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Ai lettori

Con questo volume la *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, fondata nel 1941 da Carlo Conti Rossini, riprende le proprie pubblicazioni, interrotte nel 2013 dopo la scomparsa dell'ultimo direttore, Paolo Marrassini. La concretizzazione del nuovo progetto editoriale si deve a un gruppo di studiosi di cose etiopiche che gravita intorno all'Università di Napoli "L'Orientale", e che in questi anni ha perseguito con caparbia e convinzione il raggiungimento di un risultato non scontato, anche se chiaro fin dagli inizi. Così, questa "3ª Serie" di un periodico nato settantacinque anni fa intende riproporre ai suoi potenziali lettori uno strumento di studio scientifico delle comunità umane e delle civiltà storiche di quella porzione dell'Africa orientale che comprende regioni e Paesi oggi inclusi nella definizione corrente *Orbis Aethiopicus*. Nella riaffermazione di questa parte del programma originario della rivista trovano naturale collocazione tutte le discipline e le metodologie d'indagine che ai giorni nostri caratterizzano le scienze umane: dall'archeologia all'etnografia, dalla filologia alla linguistica, dalla storia all'antropologia, dallo studio delle letterature a quello delle arti, delle scienze e delle religioni.

Eppure, accingendoci a restituire regolarità alle uscite annuali della *Rassegna*, non possiamo fare a meno di ricordare anche le difficoltà e le sfide cui andiamo incontro. Se il contesto storico e culturale dell'Europa di oggi non sembra offrire sponde rassicuranti a quanti intendono dedicarsi alla ricerca scientifica in generale e agli studi umanistici in particolare, nella tumultuosa realtà contemporanea la maggior conoscenza delle comunità dell'Africa nel loro divenire storico s'impone come un'esigenza non più rinunciabile. L'emergere di nuove soggettività politiche, i conflitti per il possesso di risorse essenziali, i fenomeni migratori transcontinentali – in sé oggetto di altri studi e di altre competenze, che non rientrano tra le finalità di questo periodico – risultano pienamente comprensibili solo a prezzo di una conoscenza non superficiale dei processi storici che han portato al costituirsi delle situazioni attuali. E ciò vale in particolar modo per una regione storico-geografica, quella 'etiopica' appunto, che vanta una storia lunghissima e un'articolazione culturale e linguistica fra le più complesse e variegata esistenti al mondo.

Sulla soglia di questa ripresa di un discorso di antica data, adattato e aggiornato secondo esigenze proprie del nostro tempo, piace esprimere l'auspicio che questo strumento di approfondimento e condivisione delle conoscenze scientifiche contribuisca a consolidare rapporti paritari e amichevoli fra l'Europa e i Paesi le cui culture sono oggetto dei nostri studi. Di ciò saranno testimonianza il numero e la costanza dei contributi di studiosi africani che saranno pubblicati sulla rivista, non meno che il bollettino delle attività didattiche e scientifiche dei centri accademici in cui si coltivano gli studi di etiopistica, ivi inclusi quelli del Corno d'Africa.

Infine, sia permesso rendere un omaggio intenso e sincero a quanti, da Carlo Conti Rossini a Martino Mario Moreno, da Lanfranco Ricci a Paolo Marrassini, con insuperata competenza e capacità han diretto la *Rassegna* nell'arco di tre quarti di secolo, e insieme ringraziare i vertici delle due istituzioni culturali e accademiche, Istituto per l'Oriente e Università di Napoli "L'Orientale", che in questi anni non hanno mai cessato di confidare nella ripartenza testimoniata dall'uscita di questo volume.

Il Direttore

To the readers

Starting from this issue, the *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, established in 1941 by Carlo Conti Rossini, resumes its publication interrupted in 2013 after the demise of its last Director, Paolo Marrassini. The current editorial project is headed by a group of researchers in Ethiopian studies pivoting around the Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”. In the past years, these scholars have stubbornly and whole-heartedly sought to achieve a demanding, but well defined result. The objective of this “3rd Series” of a periodical born seventy-five years ago is to provide potential readers with an instrument for the scientific study of regions and countries belonging to the East African sector, today referred to as *Orbis Aethiopicus*. By reaffirming this part of the original programme of the journal, all the disciplines and research methodologies typical of the humanities are followed: from archaeology to ethnography, from philology to linguistics, from history to anthropology, and from the study of literature to the history of art, science and religion.

Yet, as we prepare the regular publication of the *Rassegna*, we cannot help but recognize the difficulties and the challenges we are facing. Even though the historical and cultural context of today’s Europe does not always support those who devote themselves to scientific research (particularly in the field of humanities), in this day and age knowledge of African communities and civilizations in their historical development is an unavoidable necessity. The emergence of new political subjects, conflicts for the control of basic resources, trans-continental migrations – topics reserved to different studies and competencies, and therefore not covered by this periodical – are fully comprehensible only through an extensive knowledge of the historical processes which have led to the present situations. This inclusiveness is particularly true for the ‘Ethiopian’ region, boasting a very long history and a very complicated cultural and linguistic articulation.

On the eve of revisiting a longstanding matter, adapted and updated according to the necessities of our times, we hope that this instrument of deepening and sharing scientific gains will contribute to the strengthening of equal and friendly relationships between Europe and the countries whose cultures are the object of ‘Ethiopian’ studies.

Proof of this expectation will be the number and the regularity of the contributions from African scholars, together with the bulletin of didactic and scientific activities from academic centres, including those of the Horn of Africa, where these studies are nurtured.

Finally, we want to pay a sincere and intense tribute to those – from Carlo Conti Rossini to Martino Mario Moreno, from Lanfranco Ricci to Paolo Marrassini – who previously directed the *Rassegna* with unsurpassed competence and capability, while at the same time thanking the leaders of the two cultural and academic institutions, the Istituto per l’Oriente and the Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”, which have never wavered in providing their dedicated support to the new beginning witnessed by the publication of this volume.

The Director

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In copertina: Biblioteca Forteguerriana (Pistoia), ms. Martini etiop. 5, *Apocalisse di Maria* (*Ra'ayä Maryam*), f. 134v (gentile concessione; foto L. Mazzei)

**THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF NAPLES “L’ORIENTALE” AT SEGLAMEN,
TIGRAY, 2010-2016**

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Abstract

Report of the archaeological investigations carried out since 2010 in the modern village of Seglamen by the Italian Archaeological Expedition at Aksum, Central Tigray, of the University of Naples “L’Orientale”.

Keywords

Archaeology of Tigray – Seglamen

Since 2010 the Italian Archaeological Expedition at Aksum, Central Tigray, of the University of Naples “L’Orientale” (UNO)¹ is conducting archaeological investigations at the modern village of Seglamen.²

Research at Seglamen are part of a broader project aimed at investigating a 100 sq km transect along the Mai Negus/Haselo river valley from the southwestern periphery of Aksum to Adet, with the areas around the centres of

¹ The expedition has been directed by Rodolfo Fattovich between 2010 and 2013, by Andrea Manzo and Luisa Sernicola from 2014 onward.

² Members of the expeditions between 2010 and 2016 were: Rodolfo Fattovich, archaeologist and research director, Luisa Sernicola, archaeologist and GIS analyst, Michela Gaudiello, ceramic analyst, Marco Barbarino, surface surveyor, Diego Capra, assistant archaeologist, Gabriella Giovannone, archaeologist and ceramic analyst, Eleonora Minucci, physical anthropologist (UNO, Italy); Laurel Phillipson, lithic analyst (UK); Bar Kribus, assistant archaeologist (Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel); Rachel Moy, ceramic analyst (UCLA, USA); Assefa Getaneh, geophysicist (Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia). In July-August 2014 Helina Solomon Woldekyros, archaeozoologist (Washington University in Saint Louis, USA) examined part of the faunal remains collected during the first four seasons of excavations.

Medoge, Seglamen, Merina and Adet as major foci of investigation. The area has been selected as the Mai Negus/Haselo river valley represented an important traditional and perhaps also ancient exchange route linking Aksum, and in general the northern Ethiopian highlands, to the Tekeze river in the south-west and, through this, to the internal regions of the northern Horn of Africa (Sernicola, Phillipson 2011: 201; Fattovich *et al.* 2012: 112).

Major goals of the project are: 1) to provide a long-term reconstruction of the population history and cultural/environmental interaction dynamics in this region, and 2) to provide a detailed archaeological map of this area for the cultural heritage management of Central Tigray, to complement the assessment of the archaeological area of Aksum implemented between 2000 and 2008 (Fattovich, Takla Hagos 2006).

The project is conducted in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management of the Aksum University (AU) on the basis of a formal agreement launched in 2009 and aimed at conducting joint research programs and at providing undergraduate students in archaeology with a theoretical and practical training in archaeological survey, excavation procedures and laboratory analysis.

Research activities carried out so far included systematic surface survey throughout the study-area as well as archaeological excavations and geophysical prospections at site SG 1 at Seglamen, which are providing significant additional information on the archaeology of this area and generating insights in the population history and human-environmental interaction dynamics of the region.

Surface survey allowed to recognize remarkable differences in the settlement pattern and land exploitation strategies between the northern/central (from Medoge to Merina) and the southern (between Merina and Adet) sector of the study-area, the latter being characterized by the absence of permanent settlements. The survey also allowed to exactly locate the Proto- (ca. 400 - 50 BC) and Early/Classic Aksumite (ca. 50 BC – AD 350) cemetery of Medoge (Sernicola 2014: 480-481), first recorded and described in the 1950s by Gezau Hailemaryam (1955: 50-51) and Henri de Contenson (1961: 16-19), and to identify the settlement associated to the cemetery.

Excavations so far concentrated at site SG 1, about 11 km to the south-west of Aksum, ca. 700 m to the east of the road leading to Adet. The site extends for about 7 hectares at the edge of the western cliff of the Nigus river gorge.

The possible occurrence in this area of an archaeological site dating back to the 1st half of the 1st millennium BC was hypothesized in the early Seventies, when a royal inscription (RIÉ 1) in monumental South-Arabic commemorating the re-erection or restoration of a temple dedicated to the god *HBS*, was found by local farmers at Amda Tsion, in the southeastern sector of the modern village (Bernand, Drewes, Schneider 1991, I: 68, II: pl. 1; Schneider 1976: 81-89). Preliminary excavations aimed at detecting archaeological remains in the area were carried out in 1974 by the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, under the direction of Lanfranco Ricci (Ricci, Fattovich 1987). These brought to the light a Post-Aksumite (ca. AD 800/850-1300) rural house, built on earlier foundations.

The actual location of the pre-Aksumite³ settlement was first suggested in 2006, during the systematic survey of Aksum and its vicinities conducted in the framework of the World Bank *Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project* (Fattovich, Takla Hagos 2006: 24-26), and then confirmed in 2009, after a visit to the site by members of the UNO expedition and representatives from Aksum University and the Bureau of Culture and Tourism, Central Zone, Aksum.

Investigations focused in both the areas of Amda Tsion and Mogareb, where the remains of an affluent pre-Aksumite settlement attributable on the basis of the ceramics to the so-called “Pre-Aksumite” culture (Fattovich 1980), characterised by three major architectural phases, and associated cemetery consisting of rectangular or circular shaft tombs in some cases associated to sandstone stelae, have been brought to the light (Fattovich *et al.* 2012; Sernicola 2015; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich 2016; Sernicola, Phillipson, Fattovich *forth.*; Sernicola, Habtamu Makonnen, Phillipson 2013: 352-54).⁴

Results from excavations allowed to make inferences on some cultural and economic aspects of the communities living in this area during the 1st half of the 1st millennium BC. Analysis of the material culture and first data from

³ In the absence of a defined alternative shared by the scientific community, in this paper the lower-case term pre-Aksumite is used to refer to the chronological interval from ca. 900 to 360 BC although there is general agreement among scholars on its inadequacy (Curtis 2009: 347; Fattovich 2012: 1-60; Phillipson D.W. 2009: 257-274; Schmidt 2009: 309) for both semantic and historical reasons.

⁴ Detailed reports of each field season from 2010 are regularly published in the *Newsletter di Archaeologia CISA* available on line at http://www.unior.it/userfiles/workarea_231.

faunal remains and archaeobotany, suggest that local economy was mainly agro-pastoral, based on the cultivation and processing of cereal crops, and cattle and sheeps/goats breeding. A variety of craft and, possibly, industrial activities including cleaning and refining animal skins, wood-, stone-, pearl- and perhaps glass-working were also performed (Phillipson L. 2102: 509-530, 2013a: 380-402, 2013b: 283-303). The occurrence of imported materials from neighbouring regions as well as from the Nile Valley and the Red Sea regions suggests that the site was at a certain degree included in an interchange circuit which involved the Nile Valley, the Tigrean highland and both the African and Arabian regions of the Red Sea, possibly linking these areas with the internal regions of the northern Horn.

Further field research and additional analysis will provide additional data and help reconstructing the cultural, social and economic dynamics that characterised this region during the 1st millennium BC and accompanied the progressive emergence of Aksum.

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