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by Alessandro Bausi
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Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Susanne Hummel and Alexander Meckelburg

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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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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!
Once Again on ʾbk wdm in Ethiopian Sabaic

AARON BUTTS, Universität Hamburg, 
SIMCHA GROSS, The University of Pennsylvania, 
and MICHAEL HENSLEY, The Catholic University of America

In the extant Ethiopian Sabaic corpus,1 the collocation ʾbk wdm occurs five times:2

RIÉ 1, ll. 4–7: ywm ʾḥmlkmw ʾsʿtr ṭḥbsʾ wʾlmgh wḏṭḥʾmym ṭḥbʿdn wʾbk ṭḥm, ‘when they made him (viz. W RN HYWT) king, (they being) ʾAstar, Hobas, ṣʿAlmaqah, ḏat-Ḥamim, ḏat-Ḥaṭṭān wʾbk ṭḥm’

RIÉ 2, l. 2: ṭḥbʿdn wʾb[ʾk ṭḥm], ‘ḏat-Ḥaṭṭān wʾbk ṭḥm’3

RIÉ 10, ll. 13–15: ṣʿqr ṭḥbsʾ wʾlmqhy ṭḥʾmym ṭḥbʿdn wʾbk ṭḥm bn ḡl ṭḥʾm, ‘by the protection5 of ᾧAstar, of Hobas, of ṣʿAlmaqah,

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1 Abbreviations follow the Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI), with the addition of Kh-al-Ḥarāb 1 edited in Noman 2012. We adopt the usual scholarly convention in using ‘Ethiopian Sabaic’ (or the like) to refer to the Sabaic inscriptions found in Ethiopia and Eritrea that exhibit linguistic features different from the Sabaic attested in the Arabian Peninsula (see Drewes 1980; Schneider 1971–1972; Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 782–787).

2 Note that the collocation ʾbk wdm has also been reconstructed at the end of RIÉ 5 and 6.

3 This is the reading of RIÉ; Nebes 2010, 182, n. 5 is also confident about the reconstruction of ʾbk ṭḥm in this inscription.

4 RIÉ reads ḡl. Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 784, n. 41, however, proposed to read ḡl, which we follow here (so also Nebes 2010, 184).

5 The Ethiopian Sabaic verbal noun ṣʿqr, ‘protection’, derives from the root ṭḥḥ, which in Sabaic means ‘versichern’, ‘bestätigen’ (for which, see Stein 2010, 734, as well as the online Sabäisches Wörterbuch). For the realization of ṭḥḥ as ṭḥm in Ethiopian Sabaic, see Drewes 1980, 36; Schneider 1971–1972, 23; Avanzini 1989, 473; Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 784; Gajda and Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2009, 52—the latter two publications comment specifically on this etymology of ṣʿqr. For the status of ṣʿqr as a verbal noun, see n. 22 below.
of ḏat-Ḥamin, of ḏat-Bar’ dan w’bk wdm from everyone who is malicious.6

Addi Akaweh 1, ll. 5–8: bs’qt ‘s’t r whhs’ w’lmq[y w]ḏt-hmn wgzṯ [dn] w’bk w[dlm] bn ṭkm7, ‘by the protection of ’Astar, of Hobas, of ’Almaqah, of ḏat-Ḥamin, of ḏat-Bar’ dan w’bk wdm from an adversary.8

RIÉ 9, ll. 5–7: bs’q t ‘s’t r w [h] wbd[y ḏt-hmn wgd-b’dn w’bk wdm [b] n ṭkm9, ‘by the protection of ’Astar, of Hobas, of ’Almaqah, of ḏat-Ḥamin, of ḏat-Bar’ dan w’bk wdm from an adversary’.9

The first analysis of the collocation ‘bk wdm belongs to Roger Schneider, who in the editio princeps of RIÉ 1 considered ‘bk wdm to continue the list of deity names.10 This analysis has been adopted over the years, including by Christian Julien Robin and more recently by Iwona Gajda and Yohannes Gebre Selassie.11 An alternative analysis was proposed by Abraham J. Drewes, who suggested that ‘bk wdm begins a new sentence that should be analysed as a verbless clause, that is, ’your father is Wadd’.12 This analysis has also been invoked over the years, including most recently in the 2019 publication of RIÉ IIIB, which provides translations and commentaries for the pre-Aksumite and Aksumite inscriptions in Semitic languages. While scholars adopting each of these two options differ in how to analyse ‘bk wdm, they share in common that they have generally had no viable solution for the words that come after ‘bk wdm in

6 As proposed by Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 784, n. 61, and adopted by Nebes 2010, 184–185, mr’m is a derived stem participle of the verbal root rgm, which is attested in the Sabaic noun rgm, ‘illwill’, ‘disfavour’, ‘spite’ (for which, see Beeston et al. 1982, 22; Nebes 2010, 185, n. 17; see also the online Sabäisches Wörterbuch). For the realization of *g as ḏ in Ethiopian Sabaic, see Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 785–786; Nebes 2010, 185, n. 17—both comment specifically on this etymology of mr’m.

7 The reading of ṭkm is all but certain, even if the lower half of ṭ is partly damaged. Compare also the duplicate in RIÉ 9.

8 Robin, apud Robin and de Maigret 1998, 784, n. 61, compared ṭkm with the preposition ‘k, ‘opposite’, ‘confronting’ (for which, see Beeston et al. 1982, 22; Nebes 2010, 185, n. 21; cf. the online Sabäisches Wörterbuch). Nebes 2010, 185–186 took the comparison further, proposing that ṭkm here is a noun, from the same root as the preposition, with the meaning ‘Gegner’, ‘Widersacher’, citing mr’m as a semantic parallel.

9 The reconstruction of the end of this inscription only became evident after the publication of the duplicate Addi Akaweh 1 (see Gajda and Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2009, 52–53). Compare the earlier reading in RIÉ: w’bk wdm .. ṭkm.

10 Schneider 1976, 85: ‘la série se termine avec ces deux mots’.


12 Drewes 1980, 39.
RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9.13 This can be exemplified, on the one hand, by Gajda and Yohannes Gebre Selassie, who follow Schneider’s interpretation, and, on the other hand, by RIÉ IIIB, which naturally adopts Drewes’s proposal: the words after ’bk wdm in RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9 are left unanalysed in both of these publications.14

The proverbial exception that proves the rule is Robin, who made several important interventions in understanding the words after ’bk wdm in RIÉ 10 and RIÉ 9 (Addi Akaweh 1 had not yet been discovered at the time of Robin’s writing).15 Robin clarified the meaning of the words after w ’bk wdm in RIÉ 10 with two crucial interventions: first, he proposed the reading kl, whereas RIÉ had read km. Second, he translated mrʿm as ‘individu malveillant’ connecting it with the Sabaic noun rǵm, ‘illwill’, ‘disfavour’, ‘spite’. In RIÉ 9, Robin suggested that the final noun ʿtkm be compared with the preposition ’tк or ‘opposite’, ‘confronting’. He was, however, unable to arrive at an entirely satisfactory solution to the understanding of the end of this inscription since the word before ʿtkm had not yet been resolved, at least partly due to the fact that Addi Akaweh 1 had not yet been discovered.

Building on the work of Robin, Norbert Nebes convincingly showed that the text after ’bk wdm in RIÉ 10 should be understood as bn kl mrʿm, ‘from everyone who is malicious’, and that in Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9 as bn ʿtkm, ‘from an adversary’.16 Nebes then argued that ’bk wdm is an apotropaic formula that can be translated, for instance in the case of RIÉ 9, as ‘und Waddum ist dein (göttlicher) Vater als Schutz vor einem Widersacher’.17 Nebes’s argument has been adopted (tentatively?) by the Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions, which renders the same inscription as ‘and may your father Wdm (save you) from any opponent (?)’, explicitly referencing Nebes.18 Nebes’s argument for the apotropaic formula is not, however, without its problems, including especially how a simple verbless clause ‘Wadd is your father’, as already proposed by Drewes, can be apotropaic in such a way: note ‘als Schutz’ in Nebes’s translation as well as ‘(save you)’ in DASI, neither of which seems to be motivated—certainly not explicitly—by the Sabaic text itself. Despite this obvious grammatical difficulty, Nebes considers his proposal for understanding ’bk wdm as an apotropaic for-

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13 The exception is Robin, whose analysis is discussed in the next paragraph.
14 Gajda and Yohannes Gebre Selassie 2009, 52 and RIÉ IIIB, 43, 45, 46 (‘les trois derniers mots de l’inscription nous sont incompréhensibles’).
16 Nebes 2010.
17 Ibid., 186.
18 See http://dasi.cnr.it/index.php?id=dasi_prj_epi&prjId=1&corId=0&colId= 0&navId= 336 216217&recId=7554.
mula all but assured by the presence of the prepositional phrases bn kl mrʾm, ‘from everyone who is malicious’, and bn ʿtkm, ‘from an adversary’, in RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9, respectively. Thus, Nebes concludes his article writing, ‘Dass es sich um eine solche mit apotropäischem Charakter in der Tat auch handelt, ist jetzt durch die Erweiterung des Wortlauts um die Präpositionen bn kl mrʾm und bn ʿtkm in den äthio-sabäischen Königsinschriften aus dem abessinischen Hochland zweifelsfrei erwiesen’.19

Like Nebes, we consider the two concluding prepositional phrases to be key to solving the long-standing cruces interpretum at the end of these inscriptions; nevertheless, departing from Nebes, we think that these two prepositional phrases should be understood in conjunction with b-sʾqt, ‘by the protection of’, earlier in the inscriptions. In our view, Nebes has failed to account for the distribution of the prepositional phrases bn kl mrʾm, ‘from everyone who is malicious’, and bn ʿtkm, ‘from an adversary’ only in RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9, respectively, but not in RIÉ 1.20 It is no coincidence, we think, that the two concluding prepositional phrases are found only in inscriptions that contain b-sʾqt, ‘by the protection of’. We propose that the concluding prepositional phrases bn kl mrʾm, ‘from everyone who is malicious’, and bn ʿtkm, ‘from an adversary’, complement the earlier prepositional phrase b-sʾqt, ‘by the protection of’, to form the following formula: b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’.

The proposed formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’, can be compared with two well-known formulae in Sabaic. The first involves a deity or deities saving, protecting, and so on, a person or persons from ill effects, as the following representative example illustrates:

Ja 651: wlhʿnn wmtʿn wḥryn ʾlmqḥ ʿbdʾm ḏmḏʾm bn bʾsʾtm wnʾtkym, ‘and may Ḫmqḥ help, protect, and deliver his servant ʿBDʾM, of the family MDRʾHM, from any evil and mischief’

The formula in this inscription differs from the proposed formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’, in that the former has a verb in the first position whereas the latter has the Ethiopian Sabäic verbal noun sʾqt, ‘protection’, headed by the preposition b-. The second formula with which the proposed formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’, can be profitably compared takes the structure ‘by the

19 Nebes 2010, 187.
20 The same will be the case with RIÉ 2 (as well as 5 and 6) if the reconstructions are correct.
help/power/etc. of DN(s), as illustrated in the following representative example:²¹

Kh-al-Ḥarāb 1: brdʾ ʿṯtr sʾrqn w-ʾṯtr ḏ-zhr ysʾr w-bʾd ʿṯtr ḏt ʾḥm[ym], ‘by the help of ʿAṯtar Sʾariqan and of ʿAṯtar ḏu-Zahr Yasʾar and by (the help of) dat-Baʾ dan and of ḏat-Ḥamim

In this inscription, there is an initial verbal noun followed by a list of deity names just as in the proposed formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’. Together, these two well-known Sabaic formulae provide the building blocks for our proposed Ethiopian Sabaic formula. Thus, the proposed formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’, seems perfectly at home in (Ethiopian) Sabaic, even if the exact formulation is not yet attested elsewhere.²²

To conclude, we want to stress that it is the distribution of the various phrases in the Ethiopian Sabaic inscriptions that is ultimately decisive for us in proposing the formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’: the final prepositional phrases bn kl mrʾm and bn ṭkm are found only when b-sʾqt occurs earlier in the inscription. RIÉ 1, in contrast, does not have b-sʾqt, and thus there is no final prepositional phrase bn X. This distribution suggests to us that we are dealing with a formula b-sʾqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’. If the proposed formula is accepted, then ṣʾbk wdm must continue the list of deity names, as proposed initially by Schneider. This is necessarily the case for RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9, since the two prepositional phrases b-sʾqt and bn X bracket the list of deity names. The relevant portions of RIÉ 10 and Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9 should, then, be translated as follows:

²¹ It should be noted that PNs can also occur in this formula.

²² Lest there be any doubt, it should be pointed out that the proposed formula is grammatical in (Ethiopian) Sabaic. Compare, for instance, the morpho-syntax of the following Sabaic inscription: wlymrhw ʾlmqh thwnbʿlʾwm hʿnnhw wʾḥryn BN bʾsʾtm ʿwq wʾʾṣʾyw sʾʾm, ‘and may ṫAlmaqah Ṯahwan Lord of Ṯawam grant him his protection and his safety from any evil as well as maleficence and malice of an enemy’ (Ja 587). Here the infinitives hʾʾm and hʾḥrn (for the morphology of the infinitive in Sabaic, see Stein 2002), with pronominal suffixes and governing a concluding prepositional phrase headed by bn, have almost exactly the same morpho-syntax as the verbal noun sʾqt in the proposed formula. In this regard, it should be noted that Ethiopian Sabaic sʾqt may not only be a verbal noun, but even more specifically it could be an infinitive. Compare the masdar of I-w roots in Arabic, for instance ḫḏʾt- (root w ḫʾt) and ḫʾʿat- (root ḫʾʿw) (Wright 1896, 118–119, §206) as well as the situation in Semitic more broadly (Brockelmann 1908, 338, §121d).
RIÉ 10: ‘by the protection of ’Astar, of Hobas, of ’Almaqah, of ḏat-Ḥamin, of ḏat-Ba’dan, and of ’Abuka Wadd from everyone who is malicious’

Addi Akaweh 1 = RIÉ 9: ‘by the protection of ’Astar, of Hobas, of ’Almaqah, of ḏat-Ḥamin, of ḏat-Ba’dan, and of ’Abuka Wadd from an adversary’

The remaining inscription(s) without the proposed formula will, by implication, follow the same pattern with ṣbk ṣwdm concluding the list of deity names. The relevant portions of RIÉ 1 should, then, for instance, be translated as follows:

RIÉ 1: ‘when ’Astar, Hobas, ’Almaqah, ḏat-Ḥamim, ḏat-Ba’dan, and ’Abuka Wadd made him (viz. W’RN ḤYWT) king.’

Thus, the pantheon of the Ethiopian Sabaic corpus will have been slightly different from that of the Sabaeans in that the former includes Wadd, with the unique epithet ’Abuka, among the deities ’Astar, Hobas, ’Almaqah, ḏat-Ḥamim, and ḏat-Ba’dan.24

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23 Nebes 2010, 186 rightly draws attention to the importance of the second personal pronominal suffix in ṣbk as the earliest attestation of the form (cf. Stein 2003, 132). We are not, however, convinced by either of the possibilities that Nebes proposes as referents of the pronominal suffix, namely, the reader or the patron. It seems just as likely to us that ṣbk is a fixed epithet of Wadd in this cultural milieu and that, therefore, the second person pronominal suffix is frozen without necessarily having a single, fixed referent. We have attempted to reflect our understanding in the translations above with ṣAbuka. The proposed scenario can be compared with the use of abuna among various Christians (Ethiopian, Copt, and Syriac) or rabbi among Jews, though of course in both of these cases the pronoun is first person, whereas in the proposed Sabaic case it would be second person.

24 Contrast Nebes 2010, 183: ‘Diese Auffassung […] hat zur Konsequenz, dass die Gottheit Waddum als zum offiziellen Kanon der von den äthio-sabäischen Herrschern angerufenen Gottheiten zählend zu gelten hätte, was einen signifikanten Unterschied zur sabäischen Kultpraxis darstellt’.


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Summary

In an article published in this journal in 2010, Norbert Nebes argued that ʾbk wdm is an apotropaic formula, which can be translated, for instance in the case of RIE 9, as ‘und Waddum ist dein (göttlicher) Vater als Schutz vor einem Widersacher’ (wʾbk wdm [b]n ʿtkm). In contrast, it is proposed here that ʾbk wdm continues the previous list of deity names, as already suggested in 1976 by Roger Schneider. Key to this argument is the distribution of the concluding prepositional phrases bn kl mrʿm, ‘from everyone who is malicious’, and bn ʿtkm, ‘from an adversary’, which only occur in inscriptions that have b-sʿqt, ‘by the protection of’. Thus, the following formula is proposed: b-sʿqt DN(s) bn X, ‘by the protection of divine name(s) from X’.

Aaron Butts, Simcha Gross, and Michael Hensley