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YOUNG PEOPLE'S FRONT FOR DEMOCRACY AND JUSTICE YPFDJ

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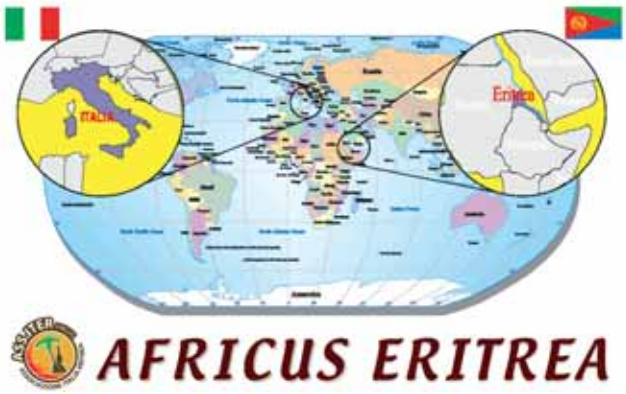

EDITORIALE

di Lidia Corbezzolo

Carissimi Amici e Carissime Amiche

pochi giorni fa abbiamo firmato un accordo con l'Orfanotrofio Governativo di Asmara per tutti i lavori di manutenzione necessari alla struttura.
I fondi li ha raccolti la signora Elsa Michael, grazie a lei e ad Assiter i bambini avranno un ambiente più salubre e più accogliente in cui vivere.
I lavori prevedono l'installazione di pannelli solari in modo che la struttura possa godere permanentemente della luce elettrica, la sostituzione di 13 porte in ferro, la pittura di sedie , panche e mobili, il rinnovamento dei dormitori, l'attivazione del pollaio, lo studio di un sistema di cisterne e di tubazioni in modo che l'acqua dal pozzo arrivi alla struttura.
Grande fermento e grande collaborazione con i responsabili dell'Orfanotrofio per tutti questi lavori ma una grandissima innovazione: i bambini avranno nelle ore mattutine una maestra diplomata che insegnerà loro i principi elementari della lettura e della scrittura e li farà giocare, non dimentichiamo che il gioco nei primi anni di vita è fondamentale per lo sviluppo armonioso del bambino. Siate con noi in questo abbraccio ideale e fattivo per l'Eritrea!

I dirigenti dell'Orfanotrofio, Lidia Corbezzolo ed il referente Assiter Onlus in Eritrea dott. Mesfin Mehreteab

A TRIP TO FILFIL SELEMUNA

by Daniel Semere

A trip to the northern Red sea region is one of the most fascinating trips in eritrea. Taking asmara as a point of departure, the trip goes following the road of Serjeqa-Weki. From Weki the road passes through *Mqlqal Michael* to Selemuna. This area has two summers a year therefore, it is green almost throughout the year. It is captivating scene for nature lovers passing through this road accompanied by green forest on the road side. If the trip is made between the months of November to March the road and the trees would be covered with fog, and the feeling is like floating on the clouds. The road stretches to Filfil passing through places like Fghenai and Medhanit, which are as beautiful. The asphalt of Weki-Selemuna is not any ordinary road. When it is seen from a mountain top or any peak around it looks like a gigantic sneak lying over proud. The end of Weki-Selemuna road connects with the road to Afabet. This road runs through the seemingly endless plains of Gahtelay, Metkel, Abiyet, Gedged, She'eb-Labka, and Ghedem Halib. On this road, especially in the months from November up to March the plains are filled with clean fresh water flowing everywhere from the springs all over the plain. When the road reaches She'eb Gedged the trip is accompanied by sorghum fields that stretch over 60 thousand hectares. The flat plain that followed is covered by green grass. It is so beautiful watching domestic and wild animals running around this grassland. The road then passes through Ma'emide or Azhara in to its final destination Afabet. It is indeed a trip not to be missed by anyone who should claim to have visited Eritrea.

Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean Profile.

MASSAWA

by Daniel Semere

In the early times Massawa used to be called 'Mitswa', a name of Geez origin which used to be pronounced as 'mitswa'e' by Arabic speakers. Later Italians began to call it 'Massawa'. Massawa is also called 'Bats'e'; another name of Geez origin. The city is located hundred fifteen kilometers to the east of Asmara at the coast of the Red Sea. Massawa is stablished in a coastal area which includes two islands called 'Mitswa'e' and 'Twalet'. These islands are connected with each other and to the part of the city on the mainland and by man-made bridges. There is a big bridge called 'Sgalet qetan', which connects Twalet with the mainland and Twalet is connected to the other island of Mitswa'e by another smaller bridge. There are also semi-islands called 'Abdelqadr' and 'Grar',

which are connected to the city by bridges. The port of Massawa is located in the island of mitswa'e.

Massawa is an ancient port that has been used by different civilization beginning from the Aksum Empire. Consequently the city is the living witness of different civilization of this area and other parts of the world.

The houses and buildings in the town are among the special features of this ancient port city. Starting from the 16th century Italians, French, Spaniards, Turkish, Egyptians etc. came and stayed in this town for different periods of time. The Portuguese built houses, villas and palaces that were modern for their day. The city was hit by an earth quake in 1929 and a lot of historical buildings were destroyed but there are still a great many left which give the city majestic. To mention some of the historical buildings in the city the mosque of Sheik Hanefi, which was built in the 15th century, a number of houses built with corals, large number of buildings reflecting magnificent Turkish architecture of those days, buildings like the imperial palace which was later renovated in 1872 for Warner Munzinger, the Saint Marry Church, villa Melloti which was built in 1930 and Banco di Italian which was built in 1920 are among the many.

Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean Profile.

ORAL POETRY: SOCIETY'S COMMUNAL TREASURE

by Meron Abraha

Last week, as my friend and I were taking an evening stroll (to my utter reluctance) after a rainy afternoon, we came across a foreigner (presumably a tourist, judging by her backpack and outdoor attire) who was apparently having difficulties obtaining the address of a certain public place from an elderly passer-by. We intervened, and offered to show her the way as we were headed on the same direction.

On the way, Ingrid (as her name was) told us that she was a linguist and that has travelled all over the world through her work as a researcher on oral traditions. And even though she was on a vacation to Eritrea with a group, Ingrid said she also wanted to (at least) take a sneak peek at the oral traditions practiced in this "multiethnic country."

I knew she had done her homework and was well informed because she did bring up the book of oral traditions in Tigrinya by Solomon Tsehaye, that was just fresh out of publication at that time. It would probably be an understatement to say she was astounded, when we tried explaining to her what the book was about.

"I have several books that make reference to Eritrean oral traditions, and I will definitely come back here to find out more…" she said.

Finding out we shared similar interests (oral poetries) I promised her an article on two particular genres of oral poetry in Tigrigna, hence the title above.

It is worth noting that when we discuss the issue of oral traditions in Eritrea we have to bear in mind the country's cultural diversity. Each of the various ethnic groups has its own language, oral literature, songs, oral history, customary laws and other forms of oral traditions.

Tigrigna oral poetry is one of the longest poetic traditions in the world, where recitations still remain a part of contemporary Eritrean culture.

Throughout the ages people have preserved and nurtured their respective oral cultures and, by so doing, have handed them down from generation to generation.

The majority of the Eritrean people are however still illiterate and a great deal of the knowledge of traditional cultures of Eritrea exists only in the oral form. "Modernization" has resulted in the disruption of the continuation of oral poetry or the way of transmitting knowledge from one generation to the other, thus posing serious challenges to oral traditions as a heritage, the retrieval and preservation of which calls for an imperative measure to research, collect and document all forms of oral traditions – before they are lost forever.

Earliest Tigrigna poetry was first published by Italian scholars during colonization. Notable works include Tigrinya Popular Songs (1906), collected by Carlos Conti Rossini.

There were other researches made in later years, whose contributions, in spite of their limitations due to linguistic and cultural barriers, towards the preservation of oral traditions in Eritrea will always remain creditable as wide ranging resource materials.

Moreover, two important oral tradition research projects were implemented by EPLF fighter-researchers from the Department of Political Orientation, Education and Culture, and the Department of Public Administration.

The research by the former department was a survey of culture in Eritrea conducted in the first half of the 1980s. Only part of the study was published (and that in a very limited number of copies), hence a rare reference material today. The research undertaken by the latter is considered to be among the most broad ranging and massive oral tradition studies done so far in Eritrea. It begun in the 1980s and continued through the post-independence period. But unfortunately the material has not yet been published.

And that's where Solomon's recent book kicks in. After over a decade's work, he brought to light the first volume of a proposed trilogy. His book features the genres *massé* and *melqes* (praise poems and poems for the recently deceased respectively)

In his book, Solomon Tsehaye has made a successful attempt to study, collect and preserve *massé* and *melqes* which are generally considered to be the highest forms of Tigrinya oral poetry.

Being composed impromptu while being recited, *massé* and *melqes* have such spontaneity that makes them a unique form of oral poetry requiring special creative talents.

The poets, or *masségnatat* as the authors of *massé* and *melqes* are called in Tigrinya, have developed exceptional skills of thinking fast and creatively, making them sharp and witty. They possess vast knowledge of history, culture, religion, law, genealogy and various aspects of social and civic affairs. The society relies on their creativity and wisdom. Some of them are even thought to have prophetic capabilities, and their poetry quoted in relation to many social circumstances.

Massé and *melqes* are not just celebratory or commemorative; they can be social critique and satire, too. This quality of being artistic and popular gives these poetic forms the power to influence society significantly.

In an exposé he wrote in Eritrea Art Book, (not officially launched publication that encompasses the Eritrean art landscape in general), Solomon mentioned the following as the principal functions of *massé* and *melqes*:

1. To convey highly valued messages on almost every aspect of life in an aesthetic way. Literally, there is no facet of social life which massé and melqes or oral poetry in general do not discuss. What makes massé and melqes enduring oral literary works is the depth and philosophical approach with which they look at social issues;
2. to serve as reference material for history, particularly when written or documented historical material is not available. Since massé and melqes reflect social reality, they can provide historical fact and evidence;
3. to revitalize language by preserving archaic words, idiomatic expressions, sayings and various figures of speech. Lexicographers, for example, make frequent reference to oral poetry;
4. to entertain and stimulate the imagination. As massé and melqes are rich in humor, satire and other forms of expression, they are both amusing and thought provoking, and they are often accompanied by remarkable performances.

While worth mentioning is the significance of oral traditions in revitalizing cultural legacies and bequeathing them to coming generations; the role of such poetic traditions as agents of conflict resolution is also noteworthy.

As mentioned earlier [in the first part], these poets are often quoted and relied upon for their wisdom. Through their recitations, these poets have settled disputes, consoled the bereaved, and commended good people or good deeds… among many other things of course.

Here today I would like to share and example of a massé that served as an instrument for resolving a conflict over a century ago. The

story is the first of two presented in a paper entitled "Aspects of Traditional Wisdom: As Agents of Conflict Resolution" submitted by Solomon Tsehaye for presentation at the Fourth Conference on "Storytelling: Global Reflections on Narrative" in May last year.

Mr. Solomon has also included the translation of the massé, which I took the liberty of incorporating into this article (see inside the box).

The event took place at the beginning of the 20th century around 1910 when two strong chiefs Degiat Tesfamariam Fissehaye of Addi Quala and Ra'esi Kidanemariam Gebremeskel of Arreza were engaged in rivalry.

It happened that a young man from Arreza was to be married to a maiden from Adi Quala. On the wedding day the groom and his entourage of no less than twenty men arrived in Adi Quala after a long travel by horses, mules and on foot. The groom's company performed the traditional prelude show at the yard in front of the bride's house amid the cheerful reception ululations of Adi Quala's women and entered the pavilion prepared for the wedding party at the bride's household. Food and drinks were served after the essential marriage rituals had been enacted.

Compliments on the quality of the feast poured from the men of Arreza. The celebration was continuing in a very happy mood when one among the Arreza men came to the middle of the pavilion with his spear and shield and boasted about the superiority of Arreza in the very presence of Degiat Tesfamariam, the ruler of the town of Adi Quala and its surrounding district. The chief felt insulted by the boastful man of Arreza and ordered his immediate arrest by his armed guards. Several men of Arreza objected the chief's order and stood in the way of the guards to prevent his arrest. Angered by their audacity the chief ordered again that the men be arrested, too. Almost half of the men of Arreza were put under arrest and were being taken away. The wedding bliss turned to sadness and confrontation. Tension was building up between the two sides and the fear that it may spark into a physical fight was growing. If a fight started then the Arreza people would be annihilated. Wisdom had, therefore, to intervene on their behalf.

A distinguished oral poet by the name of Bahrenegasi Tombosa Weldemikael from the environs of Arreza and a member of the groom's entourage requested the chief's permission to narrate massé.

Keen to know what he was going to say in his massé, Degiat Tesfamariam permitted Bahrenegasi Tombosa to perform his massé, which the oral poet had to say in the presence of the entire celebrating crowd.

The chief's heart was softened by the nice words the poet said about him.The "fullness" and grandeur bestowed on him by the poet in comparison to those chiefs whom the poet considered were only a quarter (one fourth) of him made Degiat Tesfamariam feel that it would be degrading to vie with a handful of men from Arreza who by no means were a match to him. As the massé appealed to his conscience he calmed down. His anger and eagerness to take punitive action was replaced by rationality and mercifulness. He, therefore, declared the release of those arrested, and the men apologized for their misconduct. The resolving of the conflict brought the occasion back to its festive mood. At the closing of the ceremony, the Arreza group left safely escorting their bride and groom.

Upon their arrival in Arreza a man from the group hurried to tell Ra'esi Kidanemariam, Arreza's chief, that the oral poet, Bahrenegas Tombosa, in his massé counted him as only one fourth of Adi Quala's chief. Ra'esi Kidanemariam who had been one of the great admirers of the poet felt humiliated and ordered that he be summoned to him urgently. The poet came soon only to be met by the chief's rage. But as the chief started to reprimand Bahrenegasi Tombosa for his alleged

undervaluing of him, some gentlemen who had been in the groom's entourage intervened in favor of the poet. They told the chief that he must have been misinformed. Having recounted what had befallen them in Adi Quala, they advised the chief that Bahrenegasi Tombosa as the wise and tactful savior of the men of Arreza should be rewarded and not censured. They said if it were not for his wisdom, which appeased the anger of the chief of Adi Quala, the entire Arreza group would have been in serious trouble possibly to the point of taking Arreza to war with Adi Quala. Knowing what had really happened from the account of the gentlemen, Ra'esi Kidanemariam regretted reproaching the great poet. Calling him with his pet name Tombish he congratulated and hailed him as a rescuing hero of his fellow men. Ever since, this renowned oral poet has been remembered, among his many other excellent poetic performances, for this wonderful conflict resolving massé which was his creative spiritual tool in avoiding a bloody confrontation between the peoples of Arreza and Adi Quala.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Solomon stressed that the traditional cultures of humanity as manifested in various oral traditions are incredible sources of wisdom to consult and learn from in the age of globalization.

And that's why Eritrea's oral traditions remain to date the society's communal treasure.

JEWEL

Son of Kahsu, what a jewel you are
Son of Geredingle, what a jewel you are
Son of Fissehaye, what a jewel you are
Addi Quala is caught in fire
Lucky are those
Enjoying it like camp fire.
Protector of our lands near and far
You are a weighty man of full measure
While all others are only a quarter,
You are tough when you dislike
But merciful otherwise,
Please take heed of the awlo I am saying
And spare Arreza from crying.

Meron Abraha, is journalist and web chief editor for Shaebia.org.

THE EVER SHIFTING WORLD OF IDENTITY IN THE DIASPORA

by Mahta Tewolde

Being Eritrean in the Diaspora can feel disjointed – particularly if you are of dual nationality or you have lived all your life outside of Eritrea. When are you Eritrean? With family members? At community events? In Eritrea?

Are you Eritrean when you are brushing your teeth in the morning? Or when you are travelling home from work? Do you have a sense of truly feeling connected to your Eritrean identity straight after an event such as Independence Day, an Eritrean festival or a wedding? Are these times when you especially feel at one with your fellow Eritreans? Does this feeling slowly slip away as you return to the details of everyday life? When your daily routine may bring you into contact with few or no Eritreans?

You can be Eritrean and something else (i.e. British Eritrean, Swedish Eritrean). You don't necessarily have to do anything to be Eritrean – but what, if anything, do you have to do to feel Eritrean?

I remember as a teenager being filled with dread at having to return to school after having spent a weekend surrounded by Eritreans, both in the form of family members at home and fellow revelers at a concert headlined by the latest singer visiting from Eritrea. After having spent the early part of my childhood splitting the week between a mainly white, English primary school and weekends with fellow British Eritrean children at weekly Saturday mother tongue classes, this kind of split felt both familiar and yet still exciting.

The split seemed to mirror my dual identity, part-time Brit, sometime Eri. Earlier encounters with Eritreans my age at Saturday classes were simpler as everyone was more or less like me.

They all spoke English, watched the same cartoons and liked the same pop songs as me – as well as the odd Wedi Shawel tune – and we shared an understanding about our parents who were 'different'.

My first experience of what being Eritrean meant outside my family, and the small community we had in London, was as a child at Festival Eritrea in Bologna. What a glorious feeling it was to be able to run and play for hours freely. What a strange experience to be surrounded by people like me and not be singled out or stared at for looking different.

I met children who looked like me but spoke Italian, German, Swedish or Dutch. I actually used Tigrinya as a means of communicating with people my own age for the first time. Then I was definitely Eritrean. This was what it meant to be Eritrean. I was sure that this is what Eritrea must be like: thousands of Eritreans in one place dancing, eating,

and playing (with the occasional seminar thrown in).

My teen years brought a new understanding of what young Eritreans could be like. Not just young Eritreans – as I considered myself and my friends to be – but ERITREAN Eritreans. I met more and more people who had spent their early/formative years in Eritrea, who spoke Tigrinya in a slightly different way to our parents, and who, unlike the latter, were – dare I say it – actually cool*.

So, Eritrean Eritreans were not just these ancient creatures that made strange tutting sounds when they empathised with someone, or who thought it was normal to cook onions for hours and whose response to most things was *nowri* – taboo.

With this new breed, I saw the continuation of Eritrean cultural practices I was used to – such as generosity – sharing one's food and time with others – but in a new light. They were young and fun and although they spoke the same language as our parents, they made that seem fun too. A question remained though… did I fit in?

I envied this new group's apparent ease of being. It seemed to me that they knew exactly who they were – they were definitely Eritrean. They weren't like me or my Saturday school friends and neither like my festival buddies. They understood the same cultural references as our parents. I lost track of the number of times I grinned through jokes I didn't understand which referred to such and such a place, or song – 'private' jokes shared by what seemed to be everyone but me.

There wasn't a question I could answer that began with "Do you remember when…" Being born in Eritrea seemed like such a privilege – how could I have missed out on the richness of experience, which seemed to bind everyone else together?

I was shocked to hear some of these people saying the opposite – that if only they had been raised in the UK they would have been able to speak English more fluently and understand the British better. To me they seemed to take for granted or didn't understand that, unlike me, they had to do nothing in order to feel Eritrean – they had a shortcut.

My first visit to Eritrea produced a range of emotions along with new experiences – fear, shock, and joy. The same feeling as at the Bologna Festival was amplified. Thousands more people who looked like me! There was the familiarity of the language and food along with new smells, landscapes and neighbourhoods.

Although it was a profound experience for me and led to many further trips there, visiting Eritrea didn't really answer the question for me of when I was most Eritrean. Even though I was able to converse

fluently with my family members and read shop and road signs (which made me very grateful for those hours spent at Saturday classes) at times I would feel especially British there.

With each visit I became more and more familiar with my country of origin, getting to know more people and places and enjoying learning little nuggets of information that only the locals know. Upon returning to London it wouldn't take long for tedium to kick-in. I would feel 'homesick' – can you feel homesick for a place you've only been on holiday to? For a while, I would look at photos, and listen to music from the trip and bemoan all things British – nothing is like it is 'back home'!

Over the years, the question of when and how I am Eritrean has become less of an issue to me. From my childhood experiences to my visits to Eritrea, I have encountered people from different backgrounds who are all linked by the desire to call themselves Eritrean.

I've also grown increasingly comfortable with my dual nationality and realised that by virtue of being a British Eritrean who has lived in the UK all my life, I can only be a product of my upbringing. I am a proud Eritrean who also undoubtedly has a great deal of Britain to account for who I am. I don't always have to be surrounded by Eritreans to feel a part of that wider community. I can be Eritrean when in London and when in Massawa. I can also be Eritrean when thinking in English just as easily as when I am speaking Tigrinya.

Finally, I'd just like to point out that I do now believe my parents to be extremely cool.

(This article was first posted on ELEMONLINE.com/**November 2012**)

THE COLOR OF CULTURE

by Mary Andom

Throughout elementary school, kids called me "African booty-scratcher" and "Dirty African." Though I knew they were mean and spiteful terms, I never really knew what they meant.

I was in high school before anyone questioned my African identity and culture. Kids, having learned that my parents are from Eritrea, would ask dim-witted questions like, "Do Africans run around naked in the jungle?" or my personal favorite, "What language do Africans speak?"

How shallow to think an entire continent speaks one language.

I never did like World History class, especially when we reached the slavery unit. I would sit in class, the lone black girl, my head lowered in discomfort as we watched "Roots." The screen was illuminated by scantily-clad Bushmen waving spears, chanting in some indecipherable tongue.

Distant whispers and giggles would come from the dark corners of the room. A kid once shot me with an invisible dart, "HA! Gotcha, Mary." I sank lower in my seat, eager for my 30 minutes of shame to be over.

After the movie, my teacher proceeded with the lecture about slave reparation. Then, he singled me out: "So, Mary, what are your thoughts on slave reparation?" I was offended, shocked and angry that he expected me to speak on behalf of the black race.

"What do you mean?" I stammered. "My ancestors weren't slaves!"

There was a deadly silence, all attention was directed toward me. I could feel the inconspicuous glares of my classmates. It was my time of judgment. He continued to interrogate me with questions, not once encouraging others in the class to speak up.

"My parents are recent African immigrants from East Africa; I'm not African American," I answered.

The bell rang, class ended, kids ushered out. "Hey, Mary, can I talk to you for a sec?" my teacher asked. "I apologize for putting you on the spot; I just wanted to hear your perspective. I'm interested in learning more about your culture. Maybe you can share this with the class one day."

I walked out of class, frustrated. I don't know if I was more offended that he assumed I was African American, or that he wanted me to be an ambassador for my race.

I hate being placed into a suffocating box. Growing up, I struggled with how to label myself: Black? African American? Eritrean American?

By just my physical appearance, manner of dress and perfect English, one would never guess I am African. But I don't know about "chitlings" or "grits." I don't listen to soul artists such as Marvin Gaye or Aretha Franklin. Nor do I go to church.

I realized these and more differences between black culture and my traditional Eritrean home growing up. Since I was born, I was taught to honor and respect my parents. There was no slamming doors or screaming, "I hate you, Mom!"

I grew up eating *injera* and listening to *Tigrinya* music. My parents maintained a strong cultural tie by passing on time-honoured traditions. After school, I prepare *Bun*, the traditional coffee, by hand for my mother. It is a tradition shared amongst mother and daughter. Despite my culture, to many people, I am black. This is constituted by the color of my skin, not my culture.

I've tried to break myself free from the negative stigma associated with being black in America. I speak proper English to be taken seriously. Saying "yo" and "wazzup" won't gain me any respect in the white world, just as saying, "yes, ma'am" and "I'll be obliged" won't gain me respect from my black world.

To complicate the issue, if I don't maintain my Eritrean-ness, I am seen as turning my back on my culture.

I am Eritrean at home, American in my professional realm, and black the rest of the time. It's difficult to juggle all these identities, but I am learning to adapt to my surroundings.

For a lot of black immigrants, adopting African-American culture is a step toward full integration into American culture. Much to their parents' dismay, adopting black culture is often seen as destroying the American dream they worked so hard to attain, largely because of the negative stereotypes of black Americans that still persist.

I want to be recognized by my Eritrean culture because I am proud of it. My skin colour is not something I can escape from. I am still black in America's eyes, no matter what culture I identify with.

At the end of the day African immigrant or black American, we are still one people. America might be our home but Africa is our motherland.

THE ANCIENT QOHAITO

by Daniel Semere

Qohaito is one of the most prominent yet least understood ancient urban centers in Africa. Qohaito seems to have been one of the largest ancient settlement areas of the Axumite period. It is also one of the most strategically placed communities along an axis of settlement stretching from north-central Tigray to the Gulf of Zula, following a route linking the axumite capital in the highlands of Tigray to the chief axumite port of adulis on the red sea. Qohaito is the first stopping point on a two to four day journey by foot from the red sea. Some believed that qohaito might be "Koloe", an ancient market city described by the Alexandrian geographer Ptolemy as an interior town, the first major settlement on the route from adulis to axum.

Although systematic excavations have not been conducted at qohaito, the great number of site suggest that qohaito represents a complex ancient metropolis with a diverse range of functions. It was no doubt a major ancient settlement linked to an expansive urban hinterland to the west of the plateau and perhaps functioning as both a political and market center located at a strikingly strategic and profitable setting in the heart of the northern horn.

Beyond its 1st millennium EE and probable 1st Millennium BCE heritage, the large number and diverse range of lithic artifacts present on the Qohaito plateau suggest that the plateau was long used if not inhabited by communities dating back to the Pleistocene and early Holocene. In addition, the region immediately surrounding the plateau also contains one of the highest densities of rock art in the northern horn, including a range of pictographs and petroglyphs depicting wild fauna and pastoral scenes – images central to our understanding of the early subsistence, cultural, and symbolic systems of highland communities. Today, the plateau is the home of several dozen saho-speaking communities and the location of a number of open-air Islamic prayer places, some of which may date back several centuries. The plateau played a key role in the 30-year Eritrean armed struggle for independence. Its position above the Haddas valley was utilized by Eritrea fighters moving between lowland and highland areas, and its proximity to the military garrison at Addi Keyih made it crucial to battle fought at Addi Keyih in 1977 and 1990.

Daniel Semere, is a researcher at Research and Documentation Center, he is also a columnist in Eritrean Profile.

Foto Lusci