



PATRICE LENOBLE

1942-2007

Patrice Lenoble died in the night between the 25th and 26th of February 2007 in Nantes. The last time he came to Sudan was in October-December 2005, for the fifth campaign at el-Hassa. He planned to come back in the spring to resume his survey of the tumuli necropoleis in the Island of Meroe... His last article on that very topic will be published in the forthcoming issue of *Kush*, entitled « Une carte des derniers siècles de Méroé. Sites préchrétiens autour de l'ancienne capitale, entre Wad ben Naga et Gabati ». This inspired survey rich with so much potential closes an inspired career which always managed, thanks to or despite the circumstances, to come back to the core of his dedication: the description of the Meroitic Empire and its fall.

He was not a man of concession and a scholar of unstinting generosity. This rare blend made him to all his colleagues a precious companion and/or adversary. As an archaeologist, he was the kind who likes to grasp the *touria* and the *misterin*, who needed to feel the ground. As a classicist, his culture and knowledge allowed him to change these physical encounters with our matter into a comprehensive description of the *homo meroiticus*. He was among the people who know that ever since the Hellenistic geographers, the Kingdom of Meroe has been part of the known world and of a vast legacy.

The Sudanese ground has been generous to him and rewarded the audacious choices he made with the discovery of two Post Meroitic tumuli of imperial rank in el-Hobagi. The triumphal weapons and liturgic bronzes discovered in the graves but also his understanding of their real and symbolic functions

have traveled all over the world with the recent exhibitions on Sudanese archaeology and become landmarks in what we know about the End of Meroe.

Patrice Lenoble was born in Touraine on the 6th of October 1942. The important thing to remember from his years of *apprentissage* is that he studied

mathematics and became a teacher, true son to a family devoted to the *école laïque de la République*. Then came *Mai 68* for which he was obviously ready to play an important role and the spirit of which he never let go. At that time he was appointed librarian at the *Institut d'archéologie* of the University Paris IV-Sorbonne from 1968 to 1972. He was in his mid-20's and he now turned to Greek and Roman archaeology (1970, *Licence d'archéologie*, Sorbonne



University). His next diploma (*Maîtrise d'archéologie*) in 1978 was submitted in the University of Besançon and deals with Swiss Prehistory, a new field of research that becomes understandable if one knows that from 1973 to 1975 he was practicing salvage archaeology on the future map of highway N5 in Switzerland.

So academic classical archaeology and field prehistory were his tools when he first arrived in Sudan in 1976, the country where one can find polished Neolithic axes in the sanctuary of a 4th century AD Meroitic temple. His first stay would last eight years (1976-1984) working as an artist at the *Section française de la Direction des Antiquités du Soudan* (SFDAS) in Khartoum. This was the very year of the discovery of the Neolithic and Meroitic cemeteries of el-Kadada. He dug the Meroitic tombs and Jacques Reinold the Neolithic ones under the



supervision of Francis Geus, field director and director of SFDAS.

He then had to leave Sudan during the years 1984 and 1985, testing the grounds of the sites of Isenya (Kenya) and Khirbet edh-Dharieh (Jordan). Later the same year, however, he was back in Khartoum, back in French Unit, this time as an archaeologist, for a second stay of eight more years till 1993. The dig of el-Hobagi started the year of his arrival with his two Sudanese colleagues and friends Mahmoud el-Sheikh el-Tayeb and Ussama Abdelrahman el-Nur. It would be his *grand œuvre*. Circumstances allowed him to spend long stays out of Khartoum. The hottest months saw him still digging, having sardines and their oil as a regular diet, buying dozens of grapefruits to provide vitamins for the workers and sleeping under a seyal tree.

These years were also the ones of the very first survey in the fourth cataract (1989), the project of a dam having been announced which is now under completion and to be flooded.

All the places where he worked were transformed by him into materials for the understanding of what he was looking for : the description of the End of Meroe. One just needs to survey his bibliography to

understand that always is questioned the accuracy of our tools to describe the indigenous fundamentals versus the Hellenistic influences and acculturations.

His contract in Sudan ended in 1993 when he went to Lebanon, reopened to archaeological research. He launched there the restart of the French digs in downtown Beirut (1993-1994).

The French administration, which was his employer for all these years, didn't let him go and he was appointed as an expert at the *Service régional d'archéologie* in Nantes until his retirement (2002). Studying and protecting the cultural heritage of this region of France did not prevent him from thinking about coming back to Sudan. He did so in 2000, at Sedeinga with Catherine Berger and at el-Hassa for the opening of a new dig by the SFDAS.

During these last years more than ever, his experience was constantly solicited by his colleagues and students. His personal rule of a wellcoming attitude and a total generosity was very much appreciated. In Khartoum, the date of his next coming was awaited and asked a long time beforehand. We have all lost in Patrice Lenoble a keystone of our discipline.

VINCENT RONDOT



Patrice in Khartoum, March 1993