

*This book is dedicated to Luisa Bongrani,
pioneer of Nubian Studies in Italy*

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DI STUDI SUL MEDITERRANEO E L'ORIENTE

SERIE ORIENTALE ROMA

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Eugenio Fantusati

Marco Baldi

Abu Erteila 2008-2020

Twelve Years of Research
in a New Meroitic Site



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e della Cooperazione Internazionale



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CONTENTS

Adriano V. Rossi, President of ISMEO	V
H.E. Gianluigi Vassallo, Ambassador of Italy in Khartoum	VII
Hatim Elnour, General Director of NCAM	IX
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	XI
1. The Site (E.F., M.B.)	1
The Italian-Russian Joint Mission	4
History of Studies	9
2. Flora and Fauna (R.A.L.)	13
3. Before Excavations: Survey with GPR	21
4. Building Materials (M.B.)	31
Clay	31
Stone	37
Vegetal Materials	43
5. The Residential Building K 800 (E.F., M.B.)	47
The Northern Part	50
The Southern Annex	56
Dating	57
6. The Main Temple K 1000 (E.F., M.B.)	59
The Original Plan	62
The Southern Enlargement	79
The Additional Structure K 1200	82
Consecration and Dating of the Temple	83
Later Occupation of Kom II	85
7. The Sacred Heart (E.F.)	89
The Ferricrete Sandstone Furnishings from the Main Temple	89
Epigraphy	120

8. The Lion Temple and Its Kiosk (E.F., M.B.)	127
The Temple K 1100	127
The Kiosk K 1300	129
Consecration and Dating of the Temple	131
9. The Wall-Paintings (E.F.)	133
Exterior of Main Temple K 1000	133
Interior of K 1000	139
K 1100	143
Chemical Observations	143
10. The Main Finds (M.B.)	151
Statuary	151
Faience	156
Libation Basins: Homaging Hapy	159
Metals	163
Other Finds	164
11. Pottery (M.B.)	167
Materials	176
Containers Set in the Ground	182
The Occurrence of Pot-Marks	184
The Effects of Firing in Reducing Conditions	187
Egg-shell Pottery	187
Archaeometrical Characterization	193
Pottery Catalogue	199
12. Replicas (E.F.)	269
First Phase (Sudan)	271
Second Phase (Italy)	275
13. Cemetery (E.F., M.B.)	281
Microscopic Investigations of Textiles	284
14. The Church (M.B., M.R.V.)	287
External Plan	288
Internal Plan	290
Dating	292
<i>Conclusions</i>	293
<i>Bibliography</i>	295
<i>Index</i>	307

I am really pleased to introduce this volume devoted to the ISMEO – IOS RAS (Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences) joint archaeological Mission at the Sudanese site of Abu Erteila, that has been being sustained by the new ISMEO since the re-foundation of our Association in 2012.

The mission had started in 2009 under IsIAO (Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente) in the frame of an international agreement with IOS-RAS, and after 2012 we did not hesitate to continue to offer our patronage, also in consideration of its excellent results. Notwithstanding its relatively brief life, the main finds of the Mission have been many times reported by international press agencies, and represented the core of two study days promoted and published by ISMEO: Atti della Quarta Giornata di Studi Nubiani, Rome, 2014, and Proceedings of the Fifth Day for Nubian Studies, Rome, 2017, both co-edited by the authors of the present volume.

ISMEO archaeological activity in Sudan is a clear example of our engagement in preserving and enriching highly valuable scientific heritages in need of international help, and at the same time the best continuation of the research already accomplished in a not-too-distant past by such prestigious institutions as IsMEO (Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente) and IsIAO.

ISMEO is actively involved in the study of major African cultures in continuity with the strong Italian tradition in this field. It currently supports archaeological projects in several countries in the Northern and Eastern areas of the continent—Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Sudan itself—, most of them in cooperation with international universities and research centres. All the ISMEO Missions are recognized by the Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, whose patronage has permitted inter alia the publication of this volume; the five-year MIUR (Italian Ministry of Scientific Research) Project “Studi e ricerche sulle culture dell’Asia e dell’Africa: tradizione e continuità, rivitalizzazione e divulgazione” was also instrumental in supporting both the excavations and their publications.

This volume summarizes the first twelve years of research at Abu Erteila. The two authors, who have been leading the Italian team since the first field season, accurately report the results of their work, that is still ongoing: the several finds related to architecture, art, material culture and funerary customs

are listed and analysed also in the light of the wider Nubian context, and the contribution of specialists—epigraphists, chemicals, geologists, archaeozoologists and restorers—enriches and completes the presentation. These pages make clear that Abu Erteila has now acquired a solid role in the context of Nubian archaeology, thanks to a team that represents one of the many examples of fruitful international relationships established or continued by ISMEO.

I would like to conclude these lines extending my warm thanks to NCAM (National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan) and to the Italian Embassy in Khartoum for the continuous support offered to the Mission, in the certainty that this cooperation will continue to affect also the future ISMEO projects in Sudan.

ADRIANO ROSSI
President, ISMEO

It is my great pleasure to contribute this brief foreword to the monograph Abu Erteila 2008-2020. Twelve Years of Research in a New Meroitic Site, celebrating the work of the archaeological mission now run on that site for twelve years by ISMEO and the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation and its significance for a better understanding of the history of Sudan.

Involvement of Italian archaeologists and cultural institutions in the country spans many decades, its beginning dating back nearly a century: between 1929 and 1932, Ugo Monneret de Villard completed his survey of Lower Nubian churches and analysed in some depth the relationship between Coptic, Greek and Islamic art. Thereafter, between 1957 and 1963, Michela Schiff Giorgini of the University of Pisa carried out six excavation campaigns on the site of Soleb in Northern Sudan; in later years, the archaeological sector witnessed a strong commitment of Italian Universities—chief among them Rome, Naples, Venice and Cassino—and cultural institutions—Istituto Superiore per la Conservazione ed il Restauro, ISMEO, Centro di Studi Sudanesi e Subsahariani to name but a few—whose activity has ranged from prehistory to the beginnings of Islam.

The Government of Italy supports cooperation with Sudan in the field of archaeological missions in the framework of the bilateral Cultural Agreement of 1974, mindful of their value as significant research activities, as valuable training tools and as conduits to transfer technologies in the sectors of cultural heritage, archaeology and restoration techniques where Italian expertise has won universal praise. Moreover, archaeological cooperation is evidence of the commitment by Italy to contribute actively to intercultural dialogue and to creating a path of sustainable development in areas where it sometimes represents the only token of our cultural presence. In this spirit, Italy is currently funding a UNESCO project aimed at rehabilitating the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum, whose collections date from the Paleolithic Age to the Tenth Century, and at promoting models of sustainable management of the national cultural heritage in order to enhance economic and human development.

I would like to thank our mission in Abu Erteila and all Italian archaeological missions in Sudan, for their commitment to strengthening the friendship between our two peoples through the re-discovery and enhancement of an extraordinary heritage.

H.E. GIANLUIGI VASSALLO
Ambassador of Italy in Khartoum

In my quality of General Director of NCAM (National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan), I am greatly honoured to introduce this volume that celebrates the twelve-years activity of the Italian-Russian joint mission in Abu Erteila.

First of all I would like to express my personal gratitude to the two authors, Eugenio Fantusati (co-director of the Mission) and Marco Baldi, experts of high scientific value, and their team: the involving of young promising researchers that they have encouraged during the activities on the field confirms, once again, how the great interest for Nubia and its antiquities, spreading their knowledge even outside the Sudanese boundaries, must be promoted through the training of new generations of scholars too.

Thanks to the Italian and Russian colleagues, Abu Erteila has today acquired a primary role in the Sudanese archaeology, and all the campaigns till now performed have stressed the relevance of such centre during the Meroitic times. Such important archaeological area lies in the densely settled region South of the capital Meroe, in the core of the kingdom. A kingdom that flourished between the 3rd century BCE and the 4th century CE becoming one of the major African states able to rule on a wide territory between actual Sudan and Southern Egypt and to create, at the same time, an original and rich culture that emphasized and enriched the most ancient and significant Nubian traditions.

In such direction the newly found structures of Abu Erteila represent, once again, a very important step towards a better comprehension of the Meroitic architecture and its religious customs as confirmed by the stands and the altar recovered in the local temple, bearing the cartouches of King Natakamani, Queen Amanitore and prince Shorkror: they have to be considered as some of the major discoveries effected in Sudan during the last years.

NCAM devotes its activities to the safeguard of the rich Sudanese heritage and promotes a profitable collaboration with prestigious international institutions. It is therefore reason of great satisfaction for me to conclude mentioning again Eugenio Fantusati and Marco Baldi, authors of the volume, and the fruitful collaboration with ISMEO – The Italian International Association for Mediterranean and Oriental Studies, that assured not only the patronage to the mission, but even the realization of this important monograph. The excellent results of the work till now conducted in Abu Erteila, here summarized, are

certainly the umpteenth expression of great dedication and significant traditions in the field of Nubian studies.

HATIM ELNOUR

General Director of NCAM
(National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums of Sudan)