Abstract

"Landscape Formation Processes and Archaeological Preservation in the Ethiopian Highlands: A Case Study from the Lalibela Region"

by

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This thesis describes two field seasons of research around the historic church of Gännäta Maryam in the western highlands of Ethiopia, and the subsequent analysis of the landscape and archaeological remains recovered there. Gännäta Maryam Church was an important royal church from the 13th century onward. Though the archaeological landscape around the church likely possessed a wealth of information on the role of royal churches in medieval Ethiopian society, natural and anthropogenic landscape formation processes have greatly disturbed the archaeological integrity of the region, leaving few archaeological contexts intact. This thesis examines the Gännäta Maryam study area as a palimpsest landscape where centuries of human activity and landscape evolution have successively and cumulatively left their signatures on the terrain. Using principals and methods from behavioral archaeology and geoarchaeology, I analyze and describe the past and ongoing human occupation and landscape formation processes at Gännäta Maryam in order to understand how the archaeological record came to its present state. In doing so, I argue we can trace the processes of archaeological site formation, thereby achieving a more accurate interpretation of the archaeological landscape in spite of its poor preservation. In broader terms, this project provides a case study on archaeological site formation processes in the Ethiopian highlands whose lessons and methods can improve future research and interpretation in disturbed sites and archaeological landscapes across the highlands.