



East Dorset Antiquarian Society

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NEWSLETTER – December 2012

***We wish everyone a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year***

1983 – 2013

30th Anniversary of EDAS

As many of you will know, 2013 marks a significant milestone for our society, for it is 30 years since the founding of the East Dorset Antiquarian Society. Many amateur societies succumb to age as the original members move on, but EDAS remains very active and enjoys a growing membership. We plan to mark the year with a series of activities which will allow us to, revisit events members have enjoyed in the past and look forward to a successful future. (See below for more information).

EDAS November Lecture: “The Lands of the Queen of Sheba – Myth, History and Endemics” with Ian Lewis.

Last month we welcomed Ian Lewis to EDAS, he is an experienced traveller and passionate birdwatcher and we enjoyed an interesting talk about his visits to Ethiopia and Yemen.

Firstly he explained that the Queen of Sheba is mentioned in the Judean, Islamic, Christian, Roman, Yemini and Ethiopian historical records. Her encounter with King Solomon of Judea was described in the Bible (Kings 10:1-2) and mentioned in the Aleppo Codex, the oldest surviving Hebrew text. Her image has been used by numerous artists throughout the centuries, portrayed as an exotic mix of seduction and power. How much of her story can be substantiated by archaeological evidence?

What we do know is that the earliest historical date for Biblical stories was the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 732BC and that there was no large kingdom in Israel until the Iron Age period from the 8th and 7th century BC. It is unlikely that Solomon, if he existed, was in power before this period. At this time there also existed a major civilisation covering the kingdoms of Saba in Saudi Arabia and Seba in Africa. There was an established trade route for Myrrh, Frankincense and Gold between the Horn of Africa through the Red Sea to Petra, the centre of the Nabataean civilization.

Ian then took us to Aksum, a city in the north of Ethiopia, that was the centre of the Aksumite Kingdom. It was an important trading power from the 1st century AD and is locally claimed to have strong association with the Queen. But there is no archaeological evidence to substantiate this. The Queen’s Palace is now recognised as the house of a merchant of the 7th century AD and the Queen’s Bath is a reservoir from the same period. Although no archaeological evidence has been uncovered it is believed locally that this is the site of an earlier Iron Age civilisation. Aksum is particularly famous for arrays of monolithic stelae many of which held gold discs at their summits. There are over 120 of these obelisk-like structures varying in height from 1m to 33m. They appear to be burial markers and some have false doors and windows carved into them. The earliest were built in the years just before the time of Christ and they were constructed up until the mid 4th century AD. The last was the tallest at 33m, built before the country converted to Christianity.

From AD 330 to 356 King Ezana ruled the Aksumite kingdom and according to Roman and Byzantine historians, Saint Frumentius, a slave and personal tutor, converted the young King to Christianity. The Ezana

Stone documents the conversion and the subjugation of various neighbouring peoples. It is written in three languages; Ge'ez (the ancient Eritrean/Ethiopian language); Sabaean (South Arabian); and Greek. This trilingual monument bares comparison to the Rosetta stone.

King Ezana built the Church of St Mary of Zion, the earliest church in the sub-Saharan. To the faithful of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Aksum is the location for the Arc of the Covenant, which contains the tablets of the Ten Commandments. The thirteenth-century *Kebrā Negast*, "The Book of the Glory of Kings", states that it was brought here by Menelik I, son of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel. Now every church has a copy of the ark which remains hidden except to the priests.

Ian then moved on to Lalibela, which lies 200 miles to the south. Local folklore tells of King Lalibela on his death bed being saved by a Christian God who demanded that he create a new Jerusalem -the original having fallen to the Muslims. He accepted the terms and built the famous Rock Churches, created between 1140-1180. There are ten churches, carved out of solid rock, replicating conventional building styles with false beams and other architectural features. One of the most famous is the church of St George.



St George Church, Lalibela



Stelae, Aksum

Ian also mentioned recent archaeological work in the Adi Neba region of Eritrea on monuments dating from the 6th to 7th century BC; it is possible that these may be associated with the Queen of Sheba.

Then, across the Red Sea and into the rugged land of Yemen. This is one of the routes taken by Homo sapiens sapiens as they moved out of Africa 75,000 years ago. It is a country with very fertile regions and Ptolemy referred to it as Arabia Felix (fortunate Arabia). For long periods Yemen was part of the Aksumite kingdom. The Kingdom of Saba was dominant from eighth century BC and traded far and wide, especially with Myrrh and Frankincense. Many argue that this is the fabled Land of Sheba with its capital at Ma'rib where there is an ancient temple.

Ian showed us Shibani, the Manhattan of the desert, with the tallest mud brick buildings in the world. First mentioned in AD400 although most of the tower buildings date from AD 1400 and are continually repaired.



Shibani – Manhattan of the desert



Lucy – H. Australopithecus afarensis

And to wrap up a wide ranging talk, Ian mentioned his visit to Addis Ababa museum to see Lucy, the 3.6 million year old skeleton of a Homo Australopithecus afarensis. She is believed to represent the first hominids to drop out of the trees and stand upright.

So, we're still uncertain about the Queen of Sheba, but it appears she more likely to be associated with the Yemen and the Kingdom of Saba.

Andrew Morgan

EDAS 30th Anniversary Activities

Garden Party on 23rd May 2013: to be held in the lovely grounds of the Priest House Museum, Wimborne, on the evening of the 23rd May 2013 between 6.00 to 8.30pm. This is an opportunity to entertain old friends of the society, to recall shared misadventures and tall tales. There will be a small charge for members and tickets will be made available from the February EDAS Meeting.

Newsletter Articles: we have asked members and friends of EDAS to write an article for the Newsletter to share their personal experience with the society. The response has been very enthusiastic and we will start publishing them from January. ***Please contact Andrew for further information if you would like to write a contribution.***

Ashmolean Museum Visit: we are considering organising a trip to the Ashmolean Museum some time later in the year. ***Please contact a committee member if you would like to organise this trip.***

EDAS Walks: we have arranged a series of walks throughout the summer, details will be made available in the next Newsletter.

Priest House Museum Display: Emma Ayling has kindly offered us the use of a display cabinet to celebrate thirty years of EDAS in the community. This is an excellent opportunity to promote our society and we're looking for volunteers to help put this together. ***Please contact Andrew if you are interested.***

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2012
Wed 12th December 2012	EDAS Lecture: "Were the Romans like us", with Geoff Taylor
DATE	EDAS EVENTS – 2013
Wed 9th January 2013	EDAS Lecture: The David Johnson Memorial Lecture, with Tim Schadla-Hall
Wed 20th February 2013	EDAS Lecture: Analysis of Hooks Sands and the Swash Channel wreck, with Robert Heaton
Wed 13th March 2013	AGM followed by EDAS Lecture: EDAS and the archaeology of Cranborne Chase, with Martin Green
Wed 10th April 2013	EDAS members evening: i) The 2012 Field Trip to Exmoor, with Alan Hawkins, and ii) Aerial photography over Cranborne Chase, with Jo Crane
Wed 8th May 2013	EDAS Lecture: The strange case of the Dewlish Roman Villa, with Ian Hewitt of Bournemouth University
Thurs 23rd May 2013	EDAS Garden Party: 6.00 to 8.30pm in the Priest House Garden. Tickets available from February 2013.