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Personalia

In memoriam Rodolfo Fattovich (1945–2018)

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In memoriam Rodolfo Fattovich (1945–2018)

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On the night of 23 March 2018, Rodolfo Fattovich passed away at the age of 73 after a courageous battle against cancer.

An outstanding archaeologist, Egyptologist and Ethiopianist, Rodolfo Fattovich graduated in classical studies with a thesis in Egyptology in 1969 and completed the *scuola di perfezionamento* in Oriental archaeology in 1972. In 1974 he became professor of the newly established chair of Ethiopian archaeology, which he held at the Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli, along with other courses (Egyptology and Egyptian archaeology and prehistory), until his retirement in 2014.

Despite his early and lifelong lasting attachment to the Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”, he established enduring international links with foreign scientific institutions through numerous exchanges and frequent collaboration.

As part of the Italian contribution to the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP)–Post Graduate Program (PGP), he was one of the founding fathers of the Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management of Addis Ababa University, working with his colleague and friend, Kässayäh Bāgaššaw, to establish the MA programme and define the PhD curriculum.

All those who knew Rodolfo Fattovich, starting with his family and friends, but also his colleagues, students, and collaborators, are aware of his strong bond with fieldwork, a bond that did not weaken with his retirement, as long as his health allowed it. He conducted archaeological excavations in Egypt (Naqada, Mersa/Wadi Gawasis), Sudan (Kassala), and Ethiopia (Yəḥa, Səglamen, Aksum), directing three major research projects in Kassala, Aksum, and Mersa/Wadi Gawasis, the latter two in collaboration with Kathryn A. Bard of Boston University. The contribution that these research projects provided to highly debated scientific issues, such as the origin of complex societies in north-eastern Africa, the development and decline of Aksumite civilization, and the location of Punt, was enormous and enjoyed wide international recognition thanks also to Fattovich’s vast scientific production—over two hundred publications including monographs, articles in highly ranked scientific journals, and technical reports—and his tireless participation in workshops, conferences, seminars, and international conferences.

While writing these lines—too few to remember a scholar of such calibre—the streets of Addis Abäba resound to the joyful sounds accompanying the visit of Eritrea’s president Isayyas Afäwärqı: a historical moment, a further step in a peace process started in recent weeks that will put an end to years of open hostility between the two countries. I cannot but recall the many stories that Rodolfo told me about the historical moments that he experienced first-hand in Ethiopia: his meeting with Emperor Ḥaylä Šöllase at the National Museum of Ethiopia, the fall of the Därg regime, and the hardest moments of the war with Eritrea. Moments that he lived not with the curiosity of the tourist or of the simple spectator, but with the interest of the scholar and the attentiveness of an Ethiopian citizen. For him, archaeology was a means of long-term reconstruction, not only of history, but of historical processes: the complex and dynamic network of social, economic, political, and ideological interactions that link human groups both to the environment and to each other. Investigating how history works was his main objective, making archaeology available to understand the present and showing its relevance for the future. His approach shaped the minds and professional careers of many of his students to whom he taught the importance of hard work, respect for the rules, the necessity of being curious, and especially developing an interest in those disciplines only apparently distant from archaeology *stricto sensu*. To us, and to all those who had the good fortune to interact with him, belongs the hard task of carrying forward his legacy.