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The Meroitic palace B1500 at Napata – Jebel Barkal

An architectural perspective

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General introduction

The following dissertation intends to delve into the architectural description of the major features characterizing the Meroitic palace B1500 at Napata (modern town of Karima, North Sudan), located at the foot of the Jebel Barkal, the “Sacred Mountain”.

One of the most interesting aspects concerning this building is certainly the absorbability of Hellenistic influences reflected in its architecture and decoration, which show a strong capability of developing new formal elaborations.

In order to accomplish this purpose, it was necessary to proceed to a preliminary collection of the available data which, to this date, has yet to be gathered in a single publication. Starting from that, the description of the palace has been divided into three different sections corresponding to specific architectural components of the edifice: the entrances, the foundation platform, and the peristyle. This scheme has been adopted to facilitate a comparative approach capable of revealing possible models and points of contact between B1500 and other Meroitic and Hellenistic structures.

While traces of the ancient Napata were first recognized at least in the Nineteenth Century, the first archaeological expeditions started only in 1916, when George Reisner arrived at the site on behalf of Harvard University and the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston.

The activity of the Italian Archaeological Mission at the site, initially directed by Sergio Donadoni of the University “La Sapienza” of Rome, dates back to the 1970s. In 1973 the first two structures, identified as temples (B1300 and B1400), were brought to light at the edges of the cultivated fields adjacent to the Nile.

The palace of Natakamani became the major focus of the Mission since its discovery in 1978, when the excavation area was moved at the foot of the mountain, where it is currently located.

In 2006 the direction of the Mission was entrusted to Alessandro Roccati (University of Turin), who concentrated the research on some areas situated in the vicinity of the palace in order to better clarify the layout of the structures adjacent to it.

Finally, the excavations of B1500 resumed few years later, in 2011, when the direction of the Mission turned over to Prof. E. M. Ciampini of the Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, which currently supports the expedition together with the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Moreover, since the 2014-2015 season, the Mission is part of the Qatar-Sudan Archaeological Project (project QSAP.A.34), which is also fundamental in sustaining the archaeological activity.

From the resumption of the dig in the palatial area, one of the main aims of the Mission has been the outlining of the outer perimeter walls of the edifice, in order to complete the plan in all its sectors. As the excavations proceed, the main walls composing the structure emerging from the ground are being restored to preserve them: the result is a better visibility of the walls composing the foundation platform of the edifice (cf. *infra*).

During the last campaigns, the deepening of the excavation in the inner structure of the palace unexpectedly brought to light the presence of a massive pre-existing wall related to an older building. In order to better investigate this evidence, the last season (2016/2017) focused on digging the western side of the palace, reaching its foundation level both in correspondence to the perimeter wall and to the inner ones composing the platform.

The main premise which needs to be outlined when ancient palatial architecture is involved is certainly the very definition of the word “palace” itself. The term is nowadays commonly used when referring to large, monumental buildings functioning as dwelling places for kings and/or high officials. Nevertheless, when speaking about an ancient context, specifically the Meroitic one in our case, we should first define the limits of such a word.

In this respect, the Meroitic written sources are not useful, lacking a specific corresponding expression capable of orientating the path of this research¹. Turning our attention to the archaeological data, we find out that tracing a model collecting a series of homogenous architectural traits is equally ineffectual². For example, important characteristics used as criteria for the designation of a building as “palace” have often been its imposing dimensions, the symmetry of its layout, and its localization in a specific context³; nevertheless, such an ensemble of parameters leaves inevitably out of the picture a number of cases where these features are only partially present.

Another key point which has usually been considered fundamental in the recognising of the “palatial” character of an edifice is its antithetic relation to the temples. Nevertheless, in the Meroitic context, this aspect requires an even more careful approach, considering that the nature of the relationship between these two institutions has yet to be properly understood⁴.

¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 24.

² MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 27-30.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 28.

The effort to connect a group of specific and systematic features to the concept of “palace” could therefore seem vain. Nonetheless, a reverse approach may perhaps represent a partial solution to this issue. In fact, instead of starting from the definition of the term, we should first bring our attention to the archaeological evidence and gain from it the greatest possible amount of data capable of reflecting the nature of the building on an empirical basis⁵.

In the case of building B1500, the designation of “palace of Natakamani” was the consequence of the discovery, in 1984, of a stela bearing the names of Amanitore and Arikankharor, respectively wife and son of the Meroitic king Natakamani. Although it was not preserved, it is likely that the name of the king was originally engraved on the first line of the stela, now completely erased⁶.

As the excavation progressed, the royal character of the building was even more clear, as pointed out by the monumental character of the central rooms of the structure and the features of their decoration (cf. *infra*).

After an opening introduction outlining the historical context of the ancient Napata, the dissertation proceeds to a description of the other palatial structures located on the site. The proper description of palace B1500 will follow, divided into its most characterizing features. A synthesis of the remarks emerged during the discussion will finally close the dissertation presenting a series of future perspectives on the research.

⁵ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 26.

⁶ TIRADRITTI 1992, pp. 69-70.

1. Historical introduction

The palace of Natakamani is located near the eastern slope of the Jebel Barkal: the “Pure Mountain”, a massif of red sandstone at the South-Western limits of the Nubian Desert tableland. The *Jebel* lies on the right bank of the Nile – which here flows from North-East to South-West – in the vicinity of the modern town of Karima (about 400 km north of Khartoum)⁷. In this region, the fertile land makes the cultivation possible nowadays as it did in ancient times; however, this fecundity extends for just a few kilometres, starting again only near the town of Kawa.

As far as we know⁸, the ancient town of Napata acquired royal connotation as early as the New Kingdom, when the Egyptian expansionism reached its maximum in the East to consolidate the Levantine frontiers, and in the South towards Nubia, a crucial region for trading. Here in fact several caravan routes started directed to Ethiopia, the Red Sea, and central Africa which were great sources of raw materials and exotic products. Furthermore, Nubia was also a primary source for gold: while the mining sites of the region were already known during the Old Kingdom⁹, their exploitation peaked only in the second half of the II millennium BC, when the Egyptian conquest reached the Wadi Allaqi and the Western Desert, and allowed for a more systematic utilization of the resources¹⁰.

During the reign of Thutmose III (about 1460 BC), the Egyptian domain – whose first stages began in the XVIII dynasty – reached the IV cataract of the Nile¹¹; when Thutmose arrived to Jebel Barkal, he founded the town of Napata along the lines of the Egyptian Thebes¹², and decided to set in this place the southernmost frontier of his domain.

This choice was surely motivated by the strategic position of the area: the region between the IV and the V cataracts – called *Kry* in the Egyptian textual evidence¹³ – was in fact an unoccupied zone useful to exert control over the little chiefdoms who in turn retained authority on the lands further south¹⁴; furthermore, all the products going North

⁷ For a close topographical examination of the region cf. MITCHELL 1999.

⁸ Considering that the older levels have not been excavated yet, the royal connotation of the city could be older than known so far.

⁹ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 34.

¹⁰ Cf. KLEMM ET AL. 2001, in particular pp. 649-654. VERCOUTTER 1959, pp. 120-153.

¹¹ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 92-101.

¹² For the importance of Thebes in this period as paradigm of model city, cf. KEMP 2006, pp. 264-265 and GARDINER 1905, pp. 20-22.

¹³ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 115.

¹⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 94.

had to transit here to reach their destination. However, another reason for choosing this site was surely of symbolic nature: the mountain was in fact considered a sacred place by the Nubians, who associated it with the cult of an ancient ram-headed god¹⁵; these traits probably led to its identification with the Theban Amun, the dynastic god par excellence¹⁶. In particular, in this mythological scenario, the mountain was considered the god's dwelling.

Also the textual evidence seems to confirm the ancient interpretation of the mountain as Amun's birthplace. The papyrus P. Cairo 58038¹⁷ (Boulaq 17, XVII din.) opens with the claim:

*Hail, Amun-Re
 lord of the Throne of the Two lands, prince of Karkak
 Bull of his mother, who stands before his fields
 who steps widely, first one of Upper Egypt
 lord of the Medjay and ruler of Punt
 great one of heaven, eldest of the earth
 lord of all that exists, who remains in the possession of all things*¹⁸

It is likely that the phrase "Throne of the Two lands" already indicated the Jebel Barkal at this time, as illustrated also by the later text carved in the Thutmose III stela, discovered by Reisner in Napata inside the B500 temple¹⁹:

*My [Majesty speaks(?):] Hear ye, O people of the Southland who are at the Holy Mount, which was called "Thrones-of-the-Two-Lands" among the people (the Egyptians?) when it was not (yet?) known, that ye may learn the wonderful deed of [Amun-Rā] before the face of all the Two Lands*²⁰

The text's apparent purpose is to provide an association between the Amun of Thebes – called "Lord of the Throne(s) of the Two Lands" already during the Middle Kingdom – and the Jebel Barkal²¹; in the stela, in fact, the mountain is said to be the

¹⁵ VINCENTELLI 1999, p. 94.; TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 303-309; also BONNET; VALBELLE 2004, pp. 158-159.

¹⁶ In Egypt, Amun was usually represented in human form (head and body) with a headcloth on the top of which stood two vertical feathers; nevertheless, he was frequently associated with the ram (TOSI 2011, pp. 15-16).

¹⁷ ASSMANN 1995, p. 121.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*: *inḏ hr.k Imn-R'w – nb nst t3wy hnty Ipt swt – K3-mwt.f hnty sh̄t.f – pḏ nmtt hnty t3-šm' – nb mḏ3w hq3 pwnt – wr n pt smsw n t3 – nb nti mn iḥt nbt.*

¹⁹ REISNER G.A.; REISNER M.B. 1933, pp. 24-39. Cf. p. 24 for further details about the place of discovery.

²⁰ REISNER G.A.; REISNER M.B. 1933, p. 35: *[16.85 cm missing: ḏd(?) hm].i sḏmw rmt hnty-t3 nty m p3 ḏw-w'b ḏdw r.f nswt-t3wy m rmt n rh.tw.f iḥ rh.tn t3 by3yt nt [imn-r'] hft hr n t3wy tmw.*

²¹ A similar association was made also at Naga: TÖRÖK 2002, pp. 40-41.

epithet's birthplace, and consequently the god's one too. Recognising the mountain as the dynastic god's First residence implies not only a legitimation of his cult, but also a legitimation of the king's power over the territory.

It is not surprising then that from this moment onwards the area around the *jebel* was deeply tied to the cult by the construction of several temples. The most important one is surely the B500, dedicated to Amun of Napata. The first excavations, led by G. A. Reisner in 1916, brought to light the ruins of the structure, immediately recognised by the archaeologist as “manifestly in its day the most important monument at Gebel Barkal”²².

It is likely that its first foundations were laid by Thutmose III because, in his already mentioned stela, he refers to a “resthouse of eternity” (*ḥnw n nḥh*) dedicated to Amun; even though its remains have yet to be found, we can assume that it laid under what would later be the official temple of the god²³; the discovery of a mud-brick structure below the B500 temple seems to validate this theory²⁴.

From its first foundation to the Third Intermediate Period (1069 B.C ca.) different Egyptian pharaohs restored and expanded the edifice²⁵. The temple was built in stone for the first time probably during Amenhotep III's reign – later Akhenaton, 1352 BC: the use of *talatat* masonry²⁶ clearly points at this age. In a second phase, probably at the end of the XVIII dyn.²⁷, the temple was enlarged adding a new court. Sethi I partially roofed the open court leaving the central axis open, and his son Ramses II started building a massive hypostyle hall which remained unfinished; had it been completed it would have reached 104 metres in length²⁸. Only minor restorations were made during the XX dynasty, and in the following years any working activity connected to the temple ceased.

The building activity related to edifice B500 may be interpreted as a reflection of the political context of the time; in fact, while many conservative interventions were performed during the New Kingdom, with the arrival of the Third Intermediate Period²⁹ both the Egyptian hegemony and the building activity apparently came to an end³⁰. It is

²² REISNER 1917, p. 215.

²³ KENDALL 2016, p. 36.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ For a detailed report about the interventions on the temple, cf. KENDALL 2016, pp. 35-82.

²⁶ For further details about this kind of masonry, cf. PECK 1999, p. 234 and REDFORD 1999 pp. 469-473 in the same volume); ARNOLD 2003, p. 238.

²⁷ KENDALL 2016, p. 39.

²⁸ KENDALL 2016, p. 45.

²⁹ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 101-109; GRIMAL 2011, pp. 379-380.

³⁰ This is suggested by the current available data, new excavations could change our understanding of this process.

not surprising then that we must wait for the emergence of the XXV dynasty, the so-called “Nubian” one, to notice a new blooming of Amun’s cult at Jebel Barkal.

The political and administrative void left by the Egyptian withdrawal from Nubia made space for the appearance of local political entities, never completely stifled by the Egyptian domain. Since the first stages of the conquest, in fact, the native political structures were incorporated into the Egyptian administration of Nubia in the form of vassals subordinated to the Viceroy of Kush, in charge of tax collecting³¹. Moreover, the chiefs’ sons were usually taken to the Egyptian court to be educated before being sent back to Nubia to be reinstated in their local administrative position: a position which remained hereditary³².

Therefore, the Egyptian domain over Nubia was more an administrative and commercial expansion rather than an exploitative, colonial one³³. Following Török’s interpretation, while the governmental structure was based on the network of the temple-towns rotating around a specific cult, the production and redistribution system was left in the hands of local chiefs³⁴.

It was precisely this integration in the Egyptian managing system that made possible, after the withdrawal from Nubia, the emergence of independent political structures recalling that same pharaonic model they had come to depend on.

The Kurru chiefdom – from the necropolis’ toponym where ancestors and rulers of the XXV dynasty were buried – was actually the result of the end of the Egyptian control³⁵.

Even though the lack of evidence really undermines our understanding of Egyptian and Nubian history in this period, the origin of the “Aithiopian Dynasty³⁶” which will re-unify Egypt by binding itself to pharaonic ideology is probably found at this point.

The leader of this process was Piankhi, third ruler of the 25th dynasty (747-716 BC), who reported the account of his campaign on a stela inside the B500 temple³⁷. With Piankhi this edifice returns to be an important cultic centre: a massive restoration began and to the temple were added a new outer wall and a new throne room; the hypostyle hall

³¹ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 100.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 99-101.

³⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 111.

³⁵ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 110-112.

³⁶ On the origin of this designation cf. TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 41 and DE ROMANIS 1999, p. 84-87.

³⁷ For a recent edition of the stela, cf. GRIMAL 1981; for the account on the historical events related to the 25th dyn., cf. instead TÖRÖK 1997A, pp.131-188.

was finally completed following Ramses II's model and was appointed a larger outer court and fronted by a new pylon. These renovations brought the temple to a total length of 156 metres³⁸.

To emphasise the connection between the current Nubian and the previous Egyptian dynasties, the access to the temple was decorated with ram statues coming from the temple of Soleb. This one, built by Amenhotep III during the XVIII dynasty, had become through the centuries a model for temple architecture; its accesses were adorned with lion-headed and ram-headed sphinxes, a prevailing iconographical motif during the Twenty-Fifth Dynasty due to their divine and royal connotations³⁹. The choice of using statues coming from a paradigmatic pharaonic temple is significant for the legitimation of the new dynasty, interested to appear as the direct heir of the Egyptian rulers.

In this period originated some themes connected with the concept of royalty, which prove fundamental to understand some of the aspects related to Meroitic ideology. When a king died, the inauguration of a new sovereign was certainly one of the most important moments in the management of power: the acquisition of kingship was in fact the result of a long process centred on the concept of divine legitimation. The death of the king meant entering a state of bewilderment the only remedy to which was the identification of a new guarantor.

Aspelta's Election Stela⁴⁰ illustrates these dynamics:

Come, let us cause our lord to appear (in procession), (for we are) like a herd of cattle without their drover. [...]
Our lord is here with us, (but) we do not know him! Would that we might know him, that we might enter under him and serve him, as Two-lands served Horus son of Isis, after he rested upon the throne of his father Osiris, and give praise to his Two Uraei. [...]
But there is (still) this god Amen-Rê, lord of the Thrones of Two-lands, who resides in Pure-mountain (Gebel Barkal)—he is a god of Kush. Come, let us go to him. We cannot accomplish anything without him; (for) an affair carried out without him cannot be good, while an event in the hand of the god is successful.
He has been the god of the kings of Kush since the time of Rê. It is he that guides us.
The kings of Kush have (always) been in his hands. He has (always) given (it) to (his) son whom he loves.
Let us give praise to him, kiss the ground on their (sic) bellies, and say in his presence,

³⁸ KENDALL 2016, pp. 47-51.

³⁹ ROCCATI 1999, pp. 82-83.

⁴⁰ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 218-219; *FHN* I, n. 37, p. 235-238.

'We are come to you, O Amûn, that you may give us our lord to vivify us, to build temples for all the gods and goddesses of South-land and North-land, and to institute their endowments.

The text continues describing the arrival of the high officials to the temple of Amun: after having performed the ritual purification acts, the army chiefs, and the palace officials enter the temple with the sons of the dead king; they are placed in front of the god (=his statue) so that he can choose the new king. It is interesting to note that this oracular practice explicitly recalls some divination techniques already used for the legitimation of royal power during the New Kingdom⁴¹.

Moreover, the stela's text clearly highlights some important aspects connected to the establishment of the new king: the dynastic succession of the heirs and divine consent. In this way, the election of a new ruler was justified both on the human and on the divine sphere⁴².

After this first phase the enthronement process continued through a kind of ritual pilgrimage performed by the king by visiting the most important Amun temples inside his kingdom: Napata, Kawa, and Pnubs⁴³. Considering the original political fragmentations that characterized the Kushite region before the unification, the multiple investitures in these different cult centres can be interpreted as a commemorative recall of the ancient governmental forms⁴⁴. The motif of “ambulatory kingship”⁴⁵ will be a central concept for the Meroitic royal ideology as well.

The first foundation of the temple B800 at Napata roots at the origins of the Nubian dynasty (second half 8th cent. BC)⁴⁶; it was built with mud-bricks to replace the B500, whose first phases of the restoration had just started. The necessity to build a new structure for the cult of Amun of Napata, in temporary absence of its historic place, clearly indicates the importance of the cult of this god. To decorate the temple, some sandstone statues representing rams (currently at the local Museum of Karima) were commissioned to native craftsmen⁴⁷; these statues confirm the edifice's attribution to house of Amun.

⁴¹ Cf. ČERNÝ 1962, pp. 35-48. On the concept of royal legitimation see also MAILLOT 2016 B, pp. 274-277; on the oracular practice connected to kingship celebration at Napata see also CIAMPINI 2013B, pp. 26-46.

⁴² TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 216-220.

⁴³ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 220-221.

⁴⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 230-234; POPE 2014, pp. 35-42.

⁴⁵ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 230;

⁴⁶ REISNER 1920, pp. 247-259.

⁴⁷ KENDALL 2016, pp. 110-111.

Since in the late 7th century Anlamani ordered it to be re-built in stone, it is likely that its original temporary function did not subsist anymore: it has been supposed that, at this time, the temple B800 was dedicated to Amun's cult in his Theban form⁴⁸.

The underscoring of the architectural aspects connected to the places of the cult of Amun offered so far is due to the importance of this cult in the shaping of the ideological motifs related to the concept of royalty in Napata, both in Napatean and Meroitic times.

After the conquest of Egypt by Alexander, in 332 BC, the kingdom of Kush reacted with a series of incursions in Lower Nubia and Upper Egypt against the Ptolemaic domination: the response was a military campaign intended to strengthen the Egyptian rule between the First and Second cataracts.

The resulting political stability laid the foundations for a new market based on luxury products and exotic animals; other goods could also have been involved, but nothing certain can be affirmed without a proper study of the ceramic material. This trade moved in both directions: the Nubian region exported mostly gold, elephants, ivory, ebony and African spices, while from Egypt came artefacts and prestige goods⁴⁹. The discovery of some of these in territories far from the traditional centres of power is peculiar. The case of the modern Sennar (about 300 km south of Khartoum) is a prime example: in the 1920s a Meroitic necropolis with several precious objects of Hellenistic origin was found here⁵⁰.

On the wave of this season of prosperity, an intense building activity spread throughout the kingdom, especially in those places strictly connected with the Kushite domain: Napata, Meroe, Musawwarat es Sufra⁵¹.

It was in this scenario that one of the most important moments of Nubian history took place: the transition from the Napatean (7th -3rd cent. BC) to the Meroitic (3rd BC – 3rd AD) age, traditionally associated with the relocation of the capital from Napata to Meroe. In reality, it was not the capital that was moved, but only the royal necropolis: the tomb of Arkakamani (Ergamenes I) – to whom the sources ascribe the event – is in fact located near Meroe city, between the Fifth and Sixth cataracts.

Nevertheless, it is quite clear that his reign was perceived as a crucial transition period, highlighted by the rising of a new dynasty.

⁴⁸ KENDALL 2016, p. 111.

⁴⁹ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 436; SIST 1999, p.114.

⁵⁰ DIXON 1963, pp. 227-234.

⁵¹ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 436.

Agatarchides of Cnidus – a Greek author who lived at the Ptolemaic court during the 2nd cent. BC⁵² – tells us that Ergamenes I was the first to rebel against the authority of the Amun priesthood of Napata by slaughtering all the priests inside “the golden temple of Aithiopians”⁵³.

Not wishing to indagate about the plausibility of this episode, what is really important is to underline that the rise to power of Ergamene was interpreted as a violent turning point in Nubian history.

The Roman conquest of Alexandria and Egypt, in 30 BC, caused the same reaction that occurred in the occasion of the Alexandrine one. In Upper Egypt, there was an anti-Roman uprising in which Meroe was also involved. However, the arrival of Cornelius Gallus, first *praefectus* of Egypt⁵⁴, soon ended the revolt and his actions were put in writing on a trilingual granite stela (hieroglyphic, Latin, and Greek) found at Philae in 1896, in front of Augustus’ temple⁵⁵.

The following is an extract from the Latin version:

[...] after having cau[gh]t the leaders of their revolts and [brou]ght the army beyond the Nile Cataract, a region to which neither the Roman people nor the kings of Egypt ha[d mar]ched, and having subjected the Thebaid, the common horror of a[l]l the kings, given audience to ambass[adors from the ki]ng of the Aithiopians at Philae, received the sa[me] king under his protection, and installed a ruler (tyrannus) over the Tr[iacontas]choenus on Aithiopian territory, gave (this) gift to the ancestral go[ds] and to the Nil[e his help]er⁵⁶

The stela is dated to 29 BC and lists chronologically all the different phases through which C. Gallus re-established order into the Thebaid, the centre of the revolt. While the claim that First Cataract had never been reached before is false and only propagandistic, what follows is instead plausible. The “ambassadors from the king of

⁵² *FHN* II, n. 142, p. 639-640.

⁵³ *FHN* II, n. 142, p. 647.

⁵⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 448. For a detailed account of Cornelius Gallus’ figure and his stela, cf. ROHR, CIAMPINI 2015. For the hieroglyphic text, complete with transliteration e translation, cf. HOFFMANN 2009.

⁵⁵ Used in origin as foundation for the altar, the stela had been broken – in ancient times – in two symmetrical halves; this indicates a voluntary act of destruction of the central part, which bore the figure of a horseman, victim of *damnatio memoriae*. Even though E. BRESCIANI (1989) reconstructed the name of Cornelius on the broken hieroglyphic caption, his name itself is never mentioned directly on the stela, despite he is the main character of the narrated events. The absence of a direct reference is understandable by thinking that his authority derives directly from Octavian, which is mentioned in the titles: cf. CIAMPINI 2015, p. 30.

⁵⁶ *FHN* II n. 163, p. 691.

Aithiopians” are the emissaries of Meroe, whose involvement in the conflict was surely an attempt to expand its own influence over Lower Nubia⁵⁷.

However, C. Gallus was aware of this intent and appointed a local ruler (*tyrannus* in the text) under his influence to control the Triacostaschoenus, the region between the First and Second cataracts. It is likely that this measure was the first step taken by the Roman administration towards a future annexation of the whole kingdom⁵⁸.

The submission to the new taxation system imposed by the Roman domination caused, four years later, a new insurrection: in the autumn of 25 BC., the Meroitic troops crossed the First cataract assaulting Philae, Aswan, and Elephantine; this was possible because at that time the Roman army was engaged on the Arabic front⁵⁹.

Petronius, third *praefectus* of Egypt, intervened facing the Meroitic contingent of King Teriteqas in Dakka, 200 Km south of Aswan; here the Meroitic troops were defeated and war prisoners were conducted before Augustus by late winter 24 BC⁶⁰. Petronius continued his campaign sieging and conquering the fortress of Qasr Ibrim before setting forth for Napata where, Strabo tells us, he razed the town to the ground, ignoring Queen Amanirenas’ – Teriteqas’ successor – peace offer.

Nevertheless, in 1977 Inge Hofmann⁶¹ questioned the veracity of the episode by pointing out that it would have been impossible to travel from Alexandria to Napata and back again in such a short time. We know for sure in fact that Petronius engaged the Meroitic troops soon after the autumn of 25 BC and that prisoners were already in Rome by winter of 24.

It is likely that the episode of the conquest was added by Strabo for propagandistic purposes, to emphasise the expansion of Roman power in such remote and exotic lands. What probably really happened instead was the establishment of a military garrison at Qasr Ibrim with provisions for two years, as a device to supervise the just re-pacified lands. However, as soon as the provisions started to be in short supply, the Meroitic troops attacked the fortress forcing Petronius to the negotiation of a new peace which took place on the Island of Samos, in the winter of 21 or 20 BC. As a result, the Nubians obtained the remission of the taxes imposed upon them, while the Romans took over of the Dodecaschoenus, with the border established near the present-day town of Maharraqa⁶².

⁵⁷ *FHN* II, n. 163, p. 693

⁵⁸ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 450.

⁵⁹ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 450-451.

⁶⁰ TÖRÖK 1997A, p. 452.

⁶¹ HOFMANN 1977, pp. 189-205.

⁶² TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 454-455.

When the palace B1500 was built, between the 1st cent. BC and the 1st cent. AD, the international political situation was stable and the Nubian region was not affected by conflicts with Rome anymore. Natakamani's kingdom coincides with one of the most *flourishing* periods in Meroitic history, mirrored also by an intense building activity accompanied by a season of cultural maturation⁶³.

In the town of Naga, 100 km south of Meroe, two new temples were built: one for Amun and one for Apedemak⁶⁴, a Meroitic warrior god with leonine features whose cult acquired an increasing importance during Natakamani's reign.

Moreover, the old temple of Amun in Meroe was restored and the same occurred in Napata to the B500 temple. The latter, perhaps heavily damaged by Psamtik II expedition to Napata in the mid-4th cent. BC⁶⁵, was restored during Natakamani and Amanitore's regency. The two pylons of the temple were re-carved adding new reliefs; in forecourt 501 Piankhi's reliefs were repainted and a new kiosk, probably a bark station, was raised in the same court⁶⁶.

Once more the Amun temple became a place of special interest for the royal family, as they saw in it the reflexion of ancient rulers' glorious past. Because of this, the edifice was chosen as a primary location in enthronement ceremonies and as treasury for regalia in this period too⁶⁷. This representative role acquired by the town might also explain the propagandistic tone used in the classical sources when referring to the conquest of Napata.

Both Meroe and Napata underwent a major planned urban development, based on the progressive emergence of new political and cultural requirements.

In this prosperous climate, balancing innovation and tradition, the external cultural influxes were embraced and reshaped in new, original forms. The contact with the Hellenistic world had introduced a season of open-mindedness and assimilation which resulted in a sensible and aware elaboration, both cultural and formal, of foreign models.

It is not surprising then that in Napata, the royal town in the shade of the Sacred Mountain, was erected one of the most important Meroitic palaces.

⁶³ Cf. Tables pp. 113-114.

⁶⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 461-462.

⁶⁵ GRIMAL 2011, pp. 461-462.

⁶⁶ KENDALL 2016, p. 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

2. Other palatial structures at Jebel Barkal

2.1 B1200

B1500 is not the only palatial structure built at Jebel Barkal: the first archaeological evidence of a palatial building is associated to B1200, whose remains were partially excavated by Reisner between the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919; nevertheless, the function of the structure was not clearly understood by the excavator, who first referred to it as a “palace”⁶⁸ and later as an edifice with some “temporary structures” interpreted as coronation halls⁶⁹ (Fig. 1).

The digging of B1200 resumed only in 1996 with the Boston Museum of Fine Arts mission directed by T. Kendall; he eventually identified the building as a palace on the basis of its spatial relationship to B800, i.e. the Amun temple (Fig. 2). The latter in fact lies perpendicular to the mountain and to B1200 itself, which is situated to the right coming out of the temple. According to O’ Connor’s observations on how temples and palaces were spatially related during the New Kingdom⁷⁰, this kind of layout indicates that B1200 could actually be a palace (Fig. 3). The measurements of what remained of the mud brick walls of B1200 resulted in a total dimension of 45 x 70 metres for the whole structure, composed of a number of different rooms. Moreover, comparing the new data with Reisner’s older documentation, it was clear that B1200 went through several re-building phases; among these, at present, four are better attested but there may have been at least eight of them, starting from the Ramesside to the early Meroitic period, as new soundings revealed⁷¹.

The first level related to the 25th dynasty is connected to the reign of Kashta (mid 8th cent. BC) and must have been in use throughout the early Napatan period. Archaeological evidence suggests that this palace collapsed before a new structure was built over its remains, probably by Aspelta, as some inscriptions seem to indicate⁷². This phase is one of the most documented since, in 2007, Kendall and his team continued the digging started in 1996, adding new interesting data to the context previously outlined.

The major focus of the campaign was the excavation of the so-called Aspelta “throne room”: a single large room of 8.5 x 11.25 m, identified by the excavators as

⁶⁸ KENDALL 1997, p. 321. The definition of “palace” comes from Reisner’s Diary.

⁶⁹ REISNER 1920, p. 262.

⁷⁰ O’CONNOR 1989, pp. 78-82.

⁷¹ KENDALL 2016, p. 122.

⁷² KENDALL 1997, p. 322; KENDALL 2007, p. 82.

B1200ASP-01 to distinguish it from Reisner's designation⁷³; likewise, to avoid every possible misunderstanding, all the other rooms related to Aspelta palace were numbered starting from 02.

The hall was covered by a roof made of parallel reed bundles and rafters on which the reeds laid across; furthermore, the ceiling was coated with mud plaster⁷⁴ and supported by four sandstone columns which made it reach a height of about 5 metres. The walls of the room were built of sand/gravel-tempered mud bricks of 32 x 16 x 9 cm⁷⁵ and were 1.35 m thick.⁷⁶

A wooden structure was probably located in the north-east side of the room: a baldachin or a platform on which the king stood facing the main entrance. This assumption is supported by the discovery of four sandstone sockets into the floor, disposed to form a rectangle, each with circular holes in the centre (Fig. 5)⁷⁷.

The decoration of the stone columns, shaped in the form of the Egyptian papyrus bud, is peculiar: it consisted of two registers of goddesses connected to the advent of the New Year. The columns were composed of seven drums of which only three were carved with the divinities and related utterances, while the others were just smoothed and painted. Above the capital two more drums were sculpted with addorsed ram heads crowned with sun-disks and *uraei*; moreover, each column was painted with red, blue, and yellow details on a white background (cf. Fig. 5, Fig. 6, Fig. 7)⁷⁸.

All these elements suggest that this room was an audience hall in which the king sat during his stay in Napata; furthermore, the peculiar decoration points out that here took place the rituals related to the passage to the New Year: a dangerous time in which the king needed protection against negative forces and potential disaster, in order to maintain balance and control over the flood and his domain in a moment of maximum vulnerability⁷⁹.

Before being painted, all the ASP-01 walls had been plastered with a 2 cm thick layer of mud; many fragments were found during the excavation, bearing traces of different colours: red, white, blue, grey, black and yellow. Among these, some belonged

⁷³ Cf. Fig. 1 and Fig. 4.

⁷⁴ KENDALL 2007, pp. 84-87.

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that this measure strictly reminds the Meroitic module which will be predominant in the later masonry (cf. *infra*).

⁷⁶ KENDALL 2007, p. 84.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ KENDALL 1997, p. 326.

⁷⁹ TÖRÖK 2002, p. 29; KENDALL 1997, pp. 330-331.

to the ceiling and could be distinguished from the wall ones by observing their back, where the impressions of the roof reeds were still visible (Fig. 8)⁸⁰.

A thick layer (from 10 to 20 cm) of ashes and coals covered the floor of the room, and was surmounted by another layer of mud fallen from the roof. This data clearly indicates that the hall – and probably the whole palace as well – was destroyed by fire. This is even more interesting when considering that, except for the reeds and the organic material composing the ceiling, all the other elements were not flammable, as they consisted of mud bricks and stone.

Moreover, no pottery or fragmentary objects were found on the floor, suggesting that a general removal of items occurred before the fire burnt down the edifice; a looting taking place just before the fire could be an explanation⁸¹.

These elements, united with the fact that the collapse was not accidental, are indicative of a violent destruction of the palace which most scholars attribute to Psamtik II's invasion in 593 BC⁸²; nevertheless, Török disagrees with this interpretation claiming that in none of Psamtik's commemoration stelas appears the name of Napata, and moreover they seem to indicate that the army went no further than the Third cataract⁸³.

At the moment, the issue related to the end of the Aspelta palace cannot be solved without new evidence.

However, the burning event resulted useful as it made possible to collect organic samples for ¹⁴C dating. Two of them were extracted respectively from a beam and some bundles of reed, and gave the following results: 840-760 BC (2 sigma calibrated, 95% probability; 800 BC if intercepted with calibration curve) the former, and 760-400 BC (2 sigma calibrated, 95% probability; 530 BC if intercepted with calibration curve) the latter⁸⁴; considering that this one could not have been reused, it is likely that it reflects closely the dating of the construction. Even though this result cannot give any clue about the destruction of the palace, it confirms that this level was erected around the mid-6th century, and thus an attribution to Aspelta could be justified.

The reconstruction of the palace after the fire did not take place immediately, in fact – as some evidence suggests⁸⁵ – it did not start until at least right before the end of

⁸⁰ KENDALL 2007, p. 86.

⁸¹ KENDALL 2007, p. 87.

⁸² KENDALL 2007, p. 87. The arrival of Psamtik II to Napata is supposed also by GRIMAL 2011, p. 462.

⁸³ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 371-374.

⁸⁴ KENDALL 2007, p. 86.

⁸⁵ In particular, this has been deducted by the state of conservation of the surfaces of the columns that were not covered by the layer below; *the terminus post quem* for the hypothetical dating is supposed on the basis

the 6th cent. BC, when a new earth foundation was created to cover the rubble of the previous occupation layer. Limited information is available about the new structure: it was built following a different plan than the previous one, and it was probably the same palace Irike-amanote visited in his coronation journey⁸⁶ in the mid-5th cent. BC.

The circumstances of its destruction are unknown either, but Harsiotef tells us in his stela⁸⁷ that, at his time: “the royal residence has collapsed, there not being any place into which people go”. Thus he built a new “royal residence and chambers in Napata, chambers, 60” and he “had the enclosure wall surround (it) as well.”. Considering that this document has been dated at the first half of 4th century BC, it appears that the former palace had to be rebuilt less than a century after its foundation.

Finally, the last phase of B1200 seems connected to Amanislo’s reign, mid-3rd century, since some red granite lions bearing his name⁸⁸ have been found in its north side.

One of the most interesting pieces of evidence comes from Reisner’s dumps that Kendall excavated in 1996. After an initial stratigraphic approach, the team understood that the material was too mixed to proceed in this way; nevertheless, the findings inside the debris were significant enough to deserve a close examination. They came from palace rooms numbered from 1201 to 1206 and consisted mainly of: charred and broken animal bones belonging to cattle, goats, and fowl (some river shellfish was also present); a large amount of flakes used as blades for cutting and skinning and finally a great quantity of pottery in various forms whose typology associates it to the Napatan period⁸⁹. All these elements clearly indicate that in rooms 1201-1206 a kitchen was set. Reisner was the first who argued the existence of such a room here, as he wrote in his diary:

The space 1202 was manifestly used for fires for cooking purposes. Four hearths are distinctly visible, one in the ‘NW’ corner which has burned the walls. The debris to the lowest depth all over the site contains coals, bones of cattle, ashes and potsherds – other than the burnt layer over the Aspelta floor⁹⁰

of stylistic affinities of a *shabti* found in the debris during the excavation and some other exemplars coming from Nuri, cf. KENDALL 2007, p. 87.

⁸⁶ *FHN II*, n. 71, pp. 400-428: “Then he arrived at Pure-mountain (Gebel Barkal) in the third [month] of Sum[mer, 2]8th day. Off he went His Majesty to the royal residence that he might be given the ceremonial cap [of Bow-Land (Nubia)]”.

⁸⁷ *FHN II*, n. 78, pp. 438-464.

⁸⁸ KENDALL 1997, p. 323.

⁸⁹ KENDALL 1997, pp. 325-326.

⁹⁰ Extract from Reisner’s Diary, January 11, 1919, quoted in KENDALL 1997, p. 334, n. 29.

To recap, B1200 was a quite large palatial structure of rectangular shape, with regard to the excavated area⁹¹, which was located near the Amun temple (B800) and formed with it a right angle, possibly following a New Kingdom custom. New soundings revealed that the first foundations of the palace date back to the Ramesside period, but it was mostly in use during the Napatan one. Aspelta built a large throne room rich in colours and decorations in which, apparently, a ritual connected to the New Year royal confirmation was performed every year. Perhaps during his reign, the palace was heavily damaged and destructed by fire. The west wing of the palace – corresponding to rooms 1201-1206 – was probably equipped as a kitchen area, as the related findings indicate; nevertheless, the chronology of this part of the building is not clear since the material could not be stratigraphically investigated.

After the destruction, the palace was not immediately reconstructed, and a new foundation level was created only in the end of the 6th century BC. We know that this last edifice was still in use when Irike-amanote visited it in the middle of the 5th century BC, but it had collapsed by Harsiotef's reign in the first half of the 4th century BC.

Finally, the last piece of evidence about its occupation is related to Amanislo – mid-3rd cent., Early Meroitic period, probably the last king to use it as a royal residence.

2.2 B100

In Meroitic times, another palace was built about 60 m further south-east of B1200, being this latter not used anymore. Since this new palace was the first structure excavated by Reisner at Jebel Barkal, it was called B100 (Fig. 10).

The digging was carried out between January and March 1916 and resulted in the clearing of the levels pertaining to the ground floor of the edifice, whose record comprised photographs, field diaries, finds lists and survey plans⁹². This material, which has never been published by Reisner, was fortunately preserved in the archives of the current Department of the Art of Ancient Worlds of the Museum of Fine Arts, in Boston;

⁹¹ Cf. KENDALL 2014, p. 67, Fig. 9 in this work: the magnetometry survey conducted in 2006 seems to indicate a square plan rather than a rectangular one.

⁹² KENDALL 2014, p. 65.

the last effort to present an overview of Reisner's work by analysing his field documentation has been pursued by Kendall in a recent article⁹³. Since in 1919 Reisner decided to use the B100 site as a dump for his new excavations on B500, in fact, no actual direct evidence of the structure is available nowadays⁹⁴.

In a letter dated April 29, 1916, Reisner wrote to Griffith F. Ll. about the field work in B100:

*[...] The preliminary clearing was finished about Feb. 14th (i.e. down to the first preserved floor). This building, numbered [B] 100, was some sort of administrative building, to judge by the plan and absence of household utensils. The date was clearly Meroitic [...]*⁹⁵

Even though Reisner identified it as an administrative structure, it was later recognised as a palace on the basis of its plan and its topographic relationship with the temple B500. These two buildings, indeed, reflect the same spatial pattern existent between the palace B1200 and the temple B800, with the gateway of the temple placed at a right angle on the left coming out from the palace⁹⁶.

This parallelism clarifies that B100 and B500 were in tight connection, deeply inserted in that cult landscape which so strongly characterized the area. B100 was oriented with its corners directed to the natural cardinal points, in such a way that its axis, from South-West to North-East, resulted perpendicular to the temple's entrance.

The Meroitic dating of the palace seems to be confirmed primarily by three facts: the square plan of the edifice (Fig. 11) – a common feature among the palaces of the period (cf. *infra*); the abandonment condition of the palace B1200 after the Early Meroitic age – and the consequent need of a new one; and the presence of older – Early Meroitic or late Napatan – buildings below the palace level.

These were the remains of the mud brick foundations of some little edifices, probably houses (Fig. 11), pertaining to a lower layer found below the bases of the walls of the palace, as Reisner states in the final part of the previous letter⁹⁷. The floor level related to this layer was 80 cm below that of the palace; considering that a deeper ground level would have been flooded by the Nile, it is reasonable to assume that these structures are the oldest which can be found at the site.

⁹³ KENDALL 2014.

⁹⁴ KENDALL 2016, p. 10.

⁹⁵ KENDALL 2014, p. 69.

⁹⁶ Cf. Fig. 2.

⁹⁷ KENDALL 2014, p. 69.

At present, it is difficult to obtain a more precise dating for the B100 palace. Kendall supposes that it could be contemporaneous with the B1500, surely dated to Natakamani reign, in I cent. AD and bases this supposition on the fact that – due to its connection to the B500 – the B100 could have the function of a ceremonial palace, while the B1500 would be a residential one. Nevertheless, the earlier construction of B100 is certain and the masonry, as well as the general layout of the building, fits in well with an Early Meroitic dating. Moreover, it is very likely that B100 functioned as an architectural model for B1500 which was planned to replace it⁹⁸. Although the two edifices could have co-existed for some time, a relation of contemporaneity with a strict functional differentiation seems unlikely.

The edifice's plan is an almost perfect square, its perimeter walls measuring 33.2 m on the NE and SW sides, and 37.1 m on the NW and SE ones. The exposure of the ground floor in 1916 revealed the presence of several rooms (more than twenty), including four hallways and two large columned halls (102 -108) covering alone about one third of the structure. The main floor, upstairs, could be reached by two different staircases, both in the centre of the building (cf. Fig. 11: 104, 106); however, no traces of this upper main floor were found during the excavations.

In a first phase, the edifice had no walls interrupting the passage leading from hall 108 to hall 102: by entering from the main entrance on NE side it was possible to cross the whole length of the ground floor as far as the SW gateway, without any obstacle. Nevertheless, this layout changed when a new, more massive, staircase was built in the middle of the hallway leading from 108 to 102, thus blocking the passage; for this reason, a new corridor, numbered 107, was needed to link the two main halls.

Even though the palace had four accesses, one for each side, with the NW one being the only not placed exactly in the centre of the related perimeter wall, the main gateways were surely the ones located at NE and SW. This is clear not only by the importance of the architectural elements constituting the two adjoining rooms located along this axis, but moreover by its perpendicularity to the front entrance of the Amun temple B500: by passing through these gates, the king could in fact head toward the temple or, vice versa, come back from it.

Only a reduced number of ground floor rooms were actually accessible, as suggested by the presence of a threshold: they are numbered 121, 122, 124, 127, 102, 104,

⁹⁸ MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 120-122.

106, 101, 107, and 108 in the plan (cf. Fig. 11); the remaining ones had no openings in the walls surrounding them, and consequently must have had only a structural function, serving as casemates (cf. *infra*); furthermore, these were filled with debris to better sustain the upper floor⁹⁹.

The south-eastern area of the palace was composed of two – almost specular – sections, divided by the corridor 101; neither of these was accessible, but inside the rooms 113 and 111 two square structural foundation pillars in mud bricks were found, probably marking the position of some heavy structures in the main floor above¹⁰⁰. In particular, such pillars could have functioned as supports for an hypothetical vault covering of the room¹⁰¹.

As regards the ground floor, it could have assumed a ceremonial function concretised in the walking of the king through the columned halls, going or returning from the temple. The sandstone columns, disposed in two rows of three, had an open papyrus, or bell-shaped, capital and were plastered and, originally, painted¹⁰².

The walls of the various rooms were made both of mud and red bricks, the presence of which was fundamental to contain the damage caused by the floods¹⁰³.

Kendall states that the columned halls, probably, rose to the full height of the two levels and were illuminated through some clerestory windows¹⁰⁴.

Another possible interpretation is that the two ground halls could be used as courtyards with porticos, with no roof or upper floors above them. If that was the case, to reach the south-eastern wing one should have probably used the 104 stairways and walk through the south-western wing. Unfortunately, since no evidence at all remains of the upper storey, only suppositions can be done about it.

Anyway, the available evidence allows to argue with some confidence that we are dealing with a large Meroitic royal palace, built on two floors, with one of its major focus – the columned halls – located on the ground floor.

⁹⁹ KENDALL 2014, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 121.

¹⁰² KENDALL 2014, p. 70.

¹⁰³ KENDALL 2014, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰⁴ KENDALL 2014, p. 72.

2.3 B1700

Another palatial structure has been traced in 2006 during a magnetometry campaign, and subsequently excavated in January and February 2015; it has been numbered B1700 by the excavators. Half of it was uncovered during the fieldwork, and resulted in a 16 m square edifice, even though very little remains of it were still present on the ground¹⁰⁵.

Only the foundations were still visible at the moment of the digging, and consisted of doorless rooms with mud bricks walls, filled with sherds of pottery and ashes. Nothing remains of an upper floor, but it surely had some columns and other architectural remains since some fragments of them were found during the excavation¹⁰⁶.

Probably, in the centre of the structure a peristyle was located, as suggested by the presence of thick walls (measuring 19.8 x 10.4 m) disposed in a square position and clearly visible in the 3D photoscanned image of the excavation (Fig. 15).

As regards a possible interpretation, the small dimensions of the edifice indicate that it was not a royal palace; Kendall suggests that, considering its proximity to B500, it could be the residence of the High Priest of Amun¹⁰⁷.

2.4 B2400

None of the edifices described so far belong to the Italian area: in fact, palaces B1700, B1200 and B100 all pertain to the NCAM granting, directed by Timothy Kendall. However, a structure very similar to B100 was unearthed in 2001 by the Italian team Rome University “La Sapienza”, revealing that B1500 was not the only palace in the Italian zone: B2400, as it was named, was located in the north-eastern sector of the area, near the road connecting the modern towns of Karima and Barkal (Fig. 16).

¹⁰⁵ KENDALL 2016, p. 127.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ KENDALL 2016, p. 128.

Like B100, it consisted of a square structure of 40 m per side, built on previously levelled ground without any platform; nevertheless, the typology of the foundation is very similar to the one used in B1500 (and B100 too), being it set on casemates.

The walls of B2400 were built in both mud and red bricks: the former were used for the internal part of the edifice, while the latter for the exterior perimeter wall, which was 1.75 m thick¹⁰⁸; this kind of masonry was widely employed in the area and probably constituted a measure against flood waters. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the external wall encircling the palace seemed to have no plaster or any decoration¹⁰⁹, unlike B1500.

B2400 had one access in the middle of each perimeter wall¹¹⁰: the major – and better preserved – is the western one, consisting of a ramp 6 m long and 4.30 m wide¹¹¹ leading to a square terrace (5 × 5.30 m); another similar – but smaller – structure has been recognized by the northern access. The eastern part of the edifice, instead, was not preserved since an ancient paved road was laid on its ruins after the palace's destruction and defunctionalization¹¹².

However, this does not compromise our understanding of its general plan (Fig. 17): it was organized around a central square court measuring 9 x 8.70 m which could be reached entering from each of the four accesses; 4 m south of the open court a passage in the wall¹¹³ led to another monumental space characterized by the presence of Ionic architectural elements. These were part of a peristyle court (4.70 x 6.70 m¹¹⁴) whose foundations were laid in mud bricks covered, at floor level, by red bricks and sandstone slabs (70 cm wide), placed in correspondence to the columns. These were not disposed regularly around the court: in fact the space between them in the western and eastern sides measures 1.70 m, while in the southern and northern ones it reaches only 0.75 m, thus giving the structure a rectangular shape rather than a square one.

The reconstruction of the layout of the columns has been possible thanks to the discovery of a large amount of fragments (Fig. 18): first was placed the sandstone base

¹⁰⁸ SIST 2011, p. 159; in 2009, the excavation of the south-western area of the palace revealed the presence of internal mud bricks 1.60 m wide: REPORT 2009.

¹⁰⁹ ROCCATI 2014, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ The presence of a southern entrance has been traced during the 2009 campaign, when it was noted that the southern external area underwent several ancient interventions: REPORT 2009.

¹¹¹ SIST 2011, p. 159.

¹¹² ROCCATI 2014, pp. 3-4.

¹¹³ Cf. Fig.17; ROCCATI 2014, p. 5: he refers to an “original stone wall, which was completely removed” surrounding the court.

¹¹⁴ SIST 2011, p. 160.

(1), then an octagonal plinth (2) served as a sustain for another base of Attic type (3), in a sequence of torus, listel, scotia, listel and torus again. Finally, an architrave was collocated above them and surmounted, in turn, by a cornice with a denticulated motif (Fig. 19)¹¹⁵. As already mentioned, the capitals belonged to the Ionic order, an assumption based on a fragment clearly pertaining to this style found during the excavation.

The use of an octagonal base is peculiar, being this typology especially recurring in 5th century Egypt, with examples to be found in Alexandria, in San Mena's church, in Deir Abu Makairos' monastery and in the Main Church of Saqqara. Despite its use being particularly widespread in Byzantine times, the prototype probably traces back to micro-Asiatic imperial architecture: octagonal plinths were present in Hieropolis' theatre in Phrygia and in Miletus' Didymaion (the octagonal plinths here belong to the I cent. AD completion of the temple)¹¹⁶. An even earlier case is represented by a polygonal base decorated with acanthus leaves found in Alexandria and related to a semi-column: had it been an entire one, this base would have been an octagonal plinth too; the piece has been dated to the Late Hellenistic period, in the second half of the II cent. BC¹¹⁷.

Even though the palace's eastern wing documentation is heavily compromised, the Ionic architectural fragments are, by themselves, significant enough to let us suppose the importance assumed by the palace in its times: B2400 is in fact – as far as we know – the first Meroitic palace presenting Ionic order architectural elements¹¹⁸. Such a peculiar and innovative decoration must correspond to a representative function of the edifice, or – at least – of the southern wing where the peristyle was located.

The general thickness of the walls indicates that there was probably an upper storey requiring stairways to access, thus repeating the same pattern already seen in B100; nevertheless, unlike the latter, B2400 presented no archaeological evidence of any staircase, and their location can only be supposed. A likely position is near the western or northern access, but it is important to remember that the absence of the eastern wing undermines a full comprehension of the palace's layout, which can only be assumed by its plan, and in particular by room organisation and the thickness of the brickwork. A peculiar aspect is the fact that the internal walls are as wide as the perimeter ones: this suggests that they had a structural function, possibly serving as foundations for the rooms set upon them. The narrow rooms in the north-western corner, instead, have been

¹¹⁵ SIST 2011, p. 160; for the denticulated motif in the Ionic order: PENSABENE 1993, p. 94.

¹¹⁶ PENSABENE 1993, p. 189, 486-487.

¹¹⁷ PENSABENE 1993, p. 189, 488-489.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

interpreted as storerooms¹¹⁹ accessible from the upper floor, considering the lack of any door; nevertheless, a structural function is more likely.

In this respect, it is interesting to note the resemblance they bear with some rooms in both Muweis and Wad Ben Naga palaces (Fig. 20). Despite the orientation¹²⁰ and the dimensions¹²¹ being different here, the cluster of rooms forming the northern corner of these palaces (the “A” zone in the Muweis plan, and the highlighted area in the Wad Ben Naga one) has the same layout of the corresponding rooms in B2400: the pattern is rather similar, consisting of long and narrow rooms flanked by smaller ones.

In Wad Ben Naga, the two northernmost rooms of this cluster have been identified as casemates, due to the lack of entrances, that are present, instead, in the three southern rooms, where a vestibule was also created by means of a protruding wall. Doors and vestibules are also absent in Muweis¹²², where, furthermore, a particular kind of mortar has been found on the walls of the “A” cluster (especially on F 60): being not uniformly distributed, it seems to have been used to reinforce some sensitive points in the walls rather than as a coating; its physical composition, moreover, makes it unsuitable for a living space, since it tends to disintegrate in small white grains¹²³. All these elements seem to point out that the rooms in Muweis had only a structural function and therefore must correspond to casemates, despite the clear resemblance with the storerooms in Wad Ben Naga.

Considering the similarities between the rooms in Muweis and B2400’s northern ones, it is likely that we are dealing with casemates rather than storing places here as well; the same structural function seems to be reflected also by the wide rooms built west of the Ionic hall.

The thin mud brick walls dividing the hallway west of the central court, visible on the plan, mark the original presence of three rooms whose thresholds must have been placed in the middle of the walls, thus creating a hallway leading to the centre of the edifice.

Concerning the chronological attribution, we can assume that the edifice relates to the Meroitic period: the square plan with accesses on every side and the columned

¹¹⁹ ROCCATI 2014, p. 5.

¹²⁰ NW/SE in Wad Ben Naga and Muweis; NE-SW in B2400.

¹²¹ About 14 m in Wad Ben Naga and Muweis (MAILLOT 2014B, p. 785) and less than 10 m in B2400 (cf. Fig. 20).

¹²² At Muweis, a vestibule could possibly be present in room 31 and 32, but no openings in the walls were found: MAILLOT 2014B, p. 785.

¹²³ MAILLOT 2014B, p. 785.

rooms are common features among the Meroitic palatial architecture (cf. B100 for a comparison). An earlier dating than that of B1500 has been proposed on the basis of the presence of the Ionic architectural elements and their different orientation in space¹²⁴, but no evidence remains for a more precise placement in time.

2.5 B3200

Another noteworthy structure pertinent to the Italian area is B3200: although it is not a palace, this edifice surely bears a royal connotation which connects it with the surrounding buildings.

The diggings, started in 2002 and ended in 2004, brought to light a mud-brick structure located between the palaces B1500 and B2400, 50 m north of the former and 30 m west of the latter (Fig. 21). Also in this case, the structure has a square plan (about 25 m per side)¹²⁵ (Fig. 22), but peculiarly organised around a central cell, probably higher than the other rooms: it measures 8.40 x 7.50 m with walls reaching an average thickness of 80 cm, and red bricks at the angles used probably as a strengthening device. The cell had three entrances in the middle of its western, northern, and southern walls: no traces of a fourth one were found on the eastern side. The inner wall, visible on the plan, is a later addition which reduced the internal space in the cell and closed all the accesses except for western one; the thresholds were 1,40 m wide and reinforced, once again, with red bricks jambs¹²⁶.

Two white sandstone columns sustained the roof of the cell, as proved by the discovery of their bases inside the room (68 x 68 x 28 cm); as it concerns the columns' capitals, they most likely were pertinent to the Corinthian order, made in sandstone and painted in red, light blue and yellow¹²⁷. These colours are the same used for the interior and exterior walls of the cell, where a decoration with stripes and wavy lines was also

¹²⁴ ROCCATI 2014, p. 5.

¹²⁵ The excavation did not reach the entire extension of the structure, and cleared only the eastern part of it. At any rate, the disposition of the walls and the general planimetric layout let the excavators suppose that the western wing had the same features of the eastern one, cf. also SIST 2011, p. 162.

¹²⁶ SIST 2011, p. 161.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

present. The Hellenistic features of the capitals counterbalance the outside topping of the building, consisting of a more traditional torus and Egyptian cornice¹²⁸.

The cell is enclosed by a 2.70 m wide corridor on its northern and southern sides and by a 2.40 m one on its western and eastern sides, where a 1.40 m door wide was also discovered in the middle of the outer wall (Fig. 22). Various fragments of sandstone have permitted the reconstruction of its jambs and architrave, which was surmounted by a frieze decorated with the motif of the winged solar disc and *uraeus*¹²⁹ (Fig. 23). Not one, but three entrances were found instead on both the northern and the southern sides: here the central door was aligned to that of the cell and measured 1.40 m as well, while the two lateral ones were 10 cm smaller; the thresholds, discovered during the excavation, consisted of red bricks.

Another outer corridor was built around the first one, thus giving the structure a sort of concentric layout, developed around the central cell. It was larger than the first one, reaching a width of 3.20 m and enclosed by a 1 m thick wall which was strengthened by means of sandstone slabs, at least in the south-east corner, where some fragments have been found: the use of stone and red bricks for the corners is probably an expedient to shield the edifice from flood waters. Two square rooms measuring 3.30 m per side were located at the south-eastern and north-eastern corners¹³⁰, and access to them was granted by a 1.15 m wide a passage in the walls of the outer corridor. In the southern room, moreover, a mud-brick floor has been found in good conditions (Fig. 24), indicating that this was probably a roofed place.

The doors' scheme used for the perimeter wall is reversed to that of the inner corridor, with the single entrance posed in correspondence to the triple one on the inner wall, and vice versa.

Not providing the structure with a functional layout of rooms, this intricate system of gateways probably served a ceremonial purpose: the fine decorations of the walls (painted plaster was present both on the cell and the first corridor), the Hellenistic artistic influence (the capitals of the cell), combined with the typical Egyptian architectural features (the cavetto cornice) and iconographical motifs (the sun-disk with *uraei*) clearly emphasise the importance of this building.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ SIST 2011, p. 162.

Due to its topographical position, so close to the palaces B1500 and B2400, it is very likely that B3200 was intended as a sort of pavilion inserted in the new urbanistic context wanted by the Meroitic architects. In particular, it could be part of a monumental *dromos* which led to the palace and, from there, to the temples area; the idea of such a processional way fits in well with the Hellenistic architectural conception of sacred places: we found an example of this also at Philae, which was surely known to the Meroitic architects of the time.

The spatial relation between Natakamani's palace and B3200 seems confirmed also by their reciprocal location. In fact, supposing that edifice B3200 was structured in order to emphasise its N-S axis¹³¹ and virtually extending this axis towards the palace, it appears clear that the buildings were connected, being the southern gateway of B3200 directly headed toward the northern entrance of the palace.

¹³¹ As the position of the columns seems to indicate.

3. The entrances of palace B1500

Like the other Meroitic palaces described so far, B1500 also had four accesses located approximately at the centre of each perimeter wall. In particular, even if the southern and northern entrances appear to be symmetrical to each other, the same cannot be said for the eastern and western ones, which do not lie on the same axis. On these sides, in fact, the entrances do not divide the perimeter wall into two halves, but they instead break the symmetry of the façade creating two parts of different length (about 25 and 31 m). The reason of this mismatch must be ascribed to the fact that each access belongs to a different building phase.

The southern and the eastern ones, in fact, were probably built earlier than the others, since the perimeter wall they lean on was plastered only after their completion; on the west and north sides, contrariwise, the entrances were constructed after the walls of the palace had already been plastered¹³².

3.1 Northern access

The first entrance to be excavated, in 1982, was the northern one: in that occasion, seven stone slabs were recognised as the steps of a monumental staircase that led from the ground to the top of the platform, where the access to the edifice was located. Considering the width of these steps (0.40 m), together with the fact that traces of the monumental structure were found up to 9 m away from the platform, it is likely that the staircase in question was originally composed of about twenty slabs (Fig. 26)¹³³.

On top of the platform, and abutting it, a square terrace measuring 4.40 m (in width) x 4 m (in depth) was placed just in front of the portal: this pattern is not exclusive to the northern side, but is repeated on every façade. The monumentality of the access was confirmed also by the discovery of some¹³⁴ lion statues on the ground just below the terrace where they were placed before falling down; 1,5 m high, they were depicted seated, and bore traces of yellow and blue paint¹³⁵. No elements remain to deduce how they were originally disposed, but the presence of several column drums and capitals in

¹³² ROCCATI 1997, p. 12.

¹³³ DONADONI 1993, p. 103.

¹³⁴ DONADONI (1993, p. 103) wrote about two recovered statues and a third one yet to be recuperated, thus hypnotizing the original presence of two couples of lion on the terrace.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

the same place where the lions were found indicates that some sort of columned structure had to be present on the terrace¹³⁶ (Fig. 27).

Not much evidence remains either about the actual portal which gave access to the palace's inner rooms, but some fragments of its threshold and architrave showed the typical Egyptian decoration with the winged sun disk. Concerning its dimension, even if no data can help us in the definition of the height, we can at least assume that this gateway was about 2 m wide¹³⁷.

On the northern side of the palace, another structure was unearthed about seven metres east of the central terrace, consisting of a small staircase of which only three brick steps remained. Due to its size (7.70 x 1.80 m), and orientation (parallel to the façade and not perpendicular to it), this structure was interpreted as a service passage¹³⁸ and does not recur on any other side.

3.2 Western access

A terrace and a ramp to access it were also present on the western side but, unlike the other cases, no lion statues were found here. Nevertheless, this is not surprising considering the different disposition of this entrance compared to the others: the ramp, in fact, is not perpendicular to the façade but parallel to it. This peculiar orientation is justified by the presence of the sacred area to the south: descending from the western access, in fact, the king found himself directly on the path that led to the temples.

Another *dromos*¹³⁹ connecting the palatial area to the religious sector can perhaps be imagined here as well: an architectural arrangement of the open space outside the palace would be functional to the celebration of ceremonies performed by the king on his way to the temples¹⁴⁰.

Also of ceremonial nature was probably the podium found in 2012 just south of the western staircase (Fig. 28): a rectangular building with plastered and yellow-painted walls. Traces of plaster were also present on several red bricks found on the ground during the excavation which probably formed the cover of the structure, access to which had to be granted by some sort of staircase, now completely lost¹⁴¹.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*: due to the presence of some traces on the ground.

¹³⁸ DONADONI 1993, p. 104.

¹³⁹ Another *dromos* probably developed on the eastern side of the palace, as already seen when describing the edifice B3200.

¹⁴⁰ CIAMPINI 2013, p. 55; REPORT 2012.

¹⁴¹ REPORT 2012.

The podium was built following the typical Meroitic masonry for civil architecture, with red bricks on the outer part and mud bricks on the inside; on the contrary, being composed of stone, the foundations of the structure deviated from the architectural tradition. In no other Meroitic edifice excavated at Jebel Barkal so far, in fact, such an expedient was present¹⁴². Excluding a ritual meaning, another possible explanation could be of more practical nature connected to the drainage of water.

The use of stone with this function is evident in Muweis, where some ferruginous sandstone slabs were found in the foundations of the south-eastern area of the palace¹⁴³; moreover, here these stone slabs were often accompanied by the presence of red brick fragments – sometimes mixed with vitrified brick ones – coming from halves or thirds of entire bricks. The foundations of wall F65 (Fig. 25), for example, consisted of one lower layer of red fired bricks on which more than twelve layers of overlapping stone slabs were placed¹⁴⁴. The latter, which is the result of a natural process of disaggregation, had different forms and were about 20 cm long and 2-3 cm thick, and their disposition was carefully planned to limit the spaces among them, later filled with clay¹⁴⁵.

3.3 Eastern access

In 1995, the first traces of the presence of an entrance were found in this side as well. The following year the excavations were completed and another terrace with a ramp was unearthed together with some lion statues, thus confirming the general pattern.

3.4 Southern access

The southern entrance, excavated in 1995, was quite similar to the northern one, even though, as previously underlined, it was built earlier. Not only did they have similar dimensions¹⁴⁶, but also the staircase, the terrace and the lion statues were features common to both. A major point of contrast however is the orientation: unlike the northern one, the southern access was clearly aligned with the central peristyle of the palace.

¹⁴² During the excavations conducted in 2009 on palace B 2400, a sounding in the N-W corner of the building revealed at a deep level (1.80 m from the floor) a red brick coating together with some foundation stones, cf. REPORT 2012. In addition, the 2013 campaign found the presence of some stones in the foundation of the south-west corner of the platform., cf. REPORT 2013. The foundations of the podium however indicate a systematic use of stone.

¹⁴³ MAILLOT 2014B, 787-788.

¹⁴⁴ MAILLOT 2014B, p. 787.

¹⁴⁵ BAUD 2011, p. 354.

¹⁴⁶ The entrance here is slightly wider, measuring 5 m.

Its meridional position connected it to the processional way that led to the sacred area, and this gateway seems to point directly to the Amon temple B500, a fact that would be confirmed also by the 3° bend of the staircase towards that building¹⁴⁷; moreover, one of the lion statues that were located here was found with its head turned, facing the temple (Fig 29). Its fine and accurate workmanship is another feature which distinguishes this exemplar from the others, depicted instead on their backs and looking straight in front of them. This piece is reminiscent of two other lion statues found at Jebel Barkal, the so-called “Prudhoe lions”, now at the British Museum, where Lord Prudhoe presented them in 1835¹⁴⁸ (Fig. 30): two granite statues of lions originally coming from the temple of Soleb erected by Amenhotep III, and brought to Jebel Barkal probably together with the already mentioned rams reused in the Amon temple B 500. These lions are depicted lying on their sides with the forepaws crossed and their muzzles turned; doubtless, their naturalistic traits and anatomical details indicate a very fine workmanship. At Napata they were reused to decorate the entrance of palace B1200 in Napatan times and Amansilo was the last king to incise his cartouches on their surface¹⁴⁹.

Undoubtedly, being them present at the site, they served as models for the sculptors who created the “southern lion” in Meroitic times: this renewal of a well-known ancient model was not limited to a mere imitation of its iconographic style, but also reminded of the ideological values embodied by the lion statues in pharaonic times.

An interesting comparison can be made with the already repeatedly quoted Meroitic palace of Wad Ben Naqa, ascribed to queen Amanishakhete (I cent. BC)¹⁵⁰. Also in this case, the structure had several accesses. The most monumental one was probably reserved for the eastern façade where, in a way very similar to B 1500, the entrance was reached via a ramp leading to a square terrace¹⁵¹. On the western side, two smaller accesses led to rooms S and Z (cf. *infra*). Although the architectural arrangement of the eastern entrance qualifies it as the main access, the presence of a hypostyle hall of six columns on the southern side of the palace suggests an important role of this entrance as well¹⁵². The principal characteristics of this palace will be discussed later in detail.

¹⁴⁷ ROCCATI 1997, p. 13.

¹⁴⁸ ROCCATI 2015, p. 390.

¹⁴⁹ Photographs of the Prudhoe lions together with an accurate description are present on the British Museum’s website:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=775539001&objectid=117626.

¹⁵⁰ VERCOUTTER 1962, p. 282 -283.

¹⁵¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 80.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

Very peculiar, also considering the chronological affinity between B1500 and Wad Ben Naga's palace, is the discovery in the latter of some clay figurines depicting animals. They were found inside a narrow room just to the right of the columned hall in the south (Fig. 31): among them, two represent a hawk and five a sitting lion¹⁵³. The function of these little statues is not clear but they surely testify the importance of the iconography associated with the lion all over the Meroitic kingdom. It must be remembered, in fact, that in these centuries the cult of Apedemak – the lion-headed deity – reached its peak, as confirmed also by the building of its temple at Naga during the reign of Natakamani¹⁵⁴. This discovery is even more interesting since it proves that the recurrence of the leonine motif was not limited to the cultic sphere but was widespread in the palatial one as well, whether it was in the form of a statue protecting the entrances or in the form of a little figurine.

A monumental arrangement of the entrances closely corresponding to the one of palace B1500 is not present in any other Meroitic edifice: even though accesses on every façade are a common feature (cf. B100, B2400, Wad Ben Naga), the layout consisting of big terraces reached by a wide staircase and decorated with lion statues was not a systematic feature among Meroitic palaces.

A resembling model can be observed at Philae, where the access to the temple in correspondence to the First Pylon – still visible as reconstructed on the island of Agilkia – is formed of a ramp and a square terrace, on which stand two granite lion statues looking in front of them. The connection between Philae and the Meroitic Kingdom is well known through several sources and covers the entire length of the latter's duration, from 3rd cent. BC to 3rd cent. AD¹⁵⁵; for example, a hymn of the temple of Isis has been found inside the Lion Temple at Musawwarat es-Sufra (IIIrd BC), and several Meroitic inscriptions left by pilgrims have been recognised in different structure related to the sanctuary especially between the 1st and the 3rd centuries AD¹⁵⁶

The terrace and the staircase leading to the main court of the temple appear to have been set in a later moment than the Pylon they lean on: in fact, if the latter was built together with the Second one during the reign of Ptolemy VI¹⁵⁷, the access seems rather contemporaneous to the layout of the dromos, surely arranged in Roman times.

¹⁵³ VERCOUTTER 1962, pp. 285-286.

¹⁵⁴ TÖRÖK 1997A, pp. 461-462.

¹⁵⁵ ROCCATI 2010, pp. 164-165; ROCCATI 2005, pp. 4-5.

¹⁵⁶ ROCCATI 2010, p. 164.

¹⁵⁷ GIAMMARUSTI; ROCCATI 1980, p. 68.

Considering the similarities between Philae and Napata (the “Meroitic” pose of the lions, the dimension of the terrace, the staircase) it is impossible not to notice some sort of architectural – and possibly ideological – connection between them¹⁵⁸.

This correlation proved to be useful to propose a plausible dating for the arrangement of the access of Philae – namely the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), contemporary of Natakamani¹⁵⁹ – but does not provide any help in understating the origins of this “Meroitic” model for the entrances, whose major elaboration is reflected in Natakamani’s palace B1500.

¹⁵⁸ CIAMPINI 2011, pp. 186-187.

¹⁵⁹ ROCCATI 2010, p. 165.

4. The foundation platform

Certainly, a distinctive feature of palace B1500 is its foundation platform. It consists of a square structure of 61 m per side, whose walls are the only remains of the entire palace: preserved to a height of 1.80 m, they allow to reconstruct the original layout of the edifice, at least as far as it concerns its lower level.

The platform was intended as an expedient to raise the height of the palace both for practical and visibility reasons: it ensured protection against water, stability for the upper storeys, and permitted to elevate the edifice above the surrounding ground.

For static purposes, the platform was internally divided into a number of rooms called *casemates* whose framework reflected, in some cases, the arrangement of the upper floor: the walking level of the palace, where the royal activities took place, laid in fact just above the top of the platform.

This foundation technique, also called *cellular construction*¹⁶⁰, was especially used for large edifices built in mud brickwork masonry. The name derives from the grid of rooms resulting from the intersection of different brick walls inside the platform: the cellars thus created were usually filled with rubble, debris or sand to increase the stability of the whole structure.

The platform-foundation, particularly used in Meroitic civil architecture (cf. *infra*), was also known in Egypt. Even if the first prototypes probably trace back to earlier times (Old and Middle Kingdom¹⁶¹), evidence for its use is mostly attested starting from the New Kingdom onwards.

After the description of the specific characteristics of the platform of palace B1500, a general picture of the known evidence related to foundation platforms both in Egypt and Nubia will follow. The analysis has been divided into different sections according to geographical, chronological, and typological patterns.

¹⁶⁰ ARNOLD 2003, pp. 49-50.

¹⁶¹ ARNOLD 2003, p. 49.

4.1 The foundation platform of palace B1500

The platform is a square structure with a side of 61 m and a height of 1.80 m, built using mud bricks (8 × 17 × 34 cm) for the interior and red bricks for the outer layer of the enclosing wall, 2.50 m thick¹⁶². Built as a casemate structure, it represents the foundation level of the palace, whose walls entirely collapsed leaving no trace of the upper floor. At the moment of the excavation, the inner grid of casemates was found heavily compromised by the removal of its mud bricks, stolen in ancient as well modern times to be used as fertiliser; in particular, the southern part of the platform is the most damaged of the whole building.

4.1.1 The exterior wall decoration

Although the destruction of the walls deprived us of a better understanding of the original layout of the palace, it has helped to preserve the outer coating of the building, sometimes impressed on the collapsed bricks and sometimes protected by them: in some parts of the edifice, in fact, the exterior decoration was found still in place, covered and preserved by the fallen bricks. Therefore it has been possible to identify the composition of the coating, consisting of a very hard whitewashed plaster of chalk and pebbles.

The outer surface of the perimeter wall was characterised by the presence of two different kinds of decorative motif: a simple buttress created by a protruding brick, and a more complex one composed of a pillar plus three vertical rows (*tori*) made using peculiar bricks with a round end (Fig. 69). The first one, painted blue, was regularly disposed on every façade at a distance of about 2.20 m; it seems that this jutting motif did not characterise the whole height of the wall, but stopped at about 1.40 m, where a stone “mensola” was placed¹⁶³. The second motif was composed of three rounded bands 1.10 m wide, painted red, blue, and yellow; these rows were not parallel to each other but converged instead towards the top of the platform, thus creating a sort of trapezoidal structure which could perhaps recall the shape of a pylon¹⁶⁴.

¹⁶² DONADONI 1993, p. 101.

¹⁶³ DONADONI 1993, pp. 101-102: Donadoni suppose this ledge was meant to indicate the walking level on the inside of the platform; nevertheless, considering that the platform is used as a foundation for the upper level, we must assume this latter was located on a higher height than 1.80 m; ROCCATI 2011, p. 67. Cf. also REPORT 2012.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Although the top of the wall is not preserved, it is likely that it consisted of a typical Egyptian cavetto cornice, as suggested by the discovery of some moulded and painted bricks¹⁶⁵.

On its upper part, the outer perimeter wall was then decorated with a series of glazed terracotta (faience) tiles, mostly rounded, featuring different subjects and colours: busts of women holding grapes and crowns, the god Apedemak with the lunar crescent, a series of *s3* signs arranged in a circle and others (Fig. 70); the simplest examples were just 15 cm wide monochrome plates. Most of these tiles have been found partially fragmented under the brick rubble of the walls which had covered them after the destruction of the palace. Even if there is no evidence to argue the pattern used in their disposition on the wall, the fact that fragments have been found in front of every façade of the palace indicates that some sort of regular arrangement should have existed. We also know that they were roughly inserted in the fresh mortar from which they fell soon after the pose, as proved by the presence of plaster on some of them.

In conclusion, the available data suggest the following reconstruction of the outer wall of the palace: a white background was enriched by the presence of several colourful alternating lesenas, the simpler ones regularly disposed all around the wall and the composite ones used especially near the corners and the accesses; a significant number of faience tiles with Dionysiac and sometimes Egyptian themes decorated the upper part of the wall following a non-identified pattern; finally, a cavetto cornice enriched by Hellenizing elements closed the top of the wall. The presence of Hellenizing architectural elements was noted mostly during the 2012 and 2013 campaigns, when a painted lesena capital in alexandrine style and a stone covered in painted plaster belonging to the top of the wall were found (Fig. 71).

Also in 2012, an interesting variation in the level of the outer coating was detected while investigating the missing western side of the perimeter wall of the platform. It was noted that in correspondence to the podium found just south of the west entrance (cf. *infra*, Fig. 28), the level of the plaster applied on the platform rose, reaching the same height of that applied to the podium and the base of the staircase of the western access (Fig. 72). Taking into account that in the rest of the palace the floor level is lower, such a difference could be due to an elevation of the ground – connected to a sloping terrain –

¹⁶⁵ ROCCATI 2011, p. 67.

which consequently led to the raising of the foundations of both the platform and the podium¹⁶⁶.

The decision of setting the palace on an elevated platform together with its location on raised ground is indicative of a careful preliminary planning aimed at the preservation of the edifice from the damage caused by the flood.

4.1.2 The masonry

As already mentioned, the masonry of the platform is characterised by the use of mud bricks for the inner parts of the structure and red bricks for the external surface of the perimeter wall, where a stronger resistance against flood waters was obviously required. During the 2011 campaign, the south-western section of the wall was unearthed, revealing massive destruction caused by the brick-removal activity perpetrated by the *sebbakhin*. Nevertheless, the absence of mud bricks made it easier to expose the foundations of the wall, where at least one layer of red bricks was identified (Fig. 73)¹⁶⁷; undoubtedly, this expedient contributed to seal the wall against the flood, and may thus indicate a greater need for waterproofing in this area of the palace. The presence of red bricks just under the foundations has also been traced in 2015 during the excavation of the eastern part of the same tract of the wall. The apparent absence of this technical device in other areas of the structure could be due just to the lower level reached by the previous excavations.

Another particular technical arrangement characterising this section is the use of stones in the foundation of the south-western corner of the platform, where some rows of blocks of local stone were identified during the 2013 campaign (Fig. 74)¹⁶⁸. The presence of durable materials such as stone and red bricks conveys once again the idea of an area particularly prone to flooding and consequently requiring a higher capability of drainage of the masonry built upon it.

The thickness of the internal walls of the platform ranges approximately from 1.60 to 1.90 m, creating a solid grid of empty rooms whose stability had been increased with a fill of mud and debris mostly composed of broken red bricks. The nature of this filling, whose components came from the demolition of ancient buildings, indicates that it was a

¹⁶⁶ CIAMPINI 2013A, pp. 54-55.

¹⁶⁷ REPORT 2011.

¹⁶⁸ REPORT 2013.

structural intentional device rather than a consequence of the collapse of the palace, as in the case of Muweis¹⁶⁹.

4.1.3 The plan

Before proceeding with the description of the plan of the edifice, it is necessary to take into account some remarks. First, the map of B1500 is incomplete in its south-western corner, where the first excavations have started only in 2011 and are currently still being carried out¹⁷⁰. Nevertheless, the profiles of the casemates have been outlined in 2015 in a preliminary sketch and are partially visible also in the orthophotos taken during the last campaign (Fig. 75). At the same time, it is important to underline that the investigation undertaken by the first excavators in the previous 50 years was aimed mainly at the recognition of the upper level of the casemates walls, thus leaving undug most of the content of the rooms.

In the previous chapter, we saw how the remaining evidence of the northern access qualifies it as the most likely main access to the palace; nevertheless, we must remember that the poor state of conservation of the south side of the building could affect our understanding of the importance of the related entrance¹⁷¹. What is certain is that the ceremonial life of the palace took place mostly on the north-south axis of the building, where the monumental chambers were situated.

The first circulation level was located at about 2 m from the ground and was reachable by means of a ramp. In particular, the north entrance gave access to a room [A – cf. Fig. 68] (about 9.60 × 8.80 m) where six columns were originally disposed into two rows, as testified by their stone bases (80 × 80 × 35 cm) found still *in situ*¹⁷²; for their part, the bases were standing on a foundation layer of red bricks. The identification of the two rows of columns as porches is confirmed by the concrete matrix of the floor of the room: the presence of a waterproof material fits well with an open, unroofed place. Moreover, it was by the south-western corner of this chamber that the stela bearing the names of Natakamani and Amanitore was found in 1984 (Fig. 76).

Walking south, a small rectangular room [B] (about 2.80 × 2.10 m) functioned as a vestibule leading to the next chamber. Looking at the plan, the small room appears to

¹⁶⁹ MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 95-96.

¹⁷⁰ REPORT 2011-2016.

¹⁷¹ ROCCATI 2008, pp. 256-257.

¹⁷² DONADONI 1993, p. 103: only half of them was found still in place during the excavation.

be aligned with other two cells of the same size, but only the central one bore traces of a threshold towards room C: the lateral ones also had an opening, but they were accessible only from the inside of chamber C.

The idea that this vestibule was not simply a hallway, but rather an important – and maybe symbolic – passage point was conveyed by the discovery in it of fragments of leaf gold, originally covering the plastered walls of the room¹⁷³.

The preciously decorated chamber led to another hall [C] (about 7.60 × 9.60 m) characterised by the presence of porches. Here, in fact, other stone bases (70 × 70 × 40 cm) mark the existence of six columns arranged in two parallel rows. Unlike room A, where no traces of the columns remained, several pieces of evidence were found here: three bases still bore the circular marks left by the drums set upon them; being it cut from the same stone, on two of them the bottom of the column was present; and finally, some drums were found with a 70 cm diameter¹⁷⁴.

Again, despite the resemblance with room A, this chamber was probably a roofed hall, as suggested by both the lack of a waterproof floor and the presence of some blocks with a likely sustaining function. Furthermore, the discovery of some fragments of glazed tiles let us suppose a rich decoration of its walls, which would fit well with a path characterised by ceremonial purposes leading to what has been called the “Reception Hall” of the palace¹⁷⁵.

Nevertheless, the most monumental hall of the edifice was certainly the central court D, which stands out for the presence of its peristyle on two levels. The latter, interpreted as a kiosk by Donadoni, underwent a detailed architectural analysis which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

We will just emphasise here the spatial relation existing between the court and the rest of the palace: indeed, while the rooms described so far result slightly misaligned to the west with respect to the centre of the edifice, court D lies exactly on the convergence of the main axis of the palace.

Access to the upper floor was granted, in the western wing of the edifice, by a staircase reachable from a passage opened in the middle of the western wall of hall C and lined with stone slabs¹⁷⁶. Next to this, dividing room E in two halves, a foundation layer of red bricks was detected, serving as a support for three columns or pillars of which only

¹⁷³ DONADONI 1993, pp. 104-105.

¹⁷⁴ DONADONI 1993, p. 105.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ DONADONI 1993, p. 106.

the stone bases (80 × 80 cm) remained. The presence of the row of columns can be explained considering the wideness of the room, measuring 6.40 × 8.60 m: given these dimensions, a central support was necessary to sustain the beams composing the roof¹⁷⁷.

During the dig of the room, a great quantity of ash and the presence of many fireplaces led the excavators to think they were in front of the cooking area of the building; however, the discovery of some architectural elements under the ashes proved this layer have come after the period of occupation of the palace¹⁷⁸. Not much evidence remained to deduce the original function of this chamber in the wider palatial context except for the findings in two near small rooms (F-G), which would suggest an organizational purpose for this area of the building.

These rooms, further south from room E, had, in fact, a different fill than the rest of the casemates – as already seen, usually composed of mud and debris; in this case, they contained mainly broken sherds of pottery, pieces of blue and yellow pigment used in the decoration of the walls, and fragments of bronze tools probably connected to the maintenance of the building. Other interesting findings were discovered here during the Eightie, testifying an elaborate craftsmanship: this is the case, for example, of the censer decorated with human heads or the incised granite basin (Fig. 77) – lost after the flood of 1988 – and a great amount of cretulae resulting from the sealing activity of stored jars and goods¹⁷⁹.

Within room F and G a total of 5.000 clay sealings were collected and, among these, about 1.800 bore seal prints¹⁸⁰. The stratification of the sealings suggested that they were the result of accumulation in a short time span rather than the consequence of operations related to the whole life of the palace. The clay sealings had been applied to different kinds of objects: amphorae, wooden chests, cloth and leather bags, straw baskets and the locks used for the doors themselves. The imported amphorae bearing the print of the potter in Latin characters are an interesting discovery which testifies a long-distance trade with the northern regions, perhaps even up to the coast of the Mediterranean, through mediation of Egypt¹⁸¹.

The impressions left on some of them comprehend about 70 different motifs mostly referred to royal or religious themes such as representations of the king or

¹⁷⁷ DONADONI 1993, p. 107.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; VINCENNELLI 1993, pp. 116-141; VINCENNELLI 1992, pp. 106-121.

¹⁸⁰ VINCENNELLI 1992, p. 108.

¹⁸¹ VINCENNELLI 1992, p. 107. The international character of trades is also attested by the discovery of a bronze handle depicting a Faun's head, clearly reminding a Hellenistic influence.

Apedemak and other deities (Fig. 78)¹⁸². The stamps, probably made using a metal matrix and/or signet-rings, were generally oval or circular.

Considering the nature of the findings, it is likely that this area of the palace had to be devoted to the storage of products used in its administration, thus confirming an actual residential function of the building, at least for a limited time. It is nonetheless true that the conspicuous presence of religious motifs could also hint at a preparation area for ceremonial purposes connected to royal celebrations¹⁸³.

On the south side of the peristyle, two thresholds in red bricks were detected: while the eastern one led to a closed and unroofed room [H], as indicated by its floor lined with a hard white cover, the western passage conducted to the southern entrance of the edifice passing through an oblong room parallel [I] to the unroofed chamber.

A similar corridor connecting chamber D with the eastern access has been recognized on the east wing of the palace for the presence of two doorsteps; interestingly, they result perfectly aligned with another threshold located on the north-western corner of the peristyle and leading to the west entrance via room E. Likewise, the already mentioned southern gateway lies on the same axis of the northern one which starts from the entrance and reaches the central court; in other words, a person who entered from the northern or southern access could easily cross the entire length of the palace without any interposed obstacle.

¹⁸² VINCENTELLI 1992, p. 108.

¹⁸³ Cf. MAILLOT 2016B, p. 100.

4.2 Examples of foundation platform in Egypt

In the known examples, the platform was usually built in bricks and divided, on the inside, into rooms with no passages between them, filled with gravel or sand. The building set upon it was reachable by means of a ramp starting at ground level and reaching the top of the platform¹⁸⁴.

The inner layout of the structure, consisting of several adjoining rooms, often induced scholars to think they were in front of storehouses¹⁸⁵: even if the lack of doors could be explained by assuming the presence of an access from the top¹⁸⁶, in most cases these rooms had only a structural purpose.

Nevertheless, Petrie was one of the first who recognised their true nature in 1901 writing about a mud-brick building found during the excavations of Ptolemaic and Roman layers at Hu (Diospolis Parva):

[...] The building seems therefore to have been for some public purpose; and I carefully cleared out all the chambers, but without finding anything. What remains of it is only the substructure (i.e. the platform), sunk through 7 or 8 feet of town rubbish to a rock basis; without any doorways between the chambers, which were merely cellar pits under the apparent floor level.¹⁸⁷

4.2.1 Structures related to sacred areas

In Egypt, several small buildings bearing traces of cellular construction located in the vicinity of temples have received, because of their reduced dimensions, less attention than the larger edifices that will be discussed later. This has often led to a general misinterpretation of their function and to a superficial classification, mainly as platform-foundations for bark stations or peripteral temples, given the presence of the stone decoration for the walls and the shrines at the bottom of the edifice¹⁸⁸.

Their connection to the sacred area is unquestionable and made clear by their location within the temple precincts; however, in many cases, they appeared to serve an

¹⁸⁴ SPENCER 1979, p. 120.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Cf. VERCOUTTER 1962, p. 281 (about the palace of Wad Ben Naqa): “De plus, beaucoup de ces salles n'ont pas d'accès les unes avec les autres, ni avec les pièces qui les bordent [...] **on ne pouvait y pénétrer qu'à partir de l'étage supérieur** en y descendant au moyen d'échelles; tout ceci confirme que les salles du bas [...] ne constituaient que les dépendances du palais et que les salles d'habitation et de réception étaient bien situées à l'étage.”

¹⁸⁷ PETRIE 1901, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸⁸ SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008, p. 101.

economic rather than religious function, having been identified as $\text{šn}^c \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \text{w}^c \text{ } \text{b}$, or “pure storehouse”¹⁸⁹.

4.2.1.a *Shena wab(w)* (Smoláriková 2008)

The *shena wab* of Psammuthis (29th dynasty) – Karnak, precinct of the temple of Amun (Fig. 32).

The attribution to Psammuthis has been expressed on the basis of a block found here bearing his name, but it is likely that a similar structure was already present in the same place during the 26th dyn. and later simply renewed.

The building (45.5 × 55.5 m) stood on an elevated platform 4.5 m high and is one of the largest of its kind. The main floor, where the activities took place, was separated into two main parts: a front, occupied by an outer court with portico, and an inner complex composed of several storing rooms facing three different corridors, each accessible, in turn, by three monumental gates. The function of these rooms has been confirmed by some inscriptions found on their walls together with offering scenes stating their status of $\text{šn}^c \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \text{w}^c \text{ } \text{b} \text{ } \text{r} \text{ } \text{h} \text{r} \text{p} \text{ } \text{h} \text{t} \text{p} \text{w} \text{ } \text{ } \text{ } \text{n} \text{t} \text{r} \text{ } \text{i} \text{m} \text{.f} \text{r}^c \text{ } \text{n} \text{b}$ (great and pure storehouse for managing the offerings every day).

The *shena wab* of Monthu-Re (30th dynasty(?), depiction of Nectanebo II) – Karnak, precinct of the temple of Month (Fig. 33).

Also in this case the edifice was located on a platform, but much lower than the previous one, being it only 2.5 m high. The approaching ramp was found here as well: it was adorned by means of a stone kiosk with six columns placed just in front of the main entrance, at the top of the platform.

The entrance gave access to the edifice, composed – also in this case – of a forecourt leading to the main part of the building where the storerooms were located; in the middle of the structure, a corridor lying on the same axis of the entrance permitted to reach every room.

¹⁸⁹ SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008, p. 101.

The *shena wab* of Khonsu (3rd cent. BC: restoration, inscription of Ptolemy III; original building: 25th dynasty, maybe Taharqa) – Karnak, precinct of the temple of Khonsu (Fig. 34).

Despite the poor state of conservation of this building, its mud-brick platform was still recognisable and preserved to a height of 2.7 m. The frontal part of the edifice is considerably more compromised than the rest, but it was surely reached by a ramp and embellished by a portico of four columns. Seven storerooms composed the inner part of the building and, among these, four faced the central corridor coming from the entrance.

The *shena wab* of Mut (original building: 25th dynasty, maybe Taharqa) – Karnak, precinct of the temple of Mut (Fig. 35).

The layout seen so far for this kind of building repeats itself also here with a ramp reaching the entrance at the centre of the platform, an outer part composed of a portico and at least five rooms used as storerooms in the inner part of the edifice: two other rooms visible on the plan do not present an access and their storing function is consequently dubious.

To sum up, the presence of a *shena wab* seems to be a typical element within the enclosures of the temples of Karnak at least from the 25th dynasty onwards. Its cultic and storing purpose became clear after the recognition of hieroglyphic inscriptions on its walls explicitly stating their functional status within the cultic context.

As seen in the given examples, these buildings shared a series of features, such as the presence of a portico, an approach ramp, a (variable) number of internal rooms appointed for storage facing a central corridor usually leading to a shrine in the rear of the edifice. In the proposed examples, being the living floor (namely the actual building) still present, no detailed information is available on the platform itself, except that it was built in mud bricks and reached a height between 2.5 m – for the smaller buildings – and 4.5 m – for the bigger ones. An exhaustive knowledge of its layout and masonry would be certainly useful in order to investigate the architectural features of the whole complex.

4.2.1.b *Tanis* (Spencer 1979; Smoláriková 2008)

At the site of Tanis¹⁹⁰, in the eastern Delta (Fig. 36), two great enclosure walls – the inner and earlier one attributed to Pseusennes I, the outer one to Sheshonq III – delimited the sacred area dominated by the Great Temple of Amun.

Within this temenos, a building called by Montet “L’Edifice en Briques Crues”¹⁹¹ (Fig. 37) was found during his excavations, carried out between 1921 and 1951¹⁹².

Since traces of foundation rituals similar to the ones found beneath the great walls were discovered in it, it is likely that the edifice was completed during the 21st or the 22nd dynasty as well. It is built in brickwork and divided into several inner compartments. The mere structural function of these is made clear once again by the absence of doors between the rooms and the lack – within them – of any evidence of a possible occupation; it is likely that they were filled up with gravel and/or sand to create a uniform and solid level.

A ramp, directed towards the northern wall of the Great Temple, was placed on the southern side of the edifice to ascend to the top of it, where the entrance to the actual floor level was located. Even if no evidence remained, we could assume that it pertained to some sort of religious building, probably connected to the temple. If this was the case, and considering the sacred context in which it is inserted, the architectural expedient by which a building is elevated from the ground by means of a podium-like platform could also reflect the Egyptian religious concept of the *primaeval mound*. Such an ideological interpretation could perhaps be applied also to the south-western corner of palace B1500, where some stone foundations were found (cf. *infra*).

Being the layout of the platform very similar to that of other sites in the Delta, the structure was dated to the Saite Period¹⁹³.

4.2.1.c *Saqqara* (Emery 1969; Martin 1973; Spencer 1979)

In the late Sixties, the excavations conducted by W.H. Emery on the northern part of the site led to the discovery of a great brick platform near a large courtyard, soon recognised by the excavator himself as a “rubble-built enclosure which would form a platform of some large building since destroyed”¹⁹⁴ (Fig. 38). Indeed, at the time of the

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Fig. 36 and ff.

¹⁹¹ SPENCER 1979, p. 71.

¹⁹² WILKINSON 2000, p. 112.

¹⁹³ SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008, p. 118.

¹⁹⁴ EMERY 1967, p. 144.

first digs, the only remains left on the upper part of the platform were connected to a later re-use of the platform and consisted of traces of houses of the Christian Period. Nevertheless, after the campaign of 1968, it was clear that the platform was the foundation of the temple of Isis erected by Nectanebo II in the 4th cent. BC; such an assumption was possible thanks to the discovery of some limestone cornice blocks incised with the cartouches of the king and reused as foundation for the Christian settlement.

Being the platform-foundation just an enclosure wall filled with gravel, to counterbalance the thrust against the retaining walls of the structure a large buttress made of bricks was built on the western wall of the platform (Fig. 39).

Also in this case, access to the temple was granted by a ramp – on the west side – consisting of two parallel walls filled with sand and paved with bricks.

The temple of Nectanebo was not the only building found by Emery featuring a foundation platform. Not far from it some buildings probably connected with the cult of Apis stood upon a platform within which a series of cross-walls created a grid of rooms with no doors connecting them.

These rooms were originally filled with debris to create a flat surface suitable for sustaining a building above it.

4.2.1.d Medamud (Spencer 1979; Smoláriková 2008)

During the excavations undertaken at the site in the first half of the twentieth century, a building with a platform foundation was found lying in the temple area (Fig. 40). The structure was built in bricks and was composed of several narrow rooms which led the excavators to think they had unearthed some sort of storehouse. Nevertheless, the ramp connected to the building resulted in the identification of the rooms as casemates; this is also confirmed by the lack of doors and the absence of any sign of occupation. The presence of some architectural elements suggesting the original presence of a kiosk decorated with a four-column portico rather implies its use as a *shena was*, thus connecting this edifice to the already seen typology.

4.2.1.e El-Kab (Spencer 1979)

Another example of cellular construction is found within the second enclosure wall (attributed to Nectanebo I), where a platform has been recognised as the foundation level of a temple.

4.2.2 Citadels and Fortifications

4.2.2.a *Defenna* (Petrie 1888; Smoláriková 2008)

The military settlement of Defenna, probably founded during the Ramesside Period, was later renewed under Psamtek I given its strategic position on the Sinai border¹⁹⁵. The new arrangement of the military settlement, whose garrison was composed mainly of Greek troupes, was probably implemented soon after the end of the campaign in 664 BC¹⁹⁶.

It is interesting to note that according to Petrie, who worked at the site at the end of the 19th century, the main building (plan in Fig. 41) was a palace-fort rather than a simple military base: a place where the ruler himself could live together with his troops¹⁹⁷. Despite the fact that Smoláriková has questioned the traditional designation as “fort” of this structure, its defensive purpose remains still indisputable¹⁹⁸.

The main edifice where the actual living quarters were located is lost, and once again the only evidence of the structure is represented by its mud-brick foundation-platform (45 m per side). Among its remaining walls, the highest reached about 7 m, thus implying a possible original height of 10 m (cross-section in Fig. 41).

Evidence of springing line (namely, in architecture, the point from which the arch rises from the wall support) was found on the best-preserved wall parts of the structure and suggests that at least some of the rooms composing the platform were roofed with domes. Furthermore, Petrie believed the doomed rooms to be accessible from the top via an opening in their vaulted ceiling and were thus used as store-rooms; this would also be confirmed by the discovery of some objects inside certain rooms (sculptured chips and statuettes).

Other rooms, as frequently seen, were filled with sand or brickwork to sustain a massive building on the upper level: this could be the case, for example, of the large southern compartment just above room 39. The vast room just north of this one could be either empty and vaulted or, more likely, an open, unroofed space, considering the presence of large fallen stone blocks at its bottom.

¹⁹⁵ ARNOLD 2003, p. 66.

¹⁹⁶ PETRIE 1888, p. 48: the pottery found at the site clearly indicates Greek manufactures. It is also likely that this fort hosted the Greek soldiers used by Psamtek to conquer the country, cf. GRIMAL 2011, p. 452. For the dating: PETRIE 1888, pp. 48, 53.

¹⁹⁷ PETRIE 1888, p. 53.

¹⁹⁸ SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008, pp. 14-15.

Most of the compartments were dug down to their foundations confirming that the majority of them were just filled using sand and debris for structural purposes. In the remaining rooms some objects, or fragments, were found perhaps indicating a different function: room 35 (flakes from an inscribed block, room 40 (upper part of the statuette cited above, depicting a prisoner), room 30 (several poorly made jars, some of them found under the foundation of the wall).

To reach the fort at the top of the platform a ramp or a staircase was certainly needed, but no evidence of such a structure has been found during the excavations. Considering that the later access was placed on the north side of the edifice, we can suppose that it was located here even in earlier times. A removable wooden stairway has been hypothesised based on the observation of the entrance of Naukratis.

4.2.2.b Naukratis (Petrie 1886; Smoláriková 2008)

At the site of Naukratis, a colony founded by Greek traders during the 26th dynasty which became very important for its influence on commercial traffic under the reign of Amasis in the 6th cent. BC¹⁹⁹, another building discovered inside the great temenos (Fig. 42) was clearly recognised as characterised by cellular construction (Fig. 43).

Despite the fact that both Petrie and Hogarth connected the first phases of this building to the Saite Period, Muhs proposed a Ptolemaic dating for the whole edifice, given the discovery of Ptolemaic objects in the filling of some cells²⁰⁰; nevertheless, their presence here is fully justifiable considering the significant restoring process the area underwent during the Ptolemaic Period.

The building was just one of the two edifices that were originally included within the enclosure, but of the second one only some traces remained on the ground and it was not possible to investigate its features.

As for the building of interest to us, it measured about 55 m on its northern and southern sides, 54.5 m on the eastern and 54 on the western one, thus giving the edifice a generally square plan. Regarding its original height, Petrie suggested at least 15 m on the basis of the remaining walls, 10 m high.

The edifice standing upon the platform was divided into two halves by a long corridor from which different minor hallways departed reaching the rooms thus

¹⁹⁹ WILKINSON 2000, p. 107.

²⁰⁰ MUHS 1994, p. 104.

composing the first floor. The walking level of the first storey was indicated by the wooden floor found inside these chambers, at the height of about 5 m above the ground.

The mud-brick platform on which the building stood was instead composed of the usual closed-off cellars that therefore could be reached only from the first floor and reflected the same symmetrical layout seen for the dwelling floor. This arrangement led Petrie to think that a storing function could be expected for the basement, in order to protect the valuable wares present at the site, it being an international emporium; in general, a defensive purpose was ascribed to the whole structure.

At the height of the living floor, 5 m from the ground, Petrie also found traces of two ledges placed one above the other (about 1 m apart) that Spencer interpreted as the level for the springing of the vault covering the casemates (the lower) and the level for the posing of the wooden floor (the upper).

As concerns the entrance of the structure we can assume it was placed 5 m above the ground in correspondence to the floor level and reached, as already seen, via a wooden structure that could be removed since no evidence for a permanent structure was found.

4.2.2.c Tell el-Balamun (Smoláriková 2008)

At the site of Tell el-Balamun the sacred area is characterised by the presence of two walls – the inner one related to the 26th dynasty and the outer one to the 30th – enclosing several temples and a building directly integrated into the southern corner of the inner wall (Figs. 44-45).

The edifice had an almost square plan with sides of 54.15 m × 61.10 m and an internal division in compartments filled with different type of materials. The layout of the casemates in the two halves of the structure is in this case strictly symmetrical, being the north-eastern half of the edifice the exact reproduction of the south-western one: these two halves were separated by a corridor placed in the middle of the building and delimited, in turn, by two long walls 3.25 m thick, running its full length. On both sides, a grid of cellars was created by means of intercepting cross-walls of different lengths, poorly constructed compared to the other masonry used in the building: once again, this internal division of space reflects an architectural search for stability, which also explains the inner filling of the cellars of brick rubble, earth, mud bricks, fragments of pottery and

traces of limestone²⁰¹. The presence of the latter is not surprising since at least the lower courses of the external bricks were probably reinforced with limestone blocks, as suggested by the presence of this material on the exterior walls.

The organisation of the space within the edifice followed a regular pattern: each half of the building was in fact divided into three blocks composed in turn of three rooms (two square-shaped and a long rectangular one) separated by long and narrow corridors. It is likely that the latter reflected the presence of corresponding passages located on the first floor to access the rooms.

This level was reached by a very long ramp, made of mud brick walls containing an earth infill, placed at 9.70 m from the north corner of the building and measuring 63.50 m. Being the mud bricks composing the structure of the same kind used for the building, we can assume that they are contemporaneous.

The same can probably be said for the annexe whose front was located about 60 m northeast of the main building and laid exactly on the line of the lower end of the ramp. The presence of two very narrow doors to access it combined with the thickness of its walls (2-4 m) let us suppose its defensive nature, maybe connected to the control of the activities related to the main building. Therefore, this apparent defensive purpose of the compound would confirm the identification of the foundation-platform as pertinent to a fort or citadel.

4.2.2.d Tell Qedwa (Oren 1984; Smoláriková 2008)

During the 1970's and 1980's an archaeological expedition led by the Ben-Gurion University brought to light a massive fortified structure at the edge of the eastern Delta plain (Fig. 36), consisting of a large square mud-brick enclosure wall measuring 200 m per side (Fig. 46). The wall is characterised by the presence, on three sides, of five bastions equally spaced between themselves (only the central three, not considering the ones being part of the corners); the general thickness of the wall on these sides is about 13.5 m and reaches 17.5 m in correspondence to the bastions. Moreover, small compartments measuring 3×2 m were built at regular intervals inside the walls. This arrangement was not applied on the east wall where the general layout is completely

²⁰¹ SPENCER 1996, p. 52; SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008, p. 66.

different, with an increased thickness of about 20 m and the presence, in all its length, of rectangular compartments flanked by long and narrow inner corridors.

In some of these chambers and corridors – both in the east wall and the others – excavations were carried out revealing no evidence of doorways, floors, or any trace of use (storerooms, dwelling): most of them contained fragments of bricks, stone or pottery sherds randomly disposed.

According to E. D. Oren, the whole system of compartments responds to the engineering need for stability and drainage on a soil marked by dampness and a very highwater table such as the Delta's. Moreover, the internal chamber division would be necessary to counteract the pressure resulting from the huge masses of brickwork²⁰².

Within the enclosure, some buildings were found and partially unearthed: mostly, installations for storage and industry often related to groups of large storage jars set into the ground and whose upper part had been cut off. Close to these jars stone pounders and grinders had usually been found, sometimes with evidence of copper slag indicating metallurgic activity.

As clearly visible on the plan of the fortress, no gate(s) were present in the enclosure and no traces remain either to indicate the original access of the structure; nevertheless, a location on the north-eastern corner of the enclosure has been proposed after discovery of the presence of the moat on this side of the fort. This led to the conclusion that at Tell Qedwa the entrance to the fort was granted by a ramp possibly built in mud bricks, then disappeared perhaps because of water erosion.

The presence of a ramp is even more likely considering the contemporaneous Saite fortress of Dorginarti, in Lower Nubia: here the enclosure wall, whose layout composed of bastions is very reminiscent of the one of Tell Qedwa, presents two gates on the north-western and western sides. As concerns the dating of the fortress, the collected material – in which an international influence is clearly recognisable – confirmed that the first phases of the building date back to the beginning of the Saite Period.

²⁰² OREN 1984, p. 13.

4.2.3 Domestic structures (?)

4.2.3.a *Mendes* (Smoláriková 2008)

Several casemates structures have been found at the site of Mendes, but one, in particular, is relevant for our purposes (Fig. 47). Located in the southern part of the site, it measured 11 m per side and was built using concave walls strengthened by wood beams. Among the nine casemates composing it, some were covered by domes on which the base for the upper floor was probably set. Given the lack of communication between the subterranean cellars, it is doubtless that we are in the presence of a platform foundation with no storage purpose. Nevertheless, no evidence was found capable of shedding any light on the building standing on the of it. The only certainty is that it was not related to religious purposes, thus letting us suppose a domestic function for the structure.

4.2.3.b *Tell el-Fara'in (Buto)* (Smoláriková 2008)

The same nature has been hypothesized for the casemates structures at the site of Tell el-Fara'in, where some small buildings, the larger one measuring 22.5 × 22.5 m, have been found presenting a platform-foundation probably connected to official buildings (Fig. 48). Their location on the plan would confirm this interpretation: it results in fact, in an assemblage of edifices not far from each other, separated only by narrow corridors. Despite being placed inside the settlement, no other information can be argued about them except for their probable dating to the 26th dynasty.

Their original function is moreover harder to detect considering that some of the casemates were reused in later times as burials.

4.2.4 Royal palaces

4.2.4. a *Deir el-Ballas* (Lacovara 1990; Lacovara 1997)

Since the years of the first excavations²⁰³, the site of Deir el-Ballas has revealed an Egyptian settlement, dating to the late Second Intermediate Period – early 18th dynasty, organized around a large, royal palace. The site was laid on virgin ground, at the edge of the desert line and clusters of houses were located north and south of the palace together with several administrative buildings and storerooms; curiously, no evidence of a temple has been found so far, despite the significant extension reached by the excavations²⁰⁴.

The main palace and its enclosure, called North Palace (Fig. 49) to distinguish it from a smaller, southern one, occupied an area of about 45.000 m². The masonry of the building is characterized by the employment of roughly bonded mud bricks measuring 54×27×18 cm while the core of the edifice was placed on an elevated platform composed of casemates (Fig. 50), some of which still preserved their walls to a height of 5 m.

Intended to support the upper storey where the living quarters of the palace were located, the structural function of the casemates was misinterpreted by the first excavators who dug their fill and their covering levels, mainly consisting of sterile gravel, rock, and brick rubble.

Despite the fact that the later Roman and Coptic re-occupation of the site compromised the integrity of the New Kingdom's palace features, traces of the original decoration of the façade testify the presence of wall paintings and faience tiles, a pattern very similar to the one found in B1500.

At the southern end of the site, the remains of the already mentioned Southern Palace (Fig. 51) were found. Also in this case, the edifice was built on a rectangular platform measuring 100 × 44 m and constructed on casemates. The height of the platform, 5.5 m, is similar to that of the Northern palace and its top was reached by means of a broad staircase. Also the masonry is analogous to the one employed in the main palace, with large mud bricks occasionally bonded using layers of matting.

²⁰³ The first campaign was undertaken in 1900-1901 by the Hearst Expedition from the University of California, under the direction of G. Reisner, cf. LAVOCARA 1990, p. 1.

²⁰⁴ LACOVARA 1997, pp. 81-82. As stated by the author, however, such an absence is justifiable considering that the typical redistributive role associated to the temple was here carried out by the palace itself. Moreover, small chapels located on the South Hill could sufficiently meet the requirements of the cult of a small community. This does not exclude, however, a discovery of further evidence related to a hypothetical temple in the future; to ascertain the presence of a major sacred structure in this context would require a deepen investigation to detect the possible relationship existing between the palace and the temple.

Without any doubt, this structure represents the foundation level of a building whose function is not clear, since only a few elements related to a possible occupation have been found; considering this, a residential purpose has been excluded in favour of a military one: its position atop of a high hill makes the recognition of this edifice as an observation spot an apt one. The only evidence left of the original building consisted of a several metres high debris accumulation of mud-brick rubble and gypsum plaster.

4.2.4.b *Memphis* (Petrie 1909; Kemp 1977; Smoláriková 2008)

On the northern side of Memphis, traces of a royal palace ascribed to Apries (26th dyn.) initially found in 1909 were further investigated during the Seventies, when a brief survey conducted by B. Kemp more clearly defined the layout of the building (Fig. 52).

Despite the bad state of preservation of the site, heavily damaged also by the activity of the modern *sebbakhin*²⁰⁵, it was clear that the original building stood upon a foundation-platform built on casemates, of which only a minimal part remained. The gradual destruction of the mound caused the exposure of large sections of the site, thus contributing, at least, to the outlining of its stratigraphy. It was clear, indeed, that all the major vertical walls descended unbroken through the mound, with the spaces between them deliberately filled up with earth rubble.

None of the exposed sections extended enough to reveal the bottom of the walls, but on the northern part of the building the deepest identifiable ones reached 12 m of depth, thus giving an estimation of the minimum height originally reached by the structure. The layout of this northern area, called *mandara* by Petrie²⁰⁶, is peculiar since traces of a series of massive columns were found probably referred to a columned hall, a fact that led the excavator to its identification as a reception hall. The presence of the columns could also explain the particular layout the brick cells of the casemates assume in this northern area, being oval in plan and thus probably domed: such an arrangement would indeed guarantee a better support for a heavy upper floor, like a columned hall (Fig. 53).

The filling of the casemates was composed mainly of earth with varying quantities of brick rubble; pieces of mud with palm leaf ribs impressions (probably from a roof), fragments of burnt bricks, sherds, and a few cylindrical bread moulds were also present, pointing out that part of this material likely came from a previous level of occupation.

Atop most of the casemates, a layer of mud bricks was laid to sustain, in turn, the superimposed limestone floor: many stone chips were found indicating that this floor probably covered the whole surface of the structure. The situation, however, is once again different in the northern part where, as seen, elongated domes supported by ledges were created to cover the cells. It seems that they were filled only to half their height, thus leaving some space in the upper part. On top of the earth filling the presence of brick fragments can be attributed to the collapse of both domes and walls.

²⁰⁵ The mud bricks are often dug out from the ancient buildings to be used as fertilisers.

²⁰⁶ PETRIE 1909, p. 2.

Even though no actual traces of it laid on the ground, it is likely that a ramp granted access to the top of the platform; its presence has been deduced on the basis of the traces of some enclosures placed south of the palace: shallow trenches crossing east to west and north to south probably marked the original presence of massive containing walls now disappeared. Taking into account that the central axis of this hypothetical structure appears to be aligned to the probable entrance of the palace, supposing the presence of a ramp is even more likely.

4.2.4.c *Tell el-Daba (Avaris)* (Bietak 2005)

The site of ancient Avaris presents some very well documented examples of palatial structures set on casemates (Fig. 54). One of these is palace “F”, dating to the early 18th dynasty, of which only the 7m-high foundation platform remains: it measures 70.5×47 m and is built with the usual mud-brick wall grid filled with soil and brick fragments, moreover some pot sherds related to the late Hyksos Period were also found²⁰⁷.

The proper edifice atop the platform, whose corners were aligned with the four cardinal directions (Fig. 55), was reached by a ramp 6.40 m wide located on the north-eastern side; it is likely that the doorway blocks found more than a century ago bearing the name of the king Amenemhat I were originally placed at the end of this ramp, in correspondence to the access of the edifice²⁰⁸.

The similarity of layout and dimension with the already cited “Southern Palace” of Deir el-Ballas has been used as an argument to hypothesize the original presence of a palace on top of the platform²⁰⁹. However, as already seen, the function of the southern edifice of Deir el-Ballas has not been clarified yet and such a comparison would need further investigation. Nevertheless, the presence, here, of incised blocks ascribed to King Amenemhat – if their original location has been correctly reconstructed – would fit the palatial function of the structure.

If this is the case, the casemate layout allows us to suggest a possible interpretation of the missing living floor as follows, being the grid of walls composed, in fact, of several rooms of different dimensions: on the eastern part of the edifice – excluding the four casemates constituting the foundation for the ramp on the far west side – a series of rectangular rooms varying in size (about 10 x 20 m the larger, 3 x 6 m the smaller) probably formed the foundation for a courtyard which the ramp led to, flanked by three small rooms on the northern part. The presence of a staircase is also recognisable in the very narrow room visible on the plan (Fig. 56). The central part of the edifice would be characterised, instead, by the presence of a bigger, open square court possibly decorated with a central peristyle; this area would be then surrounded by a series of wide corridors leading to the western part of the palace. Such an arrangement is suggested by the long rectangular casemates (measuring, on average, about 20×5 m) built around a central

²⁰⁷ For a reference on casemate-foundations in the Hyksos palatial architecture, see VAN SETERS 1966, pp. 38-41.

²⁰⁸ It must be highlighted here that using inscribed blocks as a chronological indicator is a questionable procedure considering the wide reuse phenomenon undergoing in that peculiar historical context. Nevertheless, the dating seems quite plausible in this case.

²⁰⁹ http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html

square one (12×12 m). On the contrary, the western area is marked by a cluster of rather small square rooms (4 m per side) flanked, on the north and south side, by two long narrow corridors serving as foundation for the stairways. Consequently, this part of the platform has been interpreted as the foundation for an upper throne room decorated with columns, whose location would correspond to the intersections of the casemate walls since this expedient would guarantee the stability needed to sustain such a heavy element on the upper floor.

More similar to the “Northern Palace” of Deir el-Ballas is instead the bigger palace of Avaris, called “G” (168×78.75 m), now reduced to its mud-brick foundation platform (Fig. 57). The inner walls of the structure had an average thickness ranging from 2.15 to 4.30 m and created a grid of long and narrow casemates filled with earth, debris and mud bricks. The finding of storage jars and arrow tips in some rooms let us suppose that not all of them had a mere structural function, but, on the contrary, could actually be used as magazines, especially in the south-eastern part of the edifice; nevertheless, the architectural purpose of the majority of the rooms is confirmed by the absence of any finishing or floor within them.

The variation in thickness of the walls has been used to reconstruct the lost upper storey (Fig. 58): the thicker walls would thus be the load-bearing elements, while the thinner ones would indicate the position of columns on the ceremonial and living quarters above. The latter were reached by means of a ramp located on the north-eastern side of the building, culminating on a terrace like in palace B1500. In addition, the length of the ramp (36.75 m) has permitted to calculate 7.35 m as the original height of the platform. At the base of the ramp, a narrow passage visible on the plan gave access to the left wing of the palace; it is therefore likely that this non-monumental access was reserved for the personnel of the palace.

Always according to the platform layout, the major entrance gave access to a large square courtyard surrounded by columns on three sides: to the west, the line of columns was repeated two more times thus creating a portico composed of three rows of columns. This area led then to a vestibule, probably roofed, in which two rows of columns were present as well.

The western half of the palace, instead, seems characterised by an ideological bipartition reflected in the architecture of the edifice: coming from the entrance, the left wing of the building would be dedicated to the king, while the right one to the god, most likely Amun. The three northern rectangular rooms entering from the vestibule would

remind, in this hypothesis, the typical tripartite temple layout of the Thutmoside period with a sanctuary located in the rear, here corresponding to the rectangular room orientated north-west/south-east (Fig. 59). Behind this, a two-rows columned hall led, in turn, to another tripartite element composed of three small rooms.

On the other side, the left wing of this area would testify the presence of a throne room also decorated with four rows of columns and leading to a more private area of the palace reflected by a series of minor rooms; these were probably accessible via the throne room and a small entrance located on the southern perimeter wall which led, through a staircase, to the upper floor. Some weapons were found in the cellars below this part of the building, therefore accessible from the small entrance and a staircase on the first floor.

The presence of a temple inside a palace, which here would explain the southern position of the throne room, is not a common feature in Egyptian architecture, but rather reflects a Near Eastern model in which the idea of the god living with the kings is present. Considering the history of the site of Avaris, the persistence of this ideological custom in later Egyptian architecture could not be so unlikely. In addition, such a close relationship between a dwelling place and a cultic one is also attested in Egypt at the site of Amarna, where big mansions were usually built in tight connection with solar chapels.

Finally, another interesting feature of the palace is the presence of baths with stone basins just before the access ramp.

4.3 Examples of cellular construction in Meroitic structures

4.3.1 Wad Ben Naga palace (Vercoutter 1962; Baud 2011; Maillot 2016b)

Located on the right bank of the Nile, about 100 km south of Meroe, the already mentioned site of Wad Ben Naga has preserved the remains of a royal palace ascribed to queen Amanishakhete and therefore dated between the 1st cent. BC and the 1st cent. AD²¹⁰, then identified with the name Wad Ben Naga 100 (Figs. 20 and 60).

The building is characterised by a square plan measuring 61 m per side enclosing a grid of narrow rooms which are only partially accessible. The presence within some of these of valuable objects – ivory, ebony, but also jars, clay figurines, and pottery – testifies their use as storage rooms, most likely accessible from the upper floor²¹¹. Nevertheless, the identification of the entire building as a storing place should be rejected since some of the narrow rooms visible on the plan are actually casemates, as indicated by the lack of any door or access in them. Indeed, while an access from the upper floor would be an acceptable explanation for the conservation of valuable materials, such a model surely could not be applied this widely, since it would inevitably affect the movements and the operations inside the rooms²¹².

The topographical position of the edifice (strictly related to the near temples), the findings, and the architectural layout all convey the idea of a royal palace. In this regard, the presence of architectural elements used for the decoration of the monumental rooms is not surprising. Room A on the southern part of the edifice, for example, was composed of two rows of three columns which created a hypostyle hall on the ground floor of the palace as well as serving as support for an open terrace on the upper floor. While the access to the hypostyle room (A) on the ground level was probably granted by means of a small external ramp on the southern side of the edifice, the upper storey was reached internally via a L-shaped ramp (R-C') leading to the room located just above chamber C²¹³. The finding of several composite capitals within the latter has permitted to identify the rectangular walls of this room as supports for a colonnade lying on the upper floor, then collapsed to this level after the destruction of the palace. Therefore, the presence of another hypostyle hall can be reconstructed also on the first floor of the building, which could be reached via ramp R; from here, the little vestibule corresponding to the lower room B gave access to the open terrace mentioned above. Even though, as clearly

²¹⁰ VERCOUTTER 1962, p. 282-284; MAILLOT 2016B, p. 83.

²¹¹ VERCOUTTER 1962, pl. XX; MAILLOT 2016B, p. 80.

²¹² BAUD 2011, p. 349.

²¹³ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 80.

displayed on the plan, rooms B and C were accessible on the ground floor, their primary function of support of the upper level is quite unquestionable.

Another room featuring three pillars in a row was also found just by the central door of the western façade and was reached via a small ramp. On this side, three other smaller ground-level entrances gave access to the north-western corner of the structure, where the storerooms containing ivory, wood, ebony, and jars were located.

In addition, at least three other hypostyle halls situated on the upper floor can be imagined in correspondence to the ground-floor rooms Z, W, and N, where the presence of rectangular structures similar to those seen in chamber C suggests this hypothesis.

Before delving into the characteristics of the cellular construction of the edifice, it is necessary to underline the fact that the level dug by Vercoutter – to which the plan refers – could just be the lowest level to have been excavated, and not, therefore, the foundation one, on which it would consequently lie²¹⁴. This hypothesis appears to be endorsed by the comparison with the central rooms' cluster of the foundation level of Muweis, where the rooms numbered 1 through 8 bear a strict resemblance to the corresponding ones in Wad Ben Naga (B-C-C'-R). The rectangular supporting structures within room C would thus represent nothing but the first-floor development of the casemates set on the lower storey, never dug so far at Wad Ben Naga; in the same way, the two north-south walls creating the three central rooms of Muweis (5-6-7) would be, as a result, the lower structural devices meant to support a columned hall two floors up, according to the following scheme: foundation level – casemates walls; first (or ground) floor – rectangular structures; second floor – columned hall (Fig. 62).

It is interesting to stress, at this point, also the homogeneity which exists between the construction technique seen in the palace of Avaris and the one used here: as described above, at Tell el-Daba the thickness of the walls has proved to be essential to distinguish between load-bearing walls and simpler supports for the columns; applying the same model on the central rooms of Muweis – and comparing them with the rectangular pillars seen at Wad Ben Naga – we can affirm that the same technique persist in this Meroitic context.

If the hypothesis of an unearthed level is correct, the actual foundation platform of the palace of Wad Ben Naga has yet to be excavated, and no clue about its layout can be drawn without leaning on the plan of Muweis. Nevertheless, the presence of casemates

²¹⁴ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 82.

has been verified and testifies the use of a cellular construction also for this level of the edifice. As shown in Fig. 20 (in which the casemates are coloured black) they were placed at the corners and in the central area of the palace: the large rectangular casemate in the centre (about 5.10×12.6 m) corresponded probably to an open space on higher level, also considering that its huge dimension prevented it from being covered with a vaulted system; this open hall would thus guarantee the necessary light intake to lighten ramp R-C'.

This floor of the palace of Wad Ben Naga would thus serve a dual-purpose enclosing in itself both structural casemates and functional chambers such as columned halls and storerooms; the same commixture that we have found in palaces B100 and B2400 at Jebel Barkal.

4.3.2 Muweis palace (Baud 2011; Maillot 2014a-b; Maillot 2015; Maillot 2016a-b)

Also in this case the palace – dated between the end of the 1st cent. BC and the early 1st AD²¹⁵ – is characterised by a square structure which, despite being heavily damaged on its eastern and southern sides, had to reach an original length of 60 m per side (Fig. 25). As already seen, the remaining evidence of the architecture of the palace is here related to its foundation level, namely its foundation platform.

A long internal wall (F17) oriented east-west divides the palace into two parts, north and south, measuring 24×61 m and 37×61 m respectively. These two halves have been further divided into other six clusters of rooms named from A to F²¹⁶. Group A is composed of a total of 9 rooms, of which 5, oriented east-west, have the same length and vary only in wideness, with an average dimension of 13.85×2.9 m; they are flanked on their west side by other 4 chambers oriented in the opposite way and with different length, included between a minimum of 1.85 m and a maximum of 5.9 m (the wideness, of 2.80 m, is the same for all). The lack of any passage connecting them suggests that they are casemates rather than functional places; moreover, their location at the north-western corner of the palace corresponds, at least partially, to the location of the casemates of the palace of Wad Ben Naga: indeed, rooms 28, 29, and 30 are identical to the casemates seen in the previous paragraph. Despite the close resemblance of the layout of these sectors in the two palaces, no evidence of a storing function has been found at Muweis unlike how

²¹⁵ MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 89-90.

²¹⁶ Cf. MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 85-89.

it happened for Wad Ben Naga, where the presence of ivory, wood and jars within some rooms revealed their storing nature. Nevertheless, this could be explained considering that at Muweis the excavated level corresponds to the foundation platform of the palace, while at Wad Ben Naga it probably coincides with the ground floor of the edifice.

The B cluster, covering the middle area of the northern half, is composed of a large room (40) measuring about 8×16 m and probably originally divided into smaller parts by some walls now lost; between room 40 and perimeter wall F31 a smaller room (39) is interposed, thus closing this portion of the palace. These two rooms are then flanked on their west side by other 5 smaller chambers (34-38), the arrangement of which is peculiar since their dimension progressively decreases from north to south. This particular feature could be explained hypothesising that they were used as a foundation for a ramp: the increasing height of the ramp would correspond to a decreasing dimension of the room sustaining it²¹⁷. The distinctive masonry of the walls in this area seems to confirm this conclusion: for example, some soundings made in 2011 on the walls have revealed that wall F24 was composed at its base of four courses of mud bricks disposed in header/stretcher pattern topped with other three courses of red bricks; in addition, its foundation, cut into the virgin soil, was laid on a 20-cm thick layer of fragmented red bricks. Other soundings made on the wall closing the series of rooms on their east side (F151) permitted to establish its stratigraphic relationship with the main wall F17, since the first covers the latter's foundation. Even more recent is finally wall F28, probably built as an extra support²¹⁸.

Of the eastern area (C) almost nothing related to the palatial phase remains, being this corner of the palace the most damaged; nevertheless, this lack of evidence has permitted to verify the presence of an early Meroitic settlement below the palatial layers (Fig. 61)²¹⁹.

Within sector D, a series of long (10.9 m) and narrow (2.20-3.20 m) chambers have been identified as storerooms, while the larger room 9 (about 6.5 m wide) probably served another function considering its dimensions. The remaining rooms of the area (15-18) are too compromised to detect any layout.

Area E, at the centre of the south area, is composed of a big rectangular room on its north end measuring 12.20×5.10 m, a long and narrow room or corridor (2.60×16.60)

²¹⁷ MAILLOT 2014B, p. 786.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ Cf. MAILLOT 2016A.

on its west side, and a series of smaller rooms for the remaining part. Among this cluster of chambers, two are oriented east-west (2-8) and three north-south (5-6-7). The lack of passages in the walls of this central part of the building is certain, since some of them were preserved to a height of about 2 m above the foundation having no traces of doors; in addition, only room 6 bore traces of a floor, and no significant coatings were found on the walls, thus suggesting a structural (casemates) rather than functional (storerooms) function of these spaces. The case of room 6 could be different given the presence in it of a floor made of several layers of whitewashed clay surfaces covered by a layer of sand and clay heavily cracked because of the use of water in the mixture; the stratification of the floor indicates subsequent stages of use for the room, traceable also in the presence of pottery and animal bones. Considering the lack of other material, this room has been interpreted as a place for the production of coatings.

Following the Wad Ben Naga model, this central cluster of rooms would reflect the presence on the upper storey of several columns, the alignment of which would correspond to the walls F8 and F7.

Finally, sector F, to the west, is composed of 5 chambers of which 4 oriented east-west and another, larger one, oriented north-south. The layout of chambers 22 and 23 suggests their structural nature as casemates, probably serving as a support for a large room on the upper floor.

Concerning the matter of the filling of the casemates, most of it consists of broken bricks, sometimes coated red ones, resulting from the collapse of the edifice rather than from voluntary action; this suggests that the casemates were originally empty, unlike other given examples of cellular construction where the filling was often essential to assure enough stability to set an upper floor on the platform. Therefore, to counterbalance the absence of inner material, the presence of a vaulted roof can be perhaps supposed, the architectural structure of which would permit to distribute the weight of the overlying load.

The structural function of most of the rooms is confirmed also by the lack of coatings on the walls or floors. Nevertheless, not all the rooms were casemates: the narrow chambers of the D cluster have been identified as warehouses after the discovery within them of floors covered with potsherds and animal bones; even though there is no evidence of any doors in here either, considering the occupational evidence, this absence could be explained by either the bad state of preservation of the area or an access from the upper floor.

4.3.3 Meroe palaces M294-295 (Török 1997b; Maillot 2016b)

The city of Meroe, by virtue of its political importance starting from the 3rd cent. BC onwards, is characterised by the presence of numerous palatial and official buildings.

One of these is edifice M294, about which few data is available because of the limited amount of documentation²²⁰. Nonetheless, enough evidence remains to argue its square layout with a 55m-long side and its topographical position: located within the great enclosure (Fig. 63), it occupies the southern portion of the area, together with another other palace (M295), and is placed in a very tight spatial relationship – and probably ideological too – with the Amun temple M260, which is located just outside the enclosure wall.

After the discovery of a *cachette* under its foundations, palace M294 has been dated between the 1st cent. BC and the early 2nd cent. AD²²¹.

The royal character of the building has been deduced through the observation of its square plan; it has been compared also to palace B1500 arguing the common presence in both buildings of a monumental element placed in the centre²²².

It is clear that the remaining walls of the edifice constitute its foundation platform, within which different rooms probably serving as casemates – given the absence of doors – are distinguishable.

The same can be said about the adjacent palace M295, once again a square structure measuring 52 × 52 m and preserved only for its north-eastern part. This consist of a grid of rooms of varying size, likely serving as casemates and composing a foundation platform on which the upper storey (or storeys) could be set. It is nonetheless true that some of these could possibly be used as storerooms, maybe with an access via the circulation floor above.

The discovery of several bricks bearing traces of deep fingerprints nearby the building could suggest a covering by vault, since in this kind of masonry, the groove left by the finger is a way to help mortar adhere better to the brick.

²²⁰ TÖRÖK 1997B, p. 153.

²²¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 71.

²²² MAILLOT 2016B, p. 69, n.5; TÖRÖK 1997B, p. 162.

4.3.4 Meroe palace M750 (Török 1997b; Maillot 2016b)

Palace M750 is located very close to temple M60-280 suggesting a strong correlation between the two. The building has a rectangular plan measuring 80 × 48 m which is characterised by the presence of a central open courtyard dividing the building into two wings, north and south. The north hall is a square structure with a 26-m long side with a series of rooms disposed around an elongated central court which probably represent the foundation level of a columned hall on the upper floor.

The southern hall is equally organised around a central element, but this time it consists of a square room (9 × 9 m) serving as a foundation for a peristyle. The rooms are here disposed symmetrically north and south with respect to the central hall and the presence of two stairways has provided evidence of an upper floor.

More than one interpretation of this plan has been proposed: in one of these the northern wing would be the official area while the southern one would be residential. Hinkel and Sievertsen argued instead that the northern part was a temple thus confining the palatial function to the southern area; they further suggested a different orientation for the main axis (east-west)²²³.

Considering the above-mentioned topographical relationship between temple M260 and building M750 is nevertheless more likely that we are dealing with a palace in all wings of the structure. Only a more extensive excavation of the edifice will enable a better investigation of this issue.

It is sure, nonetheless, that the building stood upon a foundation made of cellars filled with debris and accessible from the upper floor²²⁴. The main entrance of the palace, finally, had to be placed at its northern end since this is the direction of the processional way directed to the temple; the apparent presence of a monumental access arranged as a pylon seems to sustain this hypothesis²²⁵.

Most significantly, the foundation of the walls is composed of reused stone blocks, sometimes decorated, carefully laid. They bear a different kind of iconographic themes and styles and some of them consist of cornice blocks decorated with *uraei* or friezes of stars²²⁶.

²²³ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 74.

²²⁴ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 75.

²²⁵ TÖRÖK 1997B, p. 182.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

4.4 Casemates and platforms: some considerations

The examples mentioned above clearly indicate that the use of cellular construction is a predominant feature in Meroitic palatial architecture. How M. Maillot has demonstrated there is a very tight correlation between the dimensions of a palace and the presence of casemates: in particular, the Meroitic palaces having a surface bigger than 3.000 m² – which correspond to the 55% of the sample analysed – appear to be always characterized by cellular construction. It is interesting to note that this already conspicuous percentage increase to 82% adding those structures where the presence of casemates is likely but not archaeologically proven²²⁷. The same model, even if on a smaller scale, seems to repeat itself in the case of Meroitic large residences as well, where the buildings exceeding 1000 m² present casemates in their foundations²²⁸.

From a structural point of view, these results are widely justified considering the extent of the surface covered by the palaces. The foundation on casemates, in fact, permits to discharge the weight of the massive masonry composing the upper floor(s) on a self-supporting structure whose internal grid of walls is necessary to contribute to the stability of the whole building²²⁹.

In addition, it is important to underline the tight correlation existing between this technique and the material used in the construction process²³⁰. Cellular construction, in fact, is always connected to edifices built in mud bricks, whose low resistance to weather condition and heavy loads had to be balanced by a solid foundation; by contrast, a building assembled in red bricks or stone did not require such a massive understructure given the high carrying capacity of the material. In this respect, it may be worth noting that a change in the colour of the mud bricks could reflect an use of a different kind of raw material for different portions of the building. In the Muweis palace, for example, the lowest courses of mud bricks present different characteristics than the upper ones: the former in fact appear darker and with fewer inclusions than the latter²³¹. Given the general uniformity of this pattern, a shift due to phenomena of natural erosion has been rejected in favour of a deliberate decision dictated by structural needs; therefore, it is likely that a

²²⁷ MAILLOT 2016B, pp. 97-98, cf. also Graphs IV and VII.

²²⁸ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 98, cf. also Graphs XII and XV.

²²⁹ Cf. LECLÈRE 2008, p. 631.

²³⁰ Cf. MAILLOT 2016A, p. 183-190.

²³¹ It has been noted that dark grey mud bricks are associated with alluvial clay, while lighter grey and yellowish mud bricks appear to be made primarily using clay and sand coming from desertic areas: Cf. DAVOLI 1998, p. 356.

more loading capacity is associated to the darker bricks used in the foundations.²³² Of course, a deep archaeometrical analysis of this material would significantly increase our comprehension of the whole building process from the provision of the resources to their processing and assemblage.

Throughout this chapter, it has been highlighted that a key issue concerning casemates is to determine to what extent they are pure structural rather than functional spaces, in such a case mostly used for storing. Whereas the lack of doors in the walls has reasonably been used as a proof to argue a non-functional condition, it is correct to point out that an access from the upper floor can not be excluded *a priori*²³³. Examples of this solution are widely attested in the Greco-Roman domestic architecture of the Fayyum, where underground cellars have proved to be a common feature amidst the excavated houses, although varying in size and number²³⁴. In most cases the cellars – among these, some were just small spaces directly cut into the foundation of the house – were reachable only by means of trapdoors located on the ground floor, from whence the descent was made possible using hollows on the wall specifically made for this purpose²³⁵. It is interesting to note that this solution was always connected to vaulted roofs; in contrast, in fact, bigger and communicating underground rooms, usually reached via staircases with one or more ramps, generally had a flat roof²³⁶. Nevertheless, while this model can be profitably applied in a smaller context such as a domestic one, it would be useless in larger buildings, where the presence of a conspicuous number of not easily accessible storing rooms would inevitably compromise their functionality²³⁷. Moreover, in the presence of a systematic storing function of the platforms²³⁸ – whether in the case of Meroitic palaces or Egyptian buildings – it would be reasonable to expect them to be composed of communicating rooms with relative accesses and staircase – possibly more than one – in order to boost the availability²³⁹.

The presence of an intentional filling of debris is another indicator pointing to a structural function of the casemates²⁴⁰; at Naukratis, for instance, some rooms had a fill which almost reached the height of the first floor, thus leaving no doubt about their non-

²³² MAILLOT 2016A, pp.183-184.

²³³ MAILLOT 2015, p. 82.

²³⁴ DAVOLI 1998, p. 355.

²³⁵ DAVOLI 1998, p. 141.

²³⁶ DAVOLI 1998, p. 355.

²³⁷ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 95.

²³⁸ As Vercoutter argued for the palace of Wad Ben Naga, cf. MAILLOT 2016B, p. 95 and note 10.

²³⁹ SPENCER 1996, pp. 57-58.

²⁴⁰ LECLÈRE 2008, p. 632.

functional purpose²⁴¹; an intentional fill aimed to strengthen the structure was present within the casemates of B1500 as well, as mentioned above. The most common materials used for this purpose consisted mainly of mud, sand and fragments of bricks (often fired) which could be sourced from older edifices or from the waste material belonging to the structure itself²⁴².

Nevertheless, excluding a warehousing purpose for the whole platform does not imply that *any* room could serve this function. To give an illustration, the concurrent presence of functional rooms flanked by structural ones has been found in the palace of Muweis during the 2001 campaign: fragments of pottery, animal bones and traces of fire were discovered on the surface of some floors (an indicator of actual use of the room by itself) in the south-eastern area of the structure (rooms 9-12)²⁴³; the stratified floor levels contained an accumulation of potsherds which resulted in a chronological sequence pointing to a continuous occupation of the area from the 1st cent. BC to the 1st cent. AD²⁴⁴. In this case, lacking any door, an access from the upper floor, perhaps similar to the ones mentioned above, is the most likely assumption.

As mentioned in the relative paragraph, other pieces of evidence were also found in the centre of the palace (room 6), where a 3-4 cm thick layer of clay mixed with water showed that this area was probably connected to the production of coating²⁴⁵.

A similar line of argument can be applied to palace B1500, where the presence of storing places, probably linked to the management of goods, were discovered in the western area of the building, not far from the access (cf. *supra*). It is interesting to highlight that this particular sector of the building proved to be a storage also during the last campaign, when the excavation was undertaken in a new inner area of the edifice, just south of the west access²⁴⁶. In that occasion, several structures related to cooking and warehousing activities were found, although not all related to the same chronological phase. In particular, in the middle of the examined area, a series of orthogonal walls enclosed a square space probably intended to prepare and preserve food (Fig. 79). It has to be noted, though, that this assumption is based mainly on the observation of a near cooking structure, added to the corner of the room at a later time. This was composed of three large jars, containing other three smaller pots, placed upside down on the soil and

²⁴¹ SPENCER 1996, pp. 57-58.

²⁴² LECLÈRE 2008, p. 632.

²⁴³ MAILLOT 2014A, p. 76.; MAILLOT 2014B, p. 790.

²⁴⁴ MAILLOT 2014A, p. 76.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Cf. REPORT 2016.

enclosed on both sides by two narrow walls, thus creating a narrow corridor reaching the south-eastern corner of the square room. The identification of this assembly with a cooking station was made clear by the presence, on the surrounding ground, of a large amount of ashes and charcoals, not to mention the evident burn marks left on the pots themselves; that said, not having found traces of animal bones or seeds, which would be expected around the hearths²⁴⁷, is peculiar. Despite the absence of clear chronological data, a connection to the palatial phase can be argued on the basis of the correspondent level of the foundations both of the casemates and the walls composing the square room. Notwithstanding, considering that the former and the latter are not perfectly aligned, we can assume that the square room is a later enhancement – occurred during the time lapse of the palace occupation – which was then implemented by the cooking structure located at its corner. Unfortunately, not enough clues remain to establish a more precise relative chronology.

Ascertaining the presence of considerable stocking areas within the palace is not important only on an architectural level as they permit to achieve a better understanding of the socioeconomic role of these buildings in the wider Meroitic cultural context. Premising that the archaeological evidence available is susceptible to improvement over the next years, the data gathered so far appears to suggest that no storing facilities were systematically planned in relation to the palatial – and cultic – area; the only exception is represented by the structure M740 at Meroe – contemporary to the palace M750 – which was inserted in the *temenos* of temple M260 serving as a warehouse²⁴⁸. The presence of independent granaries linked to the two major institutions of the city (temple and palace) in the context of the Meroitic settlement would inevitably remind the Egyptian administrative model²⁴⁹, thus implying an ideological proximity as well. Unless new evidence will emerge from the future excavations, the current state of research seems rather to indicate a leading role of the palace alone in the administrative scenario of the city accomplished through its storing and redistributive functions.

²⁴⁷ Cf. REPORT 2016.

²⁴⁸ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 100: another example has perhaps to be found at Wad Ben Naga, where a circular structure connected to the palace could possibly function as a storehouse.

²⁴⁹ Cf. KEMP 2006, pp. 257-259.

5. The peristyle: a paradigm of syncretism

5.1 The peristyle court in B1500

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, a major architectural feature characterizing the palace is certainly its central peristyle. More than any other element discovered so far, this structure bears evidence of an undisputable Hellenizing influence coming from the North. To better understand the cultural implications related to this phenomenon, it is necessary to outline first an architectural description of the concerned courtyard.

The analysis carried out by Barberini²⁵⁰ has produced a final reconstruction depicting a structure built on two levels, each marked by an equal number of columns, which delimited a central open space serving as the main outer court of the palace (Fig. 80).

5.1.1 Ground-floor colonnade

The lower level of the peristyle was originally composed of 18 columns laid out to enclose a rectangular space: 5 on the southern and northern sides and 6 on the western and eastern ones. Their stone bases, made of local sandstone, stood on a foundation of red bricks encircling the whole area of the portico (10 × 8 m), which was about 10 cm higher than the sandstone floor of the court²⁵¹. The square bases, measuring 70 × 70 × 35 cm, were painted red, blue, and yellow, thus recreating the same polychromatic effect of the outer façade²⁵² (cf. *supra*). The original diameter of the drums composing the columns (54-55 cm) was deduced considering the dimensions of their bases and those of the drums whose beginnings were cut in the same stone of the pedestal, sole evidence of this lower level. Given this lack of remains, the original height of the columns too had to be inferred indirectly through a calculation of the length of the nearby chamber containing the staircase and the thickness of the walls surrounding it, resulting in an estimate of about 6.45 m for the height of the first floor and 4.30 m for the column shaft²⁵³ (Fig. 81). A fragment found north of the palace, but originally placed in the peristyle, permitted to identify the papyrus shaping of the capitals of this level and to reconstruct their original dimensions: about 110 cm wide (considering their widest part) and 55 cm high²⁵⁴.

²⁵⁰ BARBERINI 2010.

²⁵¹ DONADONI 1993, p. 105; BARBERINI 2010, p. 169.

²⁵² DONADONI 1993, p. 105.

²⁵³ BARBERINI 2010, p. 172.

²⁵⁴ BARBERINI 2010, p. 169.

5.1.2 First-floor colonnade

If almost no evidence remained about the lower level, all the tumble which covered the court proved to be related to the upper storey of the peristyle (Fig. 83). Looking at the plan, it was clear that most of the collapsed elements could be reunited into clusters according to their original position on the upper floor. The analysis of the dynamics of the fall, in fact, made it possible to recognize a pattern for the architectural arrangement of the first-floor colonnade: organized as a reflection of the lower storey, it was composed of 18 columns divided by a screen wall forming a sort of parapet, the presence of which was clearly recognizable on the plan as it fell down quite compactly (Fig. 82). Nevertheless, the tumble covering the courtyard was not homogeneous, being it apparently related just to the west and south sides of the peristyle; moreover, the fallen pieces aligned west-to-east²⁵⁵ – corresponding to the directrices starting from column bases 2, 3, and 4 on the lower floor (Fig. 84) – seemed to have fallen down earlier than their south-northern counterparts, since they were found lying directly over the sandstone floor. In a second time, the colonnade forming the upper south side of the structure collapsed too, covering the debris already present in the area. Even if no pieces related to the northern or eastern portions of the colonnade were found during the examination of the tumble, it is reasonable to imagine the presence of the same pattern in each side²⁵⁶. Such an assumption seems also confirmed by the discovery of two corner-elements (Fig. 85) (their function is indicated by the 90-degree angle made by the device predisposed as a hook to the parapet) pertaining to the upper level and indicating the presence of at least three sides of the colonnade. The lack of debris may therefore be explained assuming that the pieces found on the floor represented only those elements of the structure which fell after the destruction of the palace; the other two sides of the portico likely remained in their original position until they were finally dismantled to be reused at a later time²⁵⁷.

The large amount of red bricks covered in blue plaster found in the tumble led Donadoni to hypothesize the presence of a structure on the ground floor, namely a kiosk, located in the centre of the courtyard and circled by the ground-level columns²⁵⁸. However, the study conducted by Barberini demonstrated the unsuitability of this

²⁵⁵ Notably this was the same orientation followed by the perimeter wall in its collapse, at least in correspondence to the outer platform, west side of the palace.

²⁵⁶ Not all the columns related to the south and west sides were present either: the number of capitals found in the tumble was limited to seven while ten would be expected counting all the columns composing the south and the west sides: Cf. BARBERINI 2010, p. 172.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ DONADONI 1993, p. 106.

assumption, given the absence of any trace of foundations possibly related to such a building²⁵⁹.

The second level of the peristyle has been therefore reconstructed as follows: the 18 columns of the ground-floor served to support a wooden floor located at about 6.45 m above the ground floor and now completely lost. On this floor, other 18 columns, perfectly in line with their ground-level counterparts, rose to a height 3.05 m. Similarly to the ones seen at the lower level, these had papyrus-shaped capitals with smaller dimensions, being 40 cm high and 80 cm wide (Fig. 86); furthermore, they were characterized by a blue plastering which ranged from a minimum thickness of 4 to a maximum of 25 mm²⁶⁰. On top of them, traces of grained wood testified the presence of a pulvino supporting a trabeation also made of wood. The whole structure was then topped by a wall of red bricks (with the typical Meroitic module: 17 × 34 cm) characterized by an undulatory motif obtained using scraped bricks placed horizontally (Figs. 87-88)²⁶¹: coated and painted in a sequence of yellow, red and light blue, the final result should have been similar to a coloured series of vertical rounded ribs. Finally, the uppermost element of the structure consisted of a typical Egyptian cornice facing the inner court, built with bricks disposed on their edge²⁶².

The major point of contrast between the upper and lower level of the peristyle – excluding the obvious variation in size of the respective elements – is certainly the presence, on the upper floor, of the parapet wall. This was built using four courses of sandstone blocks, moulded to create a decorative motif and joined together in a very peculiar way: to prevent any horizontal movement, the blocks were appositely cut in order to leave an oblong void between two adjoining pieces, meant to be filled with mortar (cf. Fig. 85, top left)²⁶³.

While the columns of the lower level were free to develop in all their roundness, the presence of a screen wall inevitably affected the layout of the drums inserted between them, which resulted compressed by the blocks of stone; this implied that the drums became fully round only above the parapet, where their diameter reached up to 50 cm before decreasing to a minimum of 40 at the top²⁶⁴.

²⁵⁹ BARBERINI 2010, p. 172.

²⁶⁰ BARBERINI 2010, p. 176.

²⁶¹ BARBERINI 2010, p. 178.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

²⁶³ BARBERINI 2010, p. 173.

²⁶⁴ BARBERINI 2010, pp. 173-176.

Placed at the heart of the edifice, it is not surprising that this hall represents – at least as far as we know – the most monumental room of the entire palace. The combination of colours used for its decoration is also interesting, with the presence of the typical Meroitic *palette* (ground colonnade, upper moulded wall) separated by a series of columns and capitals painted with a homogeneous blue.

5.2 Peristyle courts in Hellenistic palaces

While the origins of the peristyle courtyards certainly have to be traced to the Hellenizing architecture²⁶⁵, and to the Hellenistic one in particular, more difficult is to argue whether a precise model was followed by the Meroitic architects in the construction of the central hall of palace B1500.

Considering the secular history of political, economic, and cultural interactions between Egypt and Nubia (cf. Ch. 1), it is not surprising to find traces of Hellenistic influences in a territory located so far from the Mediterranean shores. The Egyptian mediation, in fact, permeated with Alexandrine culture, assumed a fundamental role in the transmission of Hellenistic culture to its southern neighbour.

Although the truthfulness of some traditions arguing an active presence of Alexander in Nubia – mostly in the form of diplomatic missions – is not proven by any source so far, it is nonetheless true that contacts between Hellenistic Egypt and the kingdom of Meroe already existed before Ptolemy II and king Arkamaniqo (Ergamene)²⁶⁶. In fact, in the Hellenistic literature, the first references mentioning the kingdom of Meroe appeared around the IV cent. BC, especially in those texts focalized on geographic and ethnographic issues²⁶⁷.

It is therefore natural to start our research from those areas directly interested by the Ptolemaic control. The lack of proper archaeological sources related to the royal palace(s) of Alexandria, and to the palatial architecture of the Ptolemies in general, compels us to search for models in those regions which, albeit governed by the Ptolemies, were located outside of Egypt and whose monumental buildings were consequently mostly destined to officials.

²⁶⁵ SIST 2006, p. 475; ROCCATI 2004, p. 385; SIST 2000, p. 253.

²⁶⁶ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 19.

²⁶⁷ In his *Naturalis historia*, Pliny the Elder referred to a series of older works concerning the first travels to the Nubian region which are now lost; in the same way, most of the authors of such texts are known only because mentioned by Pliny himself: cf. TÖRÖK 2011, p. 19; *FHN II*, n. 100, pp. 541-542. To deepen the subject of the Hellenization of Egypt cf. also MOYER 2011.

5.2.1 Ptolemaic Kingdom

5.2.1.a Araq el-Emir (Transjordan)

A first interesting example to take into account is the princely palace at Araq el-Emir in Transjordan, also called “palace of Hyrcanus” after the name of the Ptolemaic official ruling the area, erected at the beginning of the 2nd century BC²⁶⁸.

The edifice was located within an enclosed park on the top of a terraced agricultural estate and surrounded by an artificial lake also serving as a basin for the irrigation system of the whole cultivation area²⁶⁹. Although the palace was never completed, it was possible to reconstruct the arrangement it originally displayed. In particular, it was characterized by two storeys with different features (Fig. 89). The lower one, lighted by means of some large and high windows, was decorated on the outside using columns with Corinthian capitals which covered the whole height of the storey and were located at the four corners of the structure, as well as at the accesses on the northern and southern façade, where they created a sort of small portico *in antis* (Fig. 90). The upper level was instead enriched by loggias running the whole length of the storey except for the portion corresponding to the north entrance: here, to mark the access, some taller columns were placed in line with the ones on the lower floor. It is interesting to note that the major decorative motif of the whole palace is characterized by the figure of the lion, as clearly stated by the presence of some reliefs placed at every corner of the outer façade, just above the first floor; the upper band under the roof was instead decorated with acroteria depicting eagles, thus leaving no doubt about the royal celebration intent of these sculptures. There is reason to believe, in fact, that Hyrcanus became eventually a sort of (semi-)independent dynast, a role which would explain such a choice of themes²⁷⁰.

The interior of the palace was accessible from the main northern entrance (Fig. 91); from here, a vestibule gave access, on the left, to a staircase to the upper floor and, in front of it, to another larger room, the function of which has not been ascertained, though it was flanked by two smaller square rooms serving as cisterns. The access from the south was arranged differently as the vestibule did not lead in this case to any room:

²⁶⁸ NIELSEN 1999, p. 138; WILL 1996, pp. 221-225.

²⁶⁹ NIELSEN 1999, p. 139.

²⁷⁰ NIELSEN 1999, p. 138-142. It is interesting to note that the lions found at Napata (cf. *supra*) had an orientalising character, similar to those found at Philae; on the contrary, the lions of Araq el-Emir are Greek in style. This mixture of elements is one of the main features characterizing the Hellenism.

this layout was perhaps only an architectural arrangement built to give a symmetrical layout to the façades of the building²⁷¹.

The use of coarse materials for the construction of the lower floor²⁷² indicates that this level of the palace was not the official one, but was rather dedicated to service purposes: in fact, excluding the vestibules with their adjoining rooms, it consisted only of four rooms encircled by a U-shaped corridor arranged to give access to them (Fig. 92)²⁷³.

On the first floor, which was by exclusion the one related to official activities and domestic use, the plan of the ground floor was probably repeated with some modifications. In particular, it is likely that the four rooms of the lower level were here replaced by a single large chamber reserved for audiences or banquets²⁷⁴.

The arrangement of the entrance, composed of a wide but short portico flanked by two smaller rooms, could easily remind the model of the so-called Bit-Hilani, a term used to indicate a kind of palace widespread in northern Syria between the 9th and the 7th cent. BC²⁷⁵. This type of building was characterized by the presence of two long narrow rooms parallel to the façade and consisting of a portico leading to an inner main room; a series of smaller chambers, mostly arranged in a row, could be present in the rear of the edifice (Fig. 93). As in the case of the palace of Hyrcanus, moreover, the Bit-Hilani usually had stairs to reach the first floor located in a room flanking the portico²⁷⁶. Once again, this represents an example of a commixture of elements coming from different cultural area and merged together to create new patterns.

Another comparison can be made between the arrangement of the loggia of the palace of Araq el-Emir and that of the Macedonian ones, where the upper floor usually had plinth-zones with smaller columns²⁷⁷.

To sum up, the palace appears to be conceived as a synthesis of different influences. In fact, if the plan and the building method are reminiscent of ancient local layouts, the architectural elements and the style of the sculptured animals are Greek²⁷⁸. To be more specific, it is very likely that the model for this palace came directly from the

²⁷¹ In fact, also here two smaller rooms were located at the sides of the vestibule, one of these contained the staircase to the upper level, thus reflecting the same pattern of the northern access.

²⁷² The first floor was built using regularly cut and decorated stone blocks while the lower floor was built using rough-hewn blocks, cf. WILL 1996, p. 223.

²⁷³ NIELSEN 1999, p. 143.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; WILL 1996, p. 223.

²⁷⁵ FRANKFORT 1952, p. 120.

²⁷⁶ FRANKFORT 1952, pp. 120-121.

²⁷⁷ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 143-144.

²⁷⁸ NIELSEN 1999, p. 142.

now-lost palace of Alexandria, namely the closest – both geographically and culturally – Hellenistic capital. Considering the official role held by Hyrcanus, it would not be surprising to imagine that, during one of his trips to the Royal Court, he saw in the palace of Alexandria a valid architectural model for his own.

The choice of discussing this peculiar example of Hellenistic palatial architecture is thus justified by a series of architectural – and maybe also ideological – affinities with palace B1500.

In both buildings, indeed, we witness a syncretistic architectural phenomenon aimed at the creation of a model capable of combining local and foreign traditions. The palace of Araq el-Emir is even more interesting in this respect because, besides representing one of the first prototypes of architectural adaptation during Hellenistic times, it also clearly reminds of a peristyle structure. In fact, despite not having an actual internal court arranged with peripteral columns, it can be said that the whole palace, with its columniation completely encircling the first floor, is conceived following a peristyle model.

5.2.1.b Ptolemais

A real peristyle court is instead found in the so-called “Palazzo delle Colonne” at Ptolemais, in Cyrenaica. Built in the 1st cent. BC, it was probably the residence of a local governor ruling the area on behalf of the Ptolemies²⁷⁹. The original core of the palace thus has to be attributed to the official in charge of the city at the beginning of the century, even if the structure underwent some modifications in later times²⁸⁰.

The palace, rectangular in plan, measured about 87 × 35 m and was characterized by the presence of two peristyles: the “Great Peristyle” measuring 17.30 × 19.50 m in the southern wing, and a smaller one (called “Small Peristyle” to distinguish it from the former²⁸¹), located on the northern sector of the building (Figs. 94-95). The former, which at the moment of the excavation still preserved 18 columns built in local sandstone all pertaining to the Ionic order, has been reconstructed as follows: two pillars with semi-columns were located at the NE and NW corners and at the SE and SW corners²⁸²; eight

²⁷⁹ NIELSEN 1999, p. 146.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*; for further detailed considerations about the chronology of the palace, cf. GASPARINI 2014, pp. 1069-1070.

²⁸¹ PESCE 1950, p. 60.

²⁸² These latter were nonetheless of a different kind than the former.

columns marked the long sides (E and W); four elements decorated the S side (two pairs of contraposed semi-columns, and two full columns) and four other columns were present on the N side²⁸³. While the capitals of the E, S, and W sides all belonged to the Ionic order, the ones related to the northern side were of the Corinthian type. The Doric order was instead reserved to the frieze decorating the side facing the open court, composed of triglyphs and metopes; as a counterpart, the face of the blocks facing the ambulatory was decorated with a frieze of the Ionic style composed of two wide bands separated by a circle. Interestingly, this frieze was surmounted by a Doric cornice enriched by lion heads²⁸⁴.

As in the case of the tumble of B1500 mentioned above, the presence, inside the pool encircled by the columns, of a huge quantity of architectural fragments varying in form and size led to the identification of an upper level of the structure. This hypothesis was further validated by the staircase found within the room located at the south-western corner of the court²⁸⁵.

On the E and W sides, the upper porticos were identical to each other and were formed by a series of eight columns with Corinthian capitals surmounted by a wooden epistyle and a stone cornice. The upper portico related to these sides, moreover, was not aligned to the lower one, but was rearward in order to be set where the bottom wall of the ground-floor ambulatory was placed (Fig. 96)²⁸⁶.

The arrangement of the southern façade was different, being the columns of the first-floor portico exactly in line with their ground-floor counterparts. Here the façade was composed of a central higher body flanked on both sides by two wings: the former, surmounted by a pediment and corresponding to the large intercolumniation on the lower level, was decorated with four semi-pillars belonging to the Corinthian order; the two lateral wings, instead, were characterized by the presence of a pseudo-portico with Corinthian semi-columns, the intercolumn of which was closed up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of their height by a wall, while the remaining quarter presented a little portico with Corinthian columns (Fig. 97)²⁸⁷.

²⁸³ PESCE 1950, p. 23.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ PESCE 1950, p. 25.

²⁸⁶ PESCE 1950, p. 26.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Finally, the northern side of the upper level of the peristyle displayed once again a different arrangement: here not a porch but a series of three aedicules each decorated with four semi-pillars were topped with a trabeation and a fronton (Fig. 96)²⁸⁸.

The smaller peristyle, located in the north-western area of the palace, was also rectangular in plan and measured 8.25 × 6.60 m. It was composed of fourteen columns: five on the longer sides (E-O) and four on the shorter ones (S-N), counting also the elements composing the corners. The order of the columns was Doric, but the trabeation was Ionic in style (Fig. 98).

While the rooms adjacent to the Great Peristyle were probably dedicated to official and residential functions, the ones surrounding the southern court were intended for administration and service purposes related to the management of the palace²⁸⁹. The main open court of the north side is very likely where audiences, trials, councils, and banquets took place, considering the monumental arrangement of the room and its dimensions.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ NIELSEN 1999, p. 146.

5.2.2 The Seleucid Kingdom

A lot of similarities with the general structure of B1500 are also present in some examples of palatial architecture coming from the Seleucid Kingdom. As in the case of the Meroitic kings, the Seleucid sovereigns used to travel frequently from one capital to another in order to maintain control over the expansive area submitted to their rule. Despite the intense building activity due to this continuous movement of the court, no archaeological evidence related to the royal palaces has survived and, similarly to the case of Alexandria, the only available data about them comes from written sources²⁹⁰. For this reason, also in this case, the governors' palaces are the most fruitful source of information to take into account when investigating the palatial architecture in use during Hellenistic time.

5.2.2.a Dura Europos (Syria)

Redoubt Palace

This is the case of the palace of Dura Europos, residence of the main civic magistrate of the city. Originally built in the 3rd cent. BC, it underwent a series of transformations during the following century, maintaining the original layout except for some additions²⁹¹. The palace was square in plan and organized around a central court not perfectly aligned with the main axis (Figs. 99-100)²⁹². Although a proper peristyle was not present, the choice of describing this palace here is justified by a series of analogies with B1500. In addition to the square plan, in fact, other similarities are: the presence of multiple accesses and the location on a high terrace in order to make the edifice more impressive and provide it with a better view; a solution which somehow reminds the platform-foundation arrangement. Moreover, the lack of a peristyle is here balanced with a central open court displaying two couples of columns on its southern and western sides. The passages thus created led, through a rectangular vestibule repeated on both sides, to two wide rooms most probably reserved for official purposes. The service rooms, on the other hand, had to be located in the northern and eastern sector of the palace; on the first floor, instead, we should probably imagine the domestic sector²⁹³.

²⁹⁰ NIELSEN 1999, p. 115.

²⁹¹ NIELSEN 1999, p. 116.

²⁹² Just like the case of B1500, where the northern access is not aligned with the northern access.

²⁹³ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 116-117; it is also interesting to note a strictly resemblance to the architecture of private houses of Dura, cf. BAIRD 2014, p. 30.

Citadel Palace

Remaining at Dura Europos, another governor's palace is worth mentioning because of its mixture of Oriental and Hellenistic characteristics. Interpreted as the dwelling place of the governor of Dura, the so-called "Citadel Palace" was built over the remains of an older building of which almost no evidence has survived; on the contrary, the second phase of the edifice dating to the 2nd cent. BC was preserved enough to reconstruct its original plan²⁹⁴.

From an architectural point of view, it appears divided into two parts reflecting two different styles: "Oriental" in the north wing and "Greek" in the southern one (Fig. 101). While the former is represented by the same functional distribution of the rooms already seen in the previous example (an official sector limited to broad rooms on the south and west wing; service rooms on the east side), the latter is clearly emphasised by the peristyle marking the central area of the palace²⁹⁵. Probably reached by the northern entrance of the palace²⁹⁶, this main court led towards a large southern room provided with five columns (or pillars) – excluding the three columns *in antis* opening onto the court – which probably served as a hall for audiences: a scheme which would clearly remind the arrangement of the Redoubt Palace, with the main court replaced here by the peristyle²⁹⁷.

²⁹⁴ NIELSEN 1999, p. 119.

²⁹⁵ Unfortunately, the available data only permitted to reconstructed a partial plan of the edifice, so that we do not know the original arrangement and extension of the structure.

²⁹⁶ NIELSEN 1999, p. 120.

²⁹⁷ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 119-120.

5.2.3 Macedonia

It is not surprising that the models of the various palaces mentioned above originated mainly from the heart of the Hellenistic culture. The great amount of archaeological evidence – at least if compared to other areas – found here is therefore even more useful considering the potential of information they can bear about the palatial model in general. Two main recurring characteristics in their layout are the raised position achieved by means of platforms or terraces and the presence of a varying number of courtyards: two fundamental features in Meroitic palatial architecture as well.

5.2.3.a Vergina

Although during the Hellenistic period the ancient Aigai lost its status of capital, it remained an important cultural centre, as the building of a new royal²⁹⁸ palace in the second half of the 4th cent. BC testifies²⁹⁹. The palace, raised on an elevated terrace to provide it with a better view on the plain below, was reached by a monumental ramp located to the east³⁰⁰.

The original layout was different to the one now visible on the plan (Fig. 102): the western sector of the building, in fact, with its smaller peristyle court, was a later addition never completed to the north. Therefore, excluding this area, the main core of the building is composed of the eastern, and larger, peristyle, which was in turn completely encircled by a series of square and rectangular rooms with accesses opened onto the court³⁰¹. The eastern side of the palace was composed of long, parallel rooms identified as porticos (*stoas*)³⁰².

The majority of the official rooms on the ground floor probably consisted of a series of banqueting chambers, as pointed out by some evidence: the asymmetrical placement of the access door, the presence of some bands to indicate the position of the couches, and the drains³⁰³.

The main wing of the palace is likely represented by the cluster of southern square dining-rooms located on the two sides of the central *exedra* (recognizable by the three double-half columns *in antis*): while the inner dining-rooms were accessible only from

²⁹⁸ On the identification of the edifice as a royal palace, cf. SAATSOGLOU-PALIADELI 2001, pp. 201-202.

²⁹⁹ NIELSEN 1999, p. 81.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ HOEPFNER 1996, pp. 8-11.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ NIELSEN 1999, p. 83.

the latter, having no doorways on their court-facing sides, the two external rooms could be entered only from the peristyle.

The west sector of the palace was characterized by three large square rooms the thresholds of which were not recognisable unlike their function, clearly indicated by the bands for couches mentioned above. In the east wing, we find a tholos – which has given rise to a series of different hypothesis concerning its purpose³⁰⁴ – and two banqueting halls facing the open court. The conspicuous presence of this type of room all over the palace has been explained hypothesizing that chambers of different sizes and arrangement were reserved to different kind of guests on the basis of their social status.³⁰⁵

Finally, as regards the north side, the bad state of preservation does not permit to hypothesize its use: whether a residential purpose could be a solution, no evidence remains to ascertain such a function, which could also be reserved to the second storey of the palace³⁰⁶, as attested in other mentioned examples.

5.2.3.b Pella

The royal palace of Pella was located on the acropolis of the capital and the whole complex covered an impressive total surface of about 60.000 m². While the original layout of the edifice dates back to the second half of the 4th cent. BC, it was later modified and enlarged in the following centuries³⁰⁷.

The proper palatial building corresponded to the eastern part of this complex and comprehended four open courtyards provided with peristyles (Fig. 104). Among these, the southern ones (called peristyle I and II) represented the official part of the structure, while the northern sector of the edifice (with peristyles IV and V) was reserved for residential purposes. This eastern sector was completed to the west with another very large peristyle (III), flanked by a series of small rooms probably intended for administration³⁰⁸.

Peristyle I had a lower and an upper storey, composed of columns respectively of the Doric and Ionic order, the latter with reduced dimensions. The axuality displayed in the disposition of the three rooms fronting the northern portico – which on this side is

³⁰⁴ NIELSEN 1999, p. 83

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ NIELSEN 1999, p. 88.

³⁰⁸ NIELSEN 1999, p. 89.

also deeper – is an index of the importance and the official character of this particular area. Traces of interior decoration made of stone found inside the central wide room indicate the official character of this chamber, letting us suppose it functioned as an audience hall, possibly flanked by two banqueting chambers corresponding to the smaller rooms at its side (Fig. 105)³⁰⁹.

³⁰⁹ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 89-91; HOEPFNER 1996, pp. 29-31.

5.2.4 Pergamon

Reminiscent of the layout of Citadel Palace at Dura Europos are two royal palaces built at Pergamon following a peristyle model and dating to the first half of the 2nd cent. BC³¹⁰.

Called Palace IV and Palace V (Figs. 106-107), they both were located atop the acropolis, together with some of the most important public and religious buildings of the town. Placed one beside the other, different data prove them to belong to the same building phase, thus excluding a relation of anteriority or posteriority between them. If this was the case, it would imply a differentiation in the use of these buildings, with the smaller likely used for residential purposes and the larger for official ones³¹¹.

Palace IV was organized around a central paved courtyard provided with a peristyle the presence of which was recognizable only because of some sockets cut in the floor, so there is no possibility to reconstruct the aspect of the columns. Despite the bad state of preservation of the buildings in general, the remaining traces of thresholds indicated that most of the rooms encircling the peristyle were facing it and no connections between them was present³¹².

Considering the size of the rooms and the portico situated on the northern area, it is reasonable to imagine this as the main wing of the palace. The easternmost of these rooms presented a fine mosaic floor provided with a band in coarse white tesserae, an asymmetrical location of the door and a general fine decoration, which made it the most suitable location for a dining-room.

The largest room on the north wing had possibly the same function, given the presence of other fine mosaic floors and a drain channel. Finally, the remaining rooms were probably used for living, as was the case for the second storey of the edifice, assuming its existence³¹³.

Palace V was also characterized by a peristyle court surrounded by a series of square rooms of varying size. Unlike Palace IV, which was about half its size, in this case, it was possible to identify the columns of the peristyle as belonging to the Doric order³¹⁴.

³¹⁰ NIELSEN 1999, p. 103.

³¹¹ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 104-105.

³¹² NIELSEN 1999, p. 105.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Once again, the north wing of the palace had to be the main one, given the presence of a large room opening onto the court characterized by a rich decoration. Its walls bore, in fact, a series of polychrome marble elements and its floor had to display a mosaic similar to the one found in the adjacent room. Here, in fact, the mosaic floor was better preserved and showed a diverse selection of motifs encircled by a broad white border pointing out its use as a dinner-room³¹⁵.

The same kinds of floor and wall decorations were repeated also within at least one of the rooms of the north wing, while the bad state of preservation of the south area of the palace lets us only suppose their function as banqueting-halls. Considering the lack of any floor covering the surface of the peristyle, a garden has perhaps to be imagined here, thus providing the dining-rooms with a view³¹⁶.

The presence of another storey is very likely, as suggested by some comparisons made with local private houses situated in the Lower Agora. Furthermore, these were structured around a central peristyle in two storeys in the Doric (lower level) and Ionic order (upper level)³¹⁷.

5.2.5 The models

Another key thing to remember is that royal palaces, wherever they were located and whenever they were built, inevitably reflected the society which produced them. Therefore, the study of the architectural features characterizing such buildings, far from being just a mere display of technical data, is an opportunity to shed some light on the culture itself revolving around this institution.

As far as Hellenistic palaces are concerned, it is important to highlight that they were the result of two main different political conceptions about royalty and management of power. In fact, while Macedonia was characterized by a governmental system based on the concept of *primus inter pares*, with a local dynasty ruling over an area from which they originated, other kingdoms such as the Ptolemaic, the Seleucid, and the Attalid one were all connected to a personal and absolutistic view of power³¹⁸. In this second case, some characters such as a marked monumentality, a higher position and the presence of

³¹⁵ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 106, cf. also p. 108.

³¹⁶ NIELSEN 1999, p. 107.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ NIELSEN 1996, p. 209.

monumental access seem to be significantly present in the architectural layout of the royal palaces³¹⁹.

This scheme clearly reminds the arrangement of Persian palaces, which probably had to be identified – at least to some extent - as the actual precursors of the Hellenistic palaces. While the buildings organized around a peristyle court have rightly been ascribed to a Greek, if not Macedonian, architectural model, it has to be noted that the core of the Oriental palaces also consisted of courtyards already in the 5th century BC³²⁰.

For sure the appearance of the royal Achaemenid palaces was known to Alexander and his successors, and their impact on the palatial architectural development of the Hellenistic times had to bear a significant role in the elaboration of their formal layout³²¹.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ NIELSEN 1996, p. 211.

³²¹ NIELSEN 1999, pp. 35-36.

5.3 Hellenistic influences in Meroitic and Egyptian architecture

Returning now to the Meroitic kingdom with a picture of the Hellenistic palatial architecture in mind, we can try to trace a path capable of connecting this model to those displayed in the Nubian region.

As stated by Török, the peristyle house type is not part of the domestic or palatial architectural tradition of either Nubia or Egypt, but it rather shows diverse affinities with Hellenistic urban house type as found in Priene or Dura³²².

In this respect, the comparison between the Hellenistic house 33 at Priene (Asia Minor) and the house M998³²³ in Meroe is one of the most compelling (Fig. 107): looking at the plans of these two structures, the major point of contact is represented by the presence of an entrance corridor leading to the south-eastern corner of a central court³²⁴.

This same pattern can also be observed in palace B1500 and palace OBN 100 at Wad Ben Naga, where, indeed, the main entrance leads towards the central open area of the building³²⁵.

The application of such a foreign model was likely the result of a mediated contact with Hellenistic palaces, villas and domestic architecture in general as known from the Hellenistic Egyptian cities, primarily Alexandria³²⁶.

The villa (or palace) of Diotimos in Philadelphia (Fayyum, Kom el-Kharaba el-Kebir), although known only from a written source³²⁷, represents a rather faithful transposition of the Vitruvius's description of the Greek house³²⁸. In particular, after an entrance portico, a vestibule led into two interior courts each opening onto a banqueting room; finally, an *exedra* was also present³²⁹.

Nevertheless, although the search for Hellenistic models is widely justified, such a trend tends to limit the evaluation of those examples where a foreign model was adapted to an Egyptian one.

Remaining in Philadelphia, the arrangement of a private structure – considered as the archetype of the local private house³³⁰ – found within the *insula* D 6 is explicative of

³²² TÖRÖK 2011, pp. 132-133.

³²³ Cf. TÖRÖK 1997B, p. 229.

³²⁴ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 133.

³²⁵ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 107.

³²⁶ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 133; concerning the Classical-style buildings or models in domestic building architecture of the Fayyum see DAVOLI 2011, p. 82.

³²⁷ Cf. VANDERBORGHT 1942.

³²⁸ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 133; cf. PESANDO 1989, pp. 193-206. Vitruvius, *De Architectura*, 6.7.

³²⁹ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 133.

³³⁰ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 105.

this kind of architectural merging. In particular, we find here the presence of casemates in relation with a typical Greek layout of the living quarters (Fig. 108)³³¹.

The reception of the Hellenistic housing model³³² has also been traced in other two sites located in the Fayyum: Theadelphia (Kharabet Ihrit) and Narmouthis (Kom Medinet Madi). At Theadelphia (Fig. 109), one of the excavated edifices – probably belonging to an important official of the city – was organized around a central rectangular open court connecting it to the other rooms composing the building. Among these, the most important was probably the south-eastern chamber (6 × 5 m), as confirmed by the decoration of the walls³³³. A staircase located in the north-western corner of the edifice led to the lower floor of the structure, thus repeating that scheme based on the juxtaposition of cellars and living quarters which proved to be very common among the domestic architecture of the Fayyum (cf. *supra*).

At Narmouthis (Fig. 110), a big structure (13 × 22.50 m) divided into 16 rooms, 3 staircases, and 6 cellars also rose on a plan with clear Hellenistic influences³³⁴. The main access was probably located on the northern side, where a corridor divided the house into two parts: on the inside of this vestibule, two columns on the left marked the access to the eastern part, while two pillars on the right led to the western half of the edifice. The latter gave access to a large room (5.20 × 5.75 m) which probably had an official character given the presence of numerous niches on every side of the chamber. The importance of the building seems also confirmed by the richness of the architectural elements decorated in Hellenistic style. Once again, the house was provided with a series of vaulted cellars located under the main body and reachable by means of trapdoors situated on the upper floor³³⁵.

The chronology of these structures is rather similar having been both dated between the 1st cent. AD and the 4th cent. AD: in particular, a period of occupation going

³³¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 107. In general, the description of the lower floors of the houses at Philadelphia is interesting as it strictly reminds the arrangement of the structures set on casemates: “Queste, [the rooms pertaining to the lower floor of the structures] che furono interpretate come cantine o magazzini, mancavano quasi sempre di porte e di finestre che davano direttamente all'esterno ed erano raggiungibili dall'interno della casa per mezzo di scale; i loro soffitti erano costruiti in forma di volta a botte o con travi di legno di palma con o senza l'ausilio di incannicciati. Le cantine avevano muri divisorii di grande spessore e spesso le stanze erano piccolissime, simili a corridoi”: DAVOLI 1998, p. 140.

³³² In particular, the transposition of the *prostas-oikos* model of the Hellenistic house: MAILLOT 2016B, p. 107.

³³³ DAVOLI 1998, p. 282.

³³⁴ DAVOLI 1998, p. 232.

³³⁵ DAVOLI 1998, pp. 232-233.

from the 2nd cent. to the 4th cent. for the building at Theadelphia³³⁶, and going from the 1st to the 4th for that of Narmouthis³³⁷.

To the same time period belong also some houses at Marina el-Alamein displaying peristyle courts built in stone which, considering the proximity to Alexandria (c.100 km to the east), could also be a reflection of this latter urban architecture³³⁸.

As Maillot has clearly pointed out³³⁹, the Meroitic buildings having a peristyle court, or a central court in general, all follow the same pattern with the non-official rooms developing around this central core which results, in turn, mainly accessible from south by means of a narrow corridor. Considerably, the structures which follows this model tend almost systematically to be connected to a foundation system based on casemates. This is particularly true for palaces, where the percentage of those having a court exceeds the 50% – this rate increases to 82% if counting also those cases where the presence of a central court is only probable and not archaeologically proven³⁴⁰. These data are even more compelling if considering, as seen in the previous chapter, that this is exactly the percentage of palaces having a casemates foundation.

³³⁶ DAVOLI 1998, p. 282.

³³⁷ DAVOLI 1998, p. 233.

³³⁸ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 108; TÖRÖK 2011, p. 133.

³³⁹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 110.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

6. The Meroitic synthesis: creating a new model

The peristyle was not the only element of Hellenistic derivation characterizing the palace. As already mentioned, the external façade of the building was marked by a mixture of features coming from different architectural traditions. For example, we find some sandstone Corinthian capitals with a decoration made of volutes and stylized acanthus leaves, combined with a floral motif recalling a pharaonic papyrus design³⁴¹ (Fig. 71). Even though there is no evidence to establish their exact original location, they were probably placed at the corners of the building, where they joined the uppermost part of the façade composed of a polychrome Egyptian cavetto cornice³⁴². The result was consequently an original style which merged together two different traditions according to a new pattern.

A clear Hellenizing influence is also found in the motifs recurring on the decorative tiles applied on the exterior perimeter wall. Among them, those bearing an anthropomorphic subject often display the image of a woman's bust in a frontal position, with the face slightly tilted towards the shoulder and the eyes looking up. The hair is represented in a schematic way while the dress consists of a chiton with wide folds. In some examples, the figures hold grapes or floral garlands³⁴³. The only available comparisons in a Meroitic context have been found in the water sanctuary complex at Meroe (M95-M194-M195)³⁴⁴; here Török supposed them to represent the Maenads from the *thiasos* of Dionysos, an interpretation which would fit well in a palatial context, considering the connection of this deity to the concept of kingship during the Hellenistic period³⁴⁵.

The international nature of the Hellenistic culture emerges distinctly especially in border areas, where the juxtaposition of complementary elements enhances their differences. For instance, the island of Philae (cf. *supra*) – crucial interface between the kingdom of Meroe and Hellenistic and Roman Egypt – is an emblematic example of merging of Egyptian style with Hellenistic conception of space³⁴⁶. Significantly, this is the same model applied to the palace of Natakamani.

³⁴¹ SIST 2006, p. 475.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ SIST 2006, pp. 476-477.

³⁴⁴ Cf. TÖRÖK 1997B, pp. 63-91.

³⁴⁵ SIST 2006, p. 477.

³⁴⁶ CIAMPINI 2011, pp. 187-188; cf. GIAMMARUSTI; ROCCATI 1980.

At Napata, decidedly, the new architectural elaborations were the product of one of the most prosperous periods of Meroitic history. In fact, the intense building activity undertaken by king Natakamani and his co-regent Amanitore is testified by the great amount of monuments they built or restored during their regency all over the reign (Napata, Meroe, Naga, Amara, Wad Ben Naga)³⁴⁷.

Although the impressive prosperity that emerged during the rule of Natakamani had to inevitably be the result of fruitful social, cultural, and economic developments, the data related to this phenomenon are rather limited and deduced mostly on the basis of the apparently increasing (both in quality and quantity) trade with Egypt³⁴⁸. Such a flourishing was probably the consequence of the stable political condition achieved after the peace treaty of Samos, stipulated a few decades earlier (21 or 20 BC)³⁴⁹, and now reaching its apex.

At Napata, in particular, we assist to a re-arrangement of the urban settlement which is mainly reflected in the apparent relocation of the town monumental core. As we already saw in the first part of this work, indeed, for centuries the focal point of the city had been situated in the immediate surroundings of the Amun temple B500, at the foot of the mountain. This is also confirmed by the location of the oldest palaces of the site, namely B1200 and B100, whose connection to the cultic area was moreover highlighted by their orthogonal position in relation to the temples.

In particular, palace B100 is an interesting expression of that transitional phase leading to the development of a new palatial architectural model which will finally converge in the Wad Ben Naga, Muweis, and B1500 palaces³⁵⁰. A square plan, accesses on every side of the edifice (although not all symmetrical), a structural arrangement based on casemates (with some chambers likely functioning as storerooms), the presence of a second storey, and columned halls located on the main axis of the building are all common features among the above mentioned Meroitic palaces.

This new architectural arrangement, diverging from the previous example displayed in B1200, appears to revolve around a central monumentalized hall – replaced by the peristyle in the ultimate model – which therefore had to be conceived as the first element of the building. The same conclusion is also suggested by the layout of palace

³⁴⁷ *FHN III*, n. 211, p. 899.

³⁴⁸ *FHN III*, n. 211, pp. 899-900.

³⁴⁹ *FHN III*, n. 211, p. 900.

³⁵⁰ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 120.

B1500, where the central peristyle was doubtlessly intended as the fulcrum of the whole architectural composition, as proved by its alignment with the southern, and older, access.

Moreover, this kind of structuring developing from a central core by means of a subsequent addition of units is reminiscent of the Hellenistic architectural layout used in palatial and domestic buildings. A court – often provided with a peristyle – connecting the other rooms around it was indeed one of the basic elements of these structures (cf. *supra*).

The fullest expression of this model has to be found in our palace: the construction of B1500 is, indeed, the consequence of a careful and precise planning reflected in the organization of the foundation platform and the arrangement of its monumental area.

Significantly, the undeniable Hellenistic legacy shown by the peristyle is here adapted to local forms (papyrus-shaped capitals, cavetto cornice) and techniques (stoneworking peculiarities of the upper storey).

Considering the chronology of the palace, we must not forget, however, also the potential Roman influences with which the Meroitic kings could have come in contact. In Roman architecture, indeed, the function of the peristyle was often connected to the celebration of prestige and social status more than it was in Hellenistic times³⁵¹. This interpretation would be suitable for a palace like B1500, one of the primary function of which was probably connected to the enhancement of the royal status of the king.

In this respect, it is worth lingering over some observations on the concept of “ambulatory kingship” mentioned in the historical introduction. As we saw, in fact, the process of legitimation of the new king after the death of his predecessor implied a sort of coronation journey of the sovereign taking place in the most important cities under his jurisdiction. The ceremonies connected with the celebration of kingship were performed both in the palace and in the temples³⁵², passing through a series of minor buildings characterized by a ceremonial function, corresponding for example to B3200 and B100 at Napata and M 251-253 at Meroe³⁵³.

The presence of numerous palaces all over the kingdom has been interpreted as a confirmation of this kind of ritual journey: the palatial buildings would correspond in this scenario to the temporary residence of the king during his visit.

³⁵¹ MAILLOT 2016B, p. 256; for the circulation of iconographic models pertaining to the Roman Imperial sphere see CIAMPINI 2011, p. 189.

³⁵² Cf. CIAMPINI 2011, p. 183.

³⁵³ Cf. MAILLOT 2016 B, pp. 72-73.

Nevertheless, while this scheme applies well to the major cities like Napata and Meroe – located miles apart – in the Butana region the presence of several palaces situated only a few kilometres away from each other (Wad Ben Naga, Muweis) force us to reconsider their function in this “ambulatory” context³⁵⁴. In particular, it is more likely that these palaces were destined to local officials or governors appointed by the king and ruling on his behalf, and were not actual stages of his ritual journey³⁵⁵. This assumption appears to be confirmed also by the poorer quality of the masonry characterizing these buildings, together with the replacement of the central peristyle with a simpler open court. Nevertheless, the architectural similarities between these palaces and the proper royal ones – which therefore would correspond, from this perspective, just to the palaces of Meroe and Napata, where the actual coronation journey took place – could be explained by the local governors’ will, or demand, to emulate the royal model *par excellence* represented by B1500³⁵⁶.

The importance of the building described in this dissertation goes beyond its impressive dimensions and its monumental nature. The palace of Natakamani is the reflection of the Meroitic culture itself as it appeared during one of the most flourishing periods in its history. The archaeological sources tell us about a season of political, economic, and most of all cultural enrichment provoked, among other things, by the intensification of commerce directed and coming from Greco-Roman Egypt. In this general atmosphere of openness, the foreign influences were received and revised into new, original syncretistic models capable of combining different features and transmitting new messages. The external influences, far from being uncritically accepted, were reformulated through a process of revision and discarding aimed to their adaptation to local needs and customs.

In this respect, it is fundamental to underline that we are not dealing with a “mélange of borrowed concepts, forms and styles or a collection of ‘quotations’ meant to assert an identity based on pretension”³⁵⁷, but with an original elaboration made by a society deeply conscious of its cultural identity.

³⁵⁴ MAILLOT 2016 B, pp. 290-291.

³⁵⁵ MAILLOT 2016 B, p. 291.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ TÖRÖK 2011, p. 40.

With this in mind, the perspectives of future research are multiple. As regards the Meroitic palatial architecture, the search for architectural models (foundation systems, decorative patterns, inner layout, etc...) clearly remains open to new close examinations as the excavations proceed all over the ancient Meroitic territory.

The acquisition of new data will inevitably affect our understanding of the palatial institution in the wider urban context in which it is inserted. In this respect, an increasing emphasis on the role of Meroitic urban archaeology would be desirable to extend the scope of the research.

As concerns the Italian Archaeological Mission at Jebel Barkal, the recently emerged evidence related to older structure(s) guides the investigation towards the origins of that urban re-arrangement of the royal district ascribed to Natakamani. Moreover, while a considerable amount of data has been gathered about palace B1500, the adjoining area has yet to be outlined in detail.

Despite the many years of activity of the Mission at Napata, its work is still fundamental to provide new evidence about this ancient capital describing its relationship with the Meroitic and “international” context.

The archaeological research thus represents a favoured tool in raising stimulating questions capable of moving the research forward.

List of abbreviations

FHN I = Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD. Vol.1: From the Eighth to the Mid-Fifth Century BC. University of Bergen.

FHN II = Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD. Vol. 2: From the Mid-Fifth to the First Century BC. University of Bergen.

FHN III = Fontes Historiae Nubiorum: Textual Sources for the History of the Middle Nile Region between the Eighth Century BC and the Sixth Century AD. Vol. 3: From the First to the Sixth Century AD. University of Bergen.

REPORT 2009 = *The Italian Archaeological Expedition in the Sudan* (University of Torino & University of Venice “Ca’ Foscari”)

REPORT 2011 = E. M. Ciampini. *The Italian Archaeological Mission in Sudan. Report for the Season 2011*. Unpublished. University Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

REPORT 2012 = E. M. Ciampini. *The Italian Archaeological Mission in Sudan. Report for the Season 2012*. Unpublished. University Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

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REPORT 2014 = E. M. Ciampini. *The Italian Archaeological Mission in Sudan. Report for the Season 2014-2015*. Unpublished. University Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

REPORT 2015 = E. M. Ciampini. *The Italian Archaeological Mission in Sudan. Report for the Season 2015-2016*. Unpublished. University Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

REPORT 2016 = E. M. Ciampini. *The Italian Archaeological Mission in Sudan. Report for the Season 2016-2017*. Unpublished. University Ca’ Foscari, Venice.

Sudan & Nubia = Sudan & Nubia: Bulletin of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society. London.

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Tables

King Natakamani: titles (*FHN III*, n. 211)

Label: EH = Egyptian hieroglyphs MH = Meroitic hieroglyphs CM = cursive Meroitic Fgm. = fragment

Source	Object/Monument	Localisation	Titles
1	Barque stand	Wad Ben Naga/ Temple of Isis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Son of Ra name (MH)
1a	Two smaller stands	“	“
1b	Fragment of an altar	“	“
2	Pylon	Jebel Barkal/ Amun temple B500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH)
3	Stray block	Jebel Barkal/ Amun temple B500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (EH) (Fgm.)
4	Jamb and thickness, entrance to Hypostyle	Jebel Barkal/ Amun temple B500 (B514)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (EH)
5		Naga/ Apedemak temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (MH)
6		Naga/ Temple of Amun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Son of Ra name (MH)
7		Amara/ Temple of Amun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (MH)
8	Sandstone block found in secondary context in building M 281	Meroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (EH)
9	Kiosk M 279	Meroe/ Temple of Amun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (MH)
10	Stela	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Son of Ra name (CM)
11	South + West (fgm.) walls of mortuary cult chapel	Meroe (Begarawiga)/ Beg. N. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Son of Ra name (EH)

Queen Amanitore: titles (*FHN* III, n. 212; TIRADRITTI 1992)

Source	Object/Monument	Localisation	Titles
1	Barque stand	Wad Ben Naga/ Temple of Isis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Daughter of Ra name (MH + EH)
2	Blocks	Jebel Barkal/ Amon temple B500 (?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Daughter of Ra (EH)
3	Pylon	Naga/ Apedemak temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra name (MH)
4		Naga/ Amun temple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Daughter of Ra (MH)
5		Amara/ temple of Amun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (MH)
6	Block from M 281	Meroe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (MH)
7	Block from kiosk M 279	Meroe/ forecourt of Amun temple M 260	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (MH)
8	Kiosk M 280	Meroe/ in front of Amun temple M 260	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throne name (EH) • Daughter of Ra (MH)
9	Stela	Unknown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (CM)
10	Blocks from mortuary chapel	Meroe (Begarawiga)/ Beg. N.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title (EH) • Daughter of Ra name (EH)
11	West wall of mortuary chapel	Meroe (Begarawiga)/ Beg. N. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (MH)
12	Stela	Jebel Barkal/ B1500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daughter of Ra (CM) • Title (CM)

Structures characterized by cellular construction

Edifice	Site	Function	Date	Platform dimensions	Platform height
<i>Shena wab</i> of Amun	Karnak	<i>Shena wab</i>	29 th dyn. (predecessor from 26 th dyn.)	45.5 x 55.5	4.5
<i>Shena wab</i> of Monthu-Re	Karnak	<i>Shena wab</i>	30 th dyn. (?)	14 x 13	2.5
<i>Shena wab</i> of Khonsu	Karnak	<i>Shena wab</i>	3 rd BC (original build. 25 th dyn.)	?	2.7
<i>Shena wab</i> of Mut	Karnak	<i>Shena wab</i>	25 th dyn. original build.	30 x 30	?
<i>Shena wab</i> (?)	Medamud	<i>Shena wab</i> (?)	3 rd BC	26 x 26	?
“Edifice en Briques Crues”	Tanis	Religious building (?)	21 st -22 nd dyn. ?	50 x 30	3-3.50 – 6
Temple of Isis	Saqqara	Temple	30 th dyn.	65 x 40	4

Edifice	Site	Function	Date	Platform dimensions	Platform height	Brick module
Fortification	Defenna	Military fort	Saite period	45 x 45	7	
Fortification	Naukratis	Military fort	Saite period	55 x 54.5	5	
Fortification	Tell el-Balamun	Military fort	Saite period	54.15 x 61.10	?	41 x 21 x 12
Fortification	Tell Qedwa	Military enclosure	Saite period	13.5-17.5	3.2 min.	40/44 x 20 x 12/15

Edifice	Site	Date	Platform dimensions	Platform height	Brick module
Palace	Deir el-Ballas (North)	New Kingdom 18 th Dyn (?)	?	5	?
Palace	Deir el-Ballas (South)	New Kingdom (?)	100 x 44	5.5	?
Palace	Memphis	Saite Period 26 th Dyn	117 x 70*	12	Min. 29 x 14 x 10 Max. 46 x 22 x 12.5
Palace	Tell el-Daba (F)	New Kingdom 18 th Dyn	70.5 x 47	?	?
Palace	Tell el-Daba (G)	New Kingdom	168 x 78.75	7.35	?

*The measurement refers to what remained of the building as surveyed by Kemp in 1977.

Edifice	Site	Date	Dimensions	Height of the remaining walls*	Brick module
Palace	Wad Ben Naga	Meroitic period 1 st BC-1 st AD	61 x 61		
Palace	Muweis	Meroitic period 1 st BC-1 st AD	60 x 60	2	35 x 18 x 8
Palace B100	Jebel Barkal	Meroitic period 1 st BC?	33 x 37		
Palace B1500	Jebel Barkal	Meroitic period 1 st AD* ²	61 x 61	1.80	34 x 17 x 8
Palace B2400	Jebel Barkal	Meroitic period late 1 st BC?	40 x 40		
Palace M750	Meroe	Meroitic period 1 st -2 nd AD	80 x 48		
Palaces M294-295	Meroe	Meroitic period 1 st -2 nd AD	55 x 55 (M294) 52 x 52 (M295)		

* Referred to the maximum height of the preserved walls.

*² Despite the connection to king Natakamani suggests this dating for the palace, we have no evidence relating the precise chronology of its foundation, a dating between the 1st cent. BC and the 1st cent. AD is at any rate the more suitable.

Images

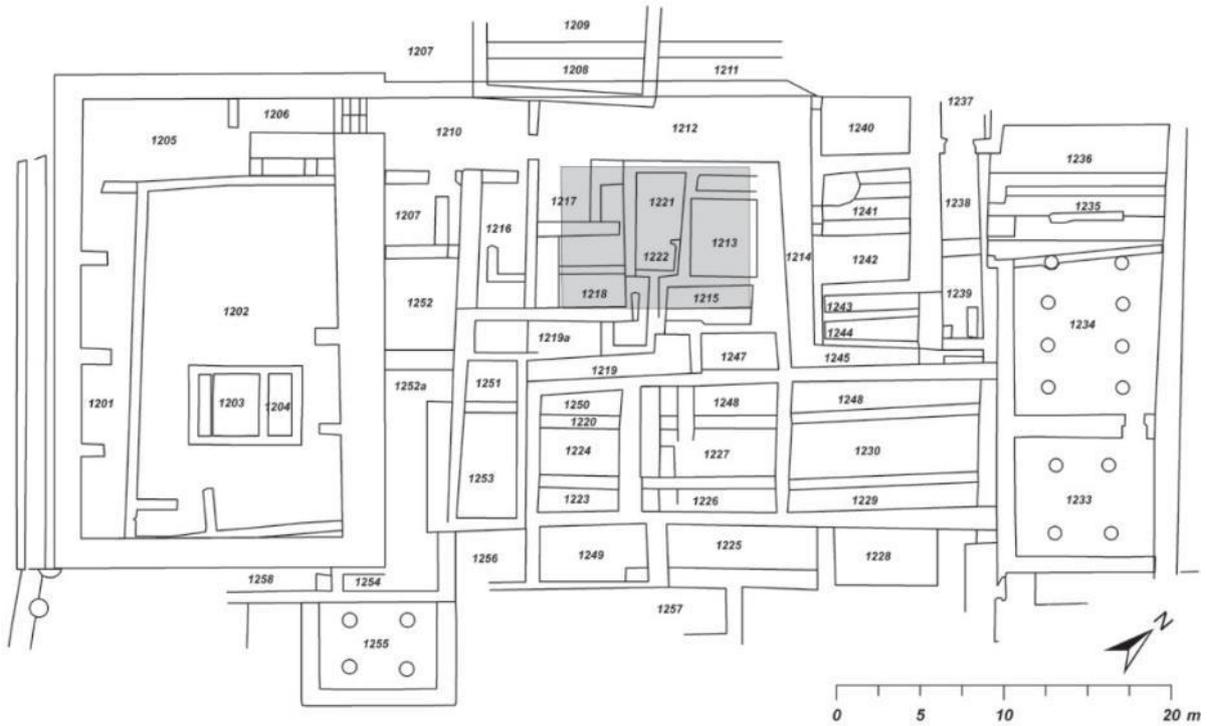


Figure 1: Plan of B1200 with rooms numbers and indication (shaded area) of Aspelta room ASP-01 (from KENDALL 2007).

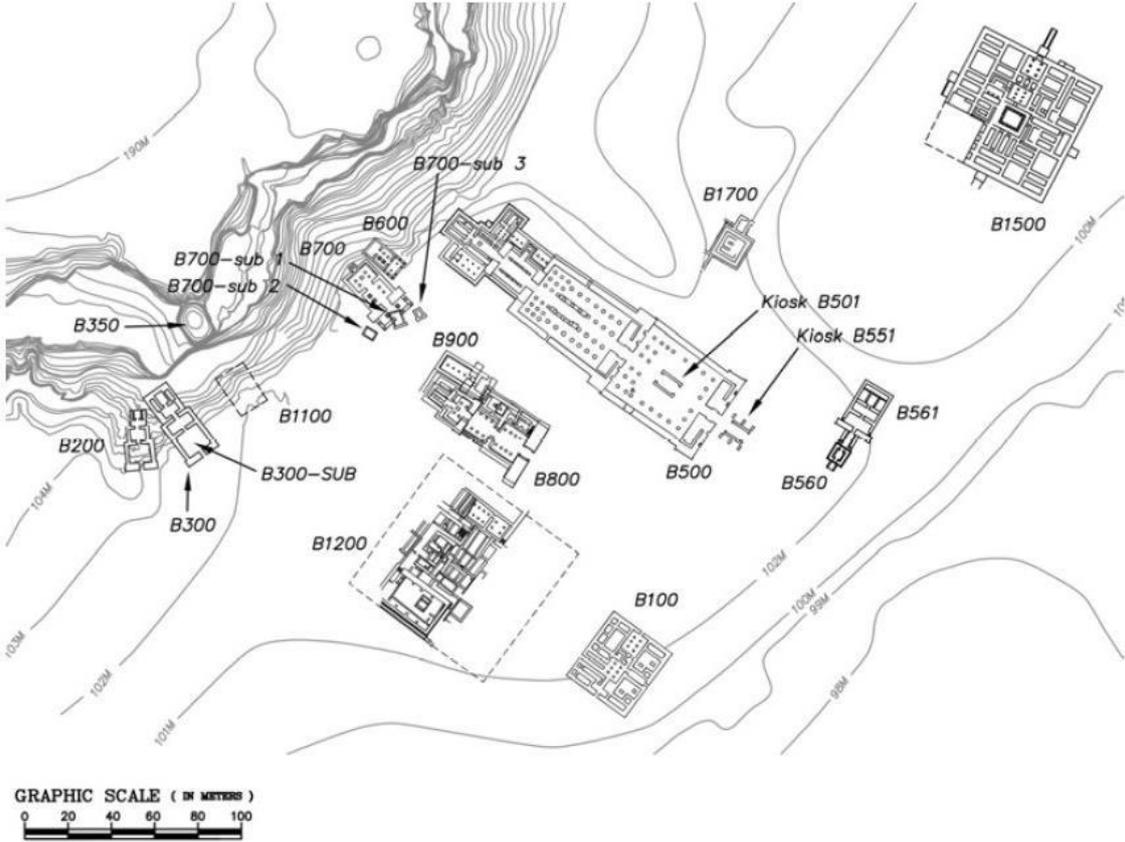


Figure 2: General plan showing the location of the buildings of the Jebel Barkal sanctuary. Except for B1500, they are all pertinent to NCAM concession area (from KENDALL 2016).

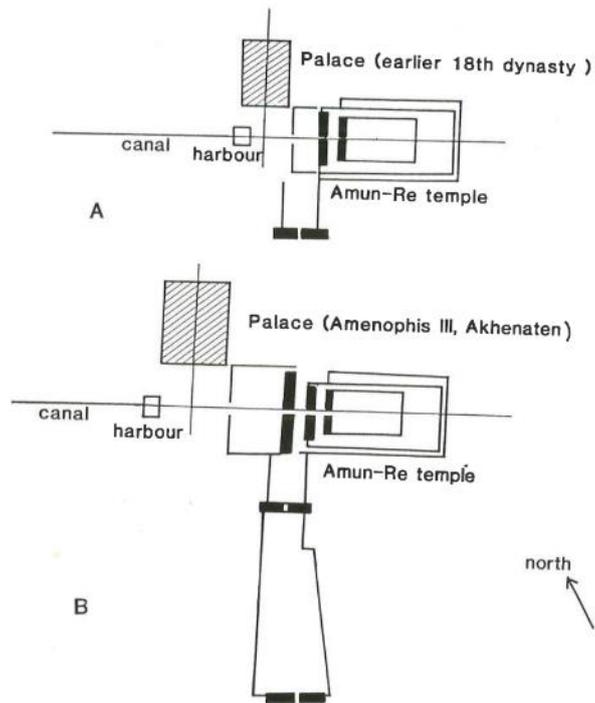


Figure 3: Relationship between Karnak temple and the royal palace during Dynasty XVIII (from O'CONNOR 1989).



Figure 4: ASP-01 after excavation in 2007 looking northeast (from KENDALL 2016).



Figure 5: Reconstruction of the ASP-01 room; the hypothetical baldachin in the centre (from KENDALL 2016).

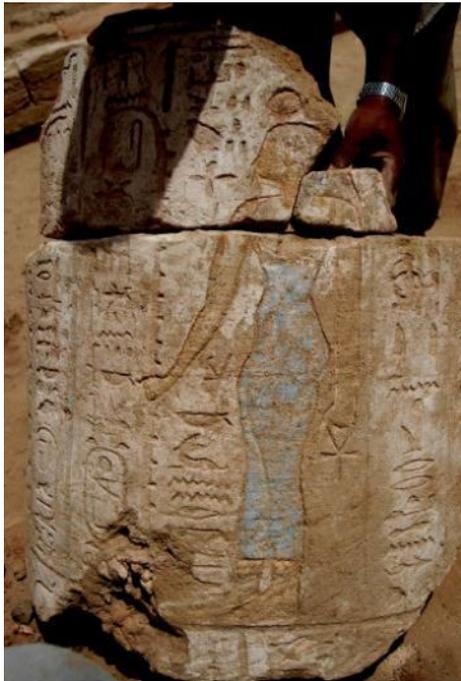


Figure 7: Fragments of column from the room ASP-01. The decoration is still visible (from KENDALL 2016).



Figure 6: Capitals with adorsed rams from room ASP-0 (from KENDALL 2016).

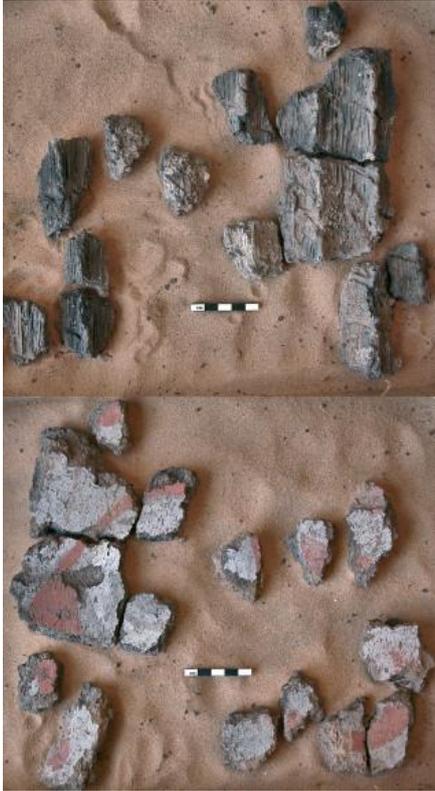


Figure 8: Fragments of painted plaster from the ceiling of ASP-01 –reversed and obverse sides (from KENDALL 2007).

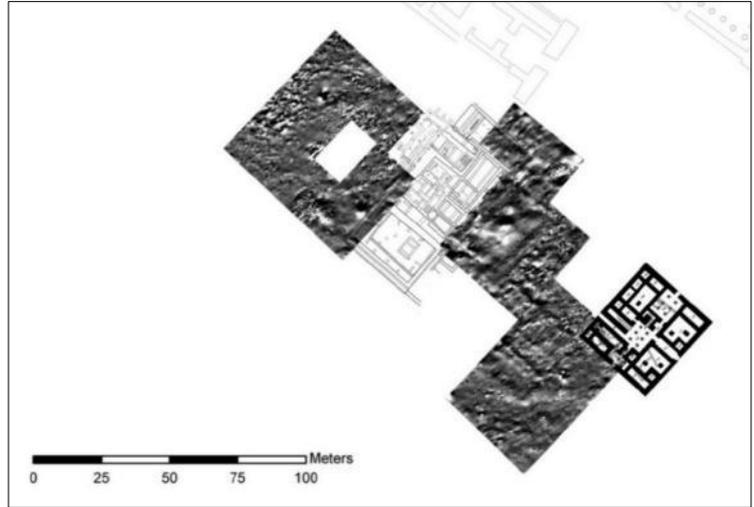


Figure 9: Magnetic image showing the real extension of B1200 (from KENDALL 2014).



Figure 10: View of the palaces B1200 (foreground) and B100 (background) from the top of Jebel Barkal. The picture was taken in 1919 after the Reisner's excavations (from KENDALL 2016).

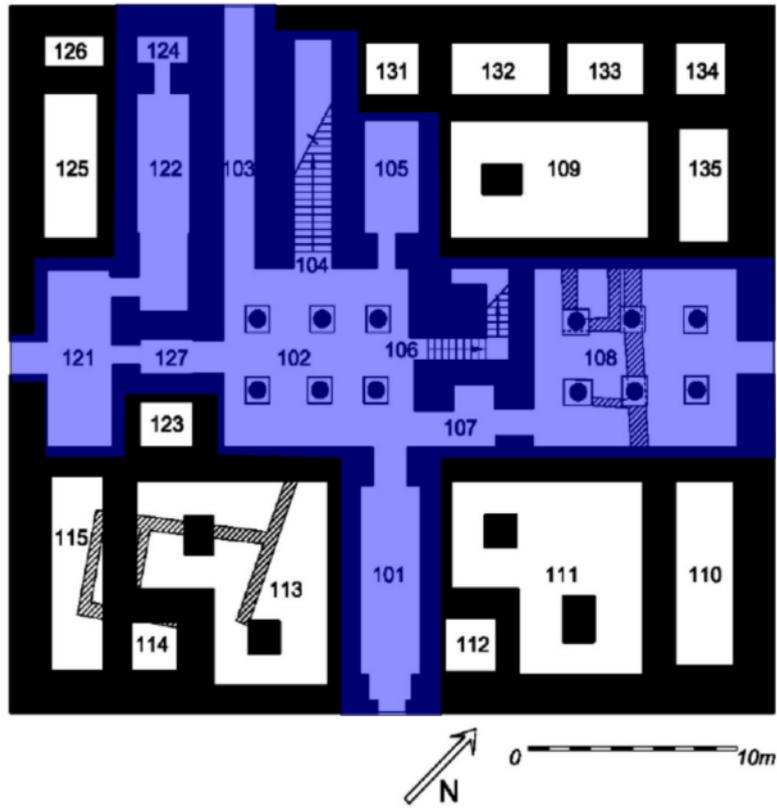


Figure 11: Plan of building B100 with room numbers – derived from Reisner’s notes and measured map. Older structures are visible in dashed line. In blue are highlighted the accessible rooms (plan from KENDALL 2014, modified by the author).



Figure 12: B100, Photograph taken in 1916 after Reisner’s excavation – view from the South (from KENDALL 2014).

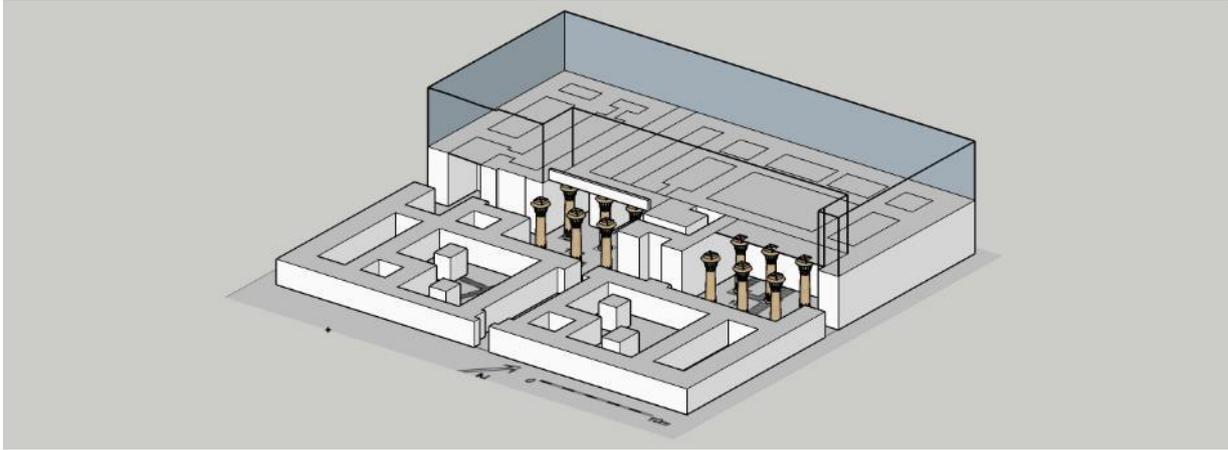


Figure 13: Hypothetical reconstruction proposed by the author of palace B100. Only the north-western wing of the edifice has been raised up in the model: the lower level plan is visible through its walls.

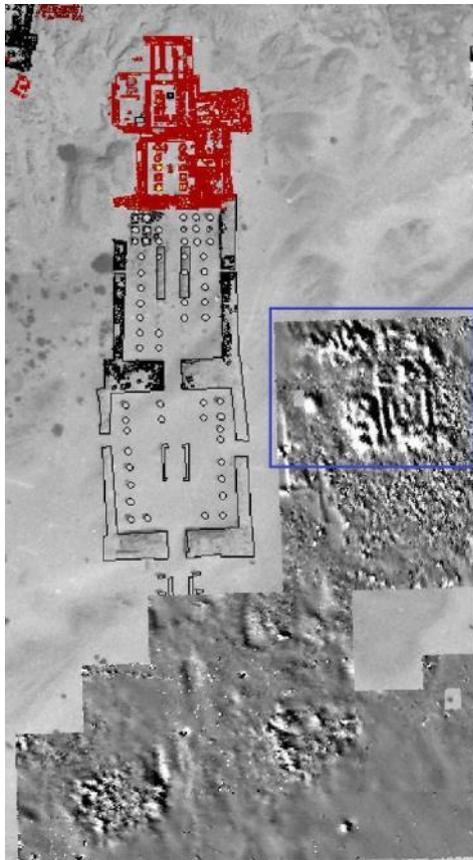


Figure 14: Magnetic image (2006); in the centre: B500; at right, highlighted in a blue rectangle: B1700 (from KENDALL 2016).



Figure 15: B1700 after the excavation (2015) oriented to the cardinal directions (from KENDALL 2016).



Figure 16: Italian excavations area with structures from B1800 to B2200. The palace B2400's area can be seen on the right (from MITCHELL 1996).

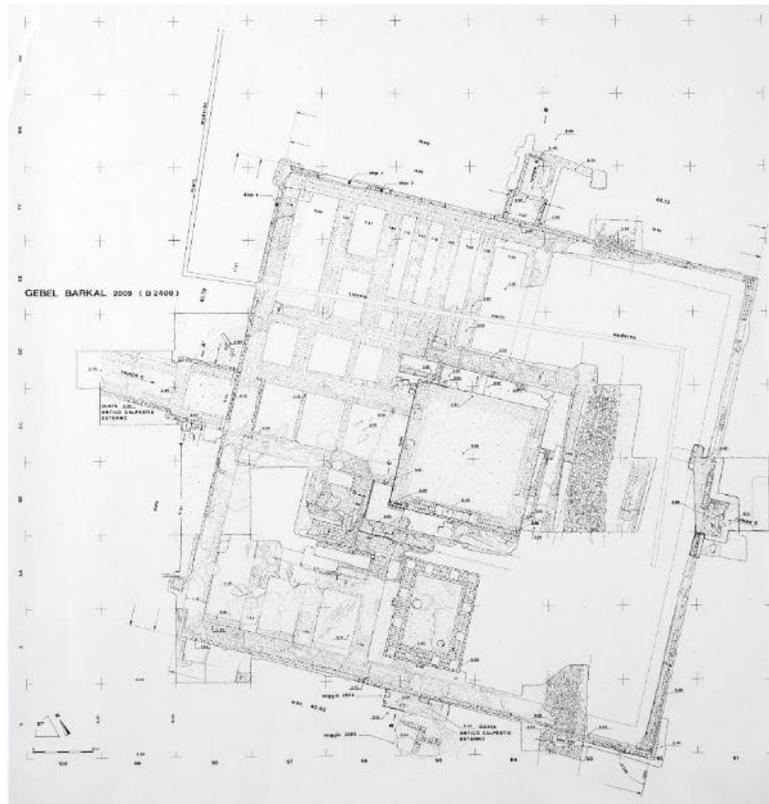


Figure 17: Plan of B2400 (from ROCCATI 2014).

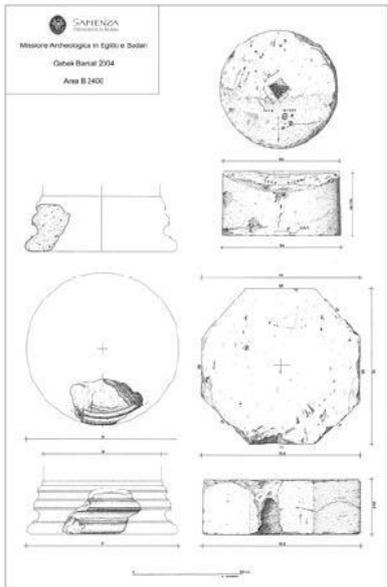
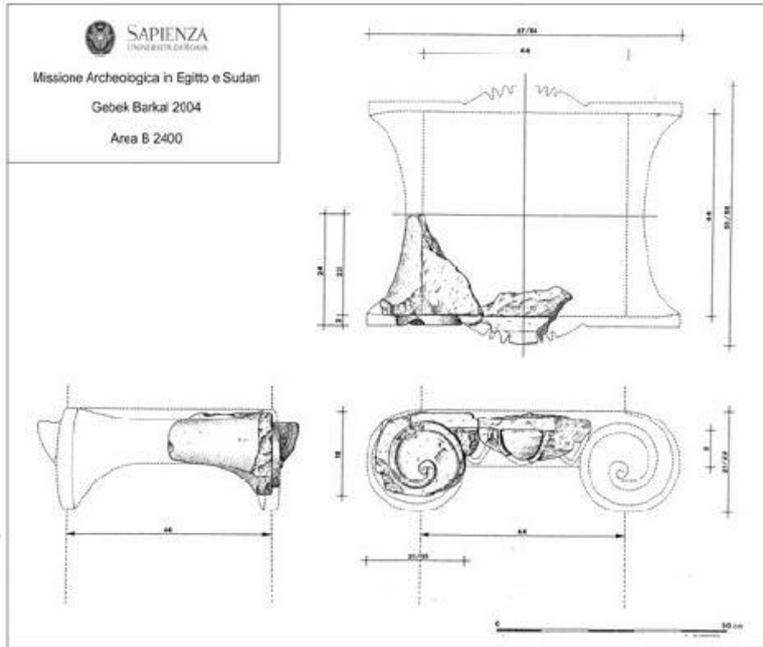
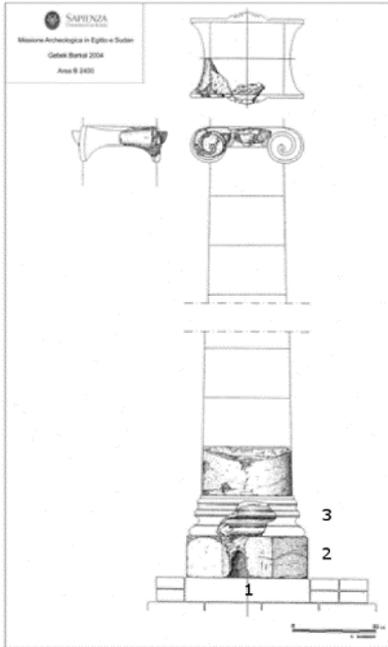


Figure 18: Upper left: reconstruction of a column from B2400 (numbers added by the author); upper right: the fragment of the Ionic capital; on the left: architectural details of the column (from SIST 2011).



Figure 19: Fragment of architrave with denticulated motif from B2400 (photograph: G. Lovera)

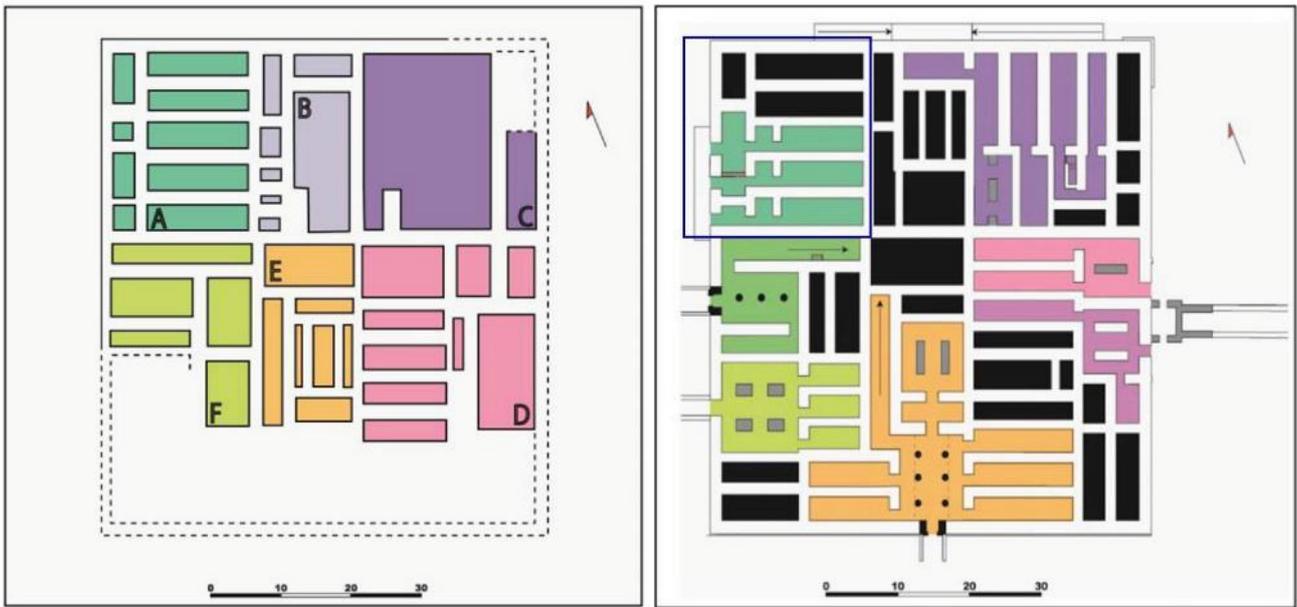


Figure 20: Plans of Muweis (left) and Wad Ben Naga (right) palaces: room clusters are highlighted in distinct colours; blue frame on the right added by the author (from MAILLOT 2014B).

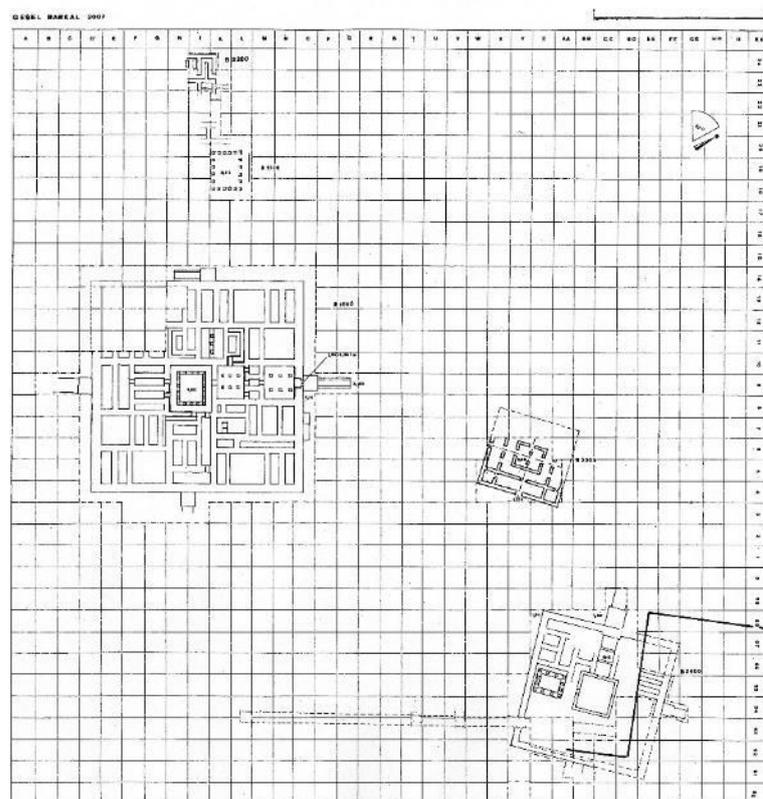


Figure 21: Plan of the northern area of the site showing the topographical disposition of structures B1500 (left), B3200 (centre) and B2400 (bottom right). Unpublished.

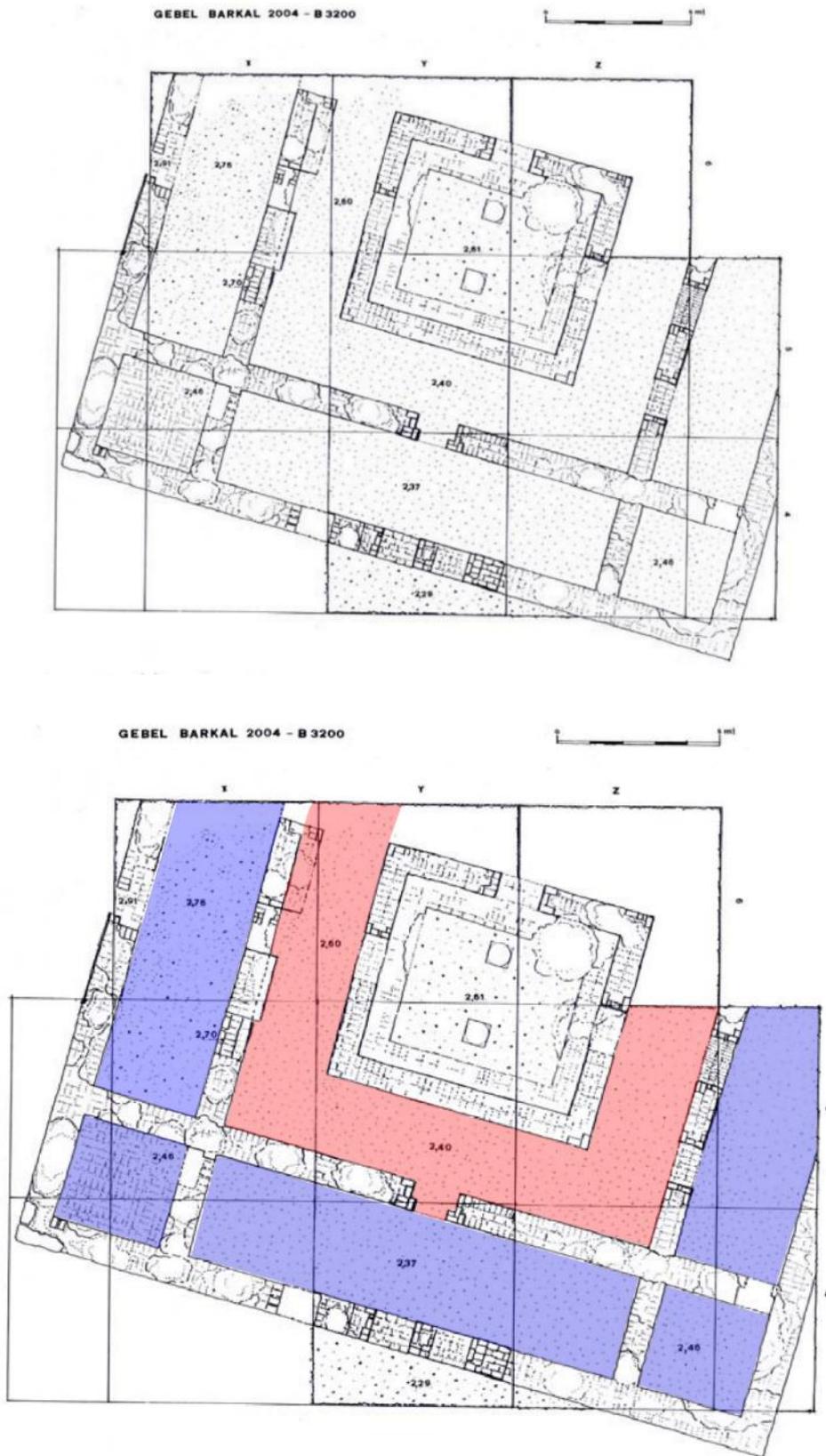


Figure 22: Plan of building B3200 (from SIST 2011): on top: original; on bottom: modified by the author. Highlighted in red: the first – inner – corridor; highlighted in blue: the second – outer – corridor.

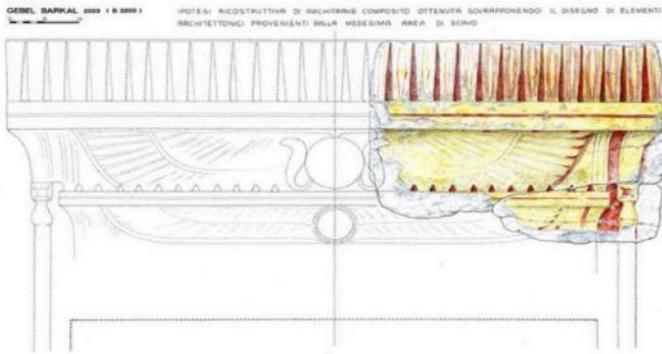


Figure 23: Reconstruction of the architrave related to the door in the eastern wall of the first corridor (from SIST 2011).



Figure 24: The mud-brick floor inside the south-eastern corner room of B3200 (from SIST 2011).

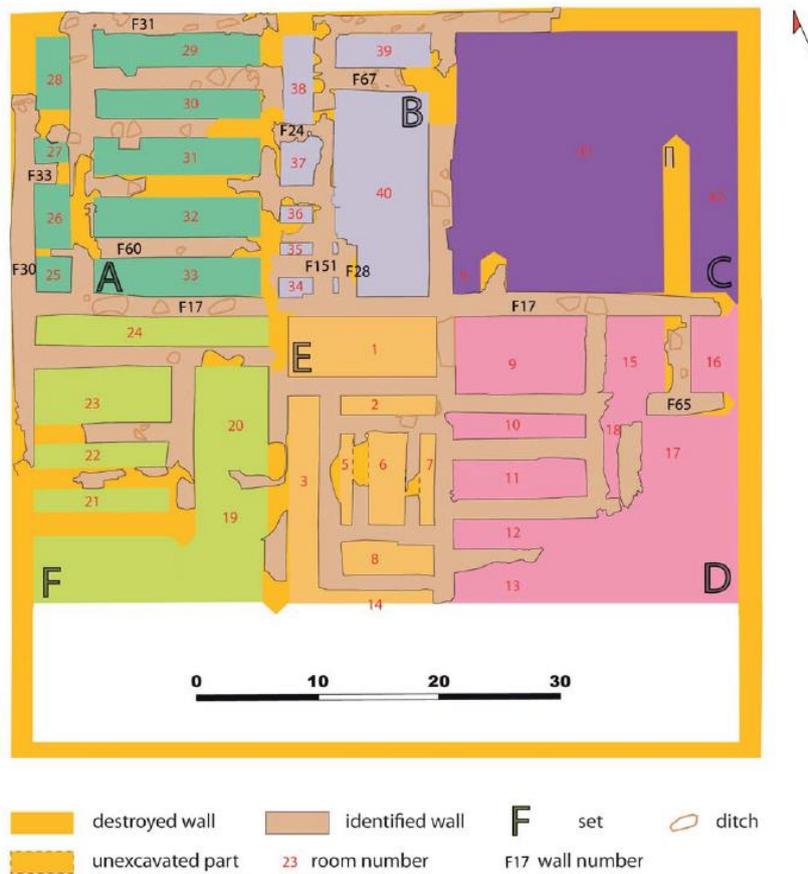


Figure 25: Plan of the palace of Muweis with walls and rooms numbers (from MAILLOT 2014B).



Figure 26: B1500 - North entrance, stairway (original photograph from the excavation).



Figure 27: B1500 - Lions statues and fragments of columns found during the excavation of the northern entrance (photograph G. Lovera).



Figure 28: B1500 - The podium found in 2012 south of the western entrance of the palace (from REPORT 2012).



Figure 29: B1500 - The lion statue from the southern entrance (photograph G. Lovera).

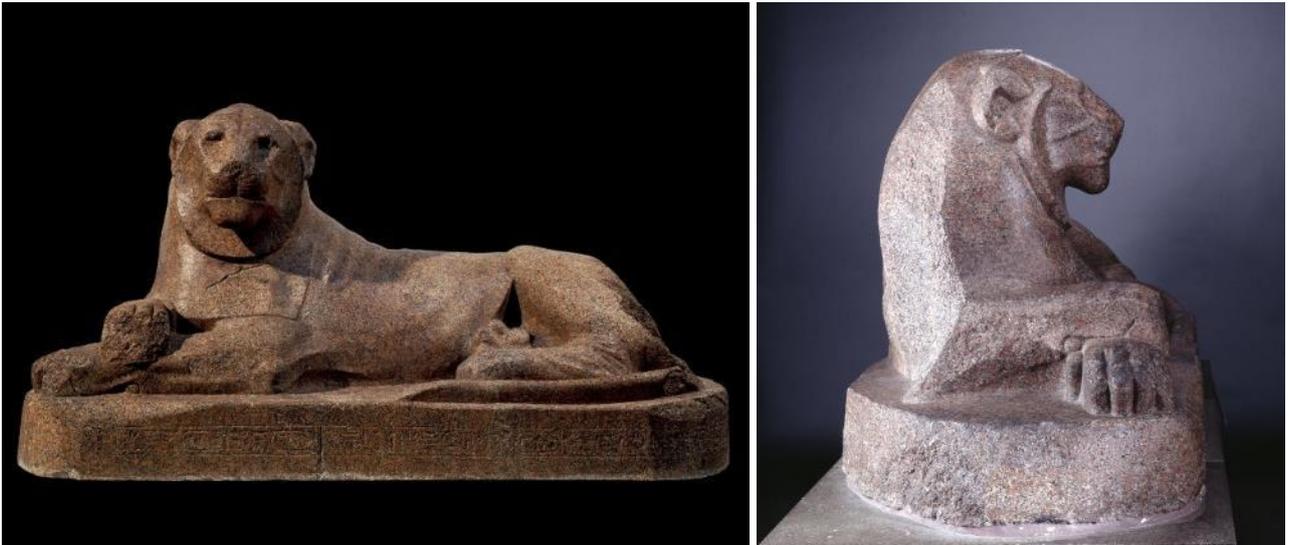


Figure 30: The so-called Prudhoe Lions, now at the British Museum (photographs from the British Museum website).



Figure 31 Two clay figurines representing a seated lion found in the palace of Wad Ben Naga (from VERCOUTTER 1962).

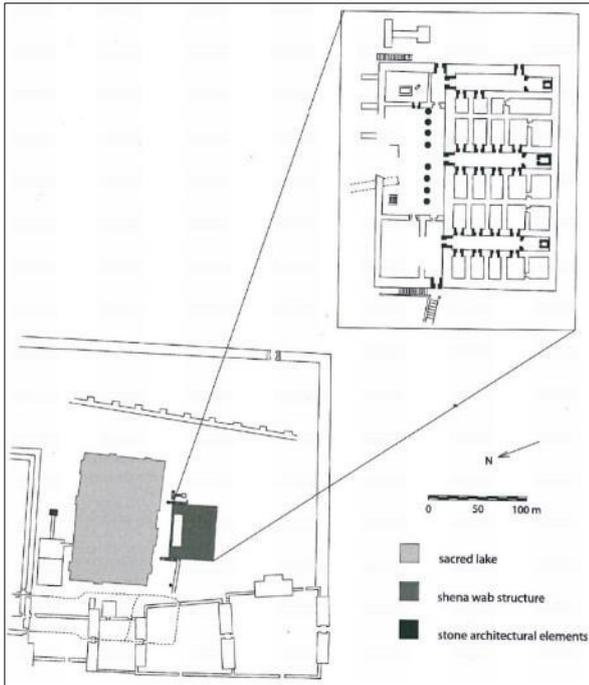


Figure 32: The shena wab of Psammuthis
(from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

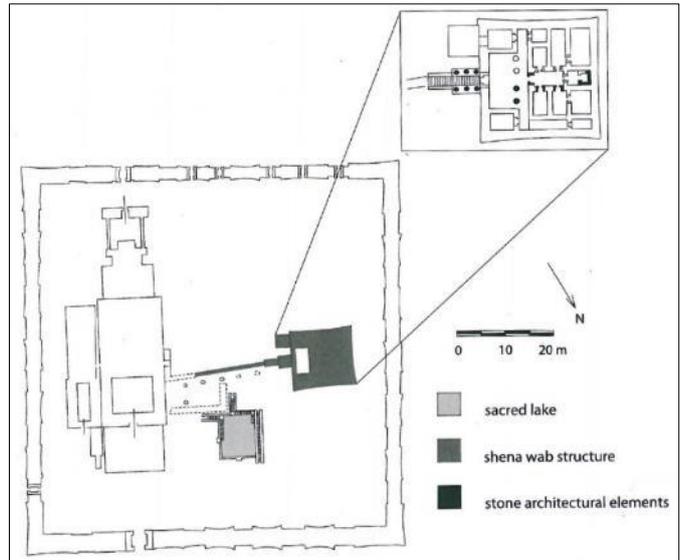


Figure 33: The shena wab of Monthu-Re
(from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

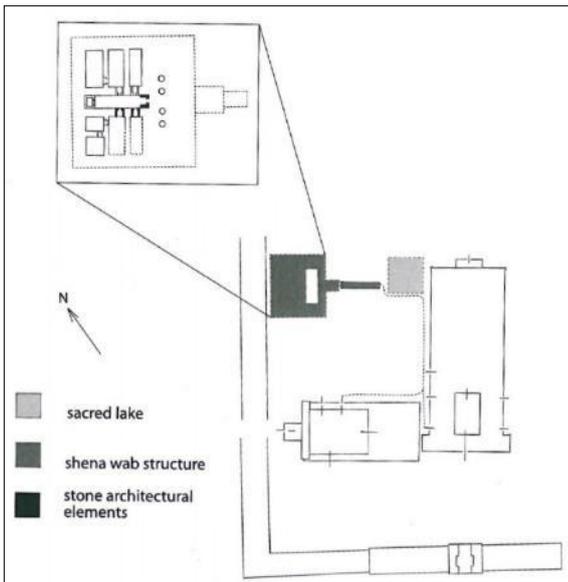


Figure 34: The shena wab of Khonsu
(from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

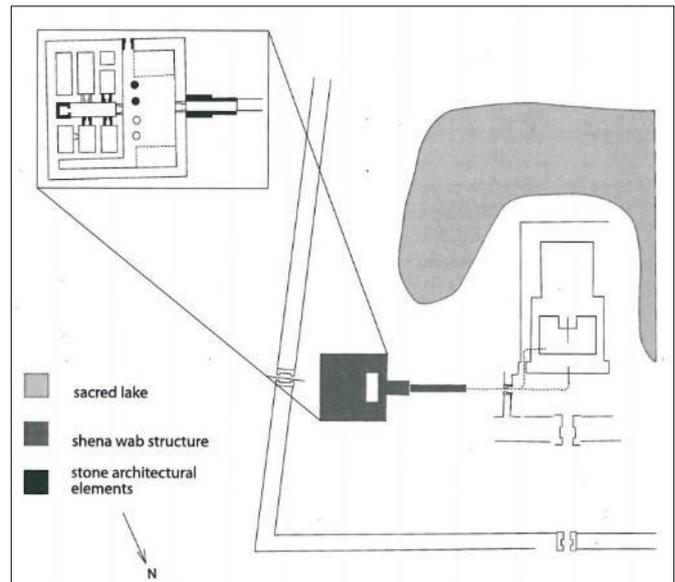


Figure 35: The shena wab of Mut
(from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

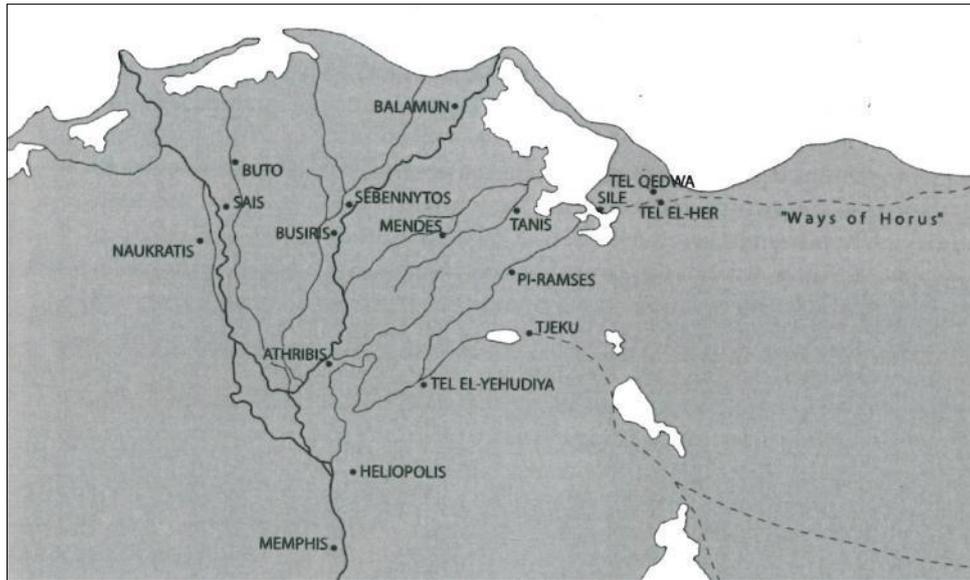


Figure 36: Map of the Delta showing some of the sites mentioned in the text (from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

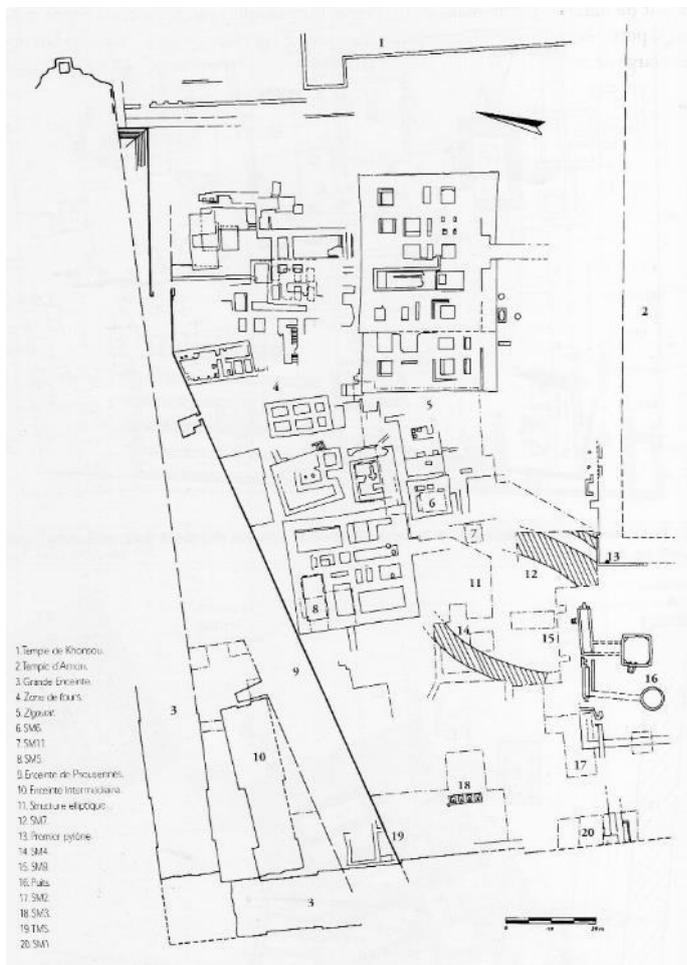


Figure 37: North-west corner of the temenos at Tanis, plan. The edifice mentioned in the text is visible on the top (from LECLÈRE 2008).

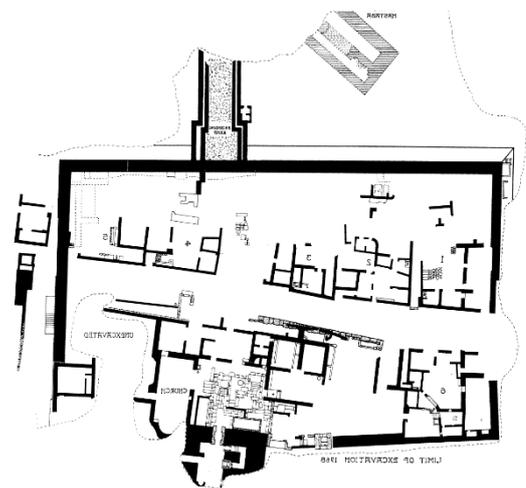


Figure 38: Edifice on platform at Saqqara, plan (from EMERY 1968).

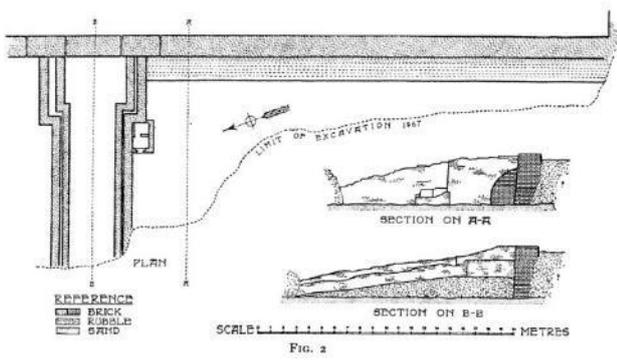


Figure 39: Abutting element of the platform at Saqqara (from EMERY 1967).

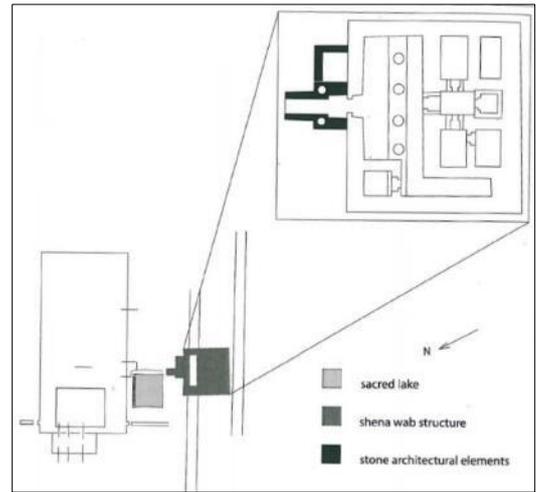


Figure 40: Edifice on platform at Medamud (from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

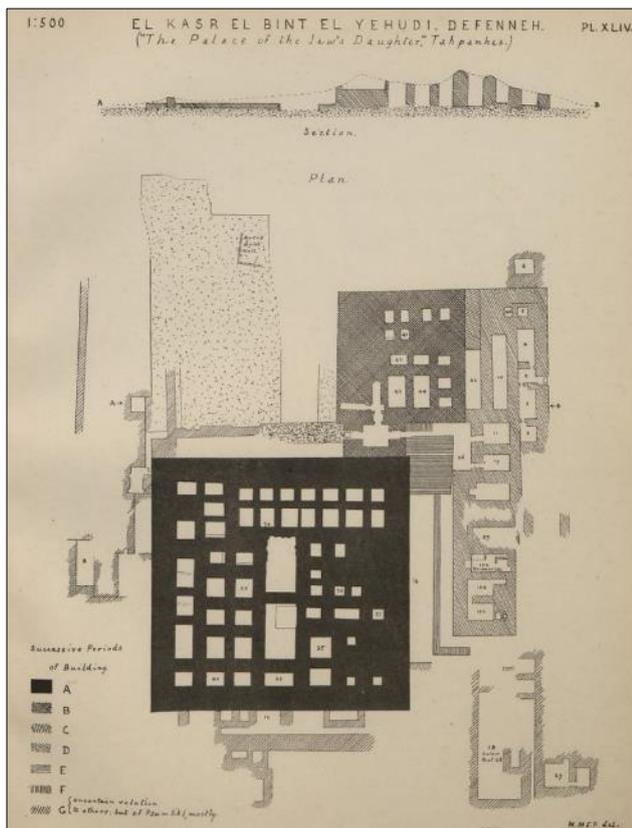


Figure 41: Edifice on platform at Defenna, plan (from PETRIE 1888).

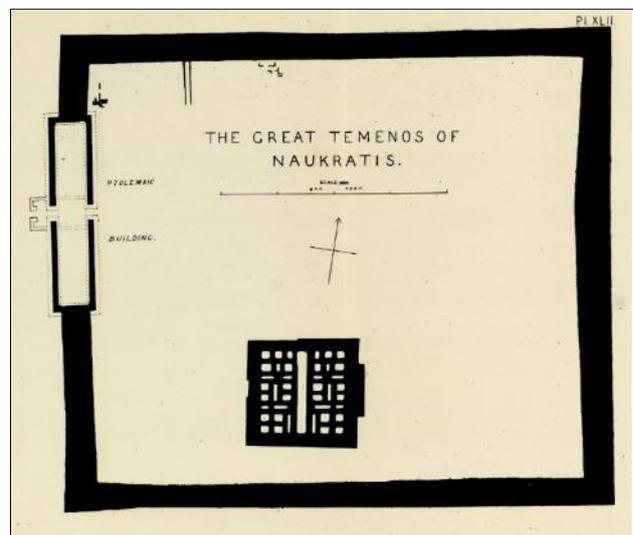


Figure 42: Great temenos of Naukratis, plan (from PETRIE 1886).

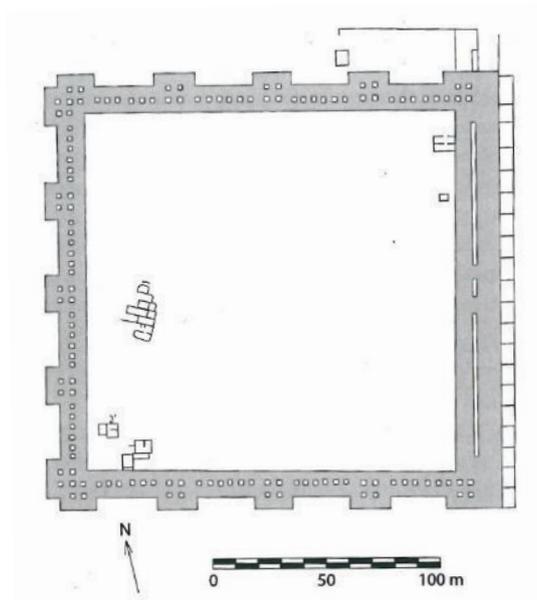


Figure 46: Fortified structure at Tell Qedwa, plan (from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

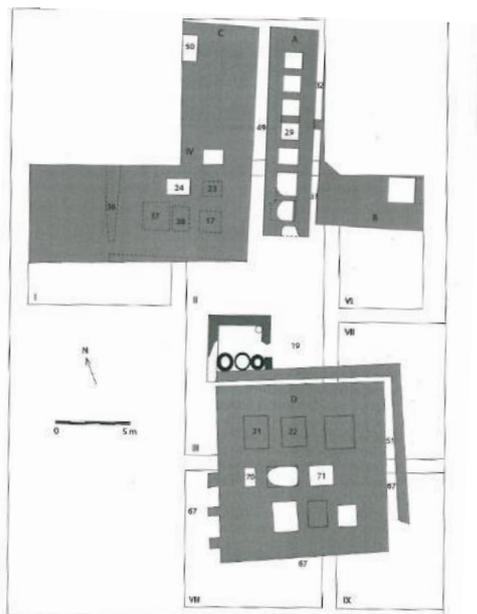


Figure 47: Domestic structures (?) at Mendes, plan (from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

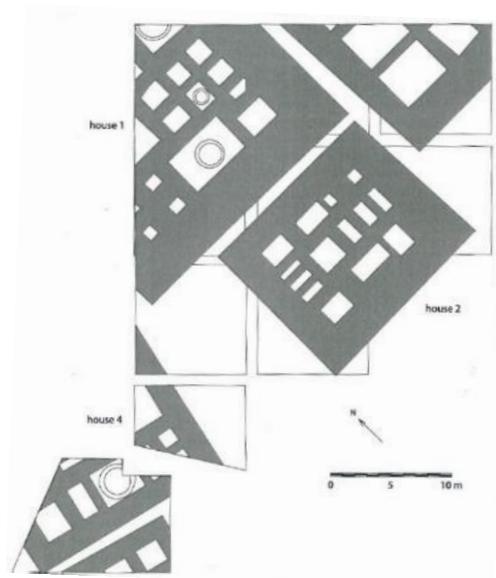


Figure 48: Domestic structures (?) at Tell el-Fara'in-Buto, plan (from SMOLÁRIKOVÁ 2008).

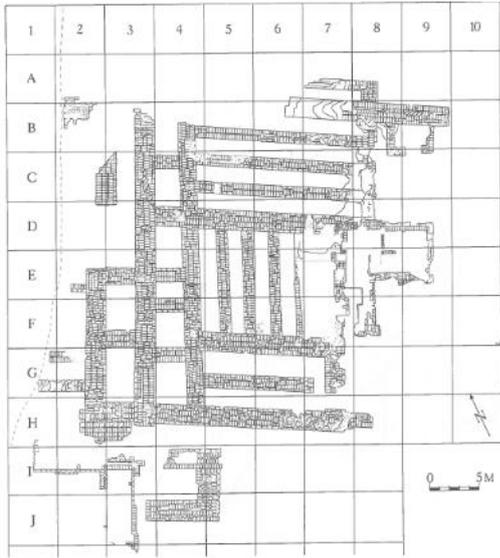


Figure 49: North Palace at Deir el-Ballas, plan (from LACOVARA 1990).



Figure 50: North Palace at Deir el-Ballas, detail of casemates (from LACOVARA 1990).

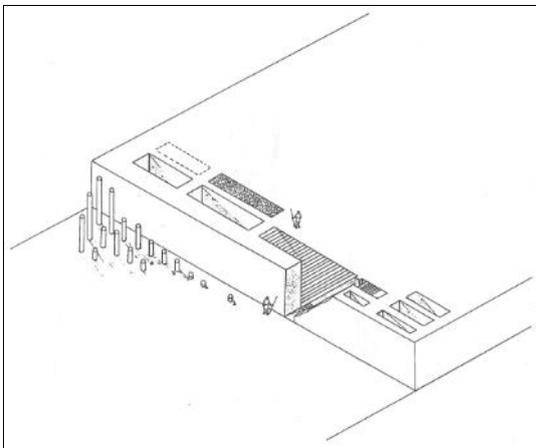


Figure 51: Hypothetical reconstruction of the Southern Palace of at Deir el-Ballas (from LACOVARA 1990).

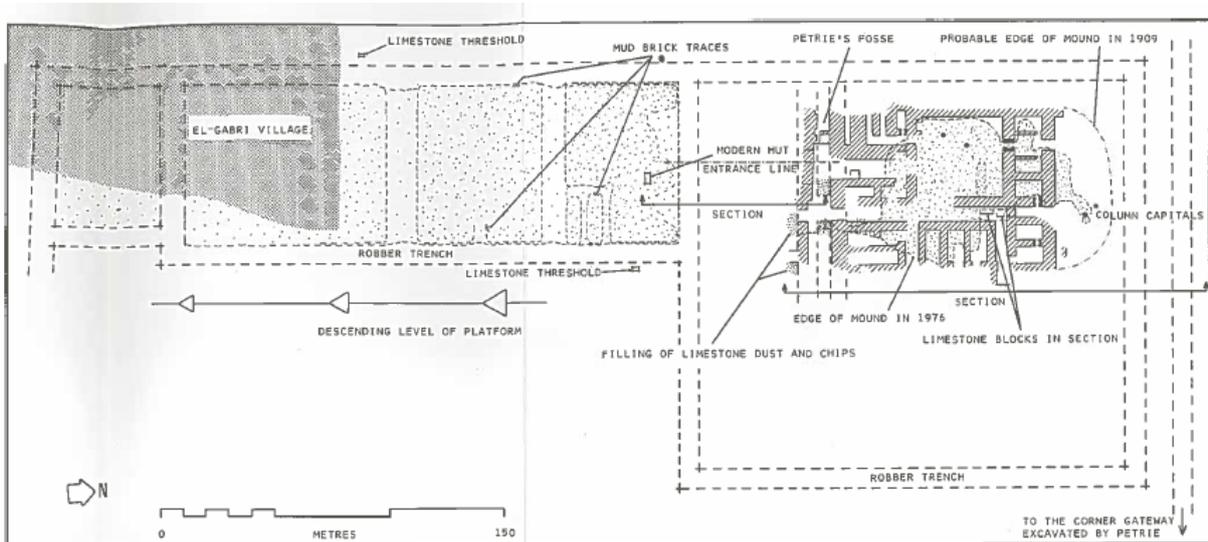


Figure 52: Sketch plan of the palace of Apries (from KEMP 1977).

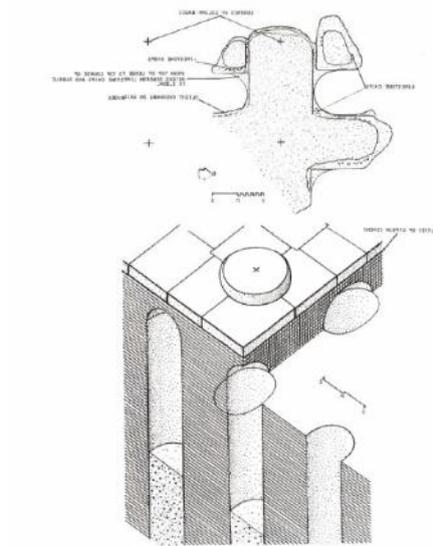


Figure 53: Sketch plan of the brick platform at the north end of the palace of Apries (top); isometric reconstruction (bottom) – (from KEMP 1977).

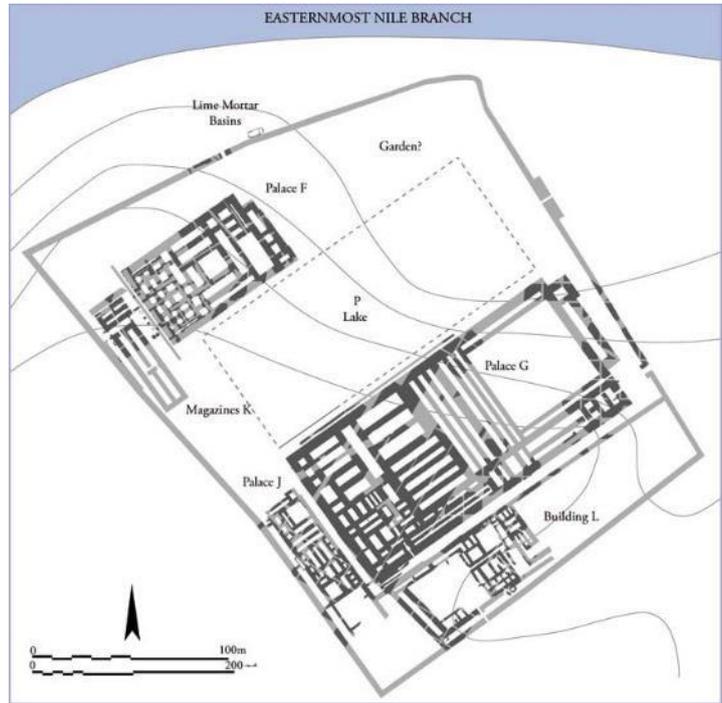


Figure 54: Palace district at Tell el-Daba, plan (from http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html).

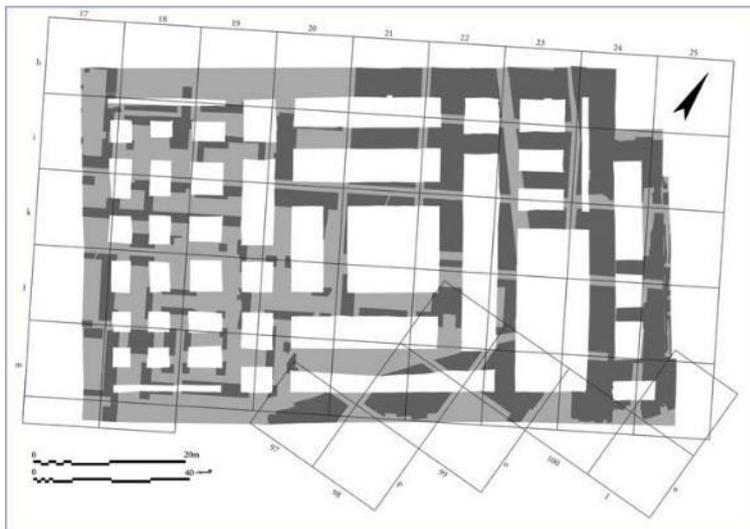


Figure 55: Palace F platform, plan (from http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html).

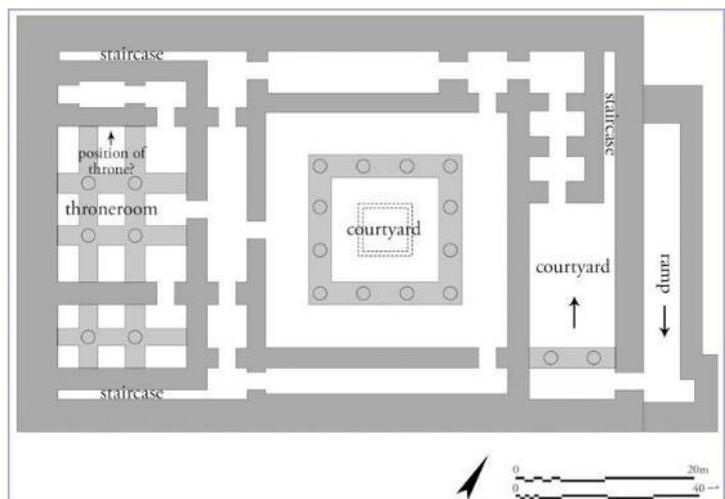


Figure 56: Palace F, reconstruction of the plan of the upper floor (from http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html).



Figure 57: Palace G, platform, plan (from http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html).

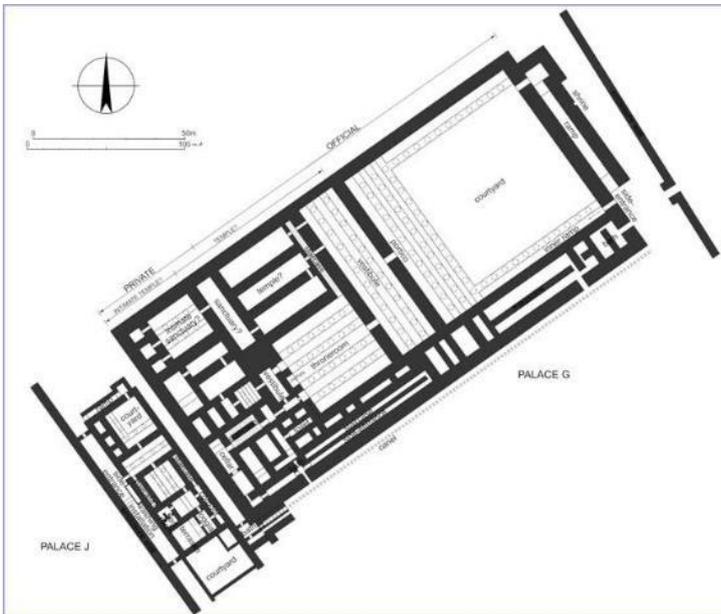


Figure 58: Palace G, reconstruction of the plan of the upper floor (from http://www.auaris.at/html/ez_helmi_en.html).

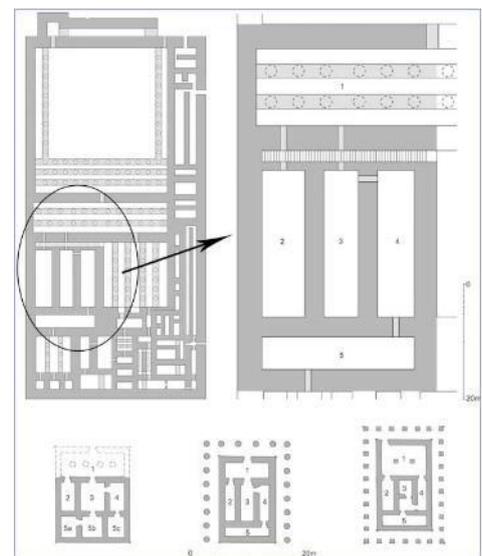


Figure 59: Scheme showing analogies between the right wing of the palace and the first Thutmosid temples of Medinet Habu (from BIETAK 2005).

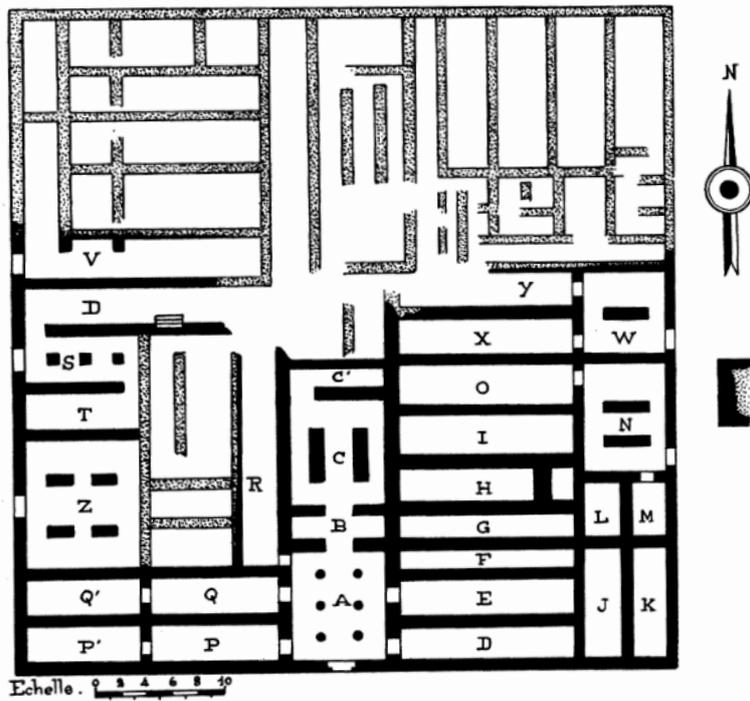


Figure 60: The palace of Wad Ben Naga, plan (from VERCOUTTER 1962).

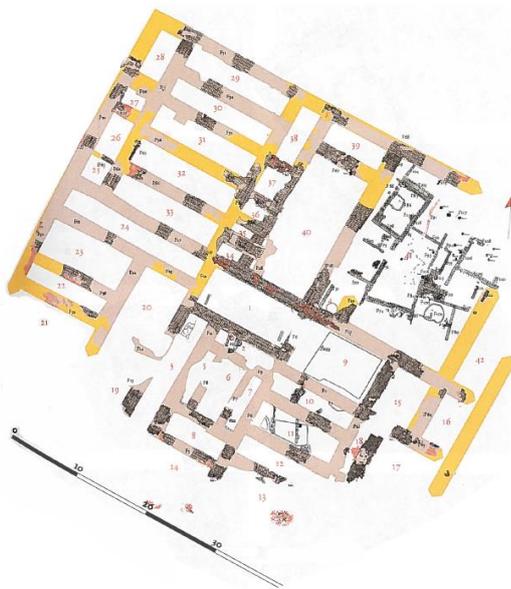


Figure 61: Disposition of bricks at the palace of Muweis; the early Meroitic settlement is visible in the corner up right (from MAILLOT 2016B).

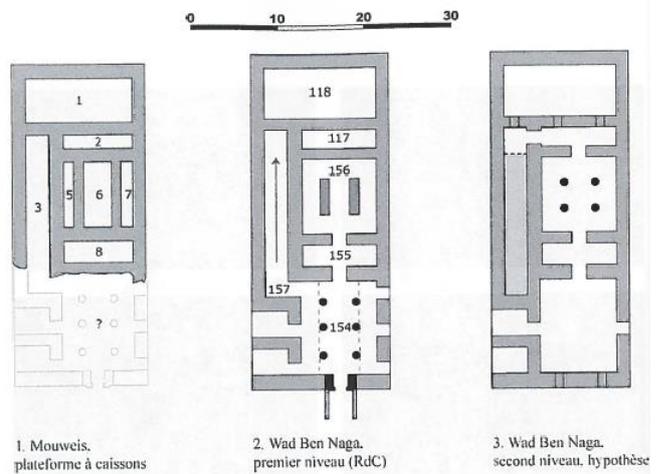


Figure 62: Comparison between the central cluster of rooms at Muweis (left) and Wad Ben Naga (centre and right) – (from MAILLOT 2016B).

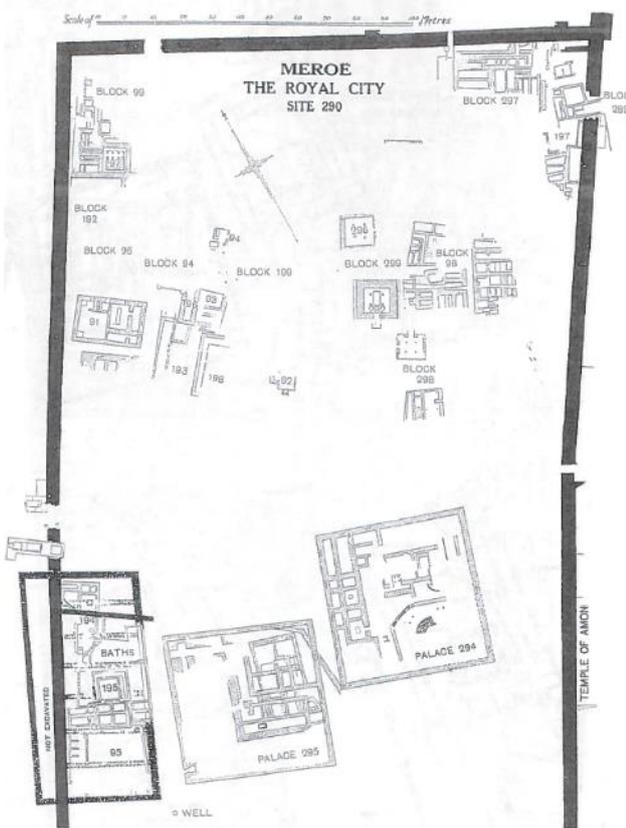


Figure 63: Great enclosure of Meroe with related buildings (from MAILLOT 2016B).

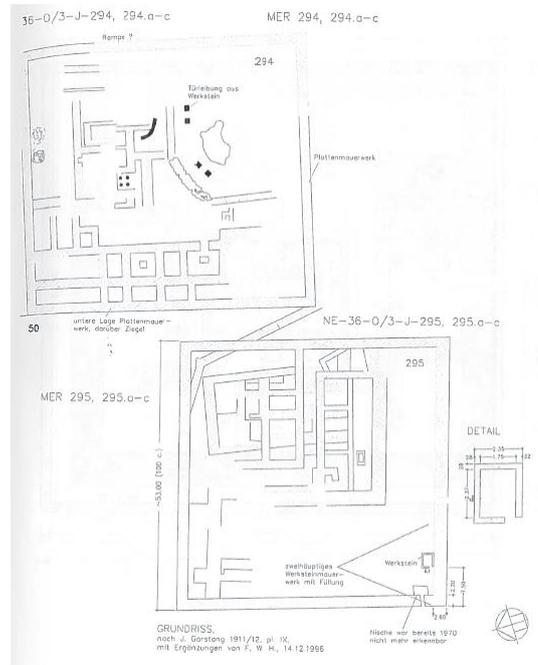


Figure 64: Meroe, plan of palaces M294-295 (from MAILLOT 2016B).

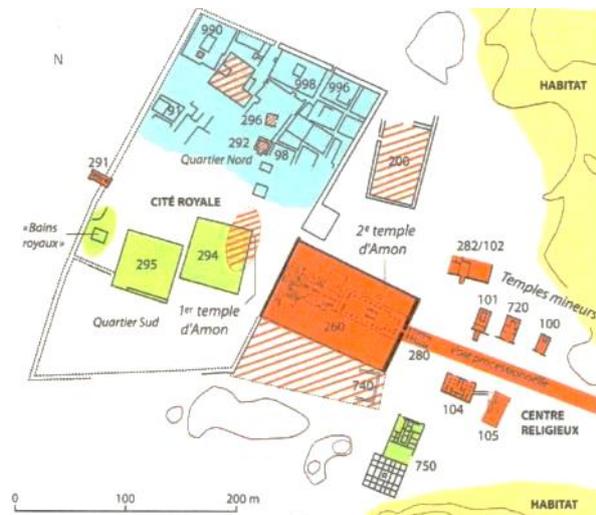


Figure 65: Plan of the town centre of Meroe (from MAILLOT 2016B).

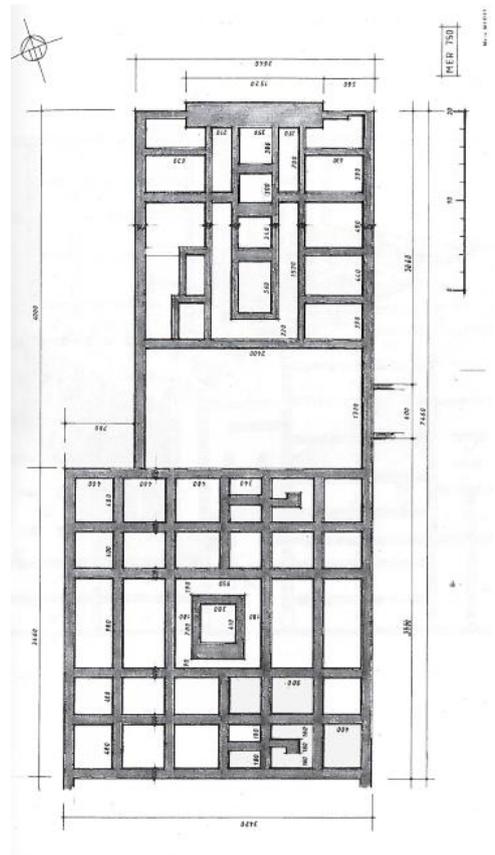


Figure 66: Palace M750, plan (from MAILLOT 2016B).



Figure 67: Palace B1500, picture taken by the author from the top of the Jebel Barkal, looking east. The area excavated during the last season is visible next to the western peripheral wall.

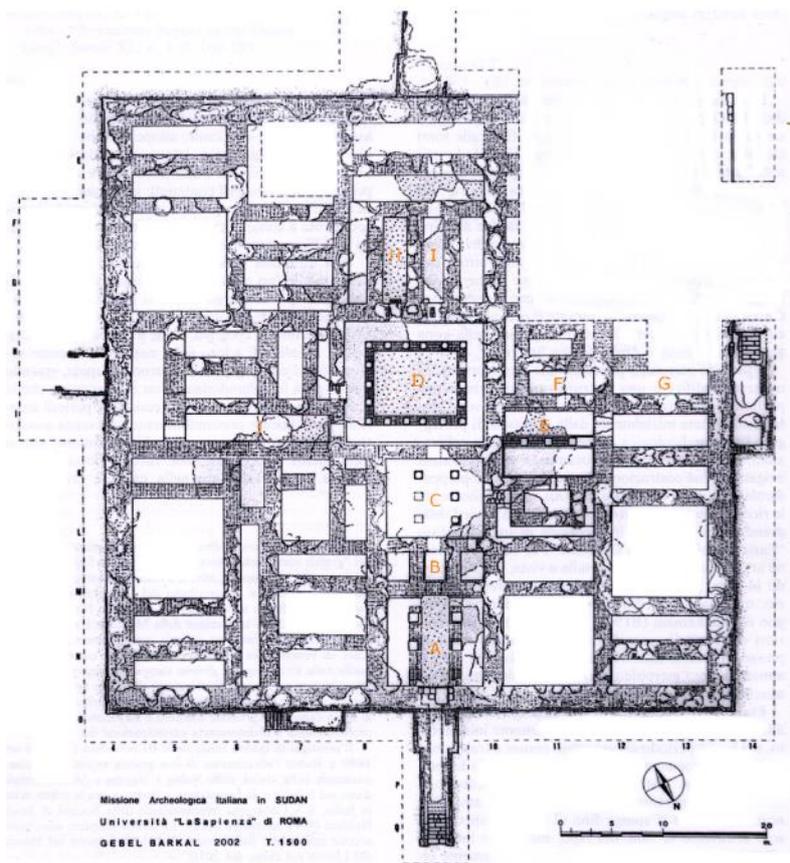


Figure 68: B1500, plan with rooms names used in the text (from ROCCATI 2011).



Figure 69: The exterior decoration of the palace with the two kinds of lesenas (from REPORT 2012).



Figure 70: Some of tiles originally placed as a decoration on the outer surface of the perimeter wall (photographs: G. Lovera).

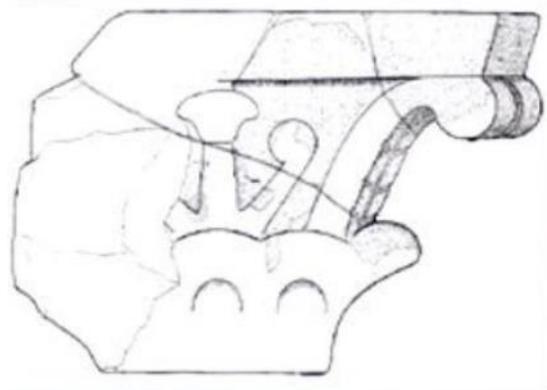


Figure 71: Left: capital in alexandrine style found in 2012 south of the external podium of the west side (from REPORT 2012). Right: Capital with Hellenistic influences from the palace found during the previous campaigns (from SIST 2006).

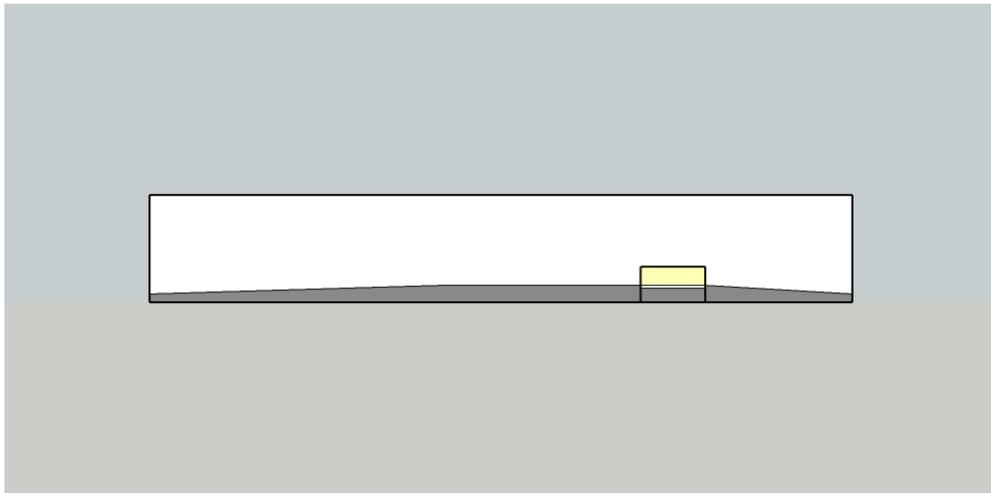


Figure 72: Hypothetical schematic reconstruction of the plaster-level situation on the western side of the palace: the level of the coating is marked white on the palace surface and yellow on the podium.
Graphic proposal by the author.



Figure 73: Layer for red bricks at the bottom of the southern perimeter wall (from REPORT 2011).



Figure 74: Stone-lined south-western corner of the palace (from REPORT 2013).

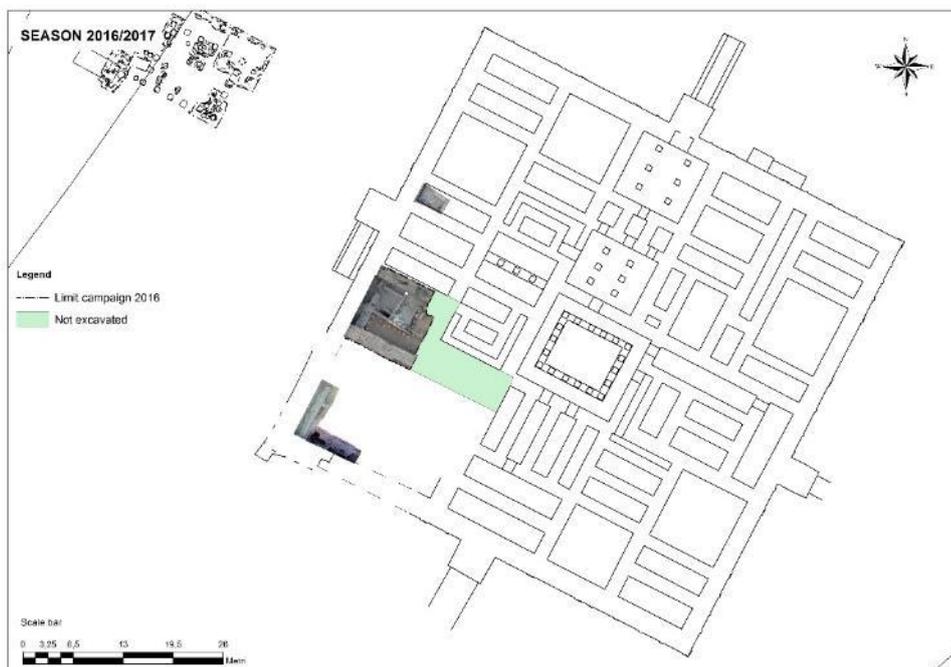


Figure 75: Plan of B1500 supplemented with recent (season 2016) orthophotographs of the newly excavated area (from REPORT 2016).

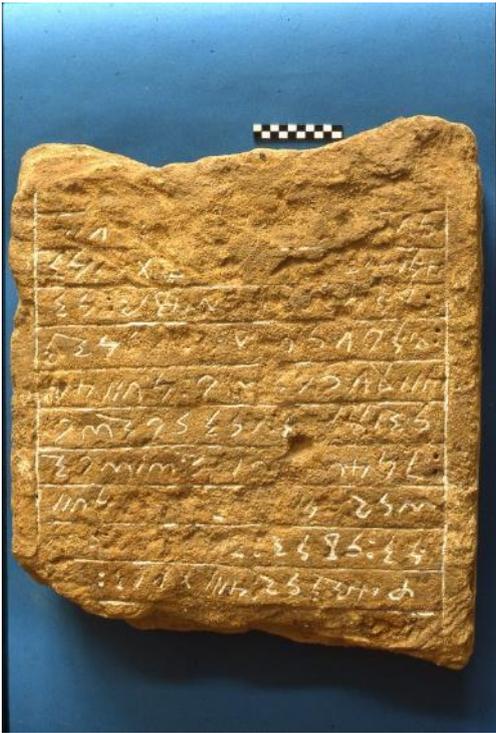


Figure 76: Stela of Natakamani found inside the palace (photograph: G. Lovera).



Figure 77: Censor and basin found in the western area of the palace (photographs: G. Lovera).



Figure 78: Some of the motifs left by the impressions on the cretulae (from VINCENTELLI 1992).

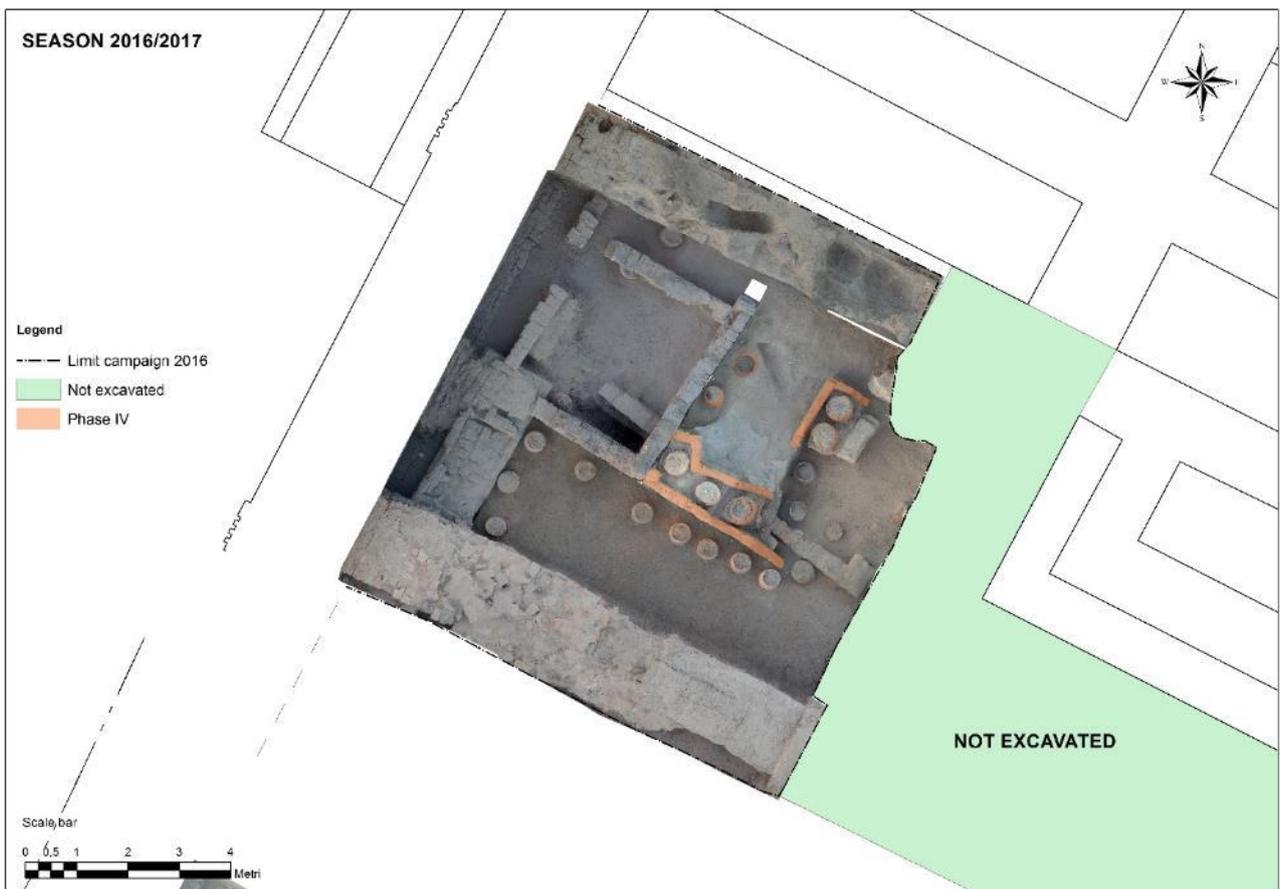
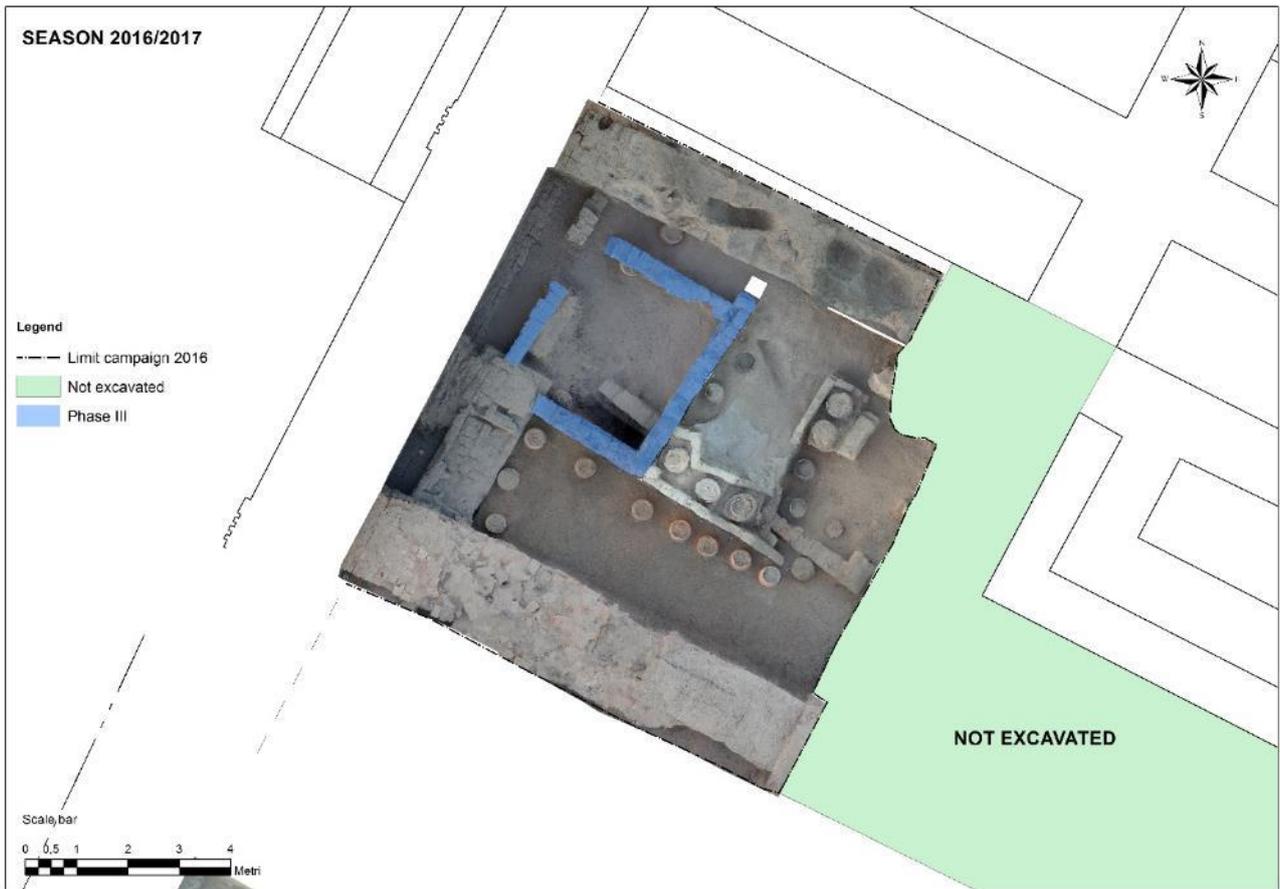


Figure 79: Orthophotos showing the so-called “square room” (top) and the later cooking structure (bottom) – (from REPORT 2016).

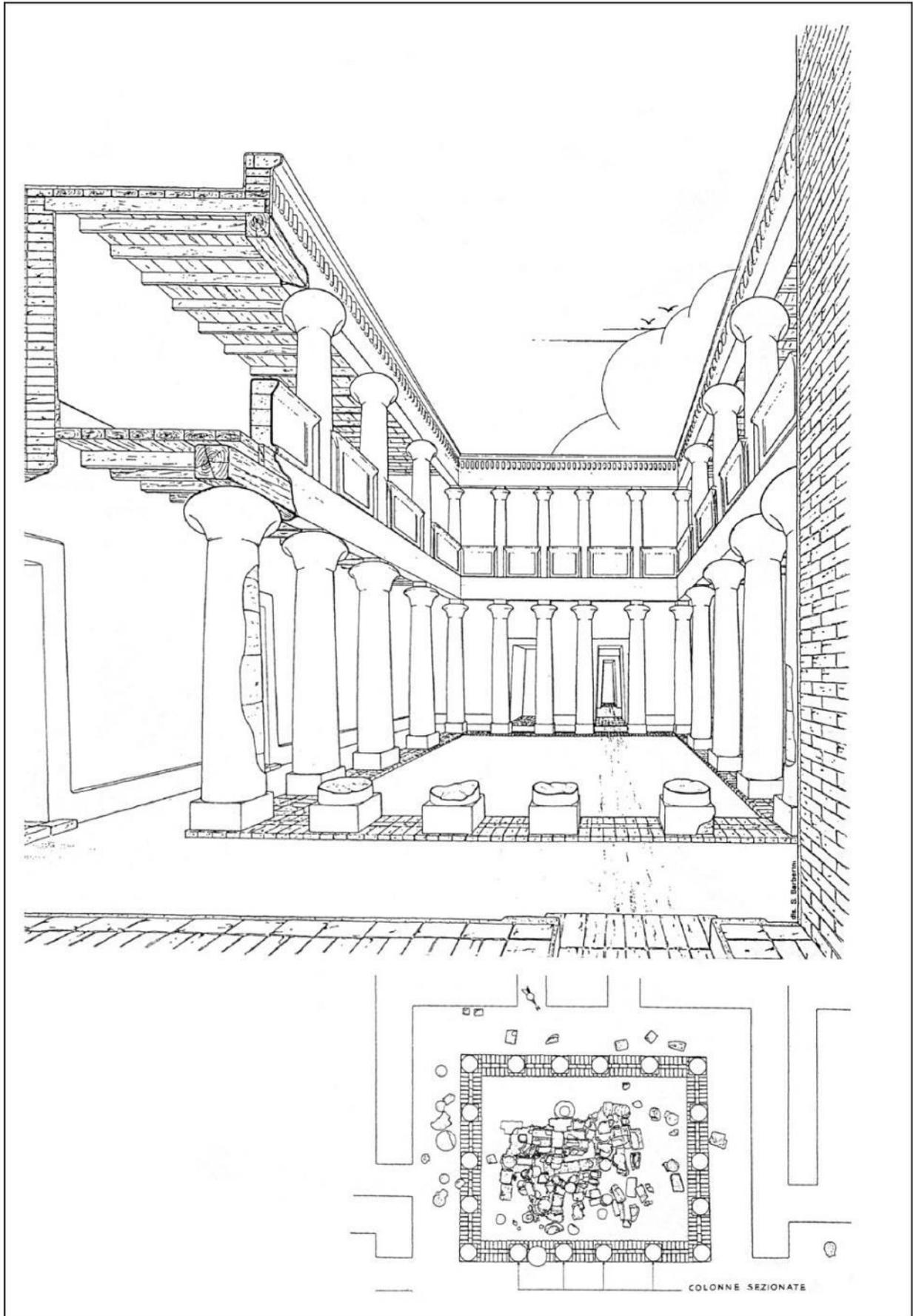


Figure 80: Reconstruction of the peristyle of palace B1500 (from BARBERINI 2010).

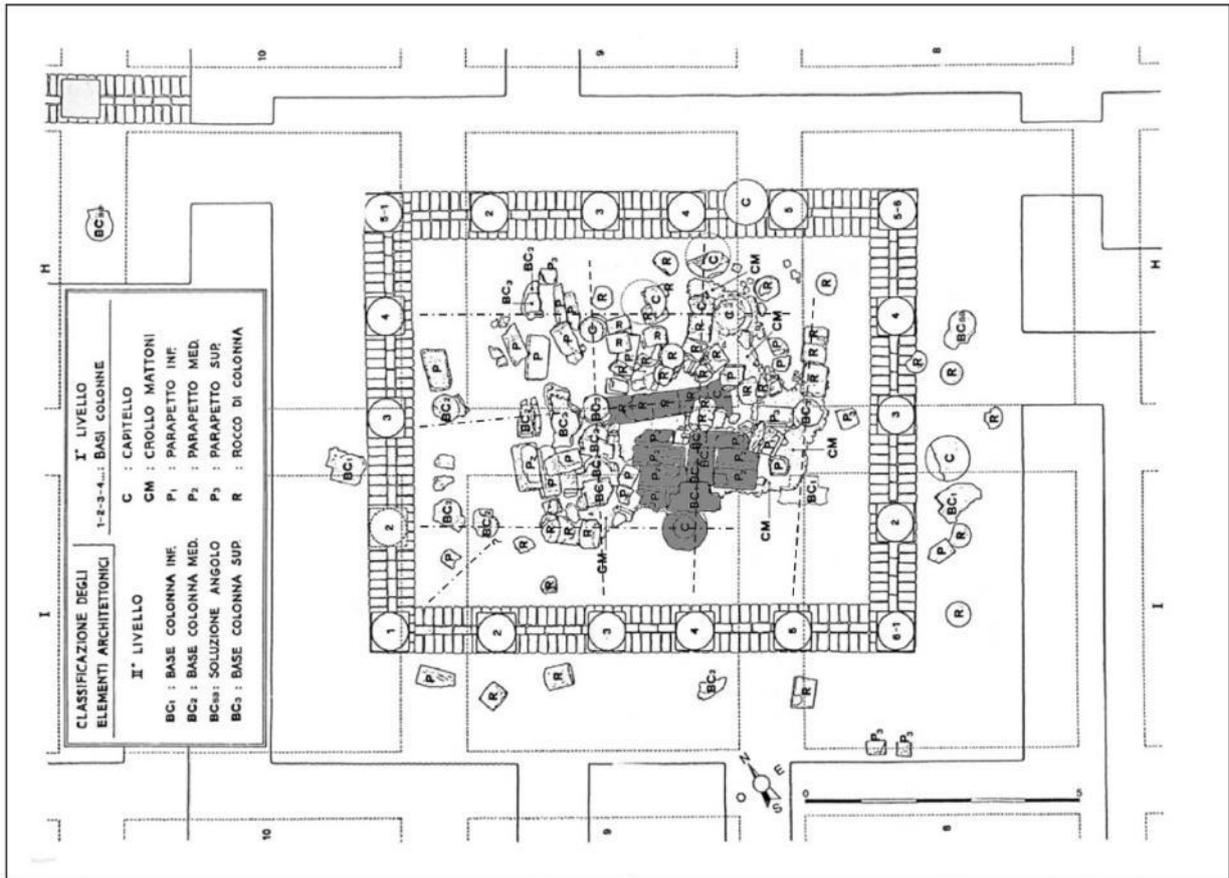


Figure 83: Plan of the tumble of the central peristyle of B1500 with the indication of the different direction of the collapse (from BARBERINI 2010).

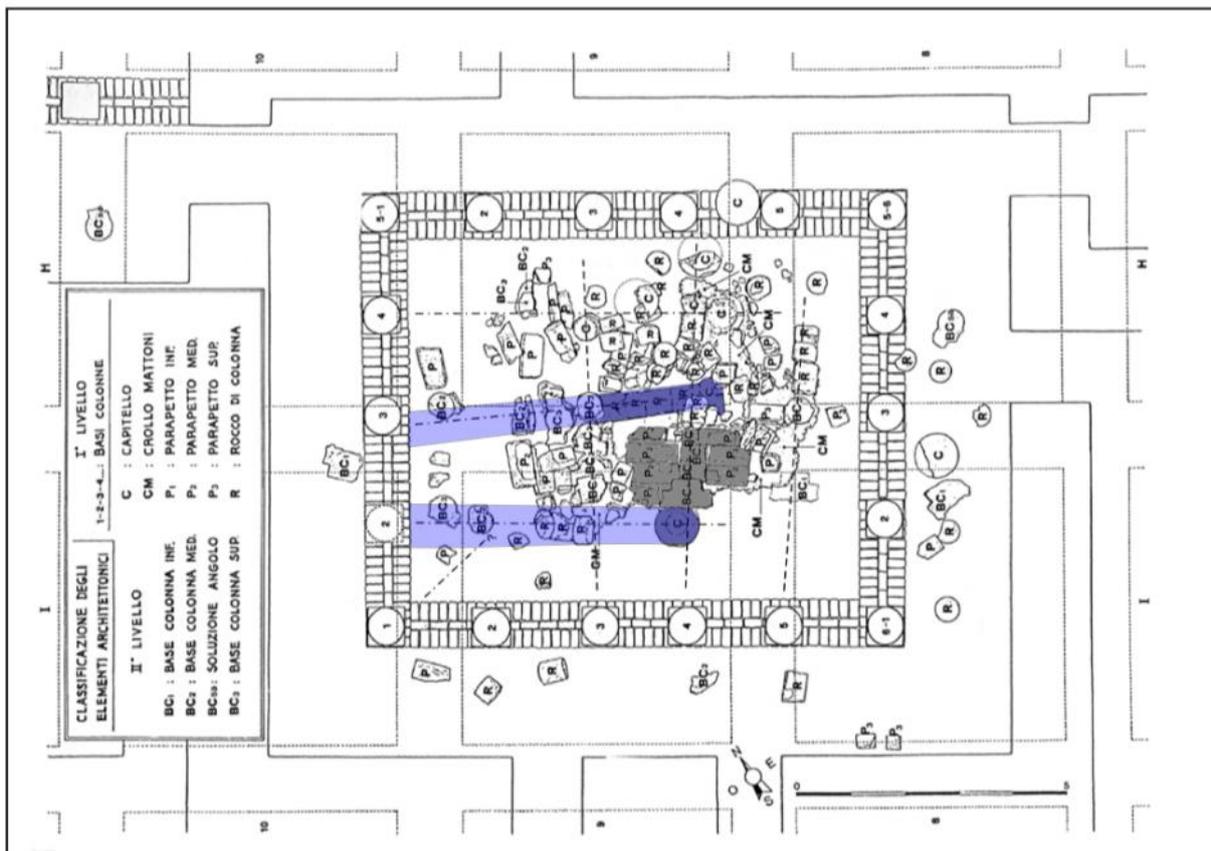


Figure 84: Plan of the tumble with the highlighting of the direction of the collapse of the columns related to bases 2 and 4 on the western side (from BARBERINI 2010 – highlightings by the author).

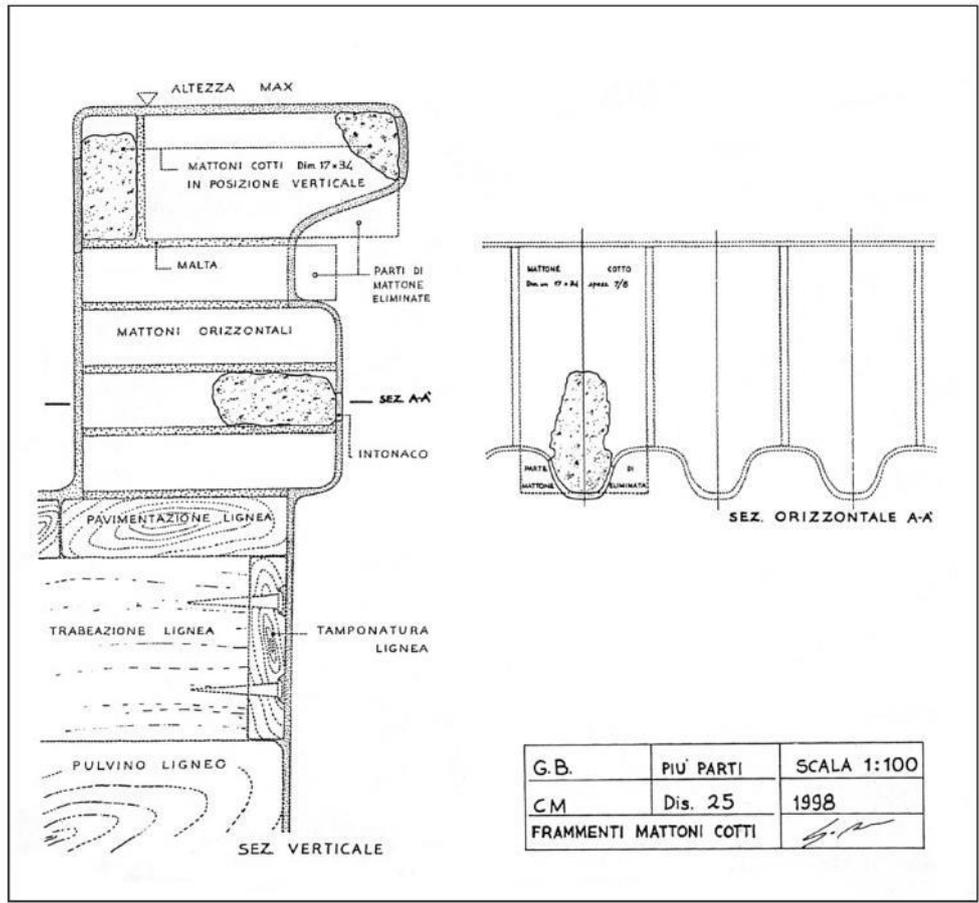


Figure 87: Cross-section through the red-brick wall crowning peristyle (from BARBERINI 2010).

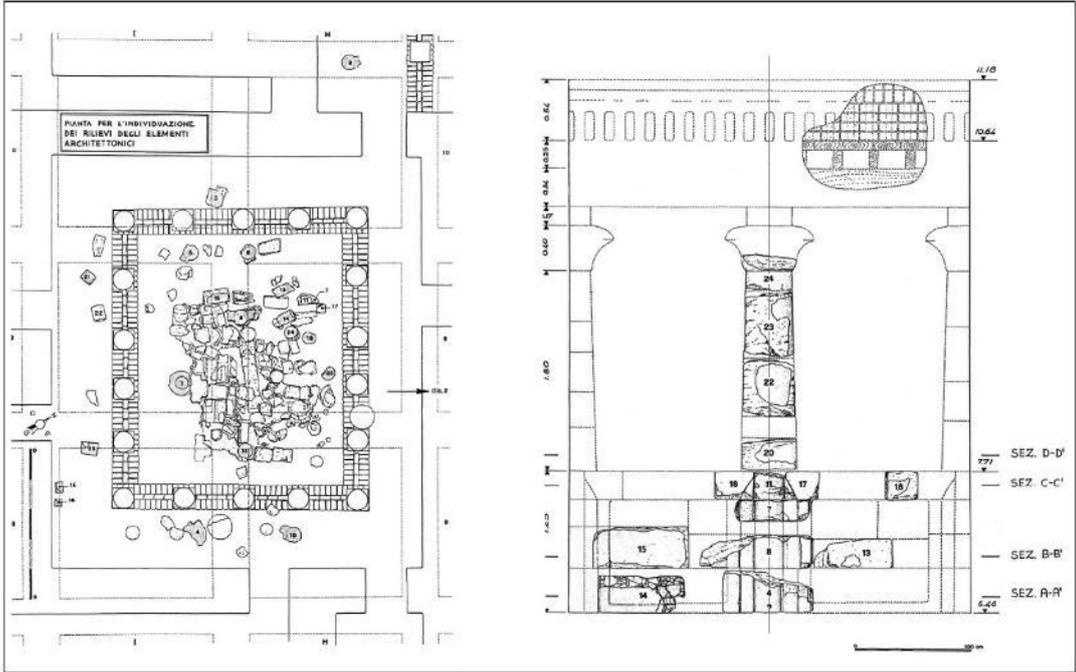


Figure 88: Right: reconstruction of the elements making up a column together with parapet wall of the upper level of the structure. Left: the plan of the tumble with the numbers connecting the elements to the related original position supposed on the reconstruction (from BARBERINI 2010).

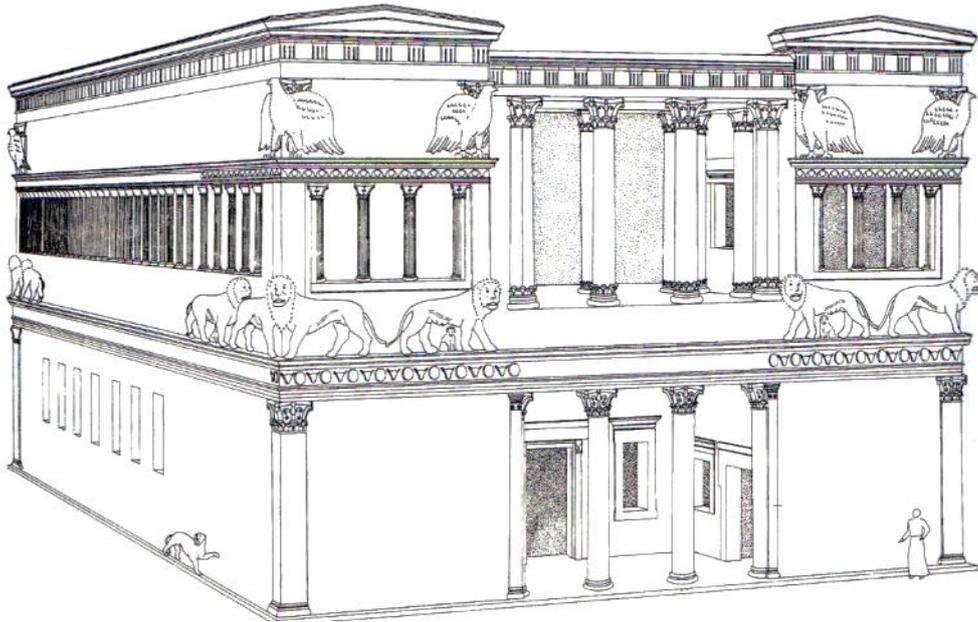


Figure 89: Reconstruction of the so-called palace of Hyrcanus at Araq el-Emir (from NIELSEN 1999).

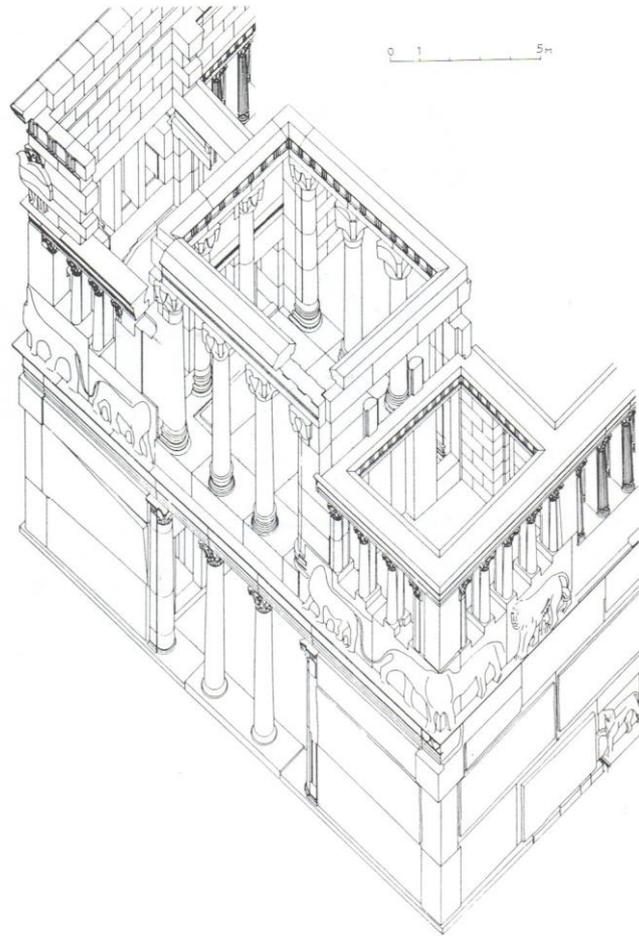


Figure 90: Axonometric view of the northern access of the palace (from WILL 1996).

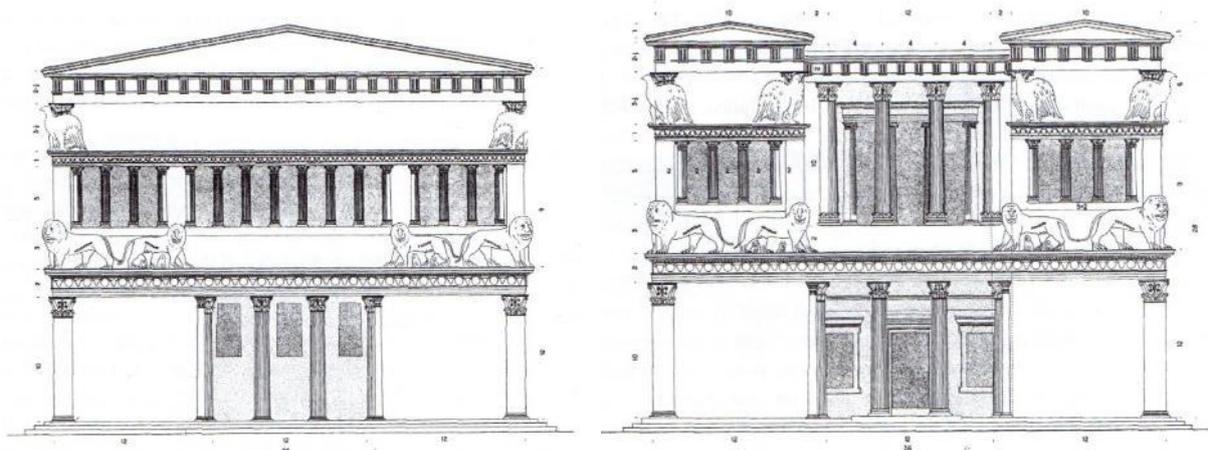


Figure 91: South (left) and north (right) façades of the palace at Araq el-Emir (from NIELSEN 1999).

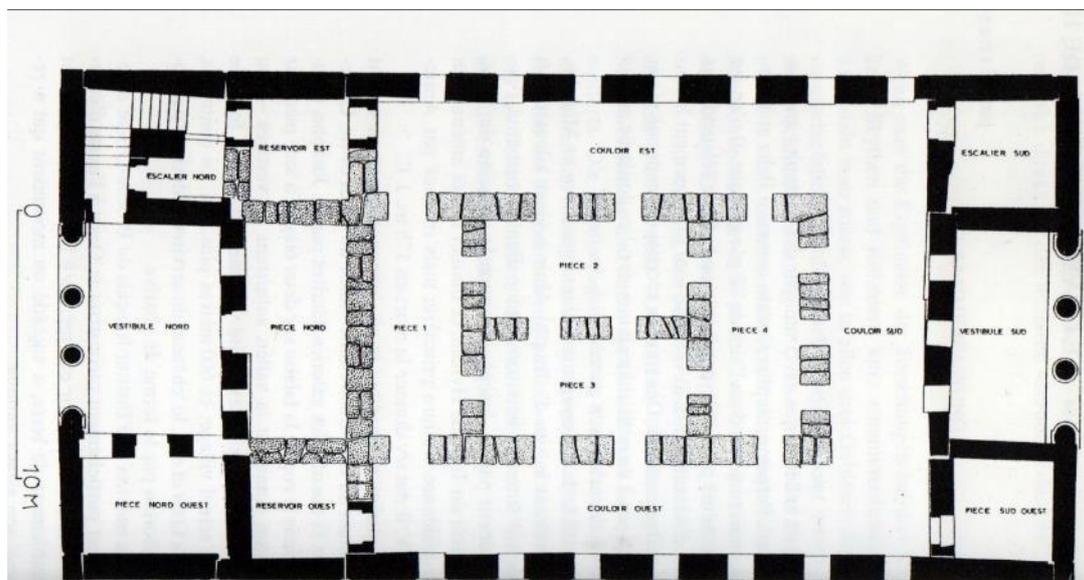


Figure 92: Plan of the palace at Araq el-Emir (from WILL 1996).

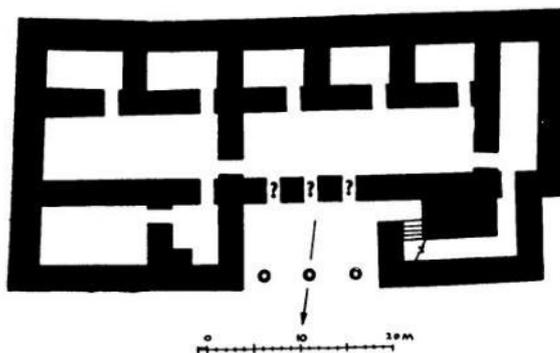


Figure 93: An example of "Bit-Hilani" palace: the Palace and Temple of Tall Ta'yinat – Turkey (from FRANKFORT 1952).

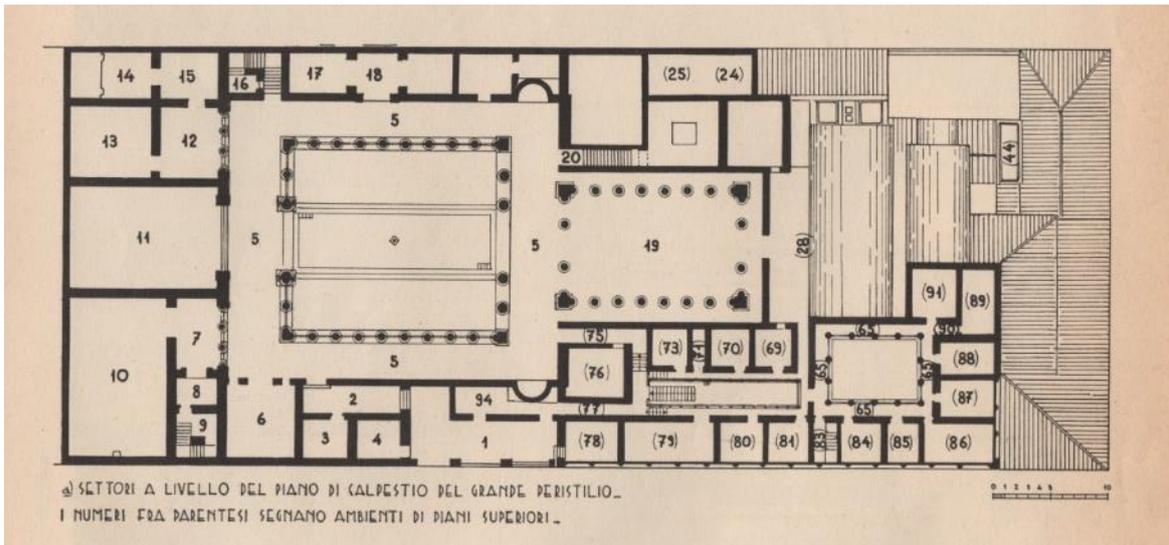


Figure 94: Ptolemais, schematic plan of the reconstructed building called "Palazzo delle Colonne" (from PESCE 1950).

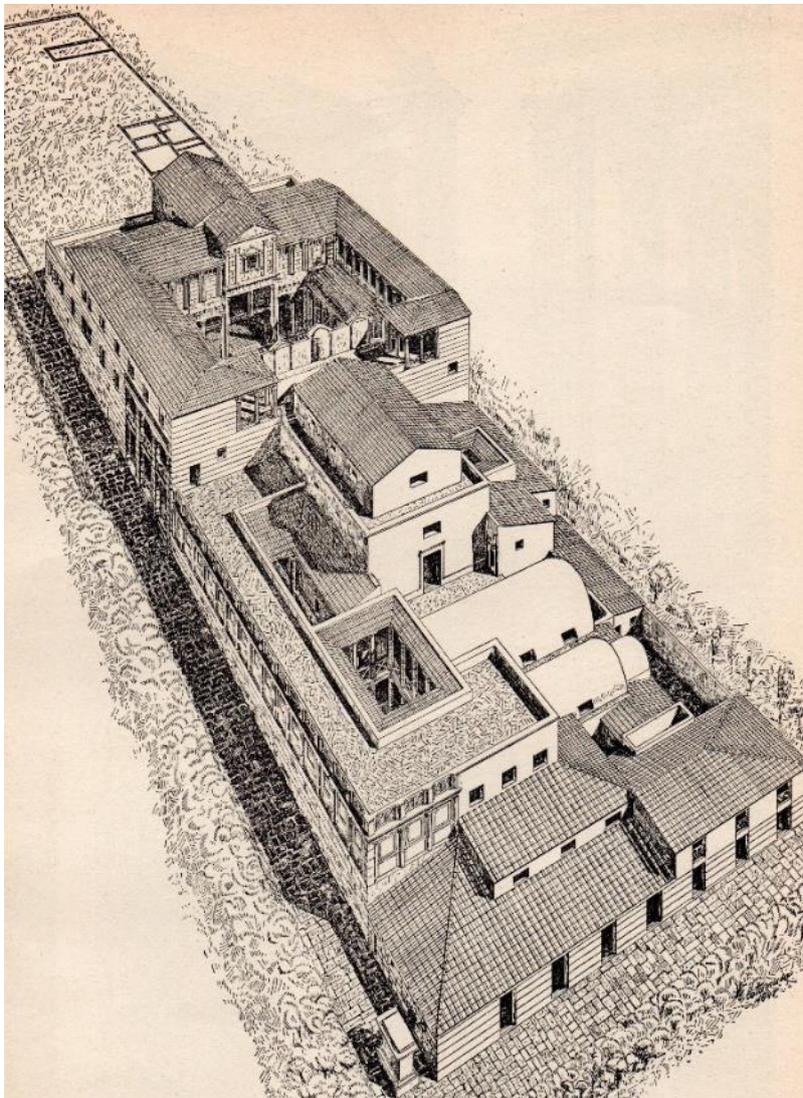


Figure 95: Ptolemais, general reconstruction of the palace, view from North (from PESCE 1950).

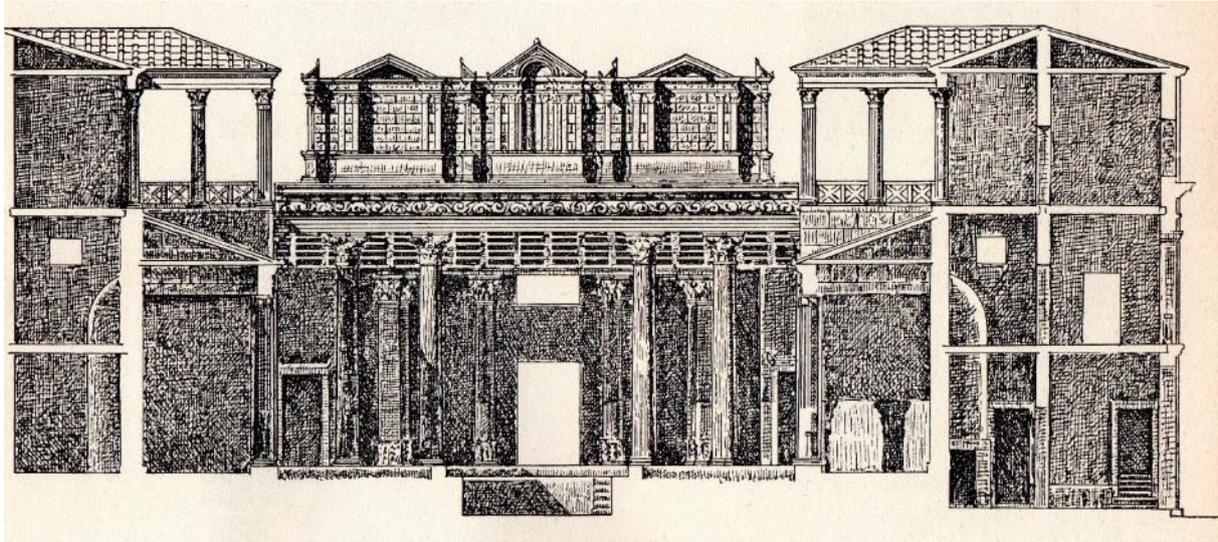


Figure 96: Ptolemais, northern façade of the Great Peristyle seen from the inside (from PESCE 1950).

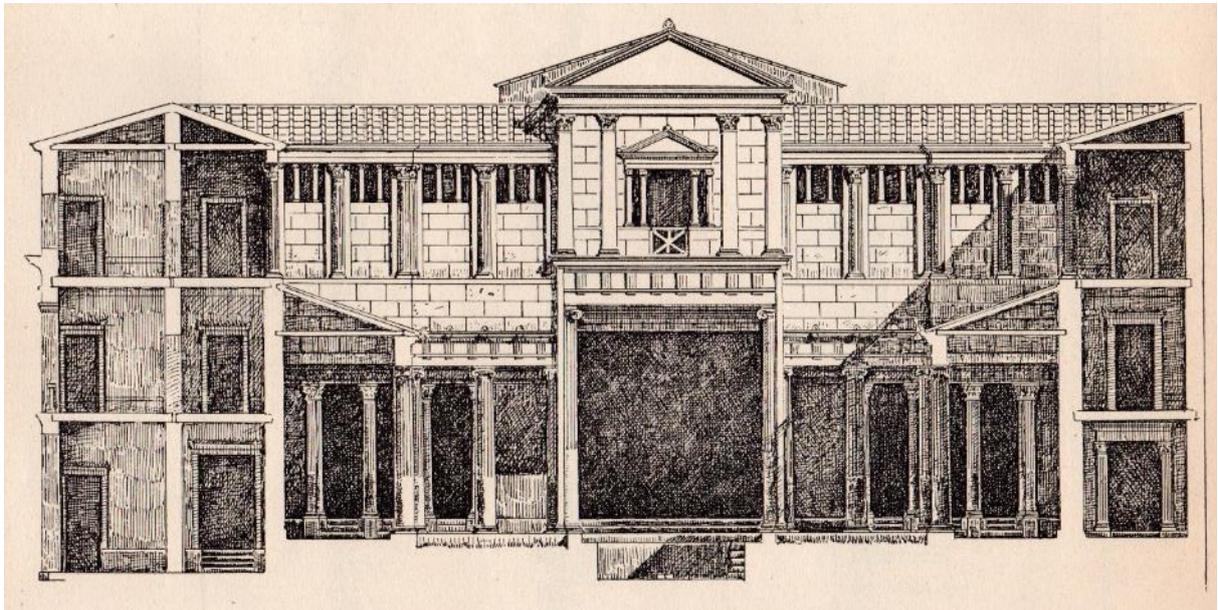


Figure 97: Ptolemais, southern façade of the Great Peristyle seen from the inside (from PESCE 1950).

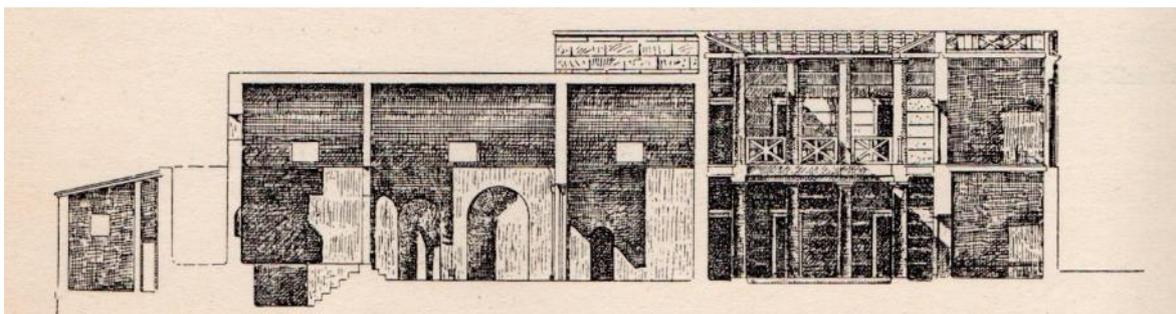


Figure 98: Ptolemais, cross-sectional drawing of the portion of the palace with the Small Peristyle on the right (from PESCE 1950).

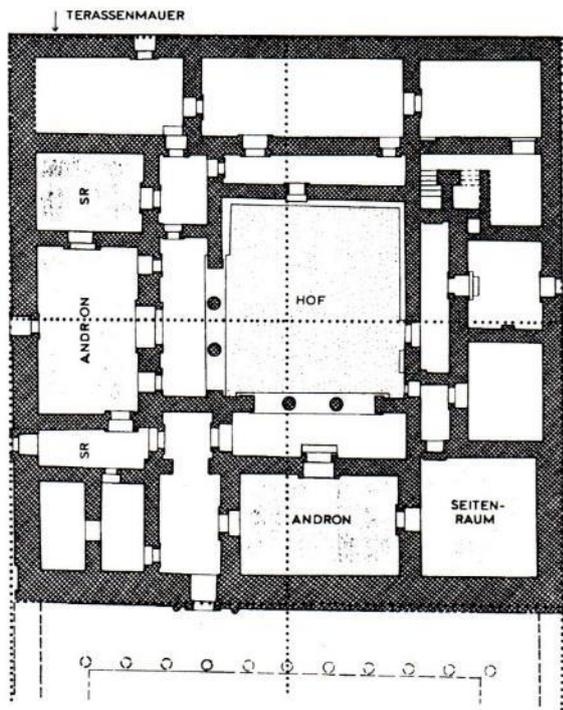


Figure 99: Dura Europos, plan of the so-called “Redoubt Palace” (from NIELSEN 1999).

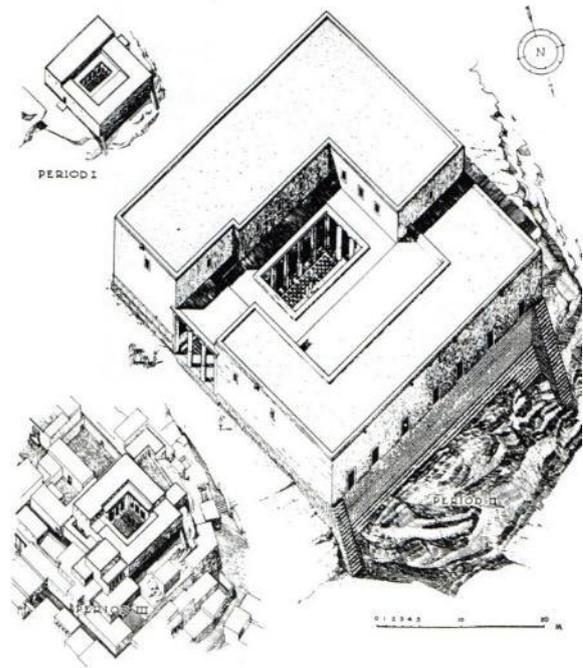


Figure 100: Dura Europos, reconstruction of the Redoubt Palace (the II period, at the centre, is the main one) the rendering of the court is not completely correct being it not an actual peristyle– (from NIELSEN 1999).

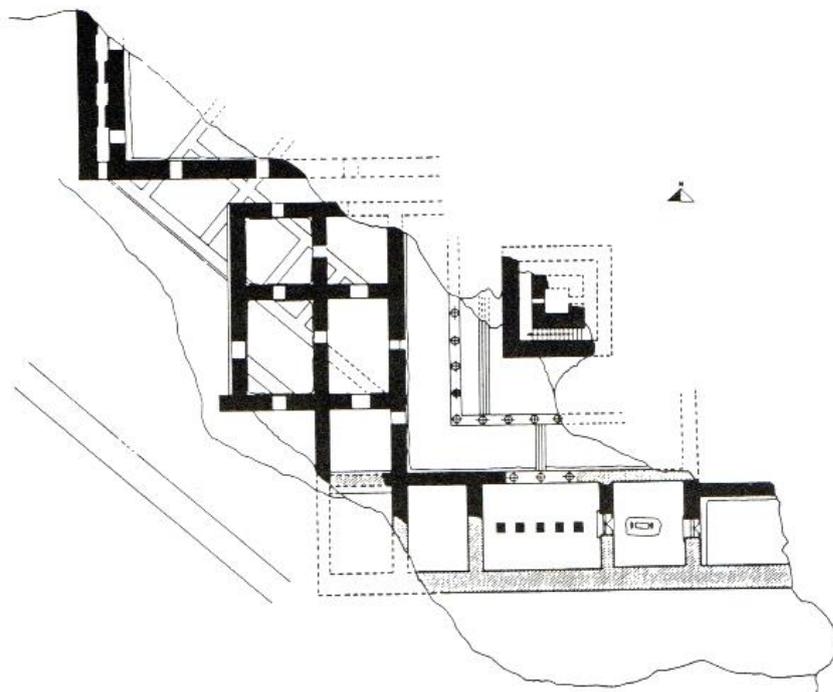


Figure 101: Dura Europos, plan of the remaining part of the Citadel Palace (from NIELSEN 1999).

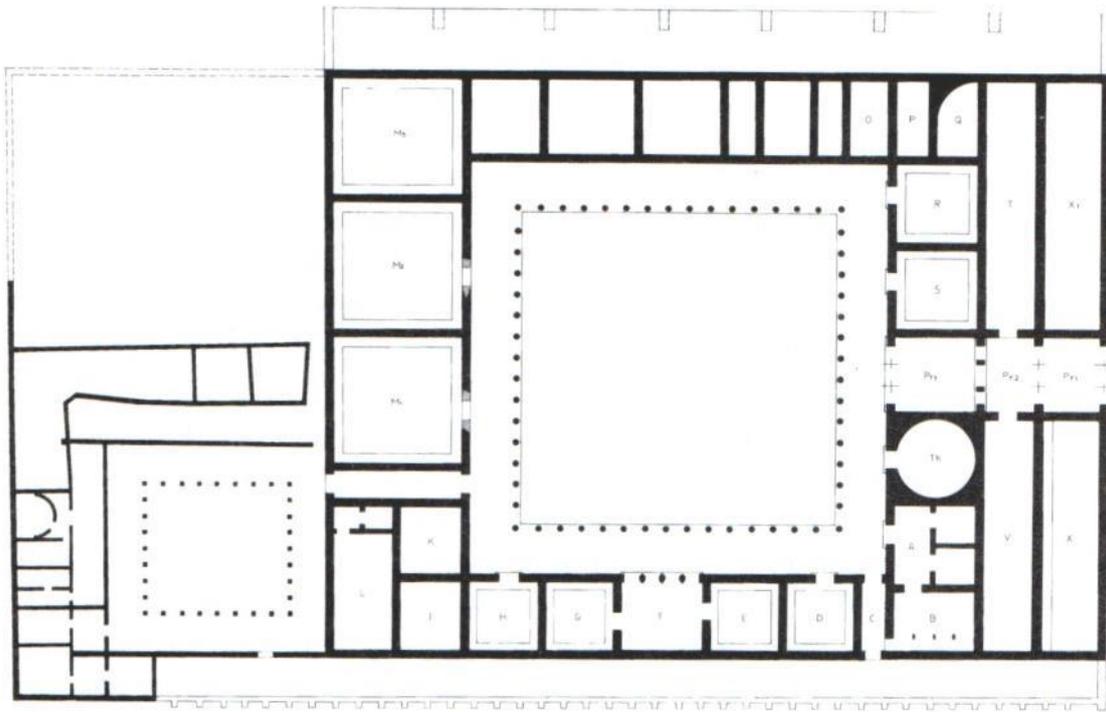


Figure 102: Vergina, plan of the palace (from NIELSEN 1999).

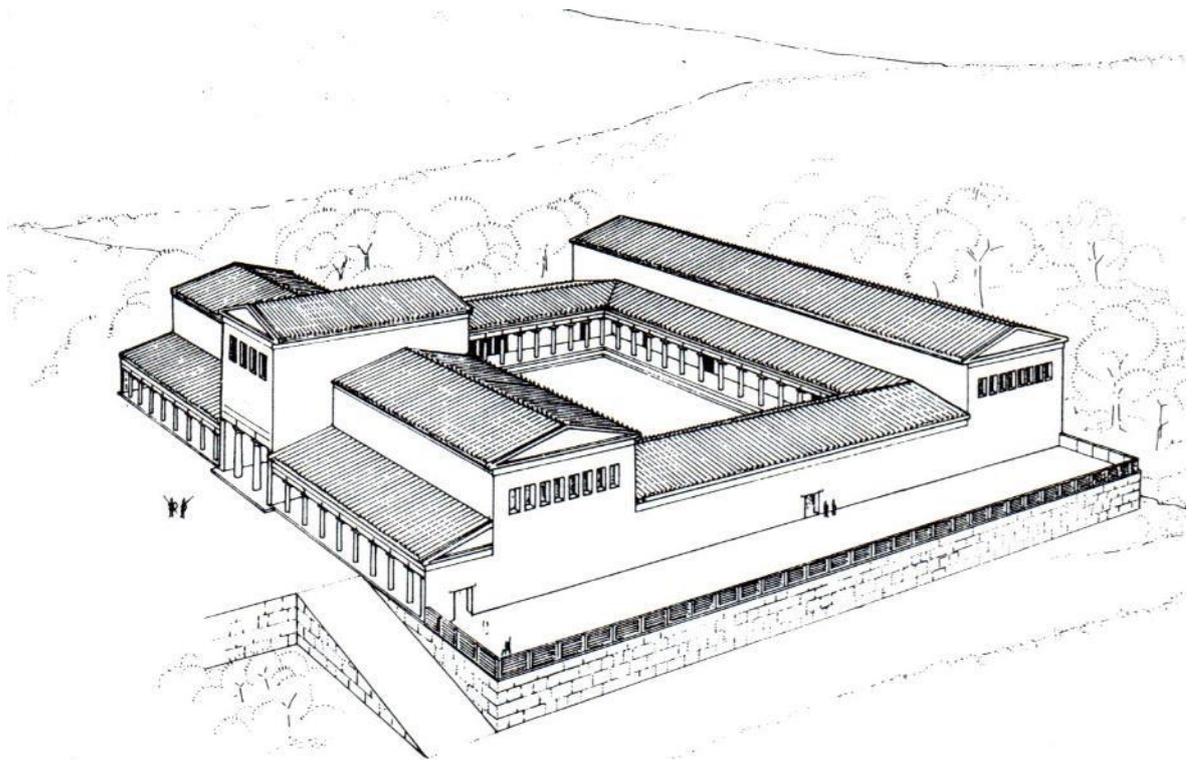


Figure 103: Vergina, reconstruction drawing of the royal palace, view from North (from NIELSEN 1999).

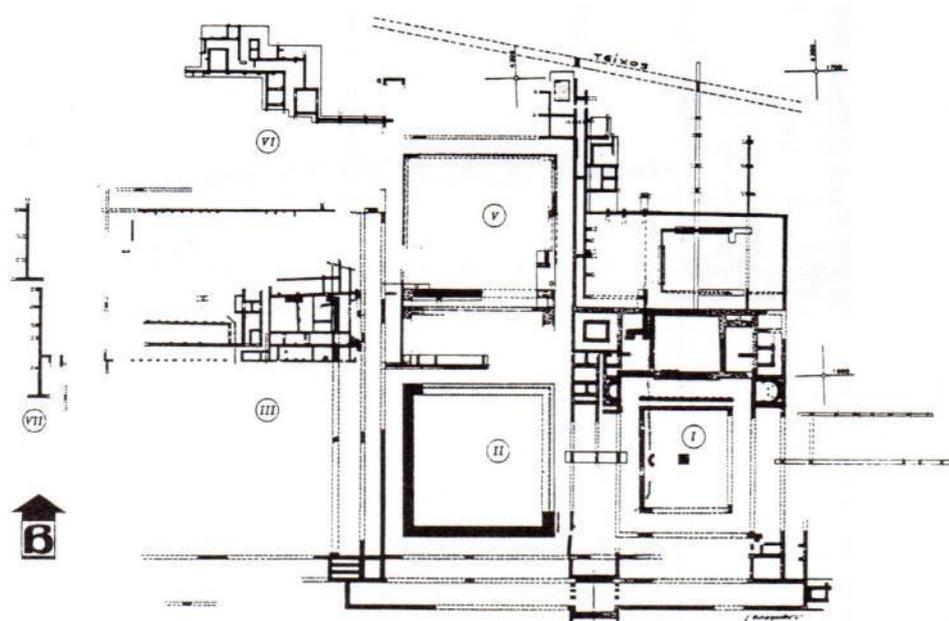


Figure 104: Pella, plan of the royal palace (from NIELSEN 1999).

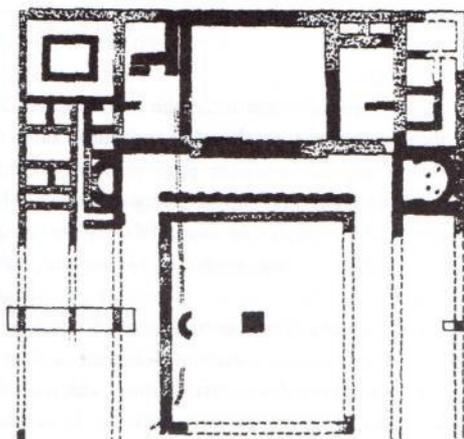
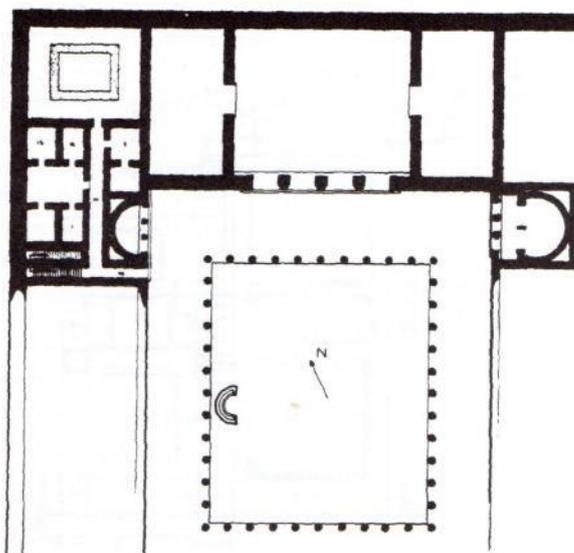


Figure 105: Pella, plan of the sector of the palace characterized by Peristyle I: reconstructed plan on the top; plan from the excavation on the bottom (from NIELSEN 1999).

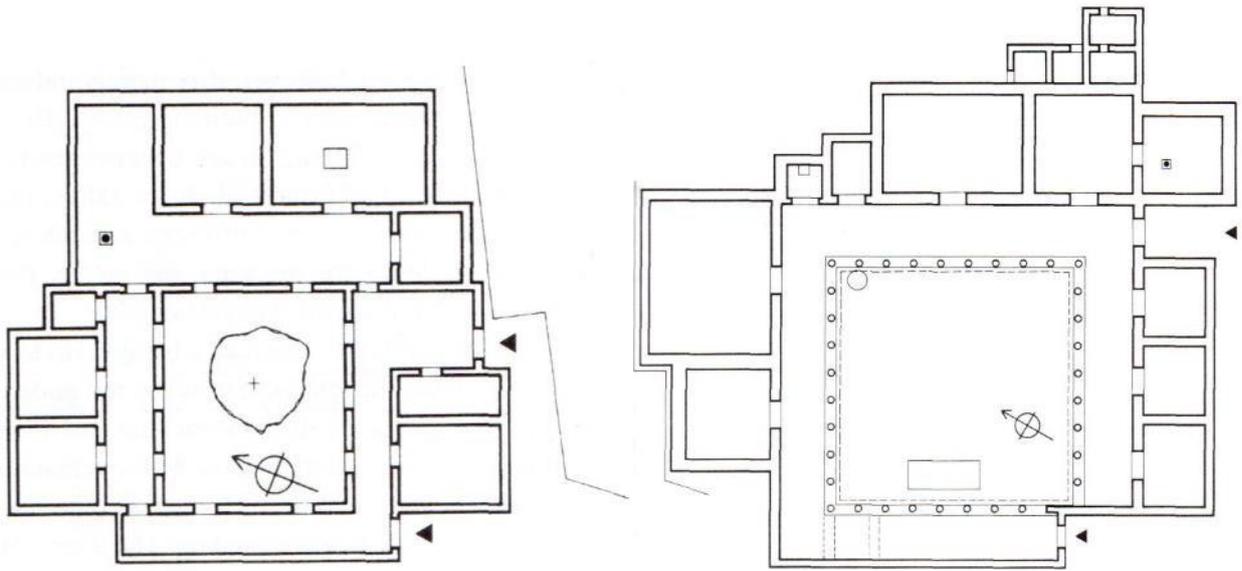


Figure 106: Pergamon, Palace IV (left) and V (right), reconstructed plans (from NIELSEN 1999).

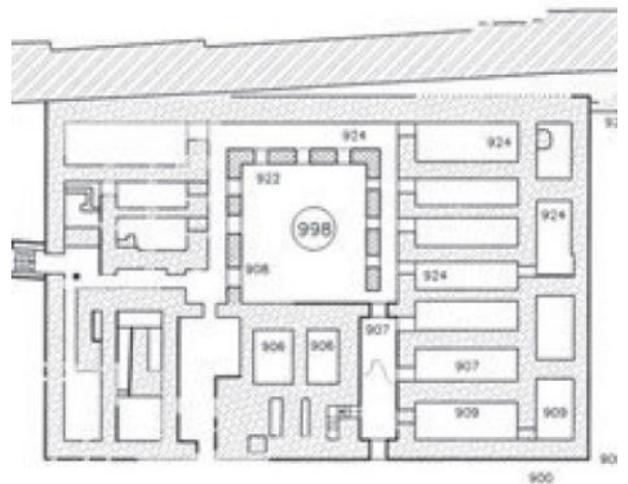
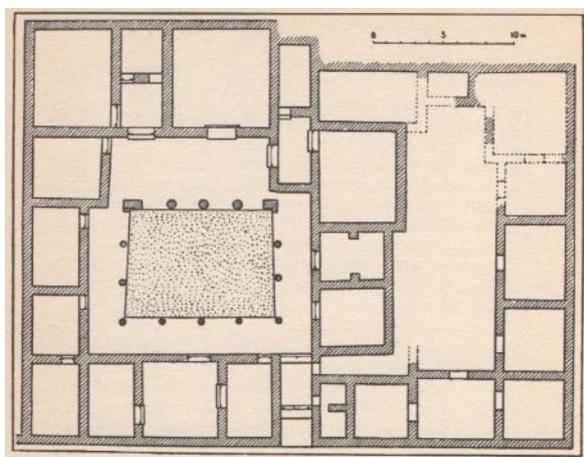


Figure 107: Priene (left), house 33; Meroe (right) House M998 (from – respectively – PESANDO 1989 and TÖRÖK 2011).

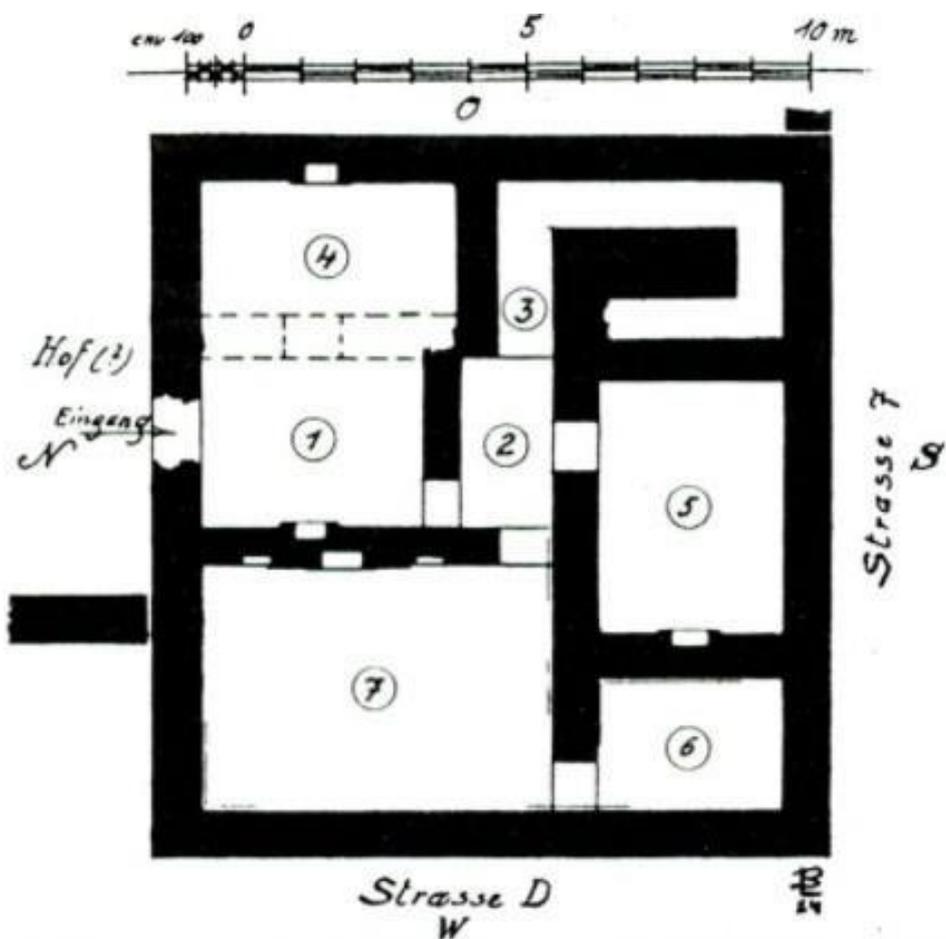


Figure 108: Philadelphia, plan of one of the houses of the insula D 6 (from DAVOLI 1998).

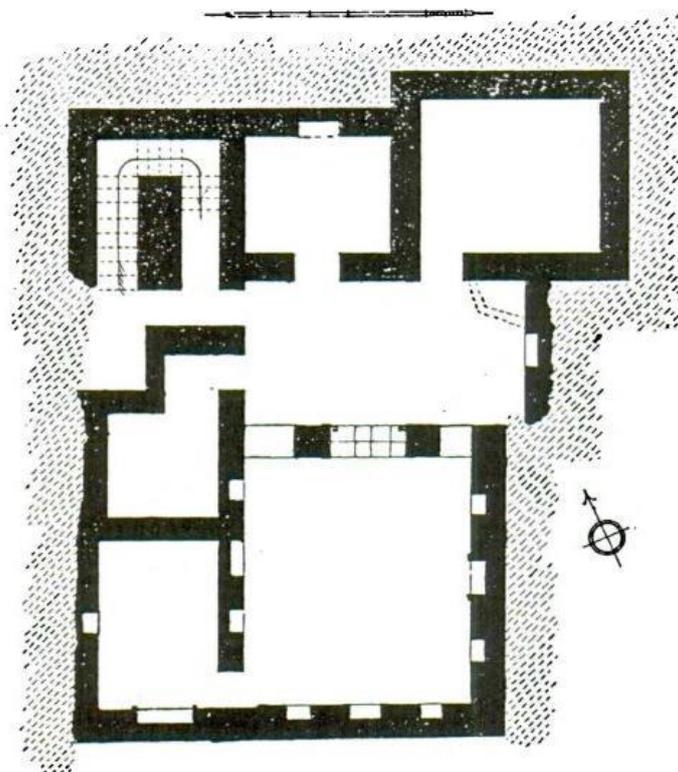


Figure 109: Theadelphia, plan of a private house (from DAVOLI 1998).

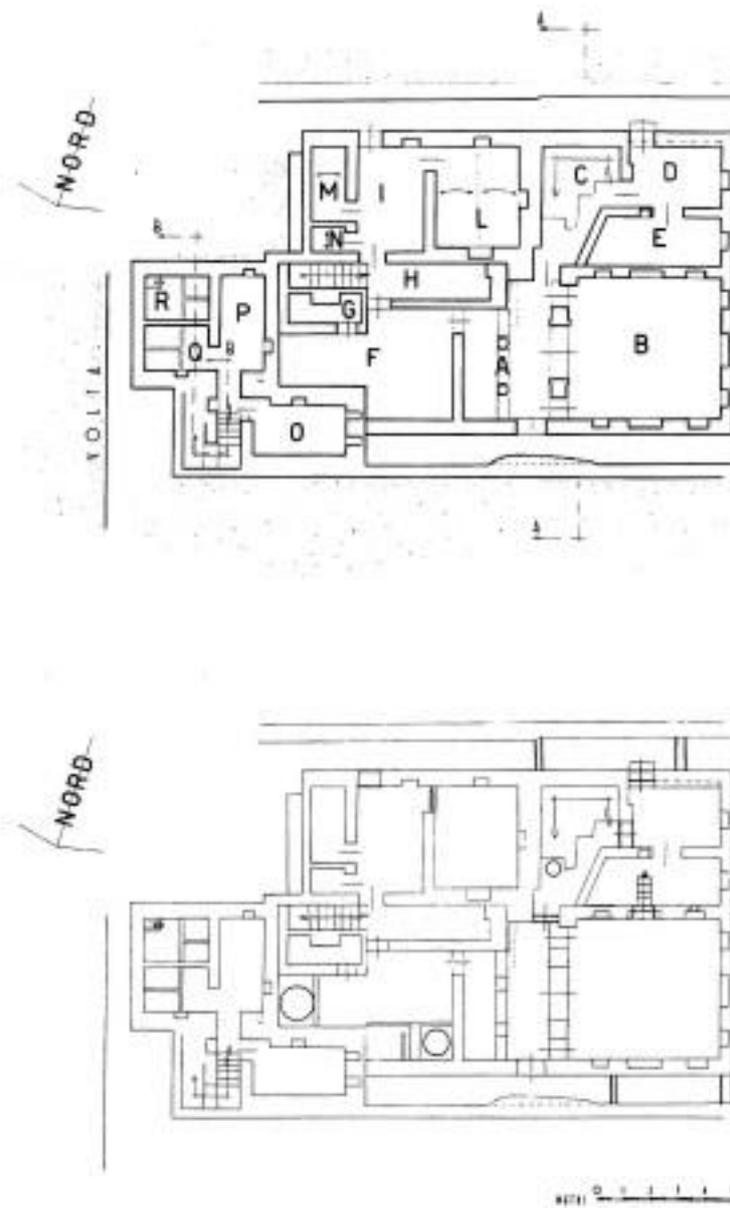
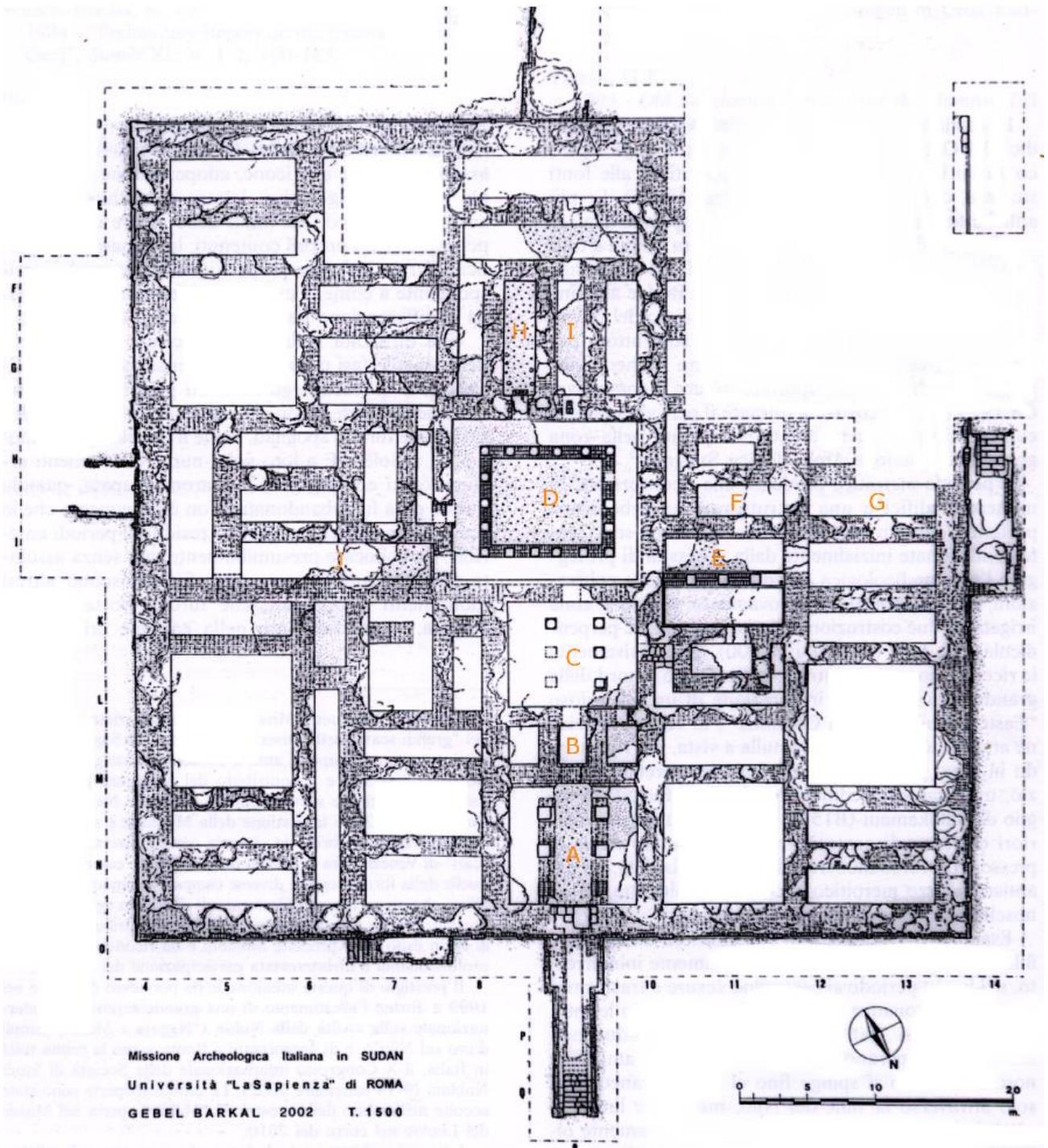


Figure 110: Narmouthis, plan of edifice, probably with an official character: top, original layout; bottom, later modifications (from DAVOLI 1998).



General map of the Nubian Territory (from Sudan&Nubia 2015, 19).



Plan of palace B1500 (from ROCCATI 2011).



General map showing the location of the Hellenistic sites mentioned in the text (from NIELSEN 1999).