

Deutsche Übersetzungen

Die monolithischen Kirchen von Lalibela

Die beim Bau der Lalibelakirchen angewandte Technik ist nicht einzig in der Geschichte der Architektur. Die römischen Villen von Bulla Regia in Tunesien verwenden annähernd dasselbe Prinzip, das wohl Vorbild für Architekt B. Zehrfuss' Pläne zur Erweiterung des Unesco-Gebäudes in Paris war.

Die monolithischen Kirchen Äthiopiens sind insofern unterirdisch als sie unter der Erdoberfläche liegen. Sie sind aber, im Gegensatz zu den Villen von Bulla Regia, keineswegs eingegraben. Wie ein unter freiem Himmel liegendes Gebäude konstruiert öffnen sie sich auf einen freien Innenraum hin. Anstatt genau genommen gebaut worden zu sein, sind sie vielmehr aus der Felsmasse herausgehauen, weshalb sie monolithisch genannt werden. Die oben genannte Technik findet sich in zwei Variationen wieder. In der Form eines völlig unter der Erde liegenden Bauwerkes, gebildet aus einem zentralen Kern, den ein relativ kreisrunder, 5 bis 7 Meter breiter und 10 bis 12 Meter tiefer, aus dem Fels gehauener Graben umgibt. Oder die Kirche wurde aber in einen Abhang gebaut und setzt sich aus einer der Hügel- oder Felsflanke abgeglichenen Hauptfassade und drei anderen, durch einen Felstunnel isolierten, Fassaden zusammen. Dadurch wird eine Art von Höhle erhalten, in der die Kirche durch Boden und Decke an die Felsmasse gebunden ist. Trotz eines außergewöhnlichen Verfahrens ist diese Architektur nicht wirklich originell. Sie verwendet alle Elemente einer gewöhnlichen Bauweise: Stein, Holz, Pfeiler, horizontale Steinlagen, usw.

Ursprung, Bestimmung und Alter der monolithischen Kirchen Äthiopiens sind unbekannt und eine Erklärung für dieses Phänomen kann nur durch manchmal wahrscheinliche, aber bruchstückhafte Hypothesen gegeben werden. Insgesamt gibt es zwanzig solcher Kirchen, die größtenteils über die Gebirgsprovinz von Lasta Waag verstreut liegen. Neun davon befinden sich in Lalibela, einem bedeutenden Ort, der mit seinen Tukul, runde mit einem konischen Strohdach bedeckten Häusern, sehr malerisch wirkt. Der Ort wird von einem Hügel beherrscht, von dessen Gipfel aus man fast dem Erdboden gleich, die Kirchendächer wahrnimmt. Alle diese Dächer, von denen die meisten eine doppelte und sehr schwache Neigung besitzen,

sind aus dem Stein gemeißelt, heute aber meist mit Wellblech bedeckt.

Die drei Kirchen von Golgatha Michael, Biet Mariam und Medhane Alem liegen praktisch im Dorffinnern. Ihre Schächte liegen, streng in Ost-West-Richtung ausgerichtet, aneinandergereiht und sind aus der Erde ausgehoben.

Die zweite Gruppe liegt auf einem Hügel in der Nähe des Dorfes. Ein außergewöhnlich großer Graben umgibt ihn. Er schließt vier in der Felswand gelegene Kirchen ein: die beiden übereinanderliegenden Kirchen von Gabriel und Raphael, die Abba Libanos-Kirche, die teilweise verfallene Biet Mercurios-Kirche und das vom architektonischen Standpunkt aus seltsamste Bauwerk, Biet Emanuel, und schließlich ein spiralförmiger Gang: Bethlehem, auch Hügel des Geweihten Brotes oder des Heiligen Pferdes genannt. Biet Giorgis, dank der äthiopischen Briefmarken das berühmteste der Lalibela-Heiligtümer, liegt in einem tiefen, in das abfallende Gelände getriebenen Schacht isoliert.

Die übrigen, schwer zugänglichen Kirchen sind: Ganeta Mariam, Bilbala Cherkos, Bilbala Giorgis, Abba Libanos, Abatu Entzessa (Die Vier Tiere), Imrahana Christos und Zemedu Mariam.

Trotz der architektonischen Verschiedenheit ist eine summarische Einteilung in drei Hauptgruppen möglich: Kirchen mit einem von Außenpfeilern gebildeten Gang, Kirchen mit horizontalen Steinlagen und solche, deren Fassaden und Fenster mit Kleeblattformen verziert sind.

Angesichts einer solch ungewöhnlichen architektonischen Haltung ist es nur zu natürlich, eine Beziehung zu etwas Bekanntem und Verwandtem herzustellen. Das einzige Beispiel eines monolithischen ausgehobenen Bauwerkes ist jedoch der Tempel von Ellora in Indien.

Biet Giorgis: Kreuzförmiger Block mit gleichen Armen (12 m mal 12 m). Aussehen eines dreigeschoßigen Gebäudes. Erinnert an die Paläste der Axumzeit. Seine Ecksteine werden durch die berühmten "Affenköpfe" gebildet.

Ganeta Mariam und Medhane Alem: Verschwommene Ähnlichkeit mit dem primitiven klassischen Tempel Griechenlands.

Biet Mariam: Einfacher, rechteckiger Block der aber durch delikat ausgeführte Kleeblattverzierungen und Tiefreliefs verschönt ist.

Biet Emanuel: Einfacher rechteckiger Block der von außen wie ein dreistöckiges Haus

aussieht. Die Fassaden setzen sich abwechselnd aus horizontalen, zurückgesetzten oder hervorspringenden Steinlagen, die stark hervorstehende viereckige Pfeiler umgeben, zusammen. (Erinnert an die Bauweise der Axumzeit, die zum Mauerbau abwechselnd Steinlagen und Balken verwendete). Vom selben Typ: **Imrahana Christos** und **Abba Libanos** (einfacher gestaltet).

In ihrem Innern erinnern die meisten dieser Kultstätten an die römischen Kirchen. Sie weisen ein Hauptschiff und ein Bogenwölbe, Nebenschiffe, Pfeiler, verzierte Kapitele, usw. auf. Die Dekoration wird von Themen der christlichen Symbolik gebildet, aber auch Sonne, Mond und Sterne wurden erstaunlich oft dargestellt. Das Entstehungsdatum ist zwar unbekannt, liegt aber vermutlich zwischen dem 11. und 13. Jahrhundert christlicher Zeitrechnung (Gründungszeit des Zagwe-Königreiches). Offensichtlich waren diese Kirchen Stätten eines christlichen Kultes, der aber noch stark von heidnischen Überbleibseln durchdrungen war (so wären die Brunnen von Biet Mariam zum Beispiel keine Taufbecken, sondern die Spuren eines alten Wasser-, das heißt Fruchtbarkeits-Kultes). Bis vor einigen Jahren war Lalibela praktisch unbekannt und kaum zugänglich. Das hat sich nun geändert und es bleibt zu wünschen, daß diejenigen, deren Neugierde durch die oft phantastischen Aussagen der Priester nicht befriedigt ist, sich daran machen, den Schlüssel zu der rätselhaften Existenz dieser monolithischen Kirchen zu finden.

P.-A. Emery

Architektur ohne Architekten in Marokko

Das Hoch-Atlasgebirge und die Vorzone der Sahara, die sich vom Tafilalet bis zum Atlantik hin erstrecken, birgt ein außerordentliches Beispiel von dem, was man künftighin als Architektur ohne Architekten oder spontane Architektur bezeichnen.

Eine reiche historische Vergangenheit hat einen nahezu einmaligen Architektur-Stil fortbestehen lassen. Die Materialien sind verschieden: trockener Stein, mit rohen Backsteinverzierungen versehene Erde (Formguß oder Einlegearbeit aus schwarzem Schiefer).

Die Form der bemerkenswerten Pläne des Patio-Hauses, das seinen Ursprung wahrscheinlich in Zentral-Asien hat, variiert je nach Klima.

Im Westen bietet der Vortras schöne Konstruktionsbeispiele aus getrocknetem oder verputztem Stein, von denen besonders die Wohnungen in Tafraout und die Agadirs in Aït-Baha, eine Art Festungsspeicher, wo ehemals die Dorfbevölkerung bei Gefahr Schutz fand, zu nennen sind.

Im Osten in den Oasen von Skoura, Tinerir usw. befinden sich die interessantesten Beispiele der Architektur der Ksour (Plural von Ksar: Schloss, Feste), Gruppe von hohen, befestigten und oft reich verzierten Wohnstätten, die mit ihrer schönen, viertürmigen Silhouette die Palmenhaine über-schauen.

Infolge einer beschleunigten sozialen Entwicklung wird diese noch lebendige Architektur von einer doppelten Gefahr bedroht. Die Stadt zieht die arbeitende Landbevölkerung an. Die Behausungen werden im Stich gelassen. Neuzeitliche und völlig fremde Architektur-Elemente werden aus der Stadt eingeführt.

Maßnahmen zum Studium und zum Schutz bestätigen sich als dringend, um ein Erbgut, dessen Bedeutung die Marokkaner selbst nicht zu würdigen scheinen, zu erhalten.

M. Ben Embarek

Bilanz der heutigen Kunst an der Biennale von Venedig

Wenn die Aufgabe einer Biennale darin besteht, über die während der vergangenen zwei Jahre geschaffenen Kunstwerke Auskunft zu geben, so erfüllt Venedig vollkommen diese Erwartung. Tatsächlich ist es dem Besucher möglich, die Tendenzen, die den jungen zeitgenössischen Künstlern gemeinsam sind, sofort zu erkennen. Die bedeutendste unter ihnen ist die Suche nach der Bewegung, die man allgemein in der sogenannten "optischen Kunst", wie sie der italienische Pavillon oder mehrere ausländische Abteilungen zeigt, bemerkt. Der erste an Ausländer verliehene Preis

ging an den argentinischen "Op"-Künstler Julio Le Parc, der den Italienern zugeordnete an Lucio Fontana.

Neben den auf gegenwärtige Strömungen ausgerichteten Ausstellungen (unter welchen wir die Spaniens, Deutschlands, der Vereinigten Staaten, Brasiliens, Englands und Österreichs nennen möchten) werden drei Retrospektiven vorgestellt. Eine erste ist Umberto Boccioni, Maler und futuristischer Bildhauer, Schöpfer des "plastischen Dynamismus", gewidmet. Eine andere betrifft die erste Gruppe der italienischen Abstrakten (1933-1940, Mailand und Como). Die letzte behandelt das Werk Giorgio Morandis, der erst jüngst verstorben ist. Er war ein großer Künstler, hatte aber keine Beziehung zu den zeitgenössischen Tendenzen.

Die Bilanz dieser letztgenannten Ausstellungen ist zweifelsohne positiv, selbst wenn sie zu sehr vom Maschinenzeitalter inspiriert sind und vielleicht nur ein Ausdruck der Abnutzung und Ermattung unserer bildlichen Ausdrucksweise sind.

Gulia Veronesi

English Translations

The monolithic churches of Lalibela

When Bernard Zehrfuss designed the extension for the UNESCO building in Paris as a series of underground rooms opening on to a patio, he probably drew his inspiration from the Roman villas at Bulla Regia in Algeria, which he was able to study at first hand. It is unlikely that he knew of the existence of the monolithic churches in Ethiopia, which, while also underground, differ in several respects. They can only be described as 'underground' in that they are built below ground level, although they are not buried in the true sense of the word. The UNESCO extension and the villas at Bulla Regia are also underground, but they are lit from a central patio, whereas the monolithic churches are designed like any other building, but are situated at the bottom of a huge pit. In addition, instead of being constructed in the normal sense, they are cut out of solid rock. The church is either completely below ground level, with a more or less circular fosse about 20 ft. wide by 35 ft. deep surrounding a central "core" out of which the temple is hewn, or else the façade of the church is flush with the side of the pit, a tunnel being cut around the other three sides, leaving the church in contact with the rock at roof and floor level. A combination of the two systems is occasionally used.

Strangely enough, this unique system has not produced a truly original architecture and all the details refer back to a stone and timber construction.

Needless to say, a number of problems have come to light, such as the churches' origin, their date and the reason for their unusual form and rich and varied decoration. Whatever the question, the answer can only be guesswork and at best, inconclusive.

The hypotheses which are referred to in this article are for the most part taken from the work of the Italian archeologist, Monti Della Corte and from the book on Lalibela by Mme Irmgard Bidder, wife of the former German ambassador to Addis-Ababa.

There are more than 20 of these churches, sited for the most part in the province of Lasta Waag, a mountainous region of central Ethiopia. Nine of them are either in the village of Lalibela or close to it. Seven others are within a 20 mile radius. There is an incompletely monolithic church in the hills to the north of Addis Ababa, and another about 40 miles to the South of the town.

The site is impressive and reminiscent of the Grand Canyon and the mountains of the Sahara. The village is quite large, consisting of two-storey circular houses in stone, with conical thatched roofs. They make a pleasant contrast to the mediocre houses to be found in the rest

of the country. The churches naturally cannot be seen, although there is a hill above the village from which one can make out the two groups, their roofs level with the ground, and the surrounding trenches. Some of these are connected by a series of underground galleries. The roofs are mostly low-pitched, cut from the stone and now nearly all sheeted in corrugated iron.

The first of these groups, almost in the centre of the village, includes the church of Golgotha Mikaël; the church of Biet Mariam of which the trench overlooks a chapel in what might have been the choir of the church of Golgotha Mikaël; and finally the church of Medhane Alem, the largest of all the Ethiopian monolithic churches. The pits of these three churches are placed in line and the churches are planned on an east-west axis. All three are of the excavated type.

The second group has a much more complicated layout and is situated on a hill near the village. This hill is surrounded by an exceptionally large trench, within which are hewn out four churches of the rock-face type — the two superimposed churches of Gabriel and Raphael; the church of Abba Libanos; the partly collapsed church of Biet Mercurios; the finest and strangest of all from the architectural point of view, the excavated church of Biet Emmanuel; and finally a corridor in the form of a spiral which is called

Bethlehem, the Hill of the sacred Bread or the Hill of the Holy Horse.

The church of Biet Giorgis, the most celebrated of the Lalibela sanctuaries is isolated in its pit which is cut out of a sloping hill.

The other churches in the region, which are more difficult of access, are Ganeta Mariam and Bilbala Cherkos (excavated); Bilbala Giorgio (rock face) which is similar to Abba Libanos but has its main entrance opening from the lateral tunnel; Abatu Entzessa (the 4 animals) a mixture of both types, with a trench on two faces; Imrahana Christos, richly decorated and cut inside a large grotto and finally Zemedu Mariam.

One is constantly surprised by the variety and originality of this architecture and, after detailed study, by its unity.

The churches can be roughly classified into three principal groups: those with an external gallery on columns, those with horizontal coursing and those with arcaded façades. In seeking a comparison with a similar architecture elsewhere, as a basis for criticism, one can only find the Hindu temples of Ellora.

Biet Giorgis is in the form of a cruciform block with arms of equal length, 40ft. high by 40 ft. wide, the whole having the appearance of a four-storey building with the floor heights emphasized by horizontal bands. There is some similarity to what we know of the palaces of the Axumite period in the upper levels, and the details of the Ground Floor are very definitely Axumite in character with square or rectangular doors and windows surrounded by deeply cut straight bands, with a square block or "monkey's head" projecting from the band at each corner. At the uppermost level, the windows have a Moorish grace and are very similar to the top of the obelisks which still stand at Axum.

Ganeta Mariam and Medhane Alem have a vague resemblance to a very worn classic Greek temple with a pitched roof but no pediment and colonnades of square columns outside. The only decoration (at Medhane Alem only) is a motif of Romanesque arches along the cornice.

Biet Mariam is simply a big, rectangular block with a pitched roof, two bands along the façades, three recessed porches with very Romanesque looking arches, delicate bas-reliefs, Axumite type windows decorated with swastikas, crosses or a sort of four-leaved clover cut in the stone. The same arches are to be found in the entrance to the trench.

Biet Emmanuel, the most surprising and original of the churches, is very Axumite in character. A rectangular block with pitched roof, it has the external appearance of a three-storey house. Its façades are composed of courses which alternate between being recessed into and proud

of the wall and very pronounced plasters. The windows are strongly Axumite and the only exterior decoration is the severe and refined treatment of the cornice. The alternating courses are reminiscent of the Axumatic detail in which stone and timber were used in conjunction. This detail is also found in the church of Imrahama Christos, and in a simple form in the church of Abba Libanos.

Bilbala Cherkos, Sarsana Mikaël and Gabriel Raphaël use various forms of large scale Axumite blind arches. The other churches use less well developed variants of the details described above.

The interior of most of these churches is very reminiscent of that of the classic Romanesque basilica churches—central nave, barrel vault, one or two aisles, rectangular columns with decorated capitals, sculpted arches separating the nave from the aisles and a cupola at the end of the nave above the Holy of Holies. This arrangement persisted in most Abyssinian Coptic churches until the 16th century, after which round and polygonal plans were adopted.

The decoration of the Lalibela churches is based on themes common to all Middle Eastern Christian architecture, although the use of so many motifs based on the sun, moon, planets and stars is surprising. The frescos are generally Byzantine and Romanesque in character and one can recognize the origins of the long tradition of Ethiopian Coptic religious painting which has survived to this day. The church of Golgotha Mikaël has two sculpted bas-reliefs representing the saints which would be completely at home in the Romanesque churches of France.

It is difficult to arrive at any valid conclusions when examining these monolithic churches, whether it be their origin, the reason for their presence and for the various stylistic influences to which they have been subjected, the fact that nothing has survived this civilization except the Coptic mural tradition.

The theories of Mme Bidder are ingenuous and likely, if not always well developed. In order to understand them, it is as well to know a little of the Axumite kingdom and civilization which figure largely in her book.

Apart from some ruined palaces and other buildings and many gold and silver coins, the best known remains of this period which we have are the monolithic stela of Axum, a type of rectangular obelisk which take the form of a sculptured skyscraper. Over the doorway at ground level there is the semblance of many floor levels crowned by a gracious arch of the type to be found at Lalibela. Mme Bidder sees these obelisks as a symbol of the ascension of the soul to heaven and the arch, like the cupola of the Lalibela churches, as a representation of heaven.

The Kingdom of Axum lasted about 18 centuries, from 1000 B. C. to about 800 A. D. It took in not only the northern part of present day Ethiopia, but also southern Arabia, the Kingdom of the Queen of Saba. It thus controlled the Red Sea.

In the 6th century A. D., there was a revolt against the king of Axum, led by a woman of whom little is known. The provinces of Tigre and Waag-Lasta united to form the kingdom of Zagwe of which the first king was Lalibela. He was a priest-king, and his name signified "owner of the bee-hives" or "commander of the Bees", the bees being the army. The capital of this kingdom was Roha, which later became Lalibela. There are supposed to have been 8 kings in the Zagwe dynasty.

Early in the life of this new dynasty, Arabia was invaded by the Persians, and many Christian Arabs sought refuge at Lalibela, which was a stronghold of their religion. With them they brought the refinements of eastern art. The kingdom of Zagwe was certainly widely renowned and Mme Bidder suggests that the letter which Pope Alexander III wrote in 1170 to John the priest-king of India was in reality written to the priest-king of Lalibela, Jan meaning priest. This is, in fact, confirmed by the journal of a German pilgrim who visited Ethiopia in 1496.

It can be assumed, then, that the churches of Lalibela date from between the 6th and 8th centuries A. D. (Christianity was proclaimed as the official religion by the Axumite king in 327 A. D.) Legend attributes the construction of Sarsana Mikaël to the Axumite king Caleb, which is unlikely, but, on the other hand, it is possible that Bilbal at Cherkos was the work of his son.

According to Mme Bidder, the last period of the Axumite empire corresponded to a period of expansion in the knowledge of the universe which should be simple to prove from the Axumite monuments and in particular from the churches of Lalibela. If one accepts that the obelisk stela of Axum, which date from before the Christian era, and were built over a tomb, symbolize the passage of the soul, through meditation, towards the illumination of the heavenly bodies, and the similarities which can be seen between the layout and detail of these stela and the layout and details of the churches at Lalibela, particularly that of Biet Giorgis, one is led to feel that they have a very pronounced symbolic significance in common. In the case of the underground churches, it is probably the expression of the bursting forth of the spirit from matter—that is, out of the earth towards the sky, towards the light; the liaison between the world underground and the super-terrestrial universe.

One finds at Lalibela the sequels to pre-Christian cults whose signs and symbols are incorporated in the Christian creed. This would tend to support Mme Bidder's thesis and would explain what to us is the most obscure aspect of these churches—the excavated construction and their layout. At the church of Biet Mariam there are three tanks which are passed off as baptismal fonts. This is ridiculous, as baptisms are carried out by immersion in the river Jordan which passes close to Biet Giorgis and is connected to it by underground galleries. At the church of Gabriel Raphaël, there are also tanks, but also, and there only, traces of fire. Is it not reasonable to assume, then, that these are the remains of an ancient water (fertility) cult? The legend of the royal serpent of Axum, carried down to us with the history of Queen Saba, would lead us to believe that this is so.

The layout of the first group of churches (Gabriel Raphaël, Merkurios, Biet Emmanuel, Abba Libanos and the hill of Bethlehem) becomes clear if one accepts that the worship took place there of the three forces of the underworld—water, fire and light—as it is there that light is re-born after its disappearance from the world. This light reappears in the labyrinth of the hill of Bethlehem, being symbolized by the horse. The hill is even called “the Stable of the Holy Horse”. Incidentally, the sign which recurs most often in these churches is that of Saturn, the sun which was destroyed in the underworld.

The second group of churches, of which the layout is more classic and generally clearer, is dedicated to the sky with the church of Biet Mariam the only one which contains the signs of both sun and moon. Its external chapels are consecrated to Denagel (The Virgin, and perhaps the planet Venus) and to Maskal (the Cross). Nowadays, the Coptic ceremony of Maskal, the most important, with that of Timkat (Epiphany, baptism) is celebrated at the end of the rainy season. The idea of the discovery of the Cross (Maskal) is mixed up with the reappearance of the sun, the renewal of light. The third church of this

group, Medhane Alem, is entirely decorated with sky-symbols, and Mme Bidder recognizes in this a throwback to the Astar cult.

Finally, the isolated church of Biet Giorgis where there is a striking example of the mystique of numbers appears to symbolize the marriage of the sky and the earth, by its cruciform plan (not necessarily Christian) its position and its connection to the River Jordan.

The symbols of the solar myth, as it was celebrated in practically all pre-Christian civilizations, are to be seen everywhere in Lalibela, particularly in the extraordinary medallions which form the interior decoration of the church of Imrahana Christos.

It is to be hoped that these churches will attract even more critical attention, now that they are much easier of access than formerly.

P. A. Emery

Architecture without architects in Morocco

The Atlas mountains and the zone which reaches from Tafilalet to the Atlantic hide a remarkable example of what one could call architecture without architects, or spontaneous architecture.

A rich history has left as a legacy an architectural style which is quite unique. The materials used are many—dry laid stone and earth decorated with brick, moulded or studded with black schist.

The remarkable plan forms are variations on the patio house which some authorities believe to have originated in central Asia. In the west are some fine examples of natural and plastered stone buildings—the most interesting being the houses at Tafraout and the Agadirs at Ait-Baha (Agadirs are a sort of fortified communal granary where the villagers would shelter in times of danger).

In the east, in the oases of Skouraeand Tinerir etc., are to be found the most interesting examples of Ksar architecture

(Ksar: castle, citadel) with their groups of high fortified houses, generally richly decorated and built with 4 corner towers.

As a result of an accelerated social evolution, this still vital architecture is in danger. The rural areas are being depopulated in favour of the towns and buildings abandoned. The towns themselves have adopted style and urgent action is required to preserve a heritage whose importance the Moroccans seem not to appreciate.

M. Ben Embarek

Modern art at the Venice Biennale

If the aim of a Biennale is to report on works of art which have appeared in the previous two years, it perfectly fulfils this function and the visitor is immediately made aware of the trends which young contemporary artists have in common. The most apparent of these is the research into what is generally known as ‘optical art’, the results of which can be seen in both the Italian and several foreign pavilions. The first prize for a work from abroad was won by the “op” artist Julio Le Parc (Argentina) and for an Italian work by Lucio Fontana.

Apart from the exhibitions of modern work (of which we would mention those of Spain, Germany, U.S.A., Brazil, England and Austria), there are three retrospective exhibitions. The first is of the work of Umberto Boccioni, the futurist painter and sculptor, creator of “plastic dynamism”. The second is devoted to the first group of Italian abstracts (1933-1940, Milan and Como). The third is dedicated to Giorgio Morandi, who died recently. He was a fine artist, but uninfluenced by contemporary thought.

On balance, the results of these latter are undoubtedly positive, even if they are rather too strongly influenced by the machine age, and even if they are, perhaps, only a demonstration of the exhausted state of our figurative expression.

Gulia Veronesi

Traduzione italiana

Le chiese monolitiche di Lalibela

Le chiese monolitiche etiopiche non sono veramente sotterranee, benchè si trovino sotto il livello del suolo. Concepite come edifici di superficie, sono rischiarate su

uno spazio libero interno. Non sono state costruite, ma tagliate nella pietra e di lì viene il loro nome di monoliti.

La chiesa si compone di un nucleo centrale circondato da una trincea relativamente

circolare, larga da 5 a 7 metri e profonda da 10 a 12 metri, scavata nella roccia. Il santuario è in salita e presenta una facciata principale a fianco di pendio e tre altre isolate da una galleria forata nella roccia.

In tal modo è stata ottenuta una specie di caverna, di cui il suolo e il soffitto uniscono la chiesa alla macchia rocciosa.

L'architettura non è veramente originale, dato che impiega materiali tradizionali: pietra e legno.

L'origine e l'età di queste chiese sono sconosciute. Ne esistono una ventina, per lo più sparse nella provincia montagnosa di Lasta Waag, salvo un gruppo di nove a Lalibela, villaggio importante e pittoresco con i suoi « tucul » rotondi a tetti di paglia conici. I santuari sono oggidi quasi tutti ricoperti di latta ondulata. Presso il villaggio sorge una collina circondata da un'immensa trincea, entro la quale si trovano quattro chiese: due sovrapposte (Gabriele e Raffaele), quella di Abba Libanos, quella di Biet Merkurios, in parte sfondata, e la più curiosa di tutte, Biet Emmanuel.

La chiesa di Biet Giorgis, isolata in un profondo fossato, è la più popolare: la sua immagine figura su i francobolli etiopici.

Tutti questi edifici possono essere classificati in tre tipi: chiese con gallerie di pilastri esterni, con suolo orizzontale e con facciate e finestre ad arco. Le sole costruzioni paragonabili sono i tempi indiani di Ellora.

Come già detto, l'età esatta delle chiese monolitiche abissine è sconosciuta, ma alcuni la situano fra i secoli VI e VIII dell'era cristiana, supponendo che erano destinate a celebrare un culto cristiano ancora fortemente impregnato di reminiscenze pagane. Ad ogni modo, gli archeologi si trovano tuttora davanti a un'enigma, tanto più che le spiegazioni dei preti copti sono spesso fantastiche.

P. A. Emery

Architettura senza architetti nel Marocco

L'Alto-Atlas e la zona pre-saariana che va dal Tafilalet all'Atlantico rappresentano un esempio eccezionale di ciò che conviene chiamare architettura senza architetto o architettura spontanea.

Un ricco passato storico ha lasciato un patrimonio architettonico assolutamente unico al mondo. I materiali sono svariati: pietra secca, terra decorata con mattoni crudi, getti o incrostrature di schisto nero. La forma è una variante, dovuta al clima, della casa a patio di cui alcuni situano l'origine lontana in Asia centrale.

All'ovest, l'Anti-Atlas offre esempi di costruzioni in pietra secca o dipinta (Tafraout per le abitazioni e Ait-Baha per gli Agadirs, specie di granai collettivi fortificati).

All'est, troviamo nelle oasi di Skoura e di Tinerir gli esempi più interessanti dell'architettura degli Ksours (plurale di Ksar = castello, cittadella). Sono gruppi di case alte e fortificate, generalmente riccamente decorate e munite di quattro torri d'angolo.

L'evoluzione sociale accelerata minaccia doppiamente questa architettura. Da un lato l'esodo rurale porta nelle città la popolazione attiva che abbandona evidentemente le costruzioni, dall'altro le città esportano elementi architettonici più recenti, totalmente estranei allo stile della regione.

Misure di studio e di salvaguardia sono urgenti se si vuole conservare un patrimonio, la cui importanza non sembra essere apprezzata dai Marocchini stessi.

M. Ben Embarek

Bilancio dell'arte d'oggi alla Biennale di Venezia

Se la funzione di una mostra biennale è quella di informare sui fatti dell'arte compiuti nei due anni trascorsi, la Biennale veneziana di quest'anno l'assolve perfettamente: il visitatore vi scopre, infatti, l'unità delle tendenze che in tutto il mondo caratterizzano il lavoro attuale dei giovani artisti. Il tratto principale, è la ricerca di movimento, che si trova generalmente nella cosiddetta "arte ottica", sia nel padiglione dell'Italia sia in diverse sezioni straniere: a un artista "op", Julio Le Parc della sezione argentina, è stato assegnato il primo premio per gli stranieri (quello per gli Italiani è toccato a Lucio Fontana).

Oltre alle mostre attuali (fra le quali si segnalano quelle della Spagna, della Germania, degli Stati Uniti, del Brasile, dell'Inghilterra, dell'Austria), due retrospettive mostrano i precedenti dell'arte d'oggi: la grande esposizione di Umberto Boccioni, il pittore e scultore futurista creatore del "dinamismo plastico", e la prima mostra d'insieme del gruppo iniziale degli astrattisti italiani, operanti dal 1933 al 1940 a Milano e a Como. Una terza retrospettiva è dedicata a Giorgio Morandi, morto recentemente: grande artista, ma che non ha rapporti diretti con l'arte d'oggi, della quale ci interessava stabilire il bilancio. E si tratta di un bilancio sicuramente positivo, anche se = forse = quest'arte che vuole adeguarsi al tempo della macchina non è che una manifestazione dell'usura e della stanchezza del nostro linguaggio figurativo.

Gulia Veronesi

Traducciones españolas

Las iglesias monolíticas de Lalibéla

Subterráneas porque están situadas bajo el nivel del suelo las iglesias monolíticas de Etiopía no están sin embargo enterradas. Ellas no han sido construídas sino talladas en la piedra, de donde viene su nombre de monolitos.

La iglesia monolítica se compone de un núcleo central que rodea un foso relativamente circular, de 5 a 7 metros de ancho y de 10 a 12 metros de profundidad, cavado en el peñasco. En cuanto al santuario, situado en una pendiente, presenta una fachada principal enrasada a la ladera de

la colina (o del acantilado) y otras tres fachadas aisladas por una galería horadada en el peñasco. Se obtiene así una especie de caverna donde el suelo y el techo unen la iglesia y la masa pedregosa.

A pesar de un procedimiento de edificación excepcional, su arquitectura no es verdaderamente original. Utiliza todos los elementos de la construcción corriente, piedra y madera (pilares, cimientos horizontales, etc.).

El origen, objetivo, edad de las iglesias monolíticas etiopes son desconocidos.

Se enumera una veintena, generalmente dispersadas en la provincia montañosa de Lasta Waag, con excepción de un grupo de nueve en Lalibéla, aldea importante y pintoresca con sus *toucoul* redondos. Desde la cima que domina la localidad se distingue, a ras del suelo, los techos de los santuarios. En Lalibéla mismo las tres iglesias de Golgotha Michaël, Biet Mariam y Medhané Alem tienen fosas sucesivas. En las proximidades de la aldea se eleva una colina en la cual hay una inmensa zanja en cuyo espacio están encerradas

cuatro iglesias en la falda del peñasco: las dos iglesias superpuestas de Gabriel y de Raphaël, las iglesias de Abba Libanos y de Biet Merkurios y la más curiosa de todas desde el punto de vista arquitectónico, Biet Emmanuel.

Biet Giorgis, aislada en un foso profundo, es popularizada por las imágenes y estampillas etíopes. Otras iglesias: Ganeta Mariam, Bilbala Cherkos, Bilbala Giorgis, Abba Libanos, Abatu Entzessa, Imrahana Christos y Zemedu Mariam.

A pesar de la diversidad arquitectónica, es posible hacer una clasificación en tres tipos principales: iglesias con galería de pilares exteriores, iglesias con cimientos horizontales e iglesias con fachadas y ventanas decoradas con arcos. Por su procedimiento de excavación se les puede comparar con los templos indostánicos de Ellora.

Al interior, la mayor parte de estas iglesias recuerdan la iglesia romana con nave central y bóveda cilíndrica, pilares y capiteles decorados, etc. Como decoración, los temas del simbolismo cristiano pero también en abundancia, lo que nos sorprende, el sol, la luna, las estrellas.

Nacidas en una fecha desconocida pero que la hipótesis sitúa entre los siglos VI y VIII de nuestra era, celebrando un culto cristiano muy impregnado aún de reminiscencias paganas (las cisternas de Biet Marian por ejemplo no serían fuentes bautismales sino que vestigios de un antiguo culto del agua) las iglesias monolíticas de Etiopía, misteriosamente construidas y misteriosamente concentradas en un espacio restringido, esperan que aquellos cuya curiosidad no fuera satisfecha por las explicaciones, a menudo imaginarias, de los sacerdotes se interesen en encontrar la clave de su existencia enigmática.

P. A. Emery

Arquitectura sin arquitectos en Marruecos

El Alto-Atlas y la zona pre-sahariana que se extiende del Tafilalet al Atlántico encierra un ejemplo excepcional de lo que se ha convenido en adelante llamar arquitectura sin Arquitecto o arquitectura espontánea. Un pasado histórico rico ha permitido que subsista un estilo de arquitectura más o menos único en el mundo. Los materiales son variados, piedra seca, tierra apisonada realzada con decoraciones en ladrillo crudo, vaciado o incrustaciones de shiste negro. La forma notable de los planos, representa una variación en función del clima sobre el modelo de la casa con patio cuyos orígenes lejanos ciertos autores sitúan en Asia Central.

Al oeste, el Anti-Atlas ofrece bellos ejemplos de construcciones en piedra seca o una mano de pintura de los cuales los más

notables se sitúan en Tafraout para las habitaciones y en Ait-Baha para los Agadir, especie de graneros colectivos fortificados donde se refugiaba en otros tiempo la población de las aldeas en caso de peligro. Al este, en los oasis de Skoura, de Tinerir etc... se encuentran los ejemplos más interesantes de la arquitectura de los Ksours (plural de Ksar: castillo, ciudadela), agrupamiento de residencias altas, fortificadas, a menudo ricamente decoradas y que dominan los palmerales con su bella silueta de cuatro torres.

A consecuencia de una evolución social acelerada, esta arquitectura aún viviente está amenazada por un doble peligro. El éxodo rural atrae a la población activa hacia las ciudades. Las construcciones son abandonadas. Se importan de la ciudad los elementos de arquitectura más recientes totalmente extraños al estilo y a la región. Se considera urgente aplicar medidas de estudio y de salvaguardia para conservar un patrimonio el cual los mismos marroquíes no parecen apreciar la importancia.

M. Ben Embarek

Balance del arte de hoy día en la Bienal de Venecia

Si el objeto de una Bienal es la información sobre las obras de arte creadas en el transcurso de dos años, la Bienal de Venecia lo realiza perfectamente. En efecto, el visitante descubre inmediatamente las tendencias comunes a los artistas jóvenes contemporáneos. La principal de entre ellas es la rebusca de movimiento que generalmente se hace evidente en lo que se llama «el arte óptico», ya sea en el pabellón italiano o en varias secciones extranjeras. El primer premio destinado a los extranjeros ha sido ganado por el artista «op» Julio Le Parc (Argentino), el atribuido a los italianos, por Lucio Fontana.

Con excepción de las exposiciones de carácter actual (entre las cuales señalamos las de España, de Alemania, de Estados Unidos, del Brasil, de Inglaterra y de Austria), existen tres retrospectivas. La primera es de Umberto Boccioni, el pintor y escultor futurista, creador del «dinamismo plástico». La segunda concierne al primer grupo de abstractos italianos (1933-1940, Milán y Como). La última es dedicada a Giorgio Morandi, fallecido recientemente. Era un gran artista, pero no tenía conexión con las tendencias contemporáneas.

El balance de estas últimas es sin duda positivo, aunque se inspira demasiado en la época de la máquina y si no son, tal vez, más que una manifestación del deterioro y del cansancio de nuestro lenguaje figurativo.

Gulia Veronesi