity.

More research is needed, but Ganda Harla, whether Muslim or not, was possibly linked with indigenous populations whose inhabitants or more likely, their ancestors, built the tumuli at Sofi and other similar burial monuments in the region. Whereas the Argobba represent the processes of Islamisation, linked with immigration (Asfaw 2000: 176), with further change wrought by incursions of Oromo and Somali from the second half of the 16th century (cf. Braukämper 2004: 109; Chekroun et al. 2011: 96). These hypotheses, particularly those relating to the identity of the Harla, and the archaeology of Islamisation in the region, will be further tested by renewed archaeological excavation and survey at Harlaa near Dire Dawa in 2015.

In relation to Harar itself, differences are also apparent and the unique identity of the Harari is a feature that has been commented upon (e.g., Braukämper 2004: 107). This cannot be given an archaeological dimension, except in relation to the architectural and ceramic differences apparent be-
tween the Harar city and regional sites. Currently it is also not possible to confirm the dual foundation date for the city distinguished in Harari local traditions and discussed by Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch (2011: 23). The first is described as occurring about the 10th century AD, and the second during the reign of Amir Nur (1552-1568) when, for example, the city wall was built (Ahmed 1990: 321), and the city structured into five quarters (Fauvelle-Aymar and Hirsch 2011: 23). Burton (1894a: 12) also describes Harar as being “restored” rather than founded by Amir Nur, it previously under Ahmed Gragn having been “a mere mass of Badawi villages” (Burton 1894a: 5). This also implies an earlier foundation date for the city and suggests that the city had deteriorated from its first foundation.

It is likely that all the units excavated in Harar post-date the period of Amir Nur’s remodeling of the city in the mid-16th century, though confirmation is pending the processing of the AMS samples. Hence although it is not possible to test the ‘dual’ foundation hypothesis for Harar, pending further excavation and survey, it is still noteworthy that the excavations constitute the first archaeological research in the city and provided information on occupation, death and burial, and iron working.

Acknowledgements

Timothy Insoll is grateful to the British Academy for funding the 2014 fieldwork. He is also grateful to Ato Habtamu Tesfaye and Mr. Malik Saako Mahmoud for assistance in the field, and to Dr Zagba Oyorote, Director, Ghana Museums and Monuments Board for releasing Mr. Mahmoud from his official duties for the fieldwork. Mr. Muhyadin Ahmed, Culture Heritage and Tourism Bureau Head, Harar, and Mr. Desalagn, Head of Research ARCCCH, are also gratefully acknowledged, as are the staff of the Harar Bureau and the people of the respective communities we worked in.

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