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Vignette:

Gold coin of King Aphilas, early third century CE, as drawn by A. Luegmeyer after the coin in Rennau collection. Weight 2.48 grams, diameter 17 mm.

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## Editorial

The present issue of AETHIOPICA is the twenty-fifth since the journal's founding in 1998. It is also the thirteenth issue I have worked on as editor-in-chief, one more than that of founder Siegbert Uhlig. The present time, however, does not lend itself to celebrations of any sort. The global political crisis and the situation in the Horn of Africa are having a deep impact on the scholarly community, which appears divided and radicalized on opposite or increasingly diverging positions as never before. The growing influence of diaspora communities is at times marked by waves of resurgent nationalism. The challenge posed by main-stream policy in countries of established scholarly traditions gives less and less space to small fields—as is the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean studies. The consequent lack of resources triggers the fragmentation of the scholarly scene. New balances based on mutual legitimation and acknowledgement of a common scholarly method are not obvious. The consequence of this complex situation, which reflects global changes, is that scholarly and academic freedom can be put at risk. Of all priorities envisaged in the mission of AETHIOPICA, preservation of academic freedom along with scholarly quality has been, is, and will remain the top priority of the journal.

I regret that in the past, and still now, the lack of available qualified authors has prevented AETHIOPICA from duly commemorating distinct colleagues and researchers recently passed away who were more than deserving of an obituary. I would like to remember at least some of them here, by name, as a very modest tribute to their work and memory: Johannes Launhardt (1929–2019), Mesfin Wolde Mariam (1930–2020), Steffen Wenig (1934–2022), Girma Fisseha (1941–2020).

To end on a positive note, three colleagues active in Ethiopian and Eritrean studies have received important awards this year, and we would like to mention them here: Samantha Kelly (Professor of Medieval History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, also on our International Editorial Board), has won the Choice Outstanding Academic Title 2020, and the African Studies Review Prize for the Best Africa-focused Anthology or Edited Collection 2021, for her *A Companion to Medieval Ethiopia and Eritrea* (Leiden–Boston, MA: Brill, 2020); Verena Krebs (Junior-Professorin für Mittelalterliche Kulturräume at Ruhr-Universität Bochum) has received the Dan David Prize for her *Medieval Ethiopian Kingship, Craft, and Diplomacy with Latin Europe* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021); and Massimo Zaccaria (Professore Associato in Storia e Istituzioni dell'Africa at Università degli Studi di Pavia) has received the Giorgio Maria Sangiorgi award of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei 'per la Storia ed Etnologia dell'Africa'. To all of them—the warmest congratulations from AETHIOPICA!

# New Readings and Interpretations on the Inscribed Stele from Ḥənzat (HS1)\*

MARIA BULAKH, HSE University, and  
YOHANNES GEBRE SELASSIE, Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris I

## 1 Introduction

The site of Ḥənzat is situated in Wār‘i Läkä wärüda, central zone of the Regional State of Təgray, 52 km south-east of the town of ‘Adwa.<sup>1</sup> In 1974, in the framework of archaeological excavations of antique sites of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea undertaken by the Italian mission supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Italy, the renowned Ethiopianist Lanfranco Ricci and some of his colleagues had the opportunity of visiting and inspecting the site of Ḥənzat. In his report of the excavations, Ricci briefly described his visit to the site,<sup>2</sup> in particular the numerous stone stelae which were found lying on earth around the church of St Gabriel. Of these, one bore a lengthy inscription. In his 1974 report, Ricci only mentioned that the inscription, written in palaeoethiopic letters, contained a king’s name. Only after sixteen years did a detailed discussion of the inscribed stele and a tentative reading and interpretation of the inscription appear in print.<sup>3</sup> According to Ricci’s description, the stele was c.4.65 m long, 67 cm broad at the base, and 64 cm broad at the upper end; 34 cm thick at the base, and 28/29 cm thick at the upper end. Precise measuring of the length had not been possible as a considerable section of the upper part of the stele (c.1.06 m long) was still covered by soil. At the time of Ricci’s visit to Ḥənzat, the stele lay at the entrance to the church of St Gabriel. However, according to local inhabitants, the stele had previously lain on a field 60–70 m away from the churchyard. Ricci tentatively suggested that this stele,<sup>4</sup> together with the neigh-

\* Maria Bulakh expresses her gratitude to RFBR/РФФИ (project no. 20-012-00515), which supported her research. Note on transcription: with Old Ethiopic words, Leslau’s (1987) system is employed (consistently reflecting early Old Ethiopic phonological system); with modern names, the transliteration system of the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* is applied.

<sup>1</sup> See Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ricci 1974, 440–441.

<sup>3</sup> Ricci 1988, 142–156.

<sup>4</sup> Ricci 1988, 144.

bouring non-inscribed stelae, had already been viewed by Alberto Pollera, whose photographs of several stelae from Hənzat had been published in Carlo Conti Rossini's *Storia d' Etiopia*.<sup>5</sup> However, no information on the inscription on the stele had been available prior to Ricci's publications.

To enable Ricci and his colleagues to obtain a better look at the inscription, the locals mounted the stele vertically. After the stele had been examined and photographs taken, the stele was returned to its initial position. Nonetheless, all the photographs published by Ricci in 1988 show the stele lying on earth.<sup>6</sup> In these photographs, the signs are not easily legible. Only one photograph (no. 15) gives complete scope of the stele's inscribed part, the view being directed upward at the inscription. The other photographs gave only the view from right to left. Ricci explained, at length, the various factors leading to the photographs' poor quality—in short, time pressure, a lack of the necessary preparations, and unfavourable lighting conditions. Due to this lack of a satisfactory photography Ricci did not send the inscription to Abraham Johannes Drewes and Roger Schneider (who were aware of its existence and requested Ricci share his findings) and was therefore not included in the *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite (RIÉ)*. As a result, the tentative transcription of this inscription published by Ricci (accompanied by a detailed discussion of the various possibilities for interpretation)<sup>7</sup> counts as the first attempt to decipher this text (see Table 2).

In 2014, Yohannes Gebre Selassie published an article on an inscription he labelled HS1, which he believed to be the second inscription on a stele found in Hənzat.<sup>8</sup> He described HS1 as an inscription on a stele measuring *c.*3.3 m high (minus the length of the underground part, which is unknown), 71 cm wide (68 cm at the place where the inscription starts), and 32 cm deep. When Yohannes Gebre Selassie was able to see the stele, it occupied a position *c.*30 m north-west of the church of St Gabriel. According to the local elders, it had previously stood some 400 m north-west of the church, where it was discovered in 1973. Yohannes Gebre Selassie published a photo and a sketch of the inscription, together with the transcription and the interpretation of the text (for a photo of the stele HS1, see Fig. 1).

<sup>5</sup> Conti Rossini 1928, pl. XXXIX.

<sup>6</sup> Ricci 1988, pl. V–VI, figs. 15–20.

<sup>7</sup> Ricci 1988, 146–151.

<sup>8</sup> According to Frantsouzoff 2019, 278, with n. 5, this stele was earlier mentioned by the French scholar Rémy Audouin in an unpublished report of an archaeological expedition to Ethiopia and Eritrea in 6 May–16 June 1994. Frantsouzoff also reproduces the photograph of the stele and its hand copy by Audouin, taken from the same report.





Fig. 1 The stele HS1, photo by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

Although Yohannes Gebre Selassie's 2014 article treated HS1 as a text distinct to that of Ricci's inscription, it is quite likely that the text Yohannes Gebre Selassie published is a new reading of the Ricci's published text.<sup>9</sup> Several arguments supporting this identification are to be put forward below.

Firstly, at present there exists only one inscribed stele in Hənzat, which is that described by Yohannes Gebre Selassie. The local elders have no memories of any other inscribed stele.<sup>10</sup> Ricci was also unaware of any other inscribed stele in Hənzat upon visiting the site in 1974. According to information Yohannes Gebre Selassie gathered locally, the HS1 stele was discovered in 1973. This accords with Ricci noting that the stele he viewed in 1974 had been recently discovered and transferred to the churchyard. Ricci's information located the stele previously as 60–70 m away from the churchyard but the interviews with locals conducted by Yohannes Gebre Selassie placed the stele 400 m away from the churchyard. But this discrepancy is not to be considered ultimately crucial. Absolute precision can hardly be expected when estimating the original location of an object long removed from its place.

The dimensions of the HS1 stele correspond roughly to the dimensions given by Ricci, as shown in Table 1. The different numbers for the length are due to a part of the stele being covered by earth at the time Ricci examined it, and a part of the stele is below ground level now—with the stele being erect. The difference in dimensions of breadth and depth is insignificant and is due to the measurements being made in different parts of the stele (the stele, as already Ricci noted, is somewhat broader and thicker at the base than at the upper end). The differences in the height of the letters are also to be expected as Ricci did not measure the letters *in situ*, but calculated their height from the photographs.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014; Ricci 1988, 146–151.

<sup>10</sup> Wolbert Smidt, personal communication.

<sup>11</sup> Ricci 1988, 145.

Table 1 **Dimensions of the stele from Hanzat**

	<b>Ricci's description</b>	<b>Yohannes Gebre Selassie's description</b>
Length	c.4.65 m long (of which a piece c.1.06 m long is covered with earth)	c.3.3 m (the length of the underground part unknown)
Breadth	67 cm broad at the base, and 64 cm broad at the upper end	71 cm in width, presumably at the base (68 cm at the place where the inscription starts)
Depth	34 cm at the base and 28/29 cm at the upper end	32 cm (no exact place of measurement is indicated)
Height of letters	c.8–10 (not measured directly but calculated by Ricci)	from 5.5 to 11 cm

Naturally, the most crucial evidence is the inscription itself. The transcribed text Ricci published is very different to that published by Yohannes Gebre Selassie. This discrepancy led Yohannes Gebre Selassie to claim in his earlier publication that HS1 'has never been mentioned in any form nor published'.<sup>12</sup>

However, this discrepancy may be due merely to different variants of reading and interpretation of the same text by two scholars. Both of them examined the stele independently, under different circumstances with a gap of several decades, each with different views on early Ethiopic palaeography.

Ricci had just one very brief occasion to examine the inscription *in situ*, and the photographs at his disposal were of very poor quality. It is thus only natural that Ricci's readings were erratic compared to the more careful deciphering Yohannes Gebre Selassie was able to carry out. In the following, this hypothesis will be considered at length.

## **2 Comparison of Ricci's (R) and Yohannes Gebre Selassie's (Y) editions**

The Ricci's and Yohannes Gebre Selassie's editions (henceforth referred to as R and Y) are presented in Table 2.

<sup>12</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 15.

Table 2 Ricci's and Yohannes Gebre Selassie's editions of the stele from Hənzat

Line	Ricci 1988, 146 (R)	Line	Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014 (Y)
1	z . . . . l + š + ś + f . . . .	-	-
2	w] š r '   (?)	-	-
3	w ḥ . . . . .	1	w ' s b
4	ḥ l d/b . . . . g . . . . ś	2	ḥ l q
5	z b . . . h t . . . . g . . . . (?)	3	[ ] y [ . . . ]
6	w l l	4	w l ḥ š n
7	ḥ l d/b w . . . . . (?)	5	ḥ l q
8	w [ . . . ] š f q   (?) . . . w . . . . (?)	6	w [ . ] f q
9	. . . . w [ . . . . . ] d w n r t ' / w   (?)	7	b 7 w n f q
10	z ḥ w l t	8	z ḥ w l t
11	z w h b l n'	9	z ' y / g n s
12	[ . . . ] k b r   (?) ' š b/d	10	' g b r / ' g z
13	l š b   n g ś	11	l ' b / n g ś
14	n / s r f   (?) ḥ š d / y	12	ḥ r f / ḥ š
15	w w d '   (?) m ' w d	13	' m d / m ' w d
16	w d l l   (?) z ' l r / š	14	w ḥ l q / ' l t
17	w l f '	15	57

At first glance, one is faced with two inscriptions with little in common: they differ in length, the number of letters in each line, and, most importantly, in content. They coincide only in a few places: line 10 in Ricci's text is the same as line 8 in Yohannes Gebre Selassie's; in line 13 of Ricci's text, the final four symbols (including the word divider) coincide with the last four symbols of line 11 in that of Yohannes Gebre Selassie; the final four letters of line 15 in Ricci's text concur with those of line 13 in Yohannes Gebre Selassie. It is to be noted that these three fragments are the easiest to read on the photo published by Yohannes Gebre Selassie,<sup>13</sup> and also the least problematic in terms of interpretation. In the first case, *z ḥ w l t* is of course to be vocalized as *\*zə/zā ḥawəlt*, 'this stele', known also from other inscriptions (RIÉ 218, 2–3, RIÉ 223, 1) and more or less expected to be found in an inscription written upon a stele. The

<sup>13</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 15.

second piece, | *n g s*, is the well-known Old Ethiopic root (here most probably vocalized as *\*\*nəguś*, ‘king’). Finally, the third piece, *m ‘ w d*, contains the Semitic root *‘wd*, preceded by a prefix *mV-*.

For one piece of Ricci’s readings, Yohannes Gebre Selassie proposed convincing emendations to the effect that it become identical with the corresponding piece of Yohannes Gebre Selassie’s text: line 14, *n/s r f—ጎ/ሰ)ረረ*—to be amended to *ḥrf (ጎረረ)*.<sup>14</sup>

The same may be the case with the preceding line: Ricci’s *l s b (ለእበ)* in line 13 is easily amended to *l’b (ለእበ)*, making Ricci’s line 13 fully identical with Yohannes’s line 11.

In other instances, only comparing the photos published by Ricci and those of HS1 taken by Yohannes Gebre Sellassie can shed light on the question under scrutiny. This is done in the subsequent subsections, line for line, notwithstanding the difficulties arising from the poor quality of Ricci’s photos.

## 2.1 R:1 = Y:-2?

The line 1 of R is entirely absent from Y. It is also hardly legible on the photo in Ricci’s 1988 article.<sup>15</sup> Below the relevant fragment of photo is reproduced as Fig. 2a (as it appears in Ricci’s article) and as Fig. 2b, with tentative identifications of symbols as read by Ricci.

The present state of HS1 makes it impossible to establish with any certainty if line 1 of Yohannes’s edition is the first line of the inscription, or if the space above had also been inscribed (meaning the illegibility of this portion of the inscription has been caused by weathering). At any rate, Ricci’s reading is extremely hypothetical, involving the highly problematic presence of a symbol *f* written in South Arabian script (ϕ),<sup>16</sup> and barely verifiable due to the photograph’s poor quality.

<sup>14</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 14.

<sup>15</sup> Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Elsewhere in the inscription Ricci suspected presence of similar ‘South Arabian type’ of letters (see Subsections 2.5, 2.16, 2.17 below; Ricci also speculated on the presence of a South Arabian *š* in R:12). In reality, we deal either with phenomena of palaeoethiopic script or with erroneous identifications.



Fig. 2a R:1 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16.

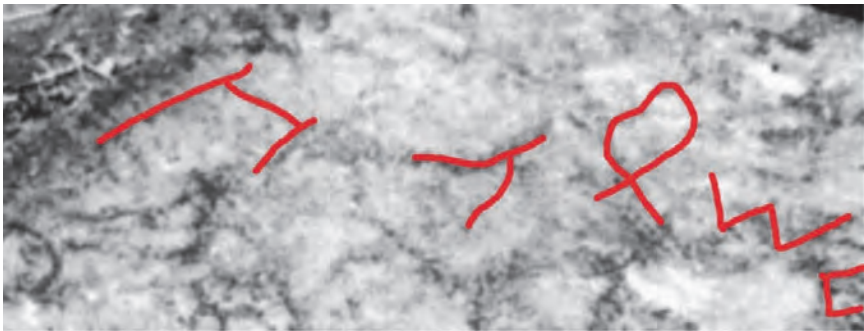


Fig. 2b R:1 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

## 2.2 R:2 = Y:-1?

Ricci himself declared line 2 to be uncertain. His decipherment implies the letters to be smaller than those of other lines, and the line to slope downward to the right, unlike the rest of the inscription. In his published photo, these symbols are barely discernible (see Fig. 3a for the relevant part of the photo as it appears in Ricci's article, and Fig. 3b, with our tentative identifications of symbols as read by Ricci).

None of these is likely to represent intended symbols, but on the HS1 photo one can tentatively identify the same lines, on the space directly preceding line Y1 (cf. Fig. 3c for relevant fragment of HS1, and Fig. 3d for our identification of Ricci's decipherments; note that the camera angle at which Ricci's photo was taken impedes comparison with the available photo of HS1).



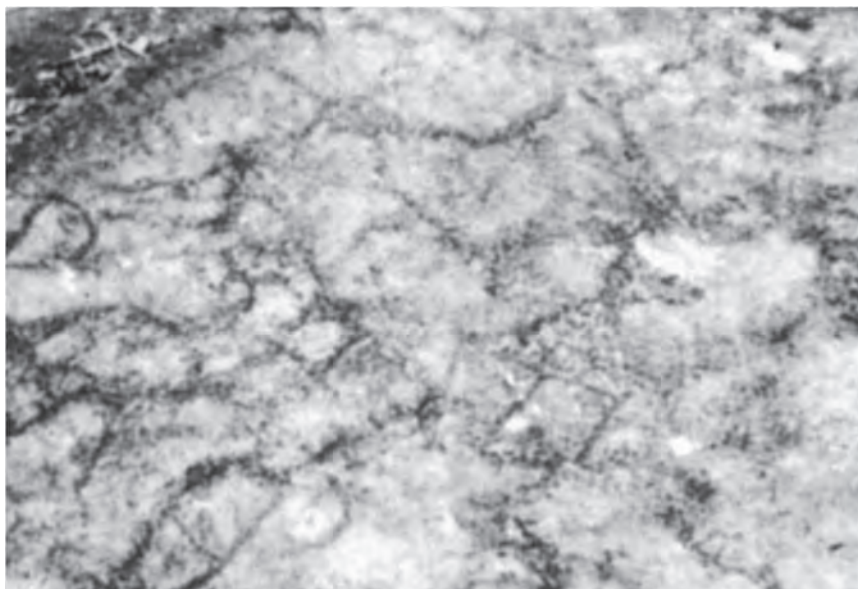


Fig. 3a R:2 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16.

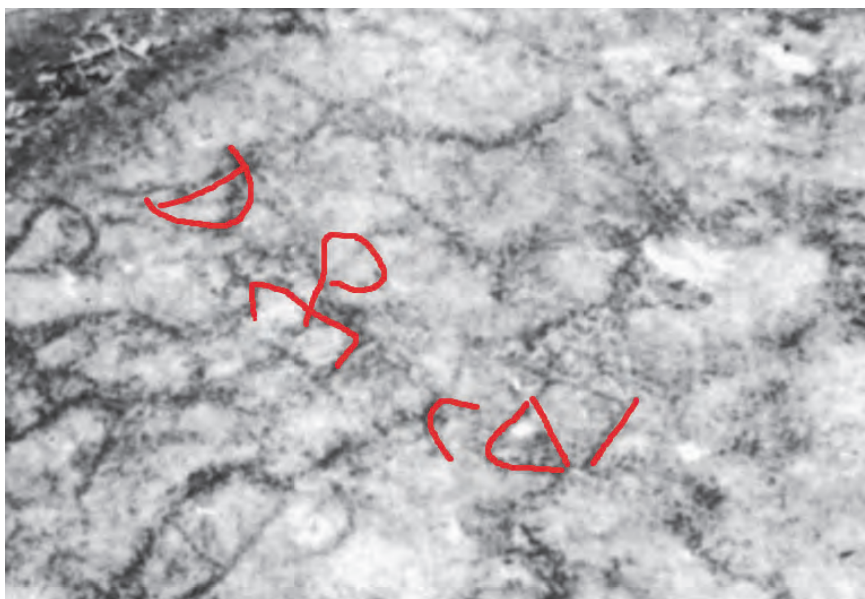


Fig. 3b R:2 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

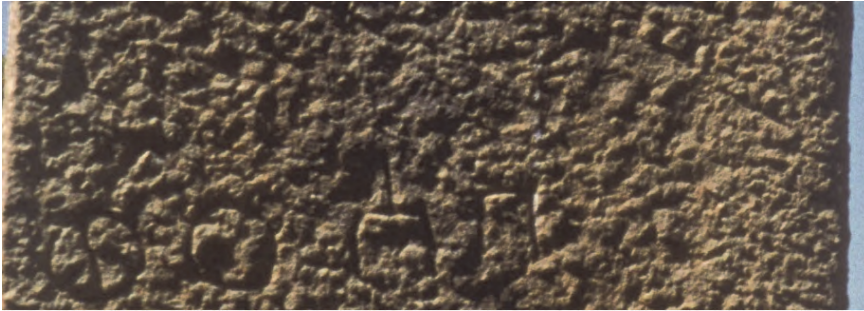


Fig. 3c Y:1 and the space before it, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

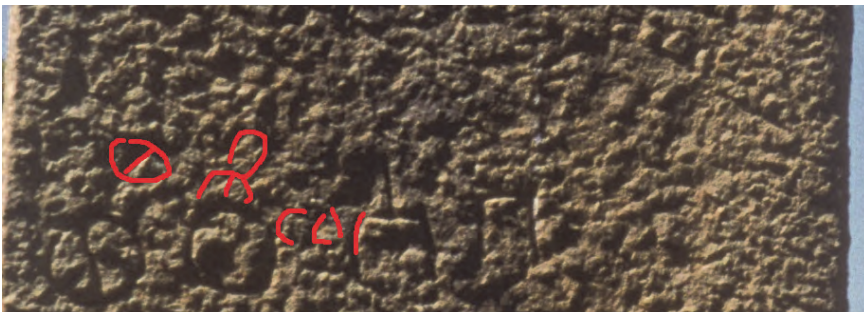


Fig. 3d Y:1 and the space before it, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

### 2.3 R:3 = Y:1

Line 3 is likewise marked by Ricci as uncertain, and only two letters have been tentatively deciphered in R:3: **ωh** (of which **h** is said to be very dubious, placed on a lower level than **ω**, with the left leg longer than the two others and reaching the next line). On the contrary, Yohannes Gebre Selassie deciphered Y:1 unhesitatingly as **ωθhn**. In all probability, it was the erroneous decipherment of line R:2 (which, as one can see on Fig. 3d, actually includes sections of Y:1), which prevented Ricci from correctly deciphering the third and fourth symbol. In Figs. 4a–d the relevant fragment of the photo published by Ricci is presented without (a) and with (b) Ricci's readings, and the fragment of HS1 showing Y:1 without (c) and with (d) Ricci's readings.



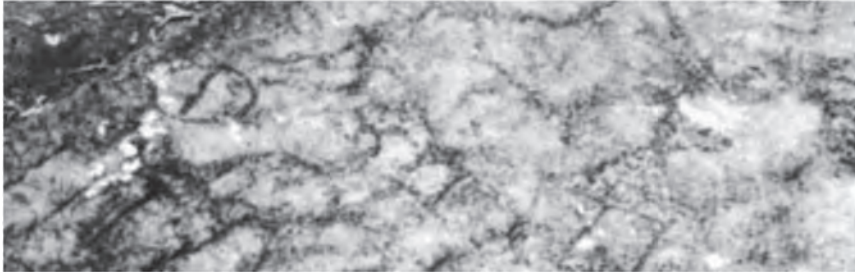


Fig. 4a R:3 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16.

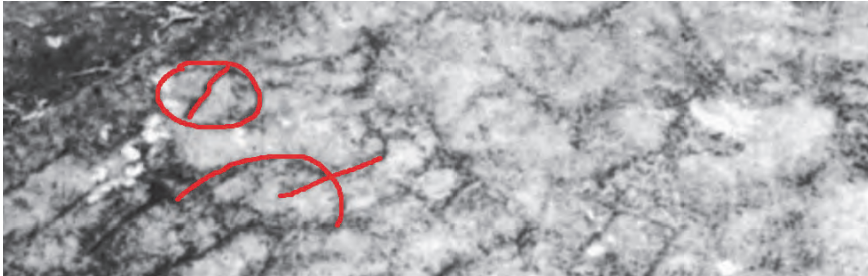


Fig. 4b R:3 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16, with Ricci's reading highlighted.



Fig. 4c Y:1, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.



Fig. 4d Y:1, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

In fact, the letters as read by Yohannes Gebre Selassie can be also discerned on Ricci's photo, as shown in Fig. 4e.



Fig. 4e R:3 from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16, with Yohannes Gebre Selassie's reading highlighted.

#### 2.4 R:4 = Y:2

There is no doubt that what reads at the beginning of R:4 as  $\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{\theta}(\mathfrak{n})$  is in fact  $\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{\phi}$  of Y:4. The symbol  $\mathfrak{\phi}$  is clearly visible on Ricci's photo (compare the relevant fragment of R in Fig. 5a and of Y in Fig. 5c). For Ricci's identification of the third letter, see Fig. 5b (his hesitation between  $\mathfrak{\theta}$  and  $\mathfrak{n}$  is due to his uncertainty about whether the horizontal lines were intentional).

The symbols  $\mathfrak{r}$  and  $\mathfrak{w}$ , tentatively deciphered by Ricci, cannot be discerned on the published photos, and they cannot be seen on the HS1 photos, although the presence of some symbols after  $\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{h}\mathfrak{\phi}$  cannot be excluded.

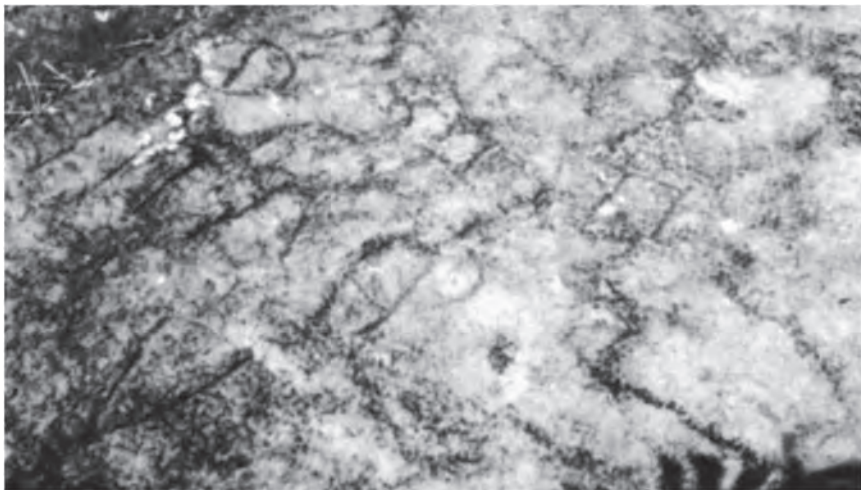


Fig. 5a R:4, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16.

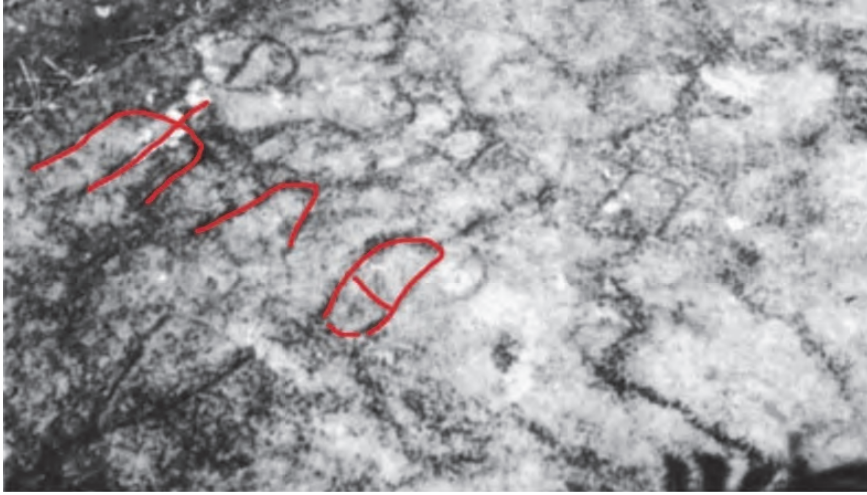


Fig. 5b R:4, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 16, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

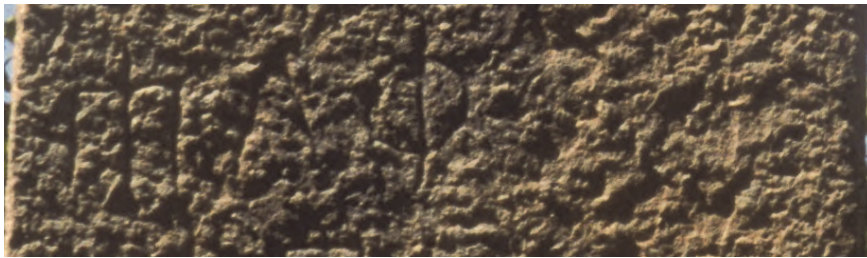


Fig. 5c Y:2, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

### 2.5 R:5 = Y:3

For Y:3, Yohannes Gebre Selassie deciphered only the symbol in the centre, **Ṕ**. The same symbol is also visible on the photo of R:5 (see Figs. 6a, 6b) and was read as 'il h, di tipo sudarabico' by Ricci—because its upper horizontal line cannot be discerned on the photo.<sup>17</sup> The rest of the symbols are illegible both on the photos of Ricci and of Yohannes Gebre Selassie (for the latter see Fig. 6c).

<sup>17</sup> Ricci 1988, 148.



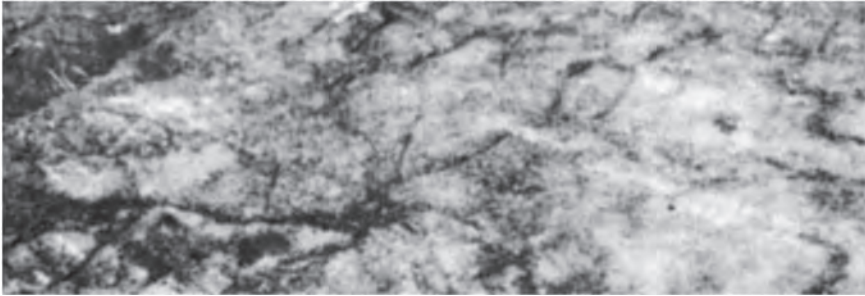


Fig. 6a R:5, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17.

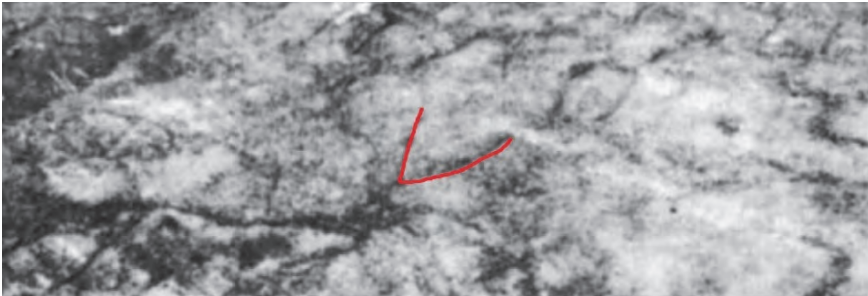


Fig. 6b R:5, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17, with Ricci's reading of the central symbol.



Fig. 6c Y:3, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

## 2.6 R:6 = Y:4

The first two letters are read as **ω** and **Λ** both in R:6 and Y:4. The third symbol was read as **Λ** by Ricci, who, however, considered it extremely dubious (see Figs. 7a, 7b). In Y:4, no second **Λ** is posited, but, instead, three letters **ጎጎጎ** are deciphered (see Fig. 7c). In fact, the same symbols can be discerned on Ricci's photos (see Fig. 7d).

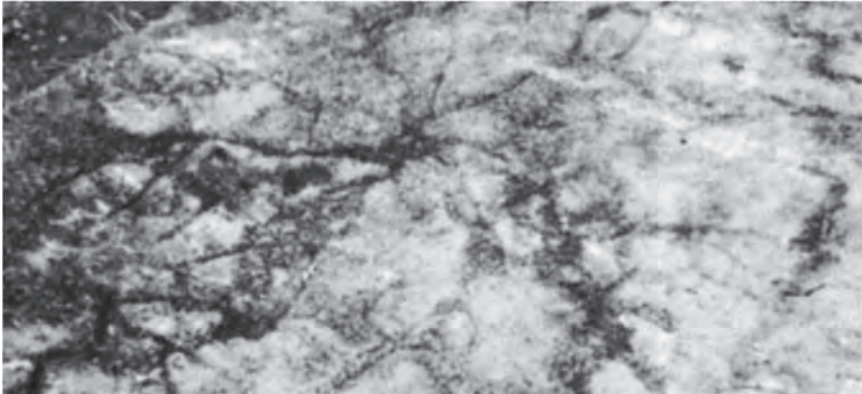


Fig. 7a R:6, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17.

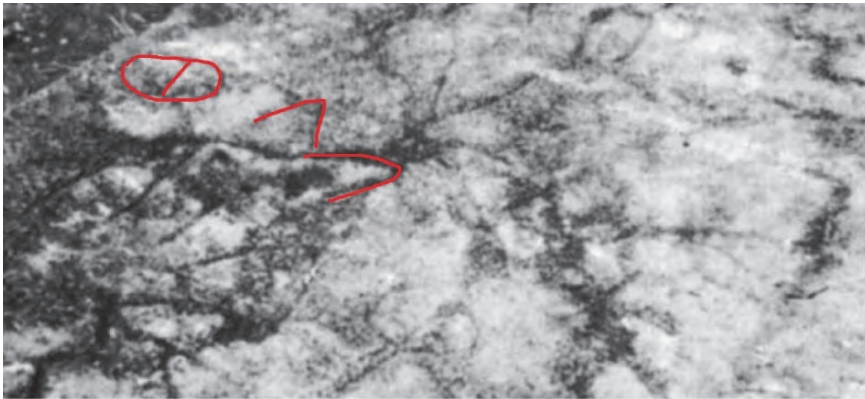


Fig. 7b R:6, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17, with Ricci's reading highlighted.



Fig. 7c Y:4, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

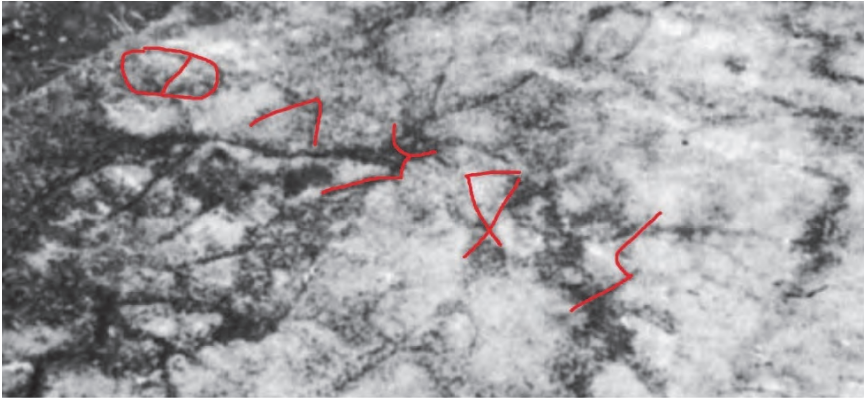


Fig. 7d R:6, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17, with Yohannes Gebre Selassie's reading highlighted.

### 2.7 R:7 = Y:5

The beginning of R:7 is identical with R:4, in the same way as the beginning of Y:5 is identical with the beginning of Y:2. Examination of Ricci's photo (Fig. 8a) reveals he mistook for  $\Pi$  or  $\theta$  the scratches preceding the  $\Phi$ , and mistook the latter symbol for  $\omega$  (see Fig. 8b). Comparison with the HS1 photo (Fig. 8b) leaves the correctness of Yohannes Gebre Selassie's decipherment in no doubt, as well as the identity of R and Y.

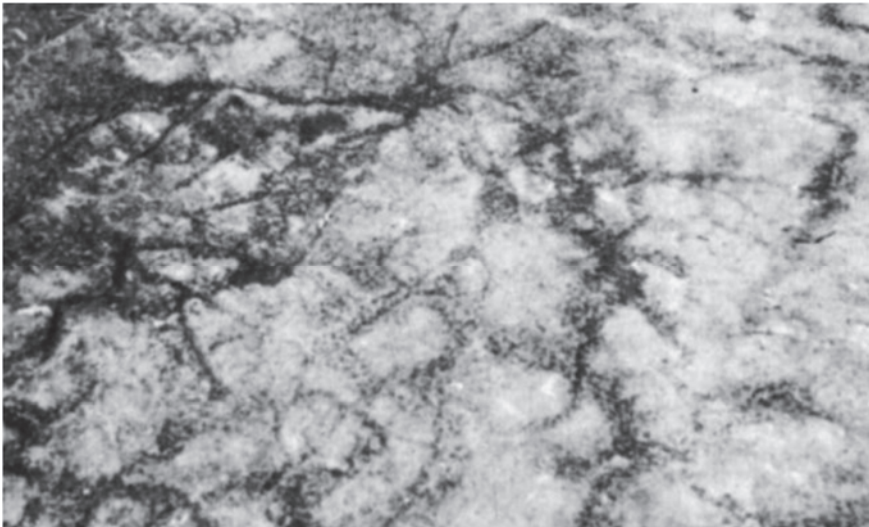


Fig. 8a R:7, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17.



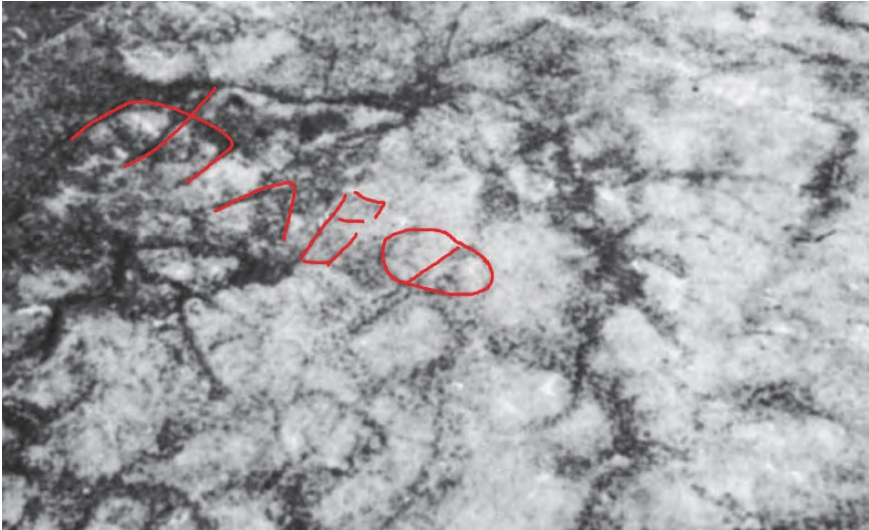


Fig. 8b R:7, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17, with Ricci's readings highlighted.



Fig. 8c Y:5, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

### 2.8 R:8 = Y:6

The first symbol is read as **ω** by both Ricci (although it is hardly discernible on his photos) and Yohannes Gebre Selassie. The second is obscure to Yohannes Gebre Selassie, and Ricci suspects it to be a South Arabian **š** (𐩨).<sup>18</sup> It is undoubtedly the same symbol which has puzzled both scholars, and it is followed by **ⲗ**.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. n. 16.

and  $\Phi$ , clearly visible to both Ricci and Yohannes Gebre Selassie (compare Fig. 9a for R:8 and Fig. 9b for Y:8). For Ricci, this line contains another symbol, to be read as  $\omega$ . Indeed, at the right end of the line one can discern on the HS1 photo some traces of a symbol that Ricci may have been taken for  $\omega$ , but which more likely represents an  $\iota$ . (see Fig. 9c for Y:8).

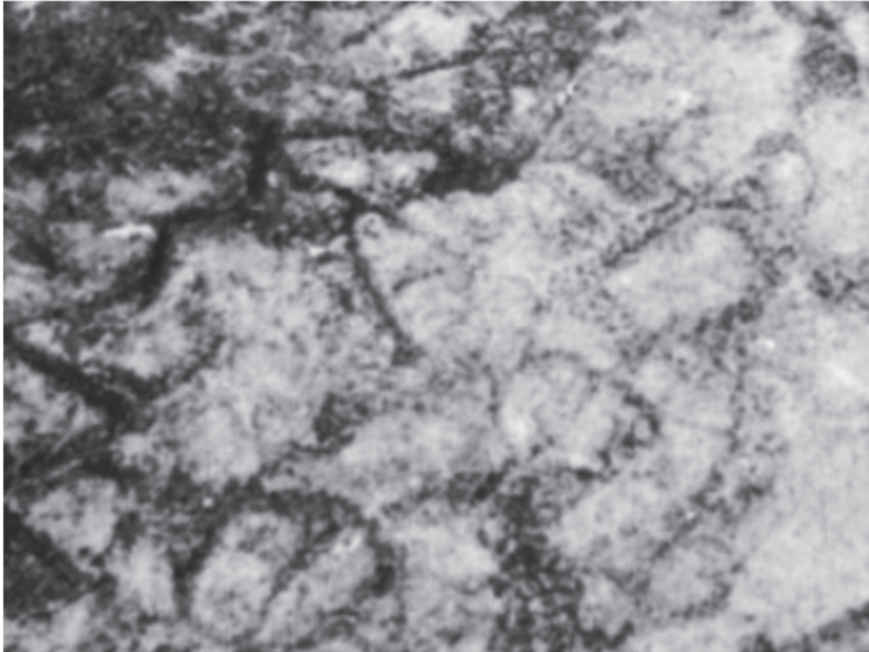


Fig. 9a R:8, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17.



Fig. 9b Y:6, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.



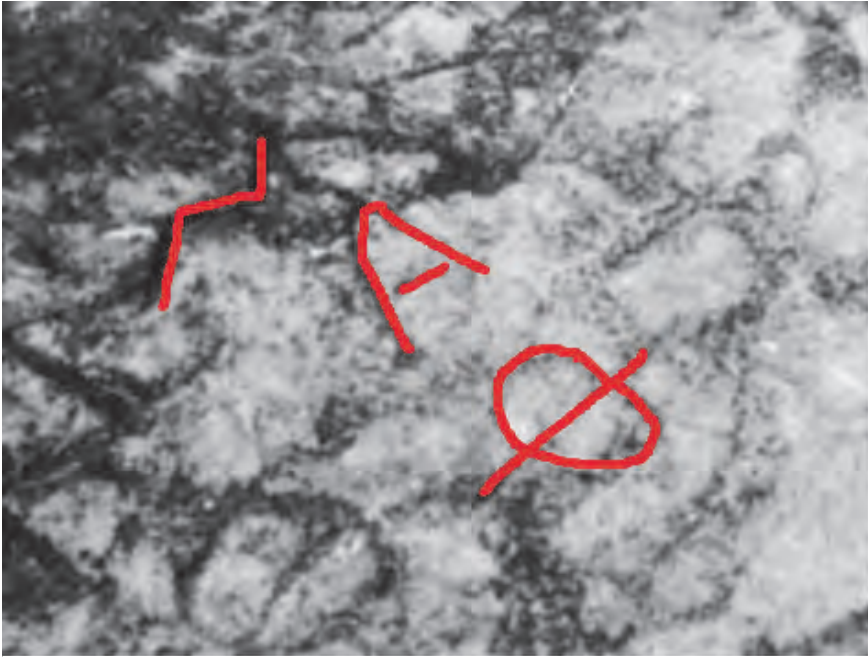


Fig. 9c R:8, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 17, with Yohannes Gebre Selassie's readings highlighted.



Fig. 9d Y:6, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with the last symbol highlighted.

### 2.9 R:9 = Y:7

At first glance, R:9 is very dissimilar from Y:7: . . . . .**ወ**[. . . . .]**ደወነረተዐ(ወ)** (?) vs **በጌወነረቀ**. This, however, must be due to the poor quality of Ricci's photo (Fig. 10a). Ricci himself marks this line as obscure. He specifically notes that **ደ** is larger than the other signs, that **ተ** is considerably smaller than the other signs, and that the symbol after **ተ** is difficult to decipher, both **ዐ** and **ወ** being only

tentative hypotheses. One can identify these hypothetical decipherments on the HS1 photo (see Fig. 10c).



Fig. 10a R:9, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 18.



Fig. 10b Y:7, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

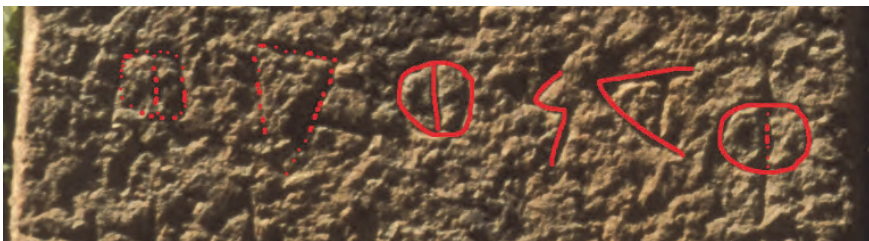


Fig. 10c Y:7, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

### 2.10 R:10 = Y:8

This is the only line read in the same way by both Ricci and Yohannes Gebre Selassie: **ዘሐወለተ**. All the signs are clearly visible on both photos, and their shape is identical (with the usual reservations caused by the different camera angle).



Fig. 11a R:10, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, pl. 18.

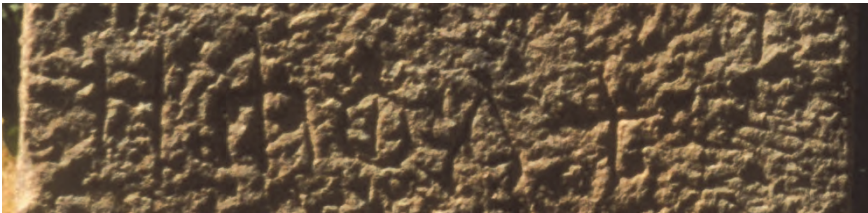


Fig. 11b Y:8, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

### 2.11 R:11 = Y:9

Ricci reads line 11 as **ዘወሀበለኝ(/ኦ)**, and Yohannes Gebre Selassie as **ዘዐየ/ገነሰ**. The first letter is the same for both scholars, Ricci surmises the second to be a vertical stroke which cannot be seen on his photo or on the HS1 photo, hence Yohannes Gebre Selassie's reading of the same symbol as **ዐ** is clearly preferable. For the third symbol, Ricci ignores the horizontal upper stroke (very obscure on his photo) thus reading **ዐ** where Yohannes Gebre Selassie suggests **የ**.

The reading of the rest of the line is obscure for Ricci,<sup>19</sup> especially the final symbol. Yohannes Gebre Selassie is also not fully certain of the shape of the signs: **ገ** is not very clear, and **ገ** has a different shape to the symbols for **ገ** elsewhere in the inscription, and it is not difficult to imagine it to be the left part of the symbol for **አ**, with its right leg poorly discernible (making Ricci's hesitation between **ገ** and **አ** quite justifiable). All in all, there is little doubt we are dealing with one and the same line.

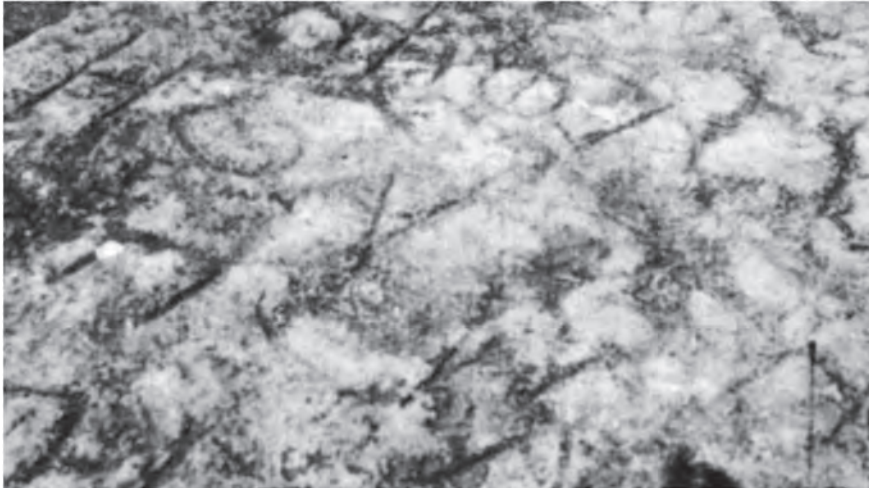


Fig. 12a R:11, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 18.



Fig. 12b Y:9, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

<sup>19</sup> Ricci 1988, 149.



### 2.12 R:12 = Y:10

The beginning of line 12 was obscure for Ricci, who read the rest as [. . . ]**ከበረ**|(?)**አጸበ**(/θ). The corresponding line was read by Yohannes Gebre Selassie as **አገበረ/አገዘ**, a passage close to RIÉ 223, 1–2. The symbols are extremely difficult to discern on Ricci's photos (see Fig. 13a), but looking at the HS1 photos, one is able to guess Ricci's decipherment of the lines.

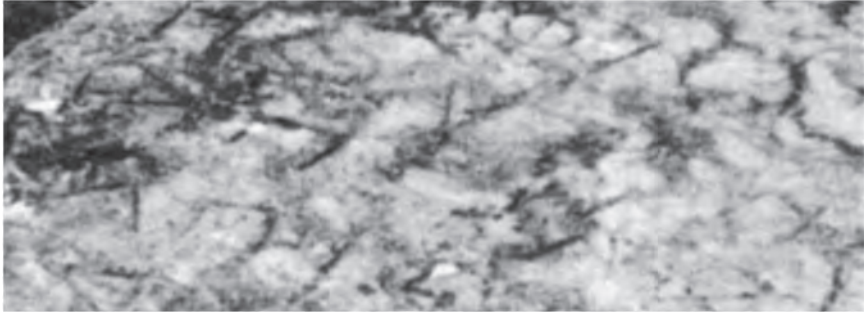


Fig. 13a R:12, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 19.

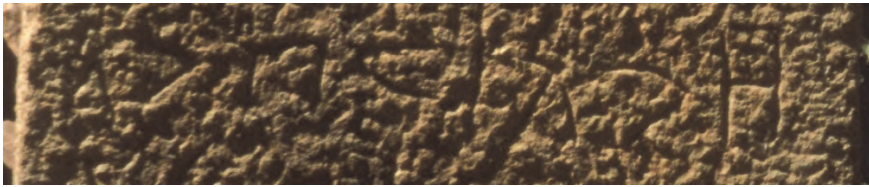


Fig. 13b Y:10, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

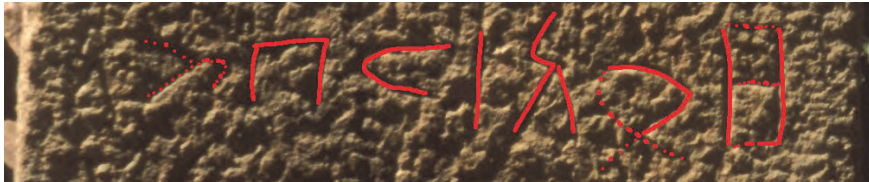


Fig. 13c Y:10, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

### 2.13 R:13 = Y:11

The difference between R:13 and Y:11 lies in the second letter only, and, as has been argued earlier, must be due to the shape of **አ** mistaken by Ricci for **ጸ**. Yohannes Gebre Selassie's reading is clearly preferred as it provides a coherent interpretation.

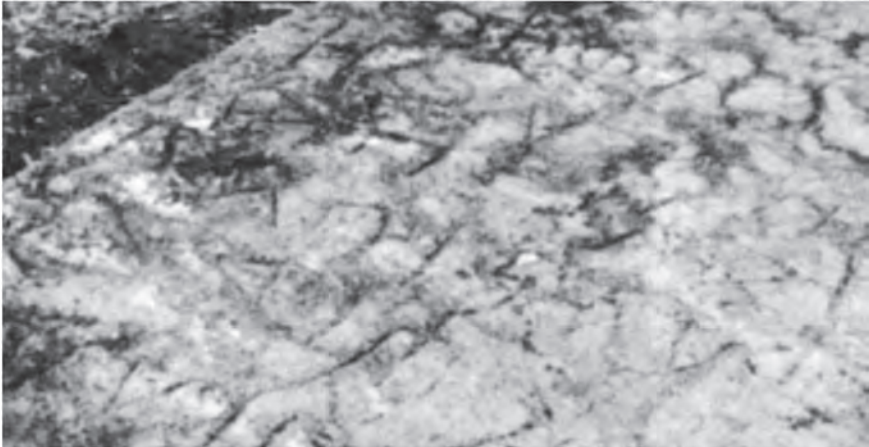


Fig. 14a R:13, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 19.

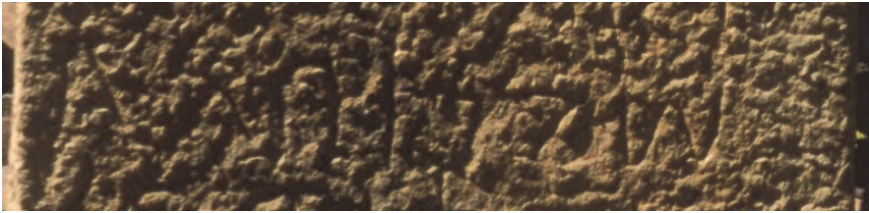


Fig. 14b Y:11, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

## 2.14 R:14 = Y:12

In line R:14 = Y:12, four symbols ( $\mathcal{L}$ ,  $\mathcal{L}$ ,  $/$ ,  $\mathcal{h}$ ,  $\mathcal{K}$ ) were read in the same way by both scholars. The first symbol was poorly legible for Ricci, who hesitated between  $\mathcal{h}$  and  $\mathcal{h}$ , whereas Yohannes Gebre Selassie suggested  $\mathcal{h}$ . After  $\mathcal{K}$ , Ricci was able to discern a letter resembling  $\mathcal{P}$  or  $\mathcal{R}$ . The letter is absent in Yohannes Gebre Selassie's reading, but an uncertain symbol is clearly visible on the photo which may indeed be read as  $\mathcal{P}$  or  $\mathcal{R}$  (among other possibilities).

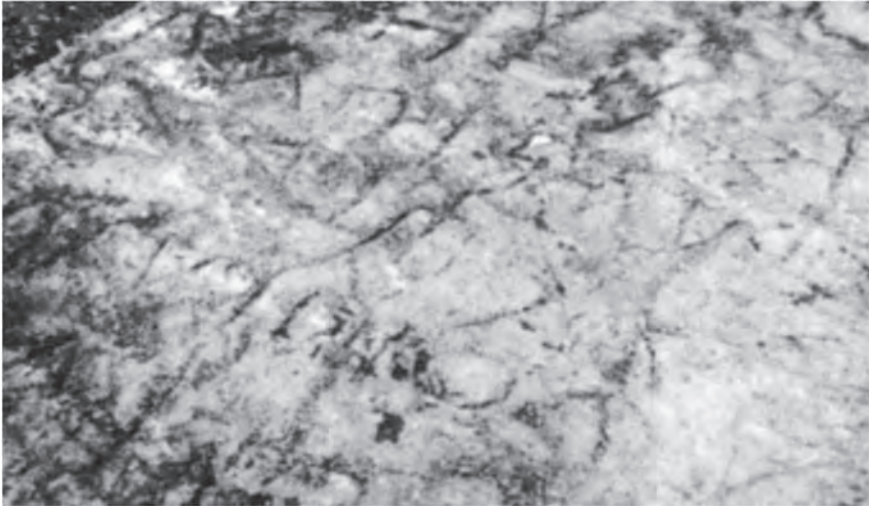


Fig. 15a R:14, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 19.



Fig. 15b Y:12, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

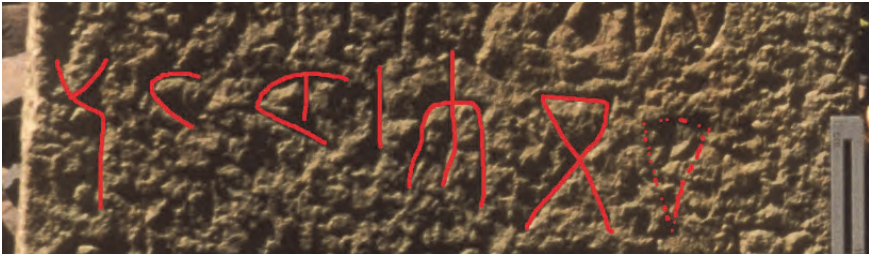


Fig. 15c Y:12, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with the letters highlighted (including the last letter).

### 2.15 R:15 = Y:13

In R:15 and Y:13, the second word is read in the same way by both Ricci and Yohannes Gebre Selassie. The discrepancy in the first part of the line is easily accounted for by the poor quality of Ricci's photo. See Fig. 16c on Ricci's readings projected onto the new HS1 photo.



Fig. 16a R:15, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 15.



Fig. 16b Y:13, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

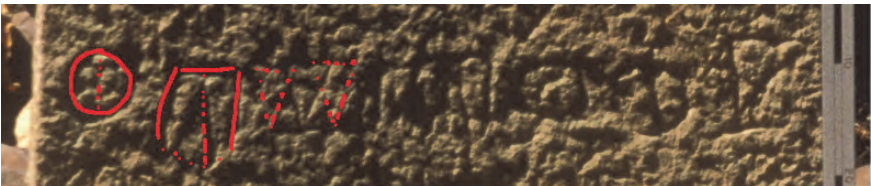


Fig. 16c Y:13, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading of the first four symbols highlighted.

### 2.16 R:16 = Y:14

Four of nine symbols in R:16 agree with the counterpart symbols of Y:14. As with other lines, the remaining symbols Ricci believed detected can be identified on the new HS1 photo. Ricci himself expressed doubts concerning correct decipherment of **Ḥ**, **Ḥ**, and **Ḥ** (for the latter symbol, an alternative, even less plausible, identification with South Arabian š [ṣ] was offered). Ricci also noted two points within the circle of **Ḥ**, which were probably just defects in the rock. The same points can be seen on the HS1 photo (see Fig. 17b).





Fig. 17a R:16, from Ricci 1988, pl. V, fig. 15.

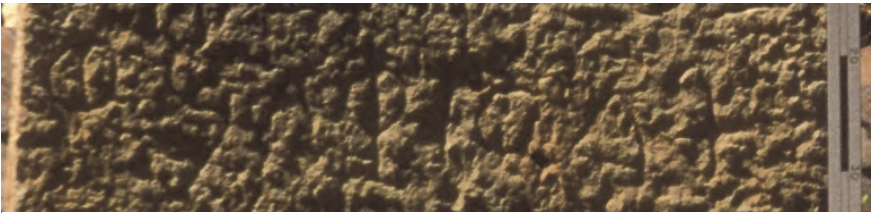


Fig. 17b Y:14, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.



Fig. 17c Y:14, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's reading highlighted.

## 2.17 R:17 = Y:15

The last line Ricci read as **ፀፈፈፀ**, whereas Yohannes Gebre Selassie saw but two numerical signs, **፻፯**. Most of the signs are illegible on Ricci's photos. The recent HS1 photos do not exclude the presence of other symbols side by side with those read by Yohannes Gebre Selassie. There is little doubt that they are the symbols of one and the same line, especially in view of a small sign in the form of a South Arabian  $\check{\text{z}}$  ( $\check{\text{z}}$ ) Ricci detected between **ፈ** and **ፀ** (see Fig. 18c for the decipherments of Ricci projected into the photo of HS1).

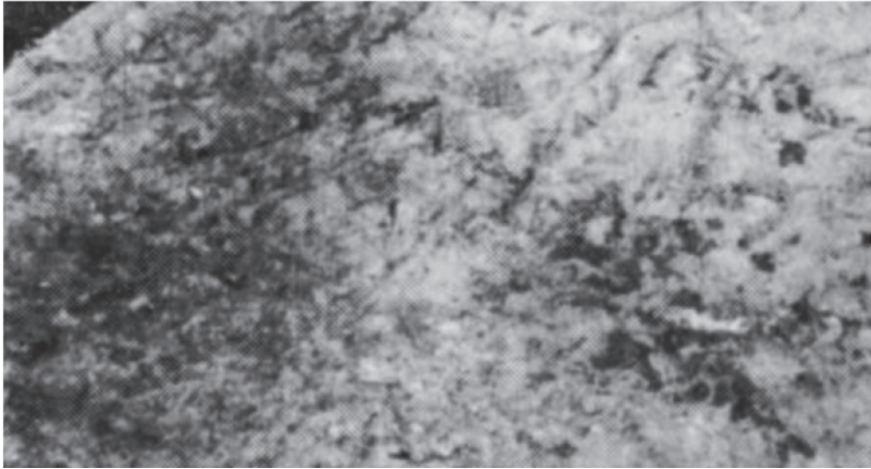


Fig. 18a R:17, from Ricci 1988, pl. VI, fig. 20.



Fig. 18b Y:15, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.



Fig. 18c Y:15, photo of HS1 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, with Ricci's readings highlighted.

### 3. Bringing together R and Y

The evidence presented in Sections 1 and 2 shows the inscription published by Ricci and by Yohannes Gebre Selassie to be the same text inscribed on the same stele.<sup>20</sup> For convenience this text is referred to as HS1, following Yohannes

<sup>20</sup> This is apparently not the first time that an Old Ethiopic inscription, seen by different scholars at different times, has been published in two versions only to be identified later as

Gebre Sellassie. In this section, the comparison will be made between the two versions—R and Y—of the reading of HS1. The general approach is, as argued in Section 1, that Yohannes Gebre Selassie’s decipherment and interpretation are superior to Ricci’s. Nonetheless, Ricci’s reading of this text can be useful in several ways: firstly, to confirm some readings offered by Yohannes Gebre Selassie; secondly, to reveal problematic places; thirdly, to bring into light the original presence of some other symbols or even lines that have become virtually invisible over the course of time.

Thus, while it is not possible to assess Ricci’s reading of R:1 (see Section 2.1), the mere existence of this line is plausible and fits in well with the fact that Y:1 starts with *w*, to be interpreted as *\*\*wa-* ‘and’. At the same time, as shown in Section 2.2, R:2 is due to the erroneous identification of cracks on the rock as intended lines. Even more important is the presence of an additional symbol after *ṣ* in Y:12 (see Section 2.14). Unfortunately, the quality of this symbol remains uncertain, and no coherent interpretation of the corresponding line can be offered at present. Furthermore, Ricci’s reading confirms the presence of one or more signs after the first three letters in Y:2, and the presence of several letters aside from the central letter in Y:3. In Y:6, Ricci’s reading suggests the presence of at least one additional symbol at the end of the line. Ricci’s reading of the last line of the inscription can be fully ignored.

Aside from this, it is appropriate here to introduce some suggestions based on a closer inspection of the HS1 photos, which naturally incur changes in interpreting HS1.

Firstly, the final symbol on line Y:5 (which partly appears on the sketch in Fig. 2)<sup>21</sup> may well be read as a numerical sign  $\overline{\text{A}}$  (see Fig. 19). The line would then read *hlq / 20 (ḥḥḥ/Ḥ)* and be interpreted as ‘20 ounces’.

one and the same object. See *RIÉ* IIIB, 301–303, on the possible identification of an inscription copied by Gerhard Rohlfs in 1880/1881 and deciphered in Fiaccadori 1981, with the inscription known as *RIÉ* 202.

<sup>21</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 15.



Fig. 19 Y:5, photo by Yohannes Gebre Selassie.

Secondly, as Y:2 contains one or more signs after **ሐለቀ** (which were perhaps more visible at the time of Ricci's visit, explaining his attempts to note and decipher them in R:4), one may guess at their quality. The plausible assumption that the word **ሐለቀ** in Y:2 has the same vocalization and the same meaning as **ሐለቀ** in Y:5 leads to the conclusion that the symbols following **ሐለቀ** in Y:2 were also some numerical signs (or only one numerical sign).

Thirdly, in Y:3, the only legible letter is not **የ**, but **ደ**. The **ደ**, which was transposed with **ኀ** below, therefore gave the appearance of **የ**, but upon closer examination, the two letters **ደ** and **ኀ** can be separated clearly.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, this change does not help in forming a plausible interpretation.

Fourthly, the beginning of line Y:7 is not certain.<sup>23</sup> The first sign as it appears on the sketch and the photo in Fig. 2 looks like **ከ** rather than **ቢ**.<sup>24</sup> However, neither **ከ** nor **ቢ** lead to a plausible interpretation of the whole line.

Furthermore, the reading of line Y:9 offered in 2014 by Yohannes Gebre Selassie has to be revised.<sup>25</sup> The stroke interpreted there as a word divider is more likely a mere crack on the stone (notably, no word divider appears on the sketch in Fig. 2).<sup>26</sup> The whole line is then read as **ከዐየኀሰ**. The easiest solution is to treat 'ygn's as a proper name (permitting a translation of the lines Y:8 and Y:9 as 'this is the stele of 'ygn's'). This interpretation gains in credibility when the evidence of the Old Ethiopic inscription 2:30 from the cave Hoq on the island of

<sup>22</sup> See Fig. 6c; see also the sketch on Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 15, Fig. 2, line 3.

<sup>23</sup> It was left undeciphered in Ricci 1988, 146 (R:9).

<sup>24</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Soqotra is drawn into consideration,<sup>27</sup> where the same sequence *ʿygn*s occurs, written very clearly. The first letter of the inscription 2:30 may well be *ṣ* (rather than [ʾ] tentatively read by Christian Robin), and thus, the beginning of the inscription can be read as [*ṣ*]ḥfʿygn*s*, and interpreted as ‘ygn*s* has written’. This well fits the identification of *ʿygn*s as a proper name (perhaps a name of a clan or an ethnic group rather than a personal name), although its internal structure remains obscure.<sup>28</sup>

In Y:15 (see Fig. 18b), the second numeric sign is the sign for ‘6’ rather than for ‘7’. Its shape differs from that of ‘7’ in Y:7 (see Fig. 10b), and precisely matches the archaic form of ‘6’ known from the manuscript tradition,<sup>29</sup> attested as early as the Abba Gärima Gospels.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, some new interpretations may be offered as alternatives to those of Yohannes Gebre Selassie’s first translation. In Y:1, *ʿsb* may stand for a noun rather than a verb:<sup>31</sup> *ʿasb*, ‘hire’, ‘salary’, ‘payment’, ‘price’.<sup>32</sup> This yields a nominal phrase: *w ʿsb ḥlq* [...] *\*\*wa-ʿasb ḥəlq ...*, ‘and the payment is [so many] ounce(s)’<sup>33</sup>. The interpretation of *ḥrf* as the king’s name was preferred by Yohannes Gebre Selassie to its identification with Classical Old Ethiopic *ḥarif*, ‘current year’, or *ḥarifa*, ‘this year (adv.)’.<sup>34</sup> However, the reference to the year seems natural in this context, and the interpretation of *ḥrf* as a common noun (which, as correctly observed by Yohannes Gebre Selassie, is also attested in

<sup>27</sup> Robin in Strauch 2012, 59.

<sup>28</sup> It is tempting to connect it with the proper name *ʾl ʿyg* (\*\**ʾalla ʿayg?*) occurring as a part of the name of the Aksumite ruler *Ḥfl* (\*\**Ḥafilā*) in two recently published inscriptions (see Nebes 2017, 360–362, with corrigenda in Nebes 2018; see further discussion in Bausi 2018, 289, with n. 13). However, this leaves the two last letters in the proper name unexplained.

<sup>29</sup> See Uhlig 1988, 337; Bausi et al. 2015, 290.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, this archaic shape is seen in numbers of chapters of Mark’s Gospel in Abba Gärima I (e.g. fols. 64v, 65r) and Abba Gärima III (e.g. fol. 344r), as well as in the Canon Tables of Abba Gärima I, II, and III (see e.g. McKenzie and Watson 2016, 49, fig. 54, 172, fig. 235, and pl. 19, 34, 49).

<sup>31</sup> The verb *ʿasaba*, ‘to hire’, encodes the hired person (rather than the price paid) as a direct object (see Dillmann 1865, 972), hence the interpretation of *ʿsb* as a verb, offered in Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 18, is less probable.

<sup>32</sup> Leslau 1987, 72; Dillmann 1865, 973.

<sup>33</sup> A combination of a noun in singular form with a numeral is a regular phenomenon in Classical Old Ethiopic (see Dillmann 1907, 487) and attested in Epigraphic Old Ethiopic as well (as in RIÉ 187, 7–8: *la ʾalata ʾəsṛā 20*, ‘for twenty 20 days’).

<sup>34</sup> See Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 21; Leslau 1987, 264; Dillmann 1865, 590.

RIÉ 232, 4)<sup>35</sup> or an adverb, is preferable. Uncertain reading of the end of the line precludes any further interpretations.

The interpretation of Y:13 offered in Yohannes Gebre Selassie's 2014 article is only one among several possible ones. *ʿmd* can be a noun ('*amd*, 'column', 'pillar').<sup>36</sup> For *mʿwd*, the only equivalent in Classical Old Ethiopic is indeed *məʿwād*, with many possibilities of interpretation.<sup>37</sup> For instance, *məʿwād* can mean 'a circle', 'a circumference'.<sup>38</sup> Thus, *ʿmd mʿwd* can be understood as 'a pillar of a circle' (perhaps implying that a multitude of steles were forming a circle). Alternatively, *məʿwād* can mean 'procession (going around something)',<sup>39</sup> thus one more translation is possible, 'the pillar of/for the procession'. The translation offered by Yohannes Gebre Selassie may also be the correct one,<sup>40</sup> and is therefore preserved in the present version.

*hlq* in Y:14 cannot be the same root as *hlq* in Y:2 and Y:5 due to the different quality of the first consonant.<sup>41</sup> It is more likely to be identified as *ḥalqa*, 'be consumed', 'be wasted', 'come to an end', 'be accomplished', 'be finished', 'be spent'.<sup>42</sup>

All these considerations are reflected in the new (Y1, mostly based on Y) version of reading and interpretation of HS1, presented in Table 3.

<sup>35</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 21.

<sup>36</sup> See Leslau 1987, 63; Dillmann 1865, 957.

<sup>37</sup> See the discussion in Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 21.

<sup>38</sup> As in Wisdom of Solomon 5:22: *šanāy məʿwāda qast*, 'a good circle of a bow (i.e. a tightly strung bow)' (see Dillmann 1865, 1001).

<sup>39</sup> As in *mazmur za-məʿwād*, psalm of the Palm Sunday, lit. 'psalm of going around' (see Dillmann 1865, 1001).

<sup>40</sup> Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2014, 21.

<sup>41</sup> There is no reason to believe that the inscription belongs to the late Aksumite period when the confusion between velar *ḥ* and pharyngeal *ḥ* is indeed sometimes observed (see *wʿḥlfkw*, 'and I led them', in DAE 13, 11 vs Classical Old Ethiopic *waʿḥlafkəwomu*; *ʿwrḥ*, 'months', in DAE 13, 12 vs Classical Old Ethiopic *ʿawrāḥ*).

<sup>42</sup> Leslau 1987, 261; Dillmann 1865, 574. Another possibility is to identify this word with *ḥʷəlqʷ*, 'number' (Leslau 1987, 261; Dillmann 1865, 577). However, the resulting reconstruction would be *\*\*waḥʷəlqʷa ʿəlat 56*, 'and the number of day is 56'—instead of the expected 'and the number of days is 56'. On the contrary, the form *ʿlt*, 'day' (in the singular), is grammatical if this lexeme governs a numeral: *\*\*waḥalqa/ḥalqu ʿəlata 56*, 'and 56 days were spent' (compare RIÉ 187, 7–8 quoted in n. 33).

Table 3 **Reading and interpretation of HS1, with corrigenda (the symbols marked in bold have been deciphered in the same way in R and Y)**

Line		Y1	Interpretation
0	?	?	?
1	<b>ወዐሰበ</b>	w ' s b	and the price (is)
2	<b>ሐለቀ</b> [...]	ḥ l q [...]	[so many] ounce[s]
3	[ ] ደ [...]	[ ] d [...]	?
4	<b>ወለ ጎጸነ</b>	w l ḥ ሻ n	and for the iron (?)
5	<b>ሐለቀ</b> [ጸ]	ḥ l q [20]	[20] ounces
6	<b>ወ</b> [ነ]ፈቀ[... ፈ ?]	w [n] f q [... f ?]	and a half (?) [... ?]
7	[.] [.] <b>ወነፈቀ</b>	[.] [.] w n f q	[... ?] and a half
8	<b>ዘሐወለተ</b>	z ḥ w l t	this stele
9	<b>ዘዐየጎሰ</b>	z ' y g n s	(is) of 'YGNS
10	<b>አገበረ/አገዘ</b>	' g b r / ' g z	'GZ <sup>43</sup> ordered it to be made
11	<b>ለአበ/ነገሠ</b>	l ' b / n g ሰ	for the father of the king
12	<b>ጎረፈ/ሐጸ</b> [.]	ḥ r f / ḥ ሻ [.]	this year (?) [...]
13	<b>ዐመደ/መዐወደ</b>	' m d / m ' w d	he erected (in the) neighbourhood (?)
14	<b>ወጎለቀ/ዐለተ</b>	w ḥ l q / ' l t	and 56 days were spent
15	<b>፶፮</b>	56	

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*DAE* = E. Littmann, *Deutsche Aksum-Expedition, IV: Sabäische, griechische und altabessinische Inschriften* (Berlin: Verlag von Georg Reimer, 1913).

*RIÉ* = É. Bernand, A. J. Drewes, and R. Schneider, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite, Introduction de Fr. Anfray, I: Les documents* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belle-Lettres–Diffusion de Boccard, 1991).

<sup>43</sup> As pointed out by Frantsouzoff 2019, 279 the interpretation of 'gz as a defective spelling of the common noun 'əgzi', 'lord', cannot be ruled out. The same is valid for 'gz in *RIÉ* 223, 2 (on its interpretation as a common noun see Conti Rossini 1896, 252; in *DAE* 34 this interpretation is mentioned with more caution, and fully ignored in more recent publications, see Ullendorff 1951, 29; Kropp 2006, 326; *RIÉ* IIIB, 320–321, 551).

RIÉ IIIB = A. J. Drewes, *Recueil des Inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite, III: Traductions et commentaires*, B: *Les inscriptions sémitiques, Introduction par Roger Schneider, Texte révisé et adapté par Manfred Kropp, édité par Manfred Kropp et Harry Stroomer*, eds M. Kropp and H. Stroomer, *Aethiopistische Forschungen*, 85, De Goeje Fund, 34 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2019).

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### Summary

In 1974 the renowned Ethiopianist Lanfranco Ricci inspected the site of Hənzat in central Təgray. *Inter alia*, he inspected and photographed a stele with a lengthy inscription. In 2014, Yohannes Gebre Selassie published an article on an inscription which he labelled HS1, and which he believed to be a second inscription on a stele found in Hənzat. However, close inspection reveals that HS1 is the same stele which Ricci saw and described. The contribution here presents evidence to support this claim. In addition, some new interpretations are offered as alternatives to Yohannes Gebre Selassie’s first translation.