

археологического института, позволяют более четко охарактеризовать эти культуры в контексте синхронных памятников Аравии и северо-восточной Африки. Культура Сабир, выделенная на западном и южном побережье Аравии, относится к концу III – началу I тыс. до н.э. Ее носителями являлись племена, практиковавшие поливное земледелие. В материальной культуре памятников, оставленных этими племенами, прослеживаются определенные черты сходства с синхронными культурами Северо-Восточной Африки, что свидетельствует о существовании регулярных контактов.

© 2002 г.

THE FIRST EXCAVATION CAMPAIGN IN «TEMPLE I» AT YEHA (TIGRAI, ETHIOPIA)

French archaeological mission led by Christian J. Robin, between 22 January and 7 February 1998, successfully carried out a first excavation campaign of the best-known and most conspicuous monument of Pre-Aksumite Tigrai, the so-called «Temple I» of Yeha¹. The decision to begin investigations from this typically South Arabian monument² reflects the main aim of the Mission, namely to make a systematic study of the South Arabian culture of Ethiopia. The following persons participated in the work, which was led by the author: Iwona Gajda (epigraphist), Philippe Aycard (site manager), Patrick Neury (architect), and Mario Mascellani (topographer-surveyor).

Anyone arriving at Yeha from the south-east, that is, along the road that shortly after leaving Inticho brings off to the north from the Adigrat-Adwa road, sees Temple I loom into view with its peculiar yellow limestone colour and great height from the dominant position it occupies on a dark hill that hides the view of the village on the south side. Contained within a double circuit of modern walls, it is flanked by the church of Enda Abba Afse, which, about 25 metres further north, rises on the higher portion of the rocky hillside. On entering the sacred enclosure from the west, one observes on the stairs and in the buildings of the two gates a large number of reused limestone blocks removed from the Sabaean sanctuary.

Visited by the Portuguese Alvares in 1520³ and by the Britons H. Salt in 1810⁴ and Th. Bent in 1893⁵, Temple I of Yeha was studied and surveyed for the first time by the German mission of E. Littmann in 1906⁶. In 1955 the Frenchman J. Doresse discovered an ancient baptismal font in the southeast corner of the Temple's interior⁷. Since then the ruins have not been subjected to any further investigation. The material originating from collapses of the walls and roof, which had risen to a height of about one third of the large room⁸ of the end of the '40s

¹ Both the name of the temple and the divinity to which it was dedicated are unknown. For the time being the name «Temple I» will be used to distinguish it (as the Germans did in their 1913 report) from «Temple II», which is situated slightly further north on the Great Be'al Gebri hill. For the archaeological topography of Yeha cf. the map recently published by *Anfray F.* Yeha. Les ruines de Grat Be'al Gebri. Recherches archéologiques // Survey of Ethiopian Studies. 1995 [1997]. 39. P. 5–24. Plan 1.

² Cf. *Conti Rossini C.* Sugli Habašāt // Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei. 1906. 15. P. 56; *Rathens C., Wissmann H. von.* Vorislamische Altertümer. II. Hamburg, 1932. S. 68–70; *Grohmann A.* Arabien, München, 1963. S. 170 ff.; *Anfray F.* Les anciens Ethiopiens. P., 1990. P. 18 ff.

³ *Alvares Fr.* Verdadeira informação das terras do Presto João das Índias. Lisboa, 1889. P. 35 ff.

⁴ *Salt H.* A Voyage to Abyssinia. P., 1814.

⁵ *Bent Th.* The Sacred City of the Ethiopians. L., 1896.

⁶ *Krencker D.* Deutsche Aksum-Expedition. II. B., 1913. S. 78–89.

⁷ *Doresse J.* Les premiers monuments chrétiens de l'Éthiopie et l'église archaïque de Yéha // *Novum Testamentum*. 1956. I. P. 209–224.

⁸ *Krencker.* Op. cit. S. 81. Abb. 168.

to be used in the construction of the church further north. Material was removed also from a small rectangular chapel and an entrance construction built in Christian times at the centre of the building and in front of the entrance⁹, respectively.

The excavation work performed during our first campaign led to the uncovering the entire paving of the temple building and the freeing of the porch structure.

The result of this campaign gives us an overview of the sanctuary, which modifies and enhances, that obtained by the 1906 German Archaeological Mission. The interior paving and the entrance platform, as well as the clearing of the vertical sections, further enhance the monumental nature of this building which, for important in the whole of pre-Aksumite Tigrai. Such an increase in the quality should, in our opinion, serve as an invitation to the Ethiopian antiquities authorities to proceed with a timely and adequate programme of consolidation and conservation of the monument.

Temple I is a large parallelepiped (15.20 m wide, 18.80 m deep and about 13 m height on the outside), the side of which are roughly aligned with the cardinal points and with an entrance only in the central third of the western facade. The dry wall delimiting it, with an average thickness of 1.40 m, consists of a double curtain of limestone blocks arranged in level courses of equivalent height and by an internal filling of stones and compacted earth. The blocks, of variable length, have been cut and laid with great care. The face of the blocks displays the classic South Arabian decoration with smooth border and central dressing. Transversal blocks laid as headers and vertically tie the two curtains together.

The building is erected on a kind of base characterised on the outside by a gradual slight increase in the courses. Before the excavation work the largest number of these expanded courses (seven) was to be found on the outer face of the rear wall (east wall), where the lowest one was found to be in contact with the rock. In a trial trench dug between the porch and the Southwest corner of the Temple as many as 13 examples of this type of course were continued (still without encountering solid rock). The uneven height of the base obviously depends on the need to match up with the uneven surface of the underlying plateau.

The inner faces of the surrounding walls show that the Temple was divided into two storeys. The four walls of the building initially rise to a height of 24 courses (or 6.30 m) at a constant thickness of 1.40 m. Then, all at once, they lose the inner curtain and only the outer one continues for a further 22 courses (that is, up to height of 5.70 m). A part of the missing inner curtain still remains in the corner to show that the vertical walls of the second storey were about 1 metre thick. In the recess formed by the decrease in thickness of the upper walls, the wooden beams supporting the first floor were laid. The careful baring of this supporting surface revealed a series of small mortises, arranged in pairs, that were used to anchor the beams.

The clearing of the paving has revealed a number of further details concerning the temple room (fig. 1, 2). The entrance (B2) is preceded by a large square cell (B1), the floor of which, made of stone slabs, is raised in the back third (i.e. the one up against the entrance) by a transversal step. The entire area is divided into five naves by four rows of three pillars (P1–P12). The central nave, aligned with the temple gate and with the entrance, is the largest. The pillars have not been conserved, although eleven monolithic bases made of volcanic rock mark their original presence, which emerge above floor level. The chiselled forms of the rectangular sections of the pillars appear on these parallelepipeds, which are supported by the underlying rock and rise to different heights.

The paving of the hypostyle hall is made of rectangular basaltic (riolite) slabs arranged in regular longitudinal rows. Part of this paving is missing in the central part of the hypostyle hall. Here the excavation work was continued as far as the solid rock. A bench (45 cm high and 40 cm wide) made of oblong blocks of the same stone runs along the foot of all the perimeter walls, the upper face remaining at the same height all around. Water and any solid fragments accumulating on the paving were discharged through two small canals that merged south of pillar P8 and then continued towards the exterior through an aperture in the southern wall.

⁹ *Ibid.* P. 79 sg. Fig. 167. The original layout of this church must date to no later than the 7th cent. A.D.; *Doresse*. *Op. cit.* P. 218 ff.

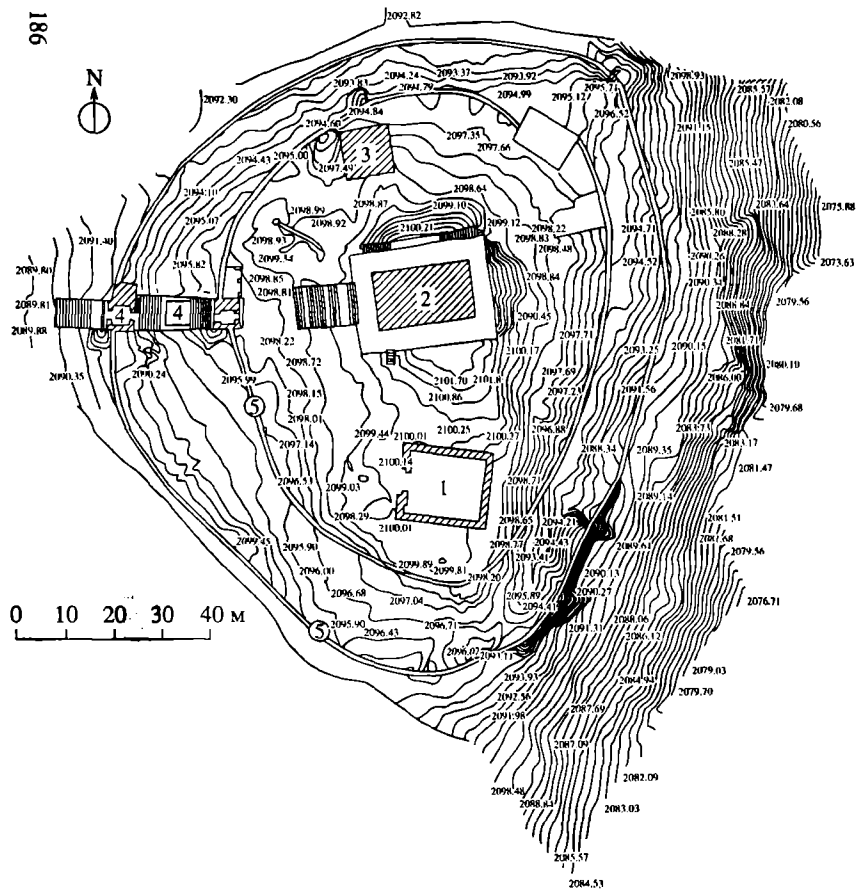


Fig. 1

Fig. 1. Ground Plan of the «Temple» Area. 1 – Temple, 1, 2 – Eglise d'Enda Abba Afse. 3 – Antiquarium, 4 – Edifices d'entrée, 5 – Encintes

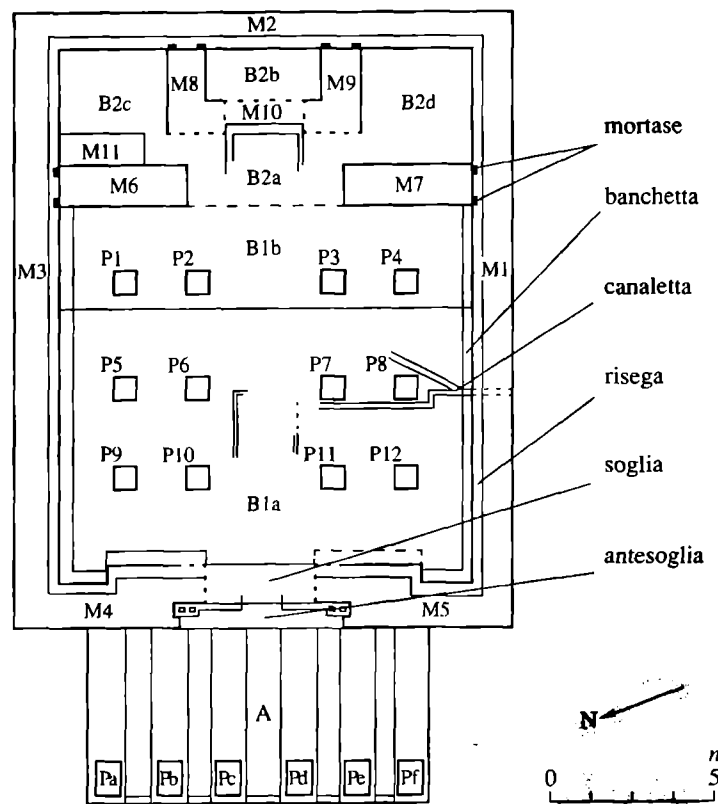


Fig. 2

Fig. 2. Ground Plan of Central Edifice. A – Pronao. B – Tempio. B 1 – cella (o sala ipostila); B 1a – parte bassa; B 1b – parte alta. B 2 – adito. B 2a – disimpegno; **B 2b – sacrario; B 2c – annesso sinistro; B 2d – annesso destro.** M 1 – M 11 – muri. P 1–P 12 – pilastri interni; Pa–Pf – pilastri esterni

Of the front walls of the entrance (M6, M7) there remain the light-coloured volcanic rock bases. Their thickness, delimited by a double course packed with stones and earth, corresponds to that revealed by the mortises in the vertical faces of the north and south walls of the Temple. The stones in the filling have been dressed and seem to be fragments of a large thick circular slab (about 130 cm in diameter) in the centre of which a circular hole with a diameter of 85 cm has been made. In all likelihood this was the mouth of a well and the fact that its fragments were used in these walls apparently indicates the fact that it pre-existed the Temple.

Access to the entrance was through the wide passageway lying between the head of walls M6 and M7. This zone (B2a), only fragments of which have been conserved, was originally higher than the upper part of the hypostyle hall (B1b). Floor level is represented by several well-dressed connected slabs that, arranged transversely, lie up against the shrine B2b. They bear a square-shaped groove that must have been used to fix an element of closure of access to the shrine.

Whereas in bedding the paving of the hypostyle hall the levelling with the underlying rock was achieved using simple earth filling, to support that of the entrance greater construction efforts were made. There are as many as three layers of thick volcanic slabs under the thinner well-dressed ones forming the floor. The lower bed, with its courses aligned with the longitudinal axis of the Temple, was used to obtain a level plane by varying the heights of the slabs corresponding to the evenness of the rock. On top a second bed of large slabs arranged transversely with respect to the first one a third layer be laid, again with a longitudinal alignment. Lastly, the upper slabs of the paving are laid on top in this area of access to the entrance. Less than in the lower one, the slabs in all the other layers seem to be «stretched» as you go towards the hypostyle hall. It is thus impossible to determine exactly where the step marking the raised portion of the entrance lay. It is not unlikely, however, that it rang along the alignment of the western faces of walls M6 and M7.

On the east side these layers of superimposed slabs arranged in alternating directions come to an and against the wall base (M10) which previously delimited the small shrine area. This wall, which is clearly visible from the east (since we found the shrine area to be lacking a pavement and to have been excavated down to the solid rock level), is composed of oblong blocks clearly showing signs of having been reused. Together with the previously seen well fragments these indicate that at Yeha, before the time of Temple I, there must have been a smaller temple probably located in the vicinity if not actually on the same site.

In the room to the right of the shrine (B2d) a baptismal font had been built in mediaeval times. In the one on the left (B2c) a large foundation layer of stones and earth was found which, as shown by a slab still conserved in the Northeast corner, must have supported a comparatively high paving. It is possible therefore that access from B2a to these side rooms was achieved by climbing a step.

After completing the exposure of the internal structures, the excavation work was continued on the outside of the Temple, in front of the entrance wall. Here, despite the constraints due to the existence of several recent graves, it was possible to open a number of trial trenches that actually confirmed the existence of a large platform (A) forming the base of the monumental porch of the Temple.

The upper face of this platform (which has deep and carefully constructed foundations) measures 10.40 m (north-south) by 5.10 m (east-west). The horizontal portion is composed of six large parallel beams (Ta-Tf) of volcanic stone 1.10 m wide and 65 cm thick, on average) that, starting from the Temple and spaced at approximately 60 cm intervals, cover the entire length of the building. The floor was obtained by filing the gaps in the beams with rubble and paving the upper surface. A rectangular recess (75 cm wide and 90 cm long) that is seen to be carved into the distal portion of each beam, attests to the original existence here of six large pillars (Pa-Pf) preceding the entrance to the Temple. The fact that the north and south limits of this porch are vertically aligned with the two «windows» that can still be observed in the upper portion indicates that the six pillars were joined to the Temple by means of six horizontal beams, and that the porch was thus provided with a monumental entrance porch. This hypothesis is compatible with what it is possible to observe in pre-Islamic Yemenite temples.

Judging by the unfinished appearance of the foundations, the base of the porch must have originally been below ground level. This is shown also by the existence of a buttress on the south side of the platform that would certainly not have been visible. There was therefore no need for steps leading up to the platform from a ground level that must have been only slightly lower than the present level. The soil surrounded the bases of the large beams Ta-Tf, and the difference in level of about 60 cm was easily bridged by climbing two steps dug out of the space between on the front.

Entry from the porch to the cell was through a monumental portal that has unfortunately only been partially conserved. The raised doorstep is made of a double course of blocks, wedged on the inside, which occupies the entire gap between walls M4 and M5. A layer of slabs probably covered this double row. At the level of this doorstep the ends of the head of walls M4 and M5 are not clearly defined. The final blocks forming the jambs are missing and it is difficult to determine the exact size of the entrance. However, in view of the size of the threshold blocks it could not have been much smaller than the opening we see today (about 3.80 m). A reduction in the size of this wide entrance achieved by means of suitable panelling seems to be documented by several recesses visible in the jambs and on the paving slabs in the area preceding the threshold.

Nearly all the material found during the excavation work (33 zambils of pottery and 33 objects) are of local origin and – in view of the archaeological context (erection of Christian structures inside the Temple; presence of graves in the vicinity of the porch and the base of the Temple) – refer to periods preceding or later than the so-called «pre-Aksumite» (or «Ethiopic-Sabaeen») period of Ethiopia.

However, conspicuous among these materials are the following vases and objects of certain South Arabian relevance:

a. Pottery

A small group of vase fragments found during the cleaning of the gaps in the rock in the hypostyle hall. The potsherds, which differ clearly from the others not only in their morphology but also because of the predominance of the pinkish colour of the clay, the large number of white inclusions and the orange-pink or reddish-violet glazing on the outside, refer to vases for which it is easy to find equivalents in South Arabia.

b. Objects

Several of the objects reveal a clear South Arabian origin:

1. A fragment of stone block with incised figures (YE. 98. I. O. 6). Found in the accumulated soil covering the porch, this yellow limestone is 7.5 high, 8.7 cm wide and 6.5 cm deep. Starting from the left, that is, from the only intact edge, of the smoothed surface two vertical incised metopes are visible, the first bearing the interwoven bodies of two snakes (?), and the second an unidentified arc motif. Both the technique used and the iconography (at least that of the intertwined snakes) are highly reminiscent of the so-called Banat 'Add figuration commonly found on the pillars of several temples in the Yemen Jawf.

2. A fragment of inscribed vase (YE. 98. I. O. 33). Found in trial trench 2 west of the porch, at a depth of 1.60 m from the upper surface; the vase wall, light brown in colour, measures 7.2 × 5.2 cm. Incised on the surface before firing there are two South Arabian characters – a *ra* and part an *alif*. Even through the custom of writing on vase surfaces is well known in the South Arabian environment, it is possible that this object may in any case have been later than the pre-Aksumite period.

From the architectonic point of view, the Temple of Yeha displays obvious similarities with the hypostyle South Arabian temples, that is, with those scattered over the Jawf/Hadramawt¹⁰ catchment area. The Hadramite temples, although displaying considerable similarities not only in the form of the hypostyle hall and the position of the entrance, but also in the presence of an

¹⁰ Jung M. *The Religious Monuments of Ancient Southern Arabia. A Preliminary Typological Classification* // *Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*. 1998. 48. P. 196 ff.

entrance vestibule (the temples of al-Hajrah and Husn al-Qays¹¹) and a single central shrine (temples of Mashga, Makaynun and Ba Qutfa¹²), nevertheless in the architectonic technique used (there wood and clay commonly used).

The examples from the Minean area (Jawf) should doubtless be considered closer. Here there are a larger number of naves and the construction method used is more similar (temples of ash-Shaqab, Ma'in [*intra mures*], Baraqish [ancient Yathil: Temple A, dedicated to Nakrah])¹³. In particular, Temple A of Yathil, excavated by the author in 1990–1992, represents the absolute parallel closer to Temple I of Yeha¹⁴. This observation is interesting as in Temple of Baraqish three distinct construction phases were identified (Minean A, B, C) which, benefiting from rather accurate dating (the more recent dates of B and C are supported also by epigraphic evidence), may be useful in making a chronological attribution for the Temple of Yeha.

The comparison with Temple A of Yathil refers above all to its earliest phase (Minean C)¹⁵, and there are many observed similarities, not only as regards the overall architectonic conception, but also the technical solutions used, the furnishing details and the decorative elements. Despite the differences between the two temples, such as the internal organisation of the entrances or the number of storeys, the number and type of similarities quite astounding. This fact is therefore not due to chance and is certainly of use in dating the Tigrayan Temple.

Phase C of the Temple of Nakrah has been dated to the 7–6th cent. BC¹⁶. In particular, several archaeological features (such as the ascertained existence during this earlier phase of the position in the walls to provide access to the Temple, which would indicate a chronological link between the place of worship and the construction – or reconstruction – of the city walls by the Sabaeen king Karib'il Watar bin Sumhu 'Ali¹⁷) apparently set the time of the first layout of the Temple of Nakrah at around 700 B.C.

In consideration of the strong structural similarities, Temple I of Yeha cannot have been built much later than this date, also in view of the fact that, after Karib'il Watar, the Sabaeen domination of Yemen began to weaken.

However, South Arabian worship on the hill of Yeha must have had an even longer history. As we have seen, reused materials have often been found in the foundations of Temple I (in the substructures of the shrine, in the entrance walls, in the entrance platform), coming from an earlier construction, almost certainly a small temple, that. Probably located on the same site as Temple I, could be dated to the 8th century B.C., that is, to when the power of the Sabaeen empire was being consolidated in the colonies of Ethiopia. The fragment of stone block with «Banat 'Add» type figured decoration found in trial trench 1 outside the Temple, must be relevant to this earlier construction and, in view of the chronological data on this type of relief being collected in the Yemen Jawf, apparently confirms this dating.

Furthermore, if a small long-necked carinated jug found in a grave at the base of the facade of the platform (trial trench 2) is confirmed as dating to the 2nd millennium BC. (as my colleague R. Fattovich suggests), it may be claimed that the Sabaeans, in building the Temple and its porch, must have encroached upon existing archaeological levels (of local origin). This would indicate that this hill of Yeha was inhabited in very ancient times.

The close architectonic relations between Temple I of Yeha and the Yemenite hypostyle temples is interesting as it raises a number of historical issues. Its interpretation is, however, no easy matter as we have to choose between two possible, but opposite, assumptions: 1) if Temple I of Yeha was built by Sabaeen peoples, also the Temple of Nakrah at Yathil would have to

¹¹ Breton J.-F., Badre L., Audouin R., Seigne J. Wadi Hadramawt. Prospections 1978–1979. Beyrut, 1982. Pl. III, VI.

¹² Ibid. Pl. II, V, IX–XI.

¹³ Maigret A. de. Arabia Felix. Un viaggio nell'archeologia dello Yemen. Milano, 1996.

¹⁴ Maigret A. de, Robin Ch. Le temple de Nakrah à Yathil (aujourd'hui Baraqish), Yemen. Résultats des deux premières campagnes de fouilles de la Mission italienne // CRAI. 1993. P. 427–496.

¹⁵ Ibid. Fig. 2, 4.

¹⁶ Maigret A. de. La seconda campagna di scavi della missione Archeologica Italiana a Baraqish (Yemen 1992) // Conference ISMEO. 1993. 6. Roma, 1992. P. 20.

¹⁷ RES 3946/1.

be considered a Sabaeen building (and not Minean, as has so far been the case); 2) if its archaeological typology situates the Temple of Yathil among the Jawf hypostyle temples, also Temple I of Yeha would have considered the work of architects from this area: it would not therefore be a typically Sabaeen construction.

Acceptance of the first hypothesis amounts to denying the typological value of South Arabian religious architecture, perhaps casting doubt on its credibility owing to the partial nature of the data so far made available by archaeological research. Considering the second as valid questions the absolute Sabaeen cultural identity of the peoples arriving in Ethiopia from South Arabia. The gaps in our present knowledge do not allow us to state with certainty, which of the two hypotheses is correct. I personally tend to agree with the second one, for two reasons: 1) The confirmation of the limitation to this Jawf/Hadramawt basin of the hypostyle temples is provided by the presence, hitherto exclusive and alternative, of courtyard temples in other areas, including the Sabaeen area. We are already familiar with numerous pre-Islamic temples in Yemen and I do not think it is possible to appeal to the sparseness of the documentation in order to challenge the exclusiveness of the distribution of hypostyle temples in the Jawf/Hadramawt zone. 2) There is no reason why the South Arabian migrants to Africa should have brought exclusively a Sabaeen culture. Just as there does not appear to be any contradiction between the existence in the Sabaeen dominated Jawf of hypostyle temples of local conception. I do not see why it should be surprising to find a Jawf-inspired hypostyle Temple in an Ethiopian colony politically governed by Sabaeans.

One final question. Was the construction of the Temple of Yeha actually completed? To tell the truth some doubt remains. It is surprising that there should be no traces (not the slightest fragment either in the Temple, or in its surroundings, or in the village) of the twelve pillars of the hypostyle hall and of the six pillars of the porch. Even the large beams of the floor of the first storey, with the pillars (or columns) supporting the roof have left no trace. It is true that the material resulting from the collapse of the building was used in the construction of the nearby church, but the filling visible at the time of the Deutsche Aksum-Expedition was actually not particularly abundant¹⁸ and certainly not enough to incorporate all the above material. On the other hand, the pillars were too large to be reused in the Abba Afse church or to be made of perishable material (such as wood).

The hypothesis that the construction work was interrupted, if proved, would provide important evidence for the setting of the final date of the Temple. It could in fact be related to a phase of definitive weakening of Sabaeen dominance in Ethiopia, a phase of decline that probably reflected that occurring in the mother country at the reign of Karib'il Watar the Great.

Alessandro de Maigret

ПЕРВЫЙ СЕЗОН РАСКОПОК «ХРАМА I» В ЙЕХА (ЭФИОПИЯ)

A. de Maigret

В 1998 г. Французская археологическая миссия под руководством Кр. Робена провела первый сезон раскопок одного из самых значительных и известных эфиопских памятников доаксумской эпохи, известный как «Храм I» в Йеа. Выбор памятника был обусловлен общей задачей миссии, нацеленной на систематическое изучение древней южноаравийской культуры в Эфиопии. В результате исследований удалось установить достаточно близкое архитектурное сходство между храмом в Йеа и древнеюменскими гипостильными храмами, особенно с храмом Накраха, раскопанным Итальянской археологической миссией в Баракише (древний *Иасиль*). Данное обстоятельство позволяет предположить, что храм был возведен сабейцами в период основания ими своих колоний в северо-восточной Африке. Имеются определенные археологические свидетельства того, что постройка храма не была завершена. Возможно, это было связано с ослаблением сабейского могущества в середине I тыс. до н.э., что безусловно отразилось и на судьбе сабейских колоний в Эфиопии.

¹⁸ *Krencker*. Op. cit. Abb. 168.