Deep-mapping the Gumuz house
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Abstract
This paper embraces the results of an ethnoarchaeological research developed by Spanish Archaeological Mission with Gumuz populations in Mettekal (north of Blue Nile, West Ethiopia) during March 2006. Gumuz is an ethnical Nilo-Saharan group which presents strong cultural and linguistic resemblances with another communities of the border between Sudan and Ethiopia, as Kuama or Uduk groups. From the point of view of the Archaeology of domestic space, we made archaeological fieldwork in three Gumuz settlements (Bowla-Dibasi, Manjari and Maataba). We designed with GPS a complete planimetry of every hamlet, recording the UTM situation of domestic structures as palisades, compounds, houses, farmyards, granaries, external activity areas, ash zones, graves, etc... This ethnoarchaeological record was completed with the inventory of the kinship relations among the different compounds of household entities. In the same way we registered the clan of every woman who lives in every settlement (Gumuz is an exogamic culture). Too we drewed maps (1/50 scale) of selectioned houses and, finally, we ultimated complete inventories of material culture inside 30 houses. This research let us to know the cultural pattern of domestic space built by Gumuz communities and, from a general point of view, to think about the relations among home, space, material culture, ethnicity and construction of social reality in a multicultural complex context.

Introduction
Archaeologists and anthropologists tend to study houses with disregard to their often chaotic materiality. The usual ethnographic procedure consists in imposing order on domestic space, bringing forward meaning and structure, in order to read society through space. In so doing, however, ethnography conceals the messy reality of artefacts, people, animals and dirt that compose any traditional home. This sanitizing and idealistic approach is quite surprising given the sheer intimacy of ethnographic research towards the subject of study – an intimacy that is generally obvious in the way particular situations, institutions and persons are deeply interwoven in narratives of nuanced detail and psychological depth.

Our study of the domesticity of the Gumuz compounds in western Ethiopia tries to convey the material richness of homes, the strong relationship between people, places, things and animals, that shape the experience of the house, and the chaotic, and simultaneously ordered, nature of domestic space. At the same time, we perceive the materiality of homes as historically constituted. It is not only social norms that permeate the structure of the house, but also long-term historical events that have action in the present. Rather than viewing social and historical features as conditioning domestic space in an abstract way, we try to prove how they are intertwined in the very materiality of houses – indoors and outdoors, in structural elements as well as in artefacts – and therefore affect the daily life of the people that inhabit those spaces.

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of ethnical groups in the study area.

In our research, we use an archaeological approach that combines detailed drawings of structures and artifacts, GPS mapping, micro-spatial distribution plans, syntactic analysis of space, ethnographic interviews and historical research with the aim of exploring the materiality of Gumuz homes and Gumuz culture in general.
Our fieldwork is a long-term (ethno)archaeological project in Benishangul-Gumuz, funded by the Dirección General de Bellas Artes (Spain) and started in 2001, whose aim is studying the complex relations between social identity, ethnicity, space and material culture among the Nilo-Saharan communities of the Ethio-Sudanese borderland.

**Aims of the project**

The aims of the project were the following:

1. To increase our knowledge of the material culture of the gumuz North of the Blue Nile in order to complete recorded information about Nilo-Saharan material culture in the Ethiopian West (cf. González Ruibal and Fernández Martínez 2003; 2007; González Ruibal 2005).
2. To study interethnic relations between gumuz and highland communities (amhara, agaw), through production, use and consumption of material culture, with a specific focus on pottery, calabashes, baskets and agricultural tools.
3. To analyse gumuz domestic spatial organisation focusing on two main aspects:
   - Understanding space production within this community and its relations with other Nilo-Saharan peoples, especially the bertha, known to us through previous campaigns (González Ruibal 2006b).
   - Observing the relations between spatial organisation and such aspects as ethnicity, cultural contact and historical circumstances (invasions from the highlands, slavery) as well as its potential changes in contexts of higher inter-ethnic tension.

Our study of living communities at Benishangul-Gumuz is generally conceived as a contribution to cultural and historical research on the region and hence as a form of Archaeology of the present.

**Methodology**

Our first step was to select several hamlets to carry out the fieldwork. In doing so we were guided both by our previous experience and Wolde-Selassie Abutte’s work (2004). We intended to compare different contexts of cultural interaction between gumuz and highland communities. Our first choice was Bowla-Dibas’i (Gublak) in the Mambuk wereda, given its distance (some 100 km.) from the Abyssinian high plain and the fact that this area has not seen agaw or amhara settlement in historic times or the recent past. Our intention was thus to study a gumuz community as far away as possible from outside influences.
farmyards, fences, activity areas, ash-pits, graves, etc.).

- Sketches of these habitation structures and complexes were made to allow an analysis of the GPS-generated map.
- Once the sketches were finished, we drew up kinship diagrams referring to all habitation structures in each hamlet. These diagrams reflected intra-domestic and extra-domestic relationships. The clan to which each of the women in the settlement was related to was also recorded given gumuz culture’s exogamic character.

Figure 4. Archaeological plan of a gumuz dwelling.

- Detailed 1:50 scale maps were drawn for several gumuz and agaw dwellings at Bowla-Dibasi and Manjäri.
- A complete corpus of material culture was collected including pottery, basketry, metallurgy, carpentry, home-building, etc. All indigenous terms for each artefact in the gumuz material world were recorded. Five female potters, three male blacksmiths and one male basket-weaver were interviewed. This work was carried out by Geremew Feyissa and Alfredo González Ruibal. Indigenous terms were also recorded by Álvaro Falquina Aparicio.
- Detailed inventories were made of all existing artefacts in several gumuz and agaw dwellings in order to account for variations derived from interethnic contact. Inventories were made for a total of 30 dwellings: 11 at Bowla-Dibasi and 19 at Manjäri. As part of these inventories, some 300 ceramic vessels were drawn from both gumuz and agaw dwellings in order to study interethnic relations through ceramic consumption and variability.
- Ethnographic information was collected to contribute to the interpretation of material data as well as marriage, funerary rituals, myths of origin, historical data, religious beliefs, etc.

Figure 5. Ironsmith tools (from Manjäri settlement).

Once we have processed the information from this campaign, a syntactic spatial analysis method will be applied (Hillier and Hanson 1984) to GPS generated maps. We shall incorporate kinship diagrams and furniture data to spatial information to draw conclusions about gumuz domestic space organisation. At a more general level, relations between space, material culture and ethnicity will be analysed in complex multicultural contexts.

Figure 6. Woman with ritual scarifications in her back (Bowla Dibasi settlement).

The Gumuz of western Ethiopia

The Gumuz are a Nilo-Saharan speaking community that live in the lowlands of western Ethiopia. Originally, they occupied a much larger area, but they were progressively expelled from the Highlands to the lowland river valleys by
their more powerful neighbors, the Amhara, Agaw and Oromo, who used to enslave them and occupy their lands. Today, the Gumuz inhabit the banks of the Blue Nile, the Didessa and the Gilgel rivers. The majority of the population, around 100,000 people in all, lives in the zone of Metekel, which occupies 26,500 sq. km north of the Blue Nile.

As many other Ethiopian societies, the Gumuz still cling to premodern customs. Most of them practice a traditional religion, characterized by a profussion of deities (musa’i), and they visit ritual specialists (gafea), who can cure several kinds of diseases. The social organization is egalitarian among males: male elders take decisions in a collective way. Although the Ethiopian state appoints local political representative, they have very little power within the community. Marriage customs also emphasize egalitarian values among males: the prevailing system is sister-exchange marriage (angiya), which means that any man who wants to get married has to provide a female relative for the family from which she is obtaining a wife. Technology can be labelled as a “domestic mode of production” (sensu Sahlins). This means that all adult members of the community are capable, or in a position to be capable, of producing the artefacts and structures needed for the social and biological reproduction of the community. Pottery, in particular, is a very widespread knowledge amidst women, even if only a few of them in each community are really proficient and can make all the types of pottery used in any home. All Gumuz are organized in clans and each clan has a delimited territory. Feuds between clans and families are frequent, as are the conflict resolution ceremonies (mangima) that put an end to them. Marriage, which is always exogamous, serves as an strategy to create alliances with other clans.

The Gumuz traditionally live in small villages, inhabited by less than 200 people. Today, with the increasing sedentarization, the arrival of immigrants from the Highlands and a steady demographic growth, some villages attain as many as 700 individuals. Although the villages are more stable now than they used to be, the swidden agriculture practiced by the Gumuz leads to the displacement of settlements from time to time, especially in those areas where the soil is less fertile.

The Gumuz live in fenced compounds, which have a number of structures, including a main house, one or more youngsters’ houses, goat pens and granaries. Inside the compound resides an extended family: a man with his wife or wives live in the main house and a secondary house is occupied by elder sons or by a young married son and his wife. Other close relatives live in nearby compounds. The main house (mes’a) is a round bamboo structure with conical thatched roof, of around 8 meters in diameter.

How will we describe, as archaeologists, the intersection between space, people and technology that makes a Gumuz village?

Is thick description thick enough?

In his The interpretation of cultures, Clifford Geertz criticized prevailing concepts of culture of his time, that held that “culture is located in the minds and hearts of men” (Goodenough, quoted in Geertz 1973: 11). While he counter-attacked these extremely idealist and formal positions, he replaced them with symbols and the social, proposing a semiotic anthropology. Cultural analysis, he says, is “guessing at meanings, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses” (Geertz 1973: 20). The gist of a semiotic approach to culture would be “gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them” (Geertz 1973: 24). Geertz’ thick description has been widely admired by postmodern archaeologists ( Hodder 1986), who aspire to disentangle similar nets of
social meanings through material culture and discover the cultural logic behind artefacts. Things are the way to get to meaning for want of anything better – living informants. What archaeologists do is to recover in an indirect way particles of meaning by means of different sorts of material evidence in context and in relation to each other (pottery, metallurgy, domestic architecture, tombs, landscape). In so doing, they try to produce a thick description of a past society, which is admittedly less complete than that achieved by an ethnographer who has access to a living culture. This is a too idealistic, in a Platonic way, and logocentric approach. Logocentrism does not end there, but also affects the way in which the past is mediated. What does the ethnographer do? – asks Geertz (1973: 19), and the answer is “he writes”. Many anthropologists, especially postmodern ones have followed this statement literally, considering ethnography a literary engagement. Archaeologists have followed the trend too, by stressing the need of writing stories about the past (Praetzellis 1998; Edmonds 1999; Joyce 2002). However, Geertz himself is more cautious: in a footnote he qualifies the idea of writing, saying that what the anthropologist actually does is “inscribing”, a practice that includes diagrams, photographs, drawings. “Self-consciousness about modes of representation (not to speak of experiments with them) has been very lacking in anthropology”, he bemoans. Experiments with modes of representation in anthropology are not plentiful in the discipline (although they have increased substantially from the time he wrote that), and they tend to focus narrowly on the way anthropologists write (e.g. Clifford 1997; Taussig 2004).

Our work in Gumuz villages tries to emphasize the materiality of the domestic world in which people live, but without leaving aside the meanings that are played out in daily practice. For so doing, we consider that the way in which we translate the material world is extremely important: we try to produce a thick description that is really thick, in that it takes into account not only meanings as expressed in social action, but also things. We need first of all a thick material description of life, which is attained, in our case, by the combination of several media: photographs and drawings of artefacts (in the making, in use and abandoned), plans of houses and compounds with the distribution of artefacts in them; maps of activity areas and areas of debris and waste; and very detailed maps of whole villages that are made both with a professional GPS and with hand-made interpretive sketches. These maps do not only include structures (houses, pens, fences, tombs), but also holes, dumps, pits, ash heaps, trails, gutters, poles and trees. The data are then crossed with information about daily activities and kinship.

Recently, archaeologists have criticized idealist stances and logocentric statements: Bjornar Olsen (2003) claims that there is more to understanding than meaning, and Michael Shanks proposes other ways of mediating the past that go beyond narrative in the usual sense. In general, there is a stronger sensibility among archaeologists and some anthropologists, towards materiality, a term that is becoming a new buzz-word in archaeology and related studies. By taking into account materiality and the non-verbal in any given culture, we should not give up our attempts to recover meaning. The retrieval of meanings, however, seems to be better articulated through the theory of practice than semiotics.

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We also take photographs of minute material details that are usually overlooked, but that are key to convey the textures of daily life: the ruggedness of a ravine, the dusty surface in front of a house, or the mishmash of sherds, bones, lumps and parched grass that extends between compounds. This data are later crossed with oral information regarding the names given to particular areas in the compound and the activities conducted in different places. We have thus discovered that different activity areas do not only have different names, but also very different material textures – a fact that is rarely considered by anthropologists. The image that emerges from our description may appear as the opposite of what Geertz (1973: 16) postulates: instead of “reducing puzzlement”, we convey the chaotic nature of life in a village. Not that abstraction is not necessary, but the problem in many ethnographic accounts is that anthropological abstraction tends to result in a too ideal image of a certain society: complex cosmologies, subtle kinship systems, sophisticated institutions could have very different backgrounds. The problem is when one considers...
the material world in which people live as that: the scenario of social dramas, instead of something active.

The aim of the kind of thick description that is proposed here is not only to give a more accurate view of how life is actually lived by the Gumuz, but also to take into account other actors that are rarely allowed in ethnographies, except as reflections of social activities or as their backdrop: the ash dump, the beer pot, the wall of a house.

**Some preliminary results**

**Bowla Dibas’i settlement**

This settlement is located some 100 km away from Gilgel Beles. For this reason we decided to stay in it while carrying out our research.

For a better understanding of relationships between the Gumuz and highlanders in historical context we interviewed several old members of the community. These fruitful interviews produced information related to slavery in the early twentieth century. The informant Duri Demeka (interview in the annex) spoke of Zäläk’a Liku, known to us through other sources as an agaw boss appointed Fitawrari by Gojjam’s regent Ras Haylu, around 1905-1910 (Abdussamad Ahmad 1984: 238). Information on slavery similarly completes that collected by other historians (Abdussamad Ahmad 1999). We were also told about the Gumuz collaborationist attitude towards Italians, to be understood in the context of their conflictive relations with the Amhara/Agaw. Italian officers had highlighted the unexpected collaboration of the “negroidi del bassopiano” (low-plain negroids) (Lauro 1949: 135) in their struggle against Abyssianian patriots. The entrance of Haile Selassie’s column in Ethiopia (Rennell of Rodd 1948: 5) made a lasting impression upon gumuz collective memory, as can be perceived through interviews made here and last year at Manjäri and Maataba K’uter 2.

The whole settlement was intensively mapped and inventories were made of 11 huts. One of these huts was sketched at a 1:50 scale featuring all movable artefacts. A preliminary model for a gumuz habitation complex was defined in terms of its material (number of structures, surface, limits, etc.) and kinship aspects.

In terms of movable artefacts, some 60 ceramic vessels were documented and drawn. A ceramic typology was designed and local names for all material culture were recorded. Four female potters were interviewed from three of the four neighbourhoods into which the village is divided, as well as one male blacksmith. The following are some preliminary conclusions:

- Habitation complexes are grouped according to kinship: within each neighbourhood, close habitation complexes usually share a common real ancestor, generally a paternal grandfather.

- Habitation complexes appear more diffusely delimited than in other settlements visited. This can be due to smooth intra-community relations and very limited extra-community relations.

- There is a spectacularly high variability in ceramic production, especially in terms of shapes and colours, which can be in relation to Gumuz society’s exogamy. Women learn to make pottery in the final stages of their childhood. When they move to their husband’s settlement, they maintain the style they learnt as children. Diversity in ceramic styles is parallel to the number of different clans from which women come.

- Artefact names do not coincide with those of the scarp, where Manjari and Maataba stand but do coincide with those recorded at Jarenja (Gubba) last year and at Berkasa (Sirba Abbay) in 2002. Thus, more intense communication seems to exist with Gumuz inhabiting West and South lands than with those in the East, although distances are similar (and physical communication is presently easier).

- Both ceramic production and metallurgy respond to what Sahlins (1972:121) dubbed the Domestic Mode of Production, which does not mean the same as “familial production”. According to this author, in this way “families are equipped to govern production through the availability of necessary tools and techniques; they generally have access to current and specific resources. This mastery corresponds to a certain simplicity of resources; it could be said, with a certain democracy of technology”. Such technologic democracy can be perceived in the fact that
practically all gumuz women can supply themselves with pottery, in that both potters and blacksmiths lack a privileged status (quite on the contrary) in the community and in spatial distribution of activities in the settlement.

Maataba
Several reasons dissuaded us from carrying out an intense research at this settlement. However, detailed cartographic records were made of two habitation complexes and several elders were interviewed. From the point of view of spatial organisation the advantage at Maataba lies in the existence of neatly defined neighbourhoods whose members are clearly related. On the other hand Maataba presents a model considerably different to that envisaged by Dibasa and Manjari, where different neighbourhoods are much closer together to the point that they become difficult to distinguish.
Collecting data on interethnic relations wasn’t a simple task. This is particularly true of information concerning relations with the amhara, a fact that can be seen as a symptom of an ongoing conflict. As we could witness in the areas of the market and the electric mill, relationships are positive at least with the agaw. The most interesting information collected was that related to myths of origin, reflecting new variations and nuances. Information on the house “spirit” or divinity and associated rituals particularly cast light upon symbolic aspects of domestic spatial organisation.

**Manjäri**

This settlement is the most interesting and at the same time the most complex of those studied, since it hosts a multiethnic and fragmented community: its inhabitants are gumuz, kumfel agaw and high-plain agaw. There is great rivalry among different gumuz sectors, especially between inhabitants of both riversides and different families. The kumfel agaw and the high plain agaw (Ch’ara agaw) do not foster relations with each other (Gamst 1969; Sewagen Shiferaw 1998). The latter accuse the former of not having been supportive when they first settled in the area while the kumfel feel looked down upon by the highplain agaw. Tensions among the gumuz usually build up to violent conflicts resulting in death of one or more persons. To this one must add this community’s state of social disruption due to several factors including repeated displacement after hostilities with the amhara (since the latter settled in the area in the 1980s); closeness to semi-urban centres in the area; land property and wealth source changes and alcohol, as much a symptom as a cause of stress. This has generated a highly unstable situation considerably uncomfortable to our group: the gumuz at Manjäri are more aggressive and distrustful than those at Dibas’a, in turn much more so than those South of the Blue Nile who we had chance to study in 2002 at Berkasa.

The following preliminary conclusions can be drawn from our fieldwork:

- Space is organised in a much more delimited fashion here than in Bowla Dibas’i. Manjari offers a labyrinth-like picture with well defined and controlled walking routes. Habitation complexes are enclosed with fences making visibility and access- leading to funnel-shaped entrances – difficult.

- Manjäri is a much larger settlement in both population and surface than the average gumuz hamlets. This, alongside its multiethnicity, generates a series of social problems probably negotiated in spatial terms. Syntactic analyses to be carried out by Xurxo Ayán and Álvaro Falquina will probably help to clarify this aspect.

- Intra-ethnic relations (between gumuz and between agaw) are surprisingly more complex than interethnic relations: this explains the fact that gumuz and agaw can be found living together, while spatial proximity of Ch’ara agaw and Kumfel agaw is comparatively rare. Also against what common sense would suggest, technologically more complex groups (as the agaw) tend to use the material culture of the simpler (gumuz) rather than viceversa. Thus, agaw huts featured hoes, sickles, bows, arrows, baskets and large ceramic vessels produced by gumuz (up to half a dozen per dwelling) while highland pottery is scarcer among the gumuz (normally one or two vessels to prepare porridge). Occurrence of other artefacts is not systematic (baskets, plough, etc.).
Differences in spatial organisation between gumuz and agaw are however very marked, especially in terms of the internal structure of dwellings. Agaw dwellings present a compartmentalized and monumental internal space. These complexes typically feature a higher number of adjective structures per square meter. This can be examined in view of their practising a more intensive form of agriculture (see González-Ruibal and Fernández Martínez 2003 for a comparison of bertha and amhara spatial organisation).

Gumuz dwellings are simpler and smaller than in the Bowla-Dibas’i area and always contain a smaller number of objects (near to half) than those in other settlements. This is rather striking given that their economic situation here should be comparatively better. Gumuz in Bowla-Dibas’i receive a rent from their agaw and amhara neighbours forced to hire gumuz land.

Decorations on gumuz granaries are a prominent element of this settlement in abundance and variety. These decorations in gumuz hamlets South of the Nile and the Gubba region present are much less varied. The presence of masculine motives (penises, testicles and whole male bodies) is one of the most interesting aspects which could be somehow connected to social stress.
Deep-mapping the Gumuz house

Material culture and trauma: the inscription of the past in Gumuz houses.

The history of slavery to which the Gumuz have been subjected is interwoven in the structure of the houses in which they live. It is incorporated into the domesticity of the Gumuz culture. By being part of the fabric of their homes, trauma is continuously played out in daily life: it is a past no longer past. Two basic material elements can be related to this everlasting history of oppression: the fence and the double door. Fences are a remarkable element in Gumuz compounds and villages. They are everywhere: they determine and restrict perambulation, visibility and interaction between people – between foreigners and locals, and between neighbors. Entering a Gumuz village is a similar experience to that of accessing a labyrinth, with closed alleys, narrow passages, funnel-shaped entrances and exits, countless junctions and unexpected open spaces. Due to this fragmented layout, it is difficult to get a whole view of a settlement.

Figure 18. Typical fence. Settlement of Manjäri.

The explanation of such a complex plan, which is not found among other Nilo-Saharan communities in the area and not even in the Gumuz villages that inhabit the areas located in the secluded Blue Nile valley, has a historical explanation: the annual invasion of their lands by slave traders since at least the Middle Ages. The complex plan of the Gumuz village made both escape and defence easier, by confusing the enemy. The same happens with the house itself. Traditionally, Gumuz main houses are endowed with two doors, one in the front and one in the back. According to our informants in different villages, the back door was used to flee from the slave raiders when they were approaching and at least an old man from Dibas’i remembered to have used the door in this way as a child.

The point that we want to make here is not a functionalist one – that the Gumuz developed a particular kind of domestic architecture and settlement to defend themselves against raids. There are many examples of defensive settlement layouts all over sub-Saharan Africa – the Dogon of Mali being the most famous example.

The point that we want to stress here is that the past, through the materiality of homes, has an effect in the present daily experiences of the Gumuz. Furthermore, the intention of our research is to explore how in a Gumuz village time, people and things are simultaneously constituted. It is not possible to tear off the materiality of homes, from their meanings, from the Gumuz as a historically-situated people. Gumuz identity, marked by a millennia-old resistance against encroachment from aliens, slave raids and persecution, is not only played out, reflected or negotiated in social institutions alone or oral memory. Gumuz identity is inseparable from their houses: they are built together. And houses themselves are a collective made of bamboo, elephant grass, mud, ancestors, beer pots, house gods (Mus’a Mes’a), people, and historical trauma.

Figure 19. Typical back door. Settlement of Manjäri.

In conclusion, if we want to understand the materiality of homes better, we need other ways of translating that materiality: new, denser ways of describing homes, and we need to understand houses as part of a wider collective that includes people, things, animals, matter, and history.

Figure 20. Houses themselves are a collective made of bamboo, elephant grass, mud, ancestors, beer pots, house gods (Mus’a Mes’a), people, and historical trauma.
References


Appendix 1

Inventory of House 1 (C. 1, structure 13), Bowla Dibas’i settlement

Left half

On floor

A blue plastic water bottle

An indigá

Some signs written in amharic alphabet

A glass bottle

A deteriorated rucksack

Two horizontally stringed arrows in the straw cover

Some sorghum sacks piled against the wall
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A bird-hunting arrow leaning against the sorghum sacks
Seven chairs
A saddle
A small wooden table (to serve coffee)
A wooden stool
A wood and string device to carry corncobs
A bottle of liquor (araki) closed with a corncob
A plastic jug to serve beer
Two iron sickles
Three pairs of shoes
A fishing net
Two indigá
A wicker basket used as a henhouse
A calabash for water
A fragmented ceramic pot
A metal pot for washing
A wooden platform with two navicular mills
A calabash
An umbrella
A metal bowl to drink water
A kolinga
A plastic bottle with mineral water of the trademark Topland
A porcelain small cup to drink coffee
A net and wooden device to hang corn from
Three hand millstones
A wooden mortar to grind toasted coffee
A calabash to collect sorghum
A missikua with non grinded sorghum
A metal coffee-pot
Two kouga
Three enchiyisa
A jebena to serve coffee
A plastic container with sorghum
A calabash with sorghum
A basket with sorghum
A plastic object with sorghum
A wooden stick to stir beer

Left half

Hanging
A wicker basket
A plastic jug for beer
A calabash for water
A kolenga

A plastic jug
Two wooden sticks to winnow
A sack with sorghum
A net with a calabash containing:
- Three crystal glasses
- Two embarrá
- A metal plate
- Two more calabashes

Right half

On the floor
A kakeá with sorghum
Two meshikúa
Two very large messhikúa
A large metal pot
Two embarrá
A large metal pot
Two plastic containers
A small shelf with:
A block of salt
A straw broom
An old bed with a mat, upon which there are:
Three blankets
A mosquito net
A rifle (libinda)
An ontoa

Hanging
A net containing:
Three embarrá
A metal container
Two plastic containers
Two cups of coffee
A plastic cup
Two plastic gwana
Three wicker baskets with two plastic jugs and a glass bottle

Separate room
A tobacco dryer on the wall
A bow and an arrow
A wooden bed
A pair of shoes
Seven cups of coffee
A crystal bottle to serve liquor (*areki*)
Two plastic containers
A large crystal bottle
A cap
A mosquito net
A net with two wicker baskets and a calabash

**Hanging from post in the corner**

A *bäkea*
A plastic bottle for water
A plastic cup
A metal cup
A bag with clothes

**Next to the door**

A drawing saying Happy new Year
A pendant
An air-pump
A spear
Clothes hanging from the crossbeam and a Reebok rucksack

**Space inside the room**

A bed with a mat
A sack
A bag with clothes
A plastic demijohn
A plastic jug
A pair of sandals
An axe
A trunk with clothes
Two nets with two wicker baskets

**On central platform**

Two beehives
A sack containing corn
A very large wicker container

A bird-hunting arrow
Sorghum bundles

Figure 21. Inventory of pottery from two domestic units from Manjäri settlement.

**Appendix 2**

**Interview with Duri Demeka (Bowla-Dibas’i).**

Tuesday-Wednesday, March 7th-8th 2006.

**Translators:** Gumuz: Gebru (Sinasha, from Gublak).
Amharic: Dawit Tibebu.

Duri Demeka is an 80-85 year-old man. He has had three wives, but only one survives. These wives gave him three sons and six daughters. The three sons and four of his daughters have died. All the daughters have got married in Gilgel Beles, Gis’i (Jimta, Dangur), Gublak, Pudupta (both in Dangur).

He was born somewhere in the road to Mankush. When the war between the Ethiopians and the Italians broke out, he fled to Mandura and he lived there for fourteen years, until he settled definitely in Bowla Dibas’i [around 1945?]. He remembers very clearly the Italian period, although he was too young to be married by then [so he was less than 15 years old in 1936].

Although he says that he does not know much about ancient history, he knows that both Amharas and Gumuz were created the same at the same time: “Our grandfather [i.e. ancestor] is the same”. Both Gumuz and Amhara lived together in peace around Bahar Dar. When the Amharas started to enslave the Gumuz, they had to flee to the lowlands. The Amharas did not want the Gumuz to have the opportunity to learn, and this explains the unequal relations between Highlanders and Gumuz. The same mother gave birth to an Amhara and a Gumuz. The Amhara took a horse and ride away. He learned many things outside and came back to the area to rule it. The Gumuz remained in the region and learned nothing. Agaw and Amhara are the same. The Gumuz come originally from Sudan. They came through Asosa and Kamashi and settled in different
areas, however they were the first to settle in Metekel. No one lived in the region before. [This myth is somewhat contradictory with the previous one, which asserts that both Gumuz and Amhara were begot by the same mother and lived together around Bahar Dar].

When Duri was young, the people that did not pay the tax were obliged to sell his children as slaves. Those who refused were compelled to escape to Sudan, Metemma or Wenbera. The Gumuz were enslaved by Sinasha, Agaw and Amhara, although the Sinasha themselves were enslaved by the Amhara.

The Agaw chief in the area when he was young was Zäläk'ä Liku. He pursued the occupation of Metekel started by his father Liku. He collected taxes for the Amhara and took slaves among those who did not pay them. Zäläk’ä enslaved everybody: women and men, children and youngsters. The sheikh of Gubba, Banjaw, had also an alliance with the Amhara and provided them slaves and taxes exacted from the Gumuz. A Sinasha chief, Merka Gai, also enslaved Gumuz and Sinasha. Many Gumuz escaped to Sudan to avoid slavery. They went to Gondar and Metemma to circumvent Banjaw in Gubba. Others took the road to Addis Ababa, crossed the Nile and went to Asosa, from where they headed to Ad-Damazin in Sudan.

All this was before the Italians came. The Italians stopped the raids. However, those areas that were beyond the Italian control were still raided. Zäläk’ä Liku enslaved Gumuz in remote areas and said “Who’s going to protect you now that you don’t have the Italians to protect you?”. For this reason, the Gumuz collaborated with the Italians. A Gumuz man called Lemma enrolled in the Italian army. After the war, he was considered a traitor, so he tried to escape to Asmara. However, he was caught on the way by patriot Agaws and killed.

Duri remembers people from his family being taken as slaves. Some returned, others were missed forever. His elder sisters were enslaved at that time [ca. 1930s]. They used the house’s back door to escape from the slavers. His family saved itself by using the back door once.

The place where the slaves were sold was Egumb, in the way to Mankush. It is a village, not a market, but many people were sold at that place. The Agaw took people from everywhere and sold them there. The Agaw came to the villages with mules and guns. They killed people, looted and took slaves. They accused the Gumuz of collaborating with the Italians. However, after Haile Selassie came back, slavery stopped. In Haile Selassie’s time, some people were educated outside the region. They were told not to create conflicts, to work hard, cultivate, etc. This continues today.

The Gumuz used to hide in caves to escape from the Agaw, who used to come during the rainy season [this is probably an error: all written accounts say that the raids took place in the dry season, which is more reasonable]. The Agaw ate lots of goats and chicken. They slept in the Gumuz’ houses after expelling their owners. They forced the women to work for them. They stole oil seeds and obliged the women to grind them and prepare food.

When they came to the area, the Italians settled around Gublak temporarily. They lived in tents around the trees. They did not build any houses. He remembers planes flying around during the Italian occupation. Haile Selassie arrived to the area with many people and mules through the main road between Mankush and Chagni.

The Gumuz call the Bertha “Guija”. Their fathers and grandfathers told them that the Guija lived in the Beles river up to Pawe. As a result of the conflict with the Amharas, they had to retreat to other areas. The Guija still lived today in Bonga and Mezijja, near the Sudanese border. Before, they used to come to this area, and the Gumuz used to go to their places. They never enslaved the Gumuz and they had good relations. In ancient times, they lived together, even in the same villages.

They have not relations with the Mao and Komo, although he knows that they live around Asosa. They came here some time ago, but never inhabited the area. He knows that the Mao and Komo have relations between them, but does not know anything else. He says that when people moved to Sudan in the rainy season to cultivate, they saw them there (during the Italian occupation and before the Đarg). Many Gumuz migrated to Sudan and settled there.

The Sinasha have their own genealogy, which is not related to the Gumuz. Gumuz and Sinasha never intermarry.

In ancient times, the Gumuz did not have guns or drums. They only had spears and they used to dance and sing with them. They had flutes and horns (from an animal called wandalbe). Also, the ancestors (grandparents) did not use metal tools, only sharpened wood tools. They cultivated kwancha (sorghum). They have always cultivated and agriculture has always been the basis of their subsistence. Metallic tools came later, from Sudan. They had pots already in ancient times, but not of such good quality as today’s. Before, potters went to termite mounds and used their fresh soil. After they learned how to make pots (kula and nsea), they learned how to cook leaves and other things. Later they learned the use of clay for making pots and they started to make big pots (koga), for preparing beer. They learned to make beds in Sudan, when people went there.

The preparation of beer. First it is necessary to mix sorghum floor with water in the koga. Then they leave it to ferment there. After that, they cook it a little bit in the mishikwa. Afterwards, they grind it in the quern stone and boil it in the mishikwa. The paste becomes very smooth then and it is introduced again in the koga, with water and sorghum sprouts for fermentation. After a day, they filter it with a diya, a traditional filter made with vegetal fibers. Although beer itself is local, the filter came from Sudan, with the ancestors of Banjaw [it is important to note that Banjaw Abu Shok and his father, Hamdan, claimed ancestry from the Sudanese Funj kingdom of Sinnar].

**Interview with Amâna Shami (Bowla-Dibasi’i), potter.**

**Wednesday. March 8th 2006.**

**Translators: Gumuz: Gebru (Sinasha, from Gublak). Amharic: Geremew Feyissa.**

Amâna Shami is a potter (eté gezezá) from the Dach’igra clan, which occupies the area to the east of Bowla-Dibas’i. She is
the wife of Urku and the mother of seven children (six boys, one girl), among them Shibabo and Kornel, who have lent their houses for us to live.

She learned to make pottery when she was 12 years old by practicing, under her mother’s surveillance (a potter herself). On the contrary, she only learned to make big pots after she had a revelation. A spirit appeared to her and taught her how to make koga. She says that the same thing occurred to other potters who are able to make big pots.

The clay for pots comes from the Beles river bank, where all the potters in the village go. It takes an hour and a half walking to reach the spot where fine clay is found. Sometimes Amâna goes with her potter friends, sometimes she goes alone. They dig the earth with a long iron stick. They carry the clay back to the village on the ndigha (carrying stick). Old pots are crushed and the grit is mixed with straw and clay to make the paste (bes’es’a) used for making pots. They never use mineral grit.

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She can make four nsekugha (small pot for cooking sauce) or one koga (big pot for preparing beer) and a mishikwa (large plate for cooking porridge) per week. Once the pot has been modelled, it is left two days under the sun to dry up (four days during the rainy season). The place were the vessels stands during the process is a circular area of trodden earth, which is marked with a piece of grinding stone stuck in the ground. After the polishing, and before the firing, the whole vessel is polished with a piece of soapstone (dukusa) first and then with a black pebble. Next, the pot is fired in an open bonfire during 30 minutes. All pots are fired in front of the house: small pots closer than bigger pots. They are fired always in front of the house to prevent the fire from damaging the hut.

She sells the pots in the same village or in the market in Gublak. Potters make more pots during the dry season, than during the rainy season. During the dry season, she can produce around 30 nsekugha and 20-25 koga, whereas in the rainy season she makes 8-10 koga, 10 mishikwa and 10 nsekugha.

During the Derg time, since the Agaw had had relations with the Gumuz for a long time and the Gumuz spoke Agaw, the relations were good. The Agaw collected taxes in imperial times and they both knew each other very well. All business transactions were carried out in Agaw: selling guns, salt, etc. The Agaw came also to the region for hunting. When the Gumuz met the Agaw, the Gumuz said “Oh, you are my relatives”, so they could hunt anything in the forest. The relation with the Amhara, on the contrary, was not good. The Amhara did not speak Gumuz nor knew their culture or vice versa. When an Amhara came to the area and tried to sell guns or communicate with the Gumuz, they were not able to get through. The Gumuz did not like the Amhara. When the resettlement began, the Gumuz killed many settlers from Wollo and other areas. The Gumuz started killing the resettlers in 1973 when the first drought in Wollo [1972-1973], when some people came here fleeing from the famine. The Gumuz speared them and the killing continued in Därg times. They consider killing as part of their culture: it means winning trophies.

After the downfall of the Därg the killing continued until 1997. With this new government’s concession of full rights to the Gumuz, they are now respecting the law. The killing continues, but not so hard: it occurs especially in other areas. Besides, the military camp [near Almu] scares the Gumuz, and the Mender 32 and 34 have a lot of resettlers, so the Gumuz are afraid of them. In former times, they did not kill Agaw. After the resettlement, they made no distinctions and killed everybody. Before, if they heard somebody speaking Agaw, they did not kill that person. When the Gumuz kill an Amhara, the Amhara blame the Agaw and accuse them of giving information to the Gumuz. So the Amhara do not trust the Amhara and do not give them any information. Now the Gumuz do not distinguish between Amhara and Agaw. They attack the Agaw, even if they know they are Agaw. Thus, 6 Agaw were killed on the road to Chagni. In former times, women were proud of the men who killed other men, especially K’ai [Highlanders]. They took hands as trophies.
Until 1995 [or 1997?] the Gumuz killed anybody they disagreed with. If someone sells a donkey to a Gumuz and the donkey dies, the Gumuz would ask for their money back, thinking that the donkey was ill and that he has been cheated. If the money is not returned, he would kill the man who sold it to him. If someone borrows money from the Gumuz, if he does not pay in time, they will go to his house stealthily and kill him with spears or guns.

They are not a tolerant people, I never borrow [money] from them.

In former times, nobody knew about this land or wanted to use it. One could buy a large lot for a bottle of arek'i or 50 birr. But now the Gumuz know about agreements and they have their own separate land and make separate agreements with the Amhara. They ask seven quintals [per hectare] without doing anything and even ask the Amhara to cultivate the rest of the land [who has not been rented] for them. So now they are taken advantage. Seven quintals per hectare is too expensive. The man who rents the land has to pay also the tax to the government. A person may get 20 quintals per hectare. A man here has to till the fields twice and weed twice. He has to pay for workers to harvest. It is too expensive. Anyone who rents the land does that because it lacks any other means of survival. Any Gumuz can build a house in a Highlander’s plot and claim the land. The Gumuz may threaten the kebele authorities so that they won’t take any measure against them.

There are about 80 settler families in the Manjäri kebele [village administration]. They do not have their own land. They work for the Gumuz. When there is a meeting in the kebele, they elect only Gumuz. They do not know about rules and regulations. Nobody controls them. When there is a disagreement between Amhara and Gumuz, the kebele authorities do not intervene, but when the conflict is only between Gumuz, they arrive on time and solve the problem, because there are always things to eat and drink [in these meetings]. They do not respect the law and do not pay taxes, but the Amhara do.

They are not in direct conflict with the Gumuz. There are personal conflicts between K’ai and Gumuz. In those cases, the kebele does not want to solve the problem. The only real problem is between those Gumuz that live in the forest and the Agaw [that is, a long-term, structural conflict]. The Gumuz who inhabit the forest live in the area right to the road of Gilgel Beles to Chagni, in a remote area where only Gumuz who inhabit the forest live. Whenever they disagree, they kill the Agaw. The Gumuz most of the time create problems Agaw and Gumuz live. Whenever they disagree, they kill each other.

When there is a quarrel, they shoot each other. We don’t have even a knife when we walk about, but nobody asks them when the Gumuz go around with their guns. The local authorities say in meetings that they are militia, but they are not. They move from village to village with their guns. This is their culture, they do not move without a knife, gun or bow. Even if they go to the toilet or when they are taking coffee, they carry a gun. When a baby is born, the relatives try to get a gun for him. I have a lot of close friends in Mandura, Dek [Maataba], and Mambuk also. I trust this people. In bad times, they gave me a lot of help. I have a lot of close friends in Mandura, Dek [Maataba], and Mambuk also. I trust this people. In bad times, they gave me a lot of help.

We don’t confront the Gumuz, even when they want us to. We cultivate their land and don’t want conflict. Even if we believe we are the losers, we accept that. If we try the Gumuz to be punished in a trial, they will revenge, so we resign ourselves and continue with our lives.

The government is trying to teach the people to be tolerant, cultivate their land, buy an ox instead of a gun and work as the other people. This area is very fertile. Many people come from other wereda [municipalities] to cultivate. But the kebele do not try to prepare any office documents or stamps for the staff of the administration. They just sit and drink alcohol. People are afraid of striking back. If somebody kills a Gumuz, they will kill everybody as a revenge.

Destaw took part in a mangëna [ritual of conflict resolution] in Gilgel Beles, when a husband killed an adulterer. He also killed the adulterer’s father and wounded a relative. The killer himself was killed by the adulterer’s relatives. The people with guns are not militia. They have just bought the guns themselves. The K’ai, however, are not allowed to arm themselves. If they try, the Gumuz would inform the government and the government would disarm them.

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I built this house after I got a permit from the government. I paid 70 hire as a tax. The Gumuz now demand this land and have built three houses here on my land. I have asked the administration to solve the problem and have my land back. But there is no solution at all yet. I have been warned to demolish my house and move, but I have no alternative, I have lots of children. I have to stay here and cultivate. That’s why I’m renting others’ land. There were Gumuz houses nearby when I arrived, but not here, so the government gave me this land. I’m the only one who got a letter from the government allowing to settle here. I came to this area to cultivate the land, grow rich, teach my children.

He has to pay 40 birr a year for the land. He is disappointed. The situations is too hard. There is no future. He also has to pay the Gumuz – to the particular family that owns the land that he cultivates.

Andergé [A Gumuz elder, who is his neighbor] lived here already. I have good friends here and I also belong to associations. We eat and drink together. Because I have been living here for eight years I know who’s trusty, who’s aggressive, who’s tolerant. So I borrow money from them and they borrow money from me. This is why I moved to this area, because I have Gumuz friends. I can’t move to any area without trusty people, who can support me in case of conflict.

A list of friends: Andergé Tanka was a good friend and trusty, now he is older and he is less trusty; Mammur Tanka Andergé’s older brother; Gunda Damte, his best friend, still trusty, young; Gide Red, the kebele’s secretary; Wëndim Mango; Bazabih Kore. Mammur Tanka and Andergé Tanka were very trusty, that’s why he came to the area. They are now old and no longer trusty. They even tell things against him. Before, they threatened violators of Destaw’s property.

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information and refuge. Not only for me, but also for my relatives and my family.

His relatives came to this area after him: Welelew Jenbere, Subalew Abebe and Dessaleñ Worku. They are all his cousins. They came to this area after he settled. The Gumuz do not allow other people to settle, except as k’enja (laborers) for them. When people ask why Destaw’s relatives were allow to settle, they say “we are working for the Gumuz”. The Gumuz themselves say “they are our k’enja”. After that, they brought their families little by little.

Appendix 3

Life-cycle of gumuz house
Illustrations

Figure 1. Geographical distribution of ethnical groups in the study area.

Figure 2. Gumuz boys of Bowla Dibas’i settlement with mes’a behind them.

Figure 3. An example of gumuz domestic mode of production.

Figure 4. Archaeological plan of a gumuz dwelling.

Figure 5. Ironsmith tools (from Manjäri settlement).

Figure 6. Woman with ritual scarifications in her back (Bowla Dibas’i settlement).

Figure 7. Traditional gumuz granary in Bowla Dibas’i settlement.

Figure 8. Agaw women of Manjäri settlement.

Figure 9. Grave and compound in Bowla Dibas’i settlement.

Figure 10. Women cooking inside a gumuz dwelling.

Figure 11. Archaeological remains of a gumuz hut (Manjäri settlement).

Figure 12. GPS mapping of Bowla Dibas’i settlement.

Figure 13. GPS mapping of the north neighborhood of Bowla Dibas’i settlement.

Figure 14: Entrance to the Matoha hamlet in Maataba settlement.

Figure 15: GPS mapping of the Matoha hamlet in Maataba settlement.

Figure 16: Sketch of agaw compounds in Manjäri settlement. First step to study the kinship relations inside the settlement.

Figure 17: Gumuz (left) and Agaw (right) neighbours of Manjäri settlement.

Figure 18. Typical fence. Settlement of Manjäri.

Figure 19. Typical back door. Settlement of Manjäri.

Figure 20. Houses themselves are a collective made of bamboo, elephant grass, mud, ancestors, beer pots, house gods (Mus’a Mes’a), people, and historical trauma.

Figure 21: Inventory of pottery from two domestic units from Manjäri settlement.

Figure 22: Amäna Shami potter working in front of her dwelling.

Figures 23-35: Life-cycle of a gumuz hut.