

From Meroe to Modern Sudan: the Kushite Building Techniques in the Present Vernacular Architecture in the Area of Begrawiya

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Villaggi popolati da costruzioni in crudo e abitazioni in materiale vegetale rappresentano uno scenario comune nelle aree rurali del moderno Sudan centrale. La partecipazione alle attività della Missione archeologica congiunta ISMEO – IOS RAS ad Abu Erteila, sul campo dal 2008 e tuttora operante, e le interazioni con la realtà locale hanno permesso di approfondirne l'analisi ed evidenziare numerosi punti di contatto con quanto noto per l'architettura templare e residenziale di epoca meroitica. L'osservazione si è incentrata sulle località di Erteila e Begrawiya ma ha preso altresì in esame i centri limitrofi con attenzione preminente agli insediamenti siti lungo il Wadi el-Hawad, senza tralasciare il continuo confronto con analoghi studi già condotti a sud della quinta cateratta. L'indagine ha offerto elementi utili in merito a materiali e tecniche a supporto della ricerca archeologica nell'area, pur sempre guidata dalla prudenza comparativa complemento necessario all'analisi etno-archeologica.

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has taken part in an archaeological campaign, even if only once, is well aware of how misleading it would be to reduce it to a mere question of digging and data filing, in total isolation from the environmental and anthropological context informing the surrounding realities. In fact, life in the mission leads to continual dialogue with and—at times even detailed—analysis of the surrounding realities.

In the case of Sudan, accommodation in dwellings that reflect the local traditions, getting supplies from the nearest market, travel and the manifestations of folklore that to some extent involve everyone, together with the work itself, shared with a variable number of workmen from the local village, all represent occasions to enter into the local everyday life, otherwise precluded.

The rural areas of the country offer opportunities to come face-to-face with realities that in many respects recall archaeological vestiges. Villages consisting of mudbrick structures, desert landscapes dotted with the short-lived but well devised shelters of the nomadic shepherds and huts in vegetal material seem to be part of ancient landscapes. They form the background to social realities only partially affected in the course of time by the succession of various different religious and cultural currents.

Persistence of this sort derives from a series of concurrent causes but find their common denominator in the essential isolation in which, whether sought after or suffered, Sudan has traditionally lived. As theorised by Kendall (1989: 625), the country has generally remained far from the major routes of cultural exchange: the inhospitable climate and environment of the upper Nile, together with the past scant interest Westerners have shown in arriving thus. Moreover, by no means secondary is the reluctance