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Coupoles et habitats.
Une tradition constructive entre Orient et Occident
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Hellenic Society, Greece



University of Liège, Belgium



Polytechnic University of Valencia, Spain



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Living in the arid margins

> Earthen Dome Villages of Northern Syria

Editor Saverio Mecca

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> Earthen Dome Villages of Northern Syria: the culture of uncertainty

When Neolithic man first began to comprehend how to interact with and use nature, developing a process of domestication of spaces and habitats, the forming of human culture began. Hunter-gatherers embarked upon a process of appropriating natural spaces, progressing from the linear and temporary to the central and permanent, defining the fundamental necessities of a site for permanent settlement that are relevant to this day, and which in the arid or semi-arid regions are met with difficulty, above all the necessity of water.

In the Fertile Crescent, the Neolithic period saw the development of agriculture and stockbreeding. The region of Aleppo, from the Euphrates to Salamiya, has been inhabited since Neolithic times by settlements of sedentary and nomadic peoples.

The arid lands of Syria and of the Aleppo region were quickly inhabited and became an area of contact, exchange and conflict between the nomads and settled populations that represented two distinct ways of life and two antagonistic ways of using the land. Two different cultures, that of sedentary farmers and that of nomadic stockbreeders, alternatively dominated this region, each coming to terms with the demands of the environment in their own particular ways. Over the centuries, not only sedentary peoples have substituted nomadic tribes, but also the populations have fluctuated between the two lifestyles, often integrated into and present in the same communities or, even, the same families.

The arid climate has dominated the character of the region for millennia, a determining factor for settlement, architecture, building culture, and use of land. The different populations inhabiting these regions down the millennia have had to restrict their living and develop strategies to deal with climatic uncertainties, and chiefly with the supply and availability of clean drinking water.

The earthen dome habitats of northern Syria express this exceptional fluctuating culture of uncertainty.

The 'Coupoles et habitats. Une tradition constructive entre Orient et Occident' project, funded by the European Union Culture 2000 programme, is proposing an original and complete analysis and documentation of this exceptional architectural heritage. The photographs of Luca Lupi, official photographer of the project, are an ideal introduction to the world of earthen dome villages in Northern Syria.