
Atsibi Silasse

Situated at the edge of Atsibi town this highly degraded site is commonly used by young boys as a park. The site is an important source of artesian water used as ‘holy water’ as well as for agricultural purposes. Little tree regeneration is observable and some tree planting has been carried out but mostly exotic species have been used.



Name: **Atsibi Silasse**

Status: church

Site Code: TU04

Floristic Region: TU

Region: 1 (eastern Tigray)

Altitude: 2480 m

Latitude: 14° 05' N

Longitude: 39° 34' E

Woodland/forest:

Status: relict

Size: 2 ha

Dominant species:

canopy: *Allophylus abyssinica*, *Ficus sur*,
Ficus sycomorus,
shrub/ground: *Discopodium*
penninervium, *Phytolacca dodecandra*,
Vernonia auriculifera

No of woody species: 46

No of species with less than 5 individuals: 1

Threats: population pressure

Photograph: The Atsibi Silasse church and associated woodland is situated at the edge of town. The compound is delimited by a stone wall. All trees growing beyond the town are eucalypts.

The town of Atsibi is situated on the undulating Tigrayan plateau renowned for its rock churches. The woodland has in its centre an important and permanent well which generates large quantities of water, much of it being used for irrigation downstream.

The woodland is nearly completely surrounded by a stone wall and does not suffer from grazing. It is widely used by local people, but especially teenage boys who use the area for studying and as a play ground. As a result the area is in parts heavily disturbed. The tree canopy is broken in many places and in the damper parts it is dominated by large fig trees under which little or no ground vegetation is present. In places there are masses of climbers on some of the larger trees. Where the tree canopy is absent, there is a dense and tall scrubby vegetation. In recent decades tree planting has been carried out in the close vicinity of the church and this consists mainly of exotics (especially *Acacia melanoxylon*) but also includes some *Olea europaea* ssp *cuspidata*.

In the countryside surrounding Atsibi, native trees are scarce but there is a timber resource in the form of planted eucalypts. Further afield there are substantial areas of native scrub that were once probably dominated by forest trees such as *Juniperus procera* (see Kidus Georgis – TU05).

History

The ancient church of Atsibi Silasse, allegedly one of the oldest in Ethiopia, still exists and is adjoined by a more recent and much larger building erected about 100 years ago. Many of the large junipers then present were cut down to build this church. This Atsibi Silasse Church has long been associated with Atsibi, an old trading town.

Conservation status

Being the only stand of native trees around the town of Atsibi, this woodland is an important refuge for native vegetation.

Of particular importance is the large source of water surfacing in the midst of the woodland.



The church yard is surrounded by a stone wall and on the town side there is a large tower right next to the main entrance. The area around the church has a limited amount

of vegetation but it does include a number of young trees planted in recent years.

Threats

This site does not suffer from grazing or tree cutting. Being in the close vicinity of a major town it does, however, suffer from heavy human pressure. Large areas of the woodland are heavily trampled. Elsewhere, but in damper areas in particular, there are very dense and high thickets composed of a variety of shrubs. As a result there is very little tree regeneration.

A large proportion of the remaining junipers suffers from crown dieback and two mature trees have died in recent years.

Management

A significant amount of tree planting has been carried out over the past decade. Further planting should be carried out in areas still devoid of trees. The substantial area planted with *Acacia melanoxylon* should be interplanted with native tree species (e.g. *Juniperus procera* and *Olea europaea* ssp *cuspidata*). The large fig trees show sign of old age and their gradual replacement should be envisaged. Planting of native trees on graves could be promoted.