



# Aethiopica 26 (2023)

International Journal of Ethiopian and  
Eritrean Studies

---

ALESSIO AGOSTINI, Sapienza Università di Roma

## Review

ANNE MÜLTHOFF, *Die sabäischen Inschriften aus Mārib. Katalog,  
Übersetzung und Kommentar*

Aethiopica 26 (2023), 285–287

ISSN: 1430-1938; eISSN: 2194-4024

---

Edited in the Asien-Afrika-Institut  
Hiob-Ludolf-Zentrum für Äthiopistik  
der Universität Hamburg  
Abteilung für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik

by Alessandro Bausi

in cooperation with

Aaron Michael Butts, Bairu Tafla, Ludwig Gerhardt, Hewan Semon Marye,  
Susanne Hummel, and Alexander Meckelburg

Editorial Team

Sophia Dege-Müller, Karin Ghion-Hamadu

## REVIEWS

ANNE MULTHOFF, *Die sabäischen Inschriften aus Mārib. Katalog, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, 9 (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2021). 524 pp. Price: €69.80. ISBN: 978-3-86757-130-2.

This voluminous work gathers a great number of already published Sabaic inscriptions from the area and immediate surroundings of the Mārib oasis (*Mryb*), the capital of the kingdom of Saba', covering the entire extent of pre-Islamic South Arabian history from the beginning of the first millennium BCE to the mid-sixth century CE. In total, the number of texts is approximately 700, which have been divided into major categories: dedicatory texts (124), legal texts (66), building inscriptions (133), commemorative/annalistic texts (4), funerary inscriptions (86), followed by texts of a different nature in which we find onomastics, texts containing mainly apotropaic formulas, and possibly a hymn (63); the last chapter groups fragmentary documents whose typology remains indeterminate (228).

The idea of this corpus, carried out with great dedication and skill by Anne Multhoff, began within the archaeological and epigraphic research project that German institutions had set up around the Sabaeen capital since 2007 (namely, Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and Friedrich-Schiller-Universität of Jena). Following the interruption of this project, this material became one of the bases on which the commendable project of the new digital Sabaic dictionary, conducted at the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität, was established (*Sabäisches Wörterbuch*: <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de>).

In this volume, we find inscriptions well known since the first surveys of Eduard Glaser and Joseph Halévy, but also texts of more recent acquisition, including some of those discovered during the German investigations at the Great Dam, the extra-mural temple of Bar'ān, and the necropolis outside the temple Awām (only partially published so far), all of which feature very different editorial backgrounds. The vast number of texts from the oval temple Awām dedicated to Almaqah, on which the US mission of the American Foundation for the Study of Man has been working for a long time, have been excluded, as they will require a dedicated publication. The rock inscriptions of Jabal Balaq al-Janūbī (the so-called *Eponymenliste*), located just south of the urban site, have also been left aside because a new direct observation would have been essential to verify the readings, an operation which is still impossible under the present circumstances. Indeed, when possible, most of the inscriptions here collected have undergone a

complex process of revision, which has led to new readings as well as new integrations thanks to broader comparisons, which have been effectively summarized in the commentaries.

The texts are primarily organized based on their textual typology and then on further content-related evaluations. For example, construction inscriptions have been arranged according to the building involved, while dedicatory inscriptions have been ordered based on the deity to whom the dedication is offered. This distribution also applies to fragmentary inscriptions for which this data can still be identified. Within each category, priority is given to the texts that mention rulers, which are then ordered chronologically: in the small chapter devoted to the annalistic texts the great inscriptions of the fifth–sixth centuries CE (CIH 540, DAI GDN 2002-50, CIH 541) precede the more ancient text RES 3943 whose royal subject has not been preserved in the mutilated block—regarding this highly controversial document, Multhoff seems to follow the consensus view that it was commissioned by the *mukarrib* Yīṭaʿamar Bayyin son of Sumuhūʿalī [Yanūf], dated here to the second half of the sixth century BCE.<sup>1</sup> The meticulous subgrouping of the texts undoubtedly makes it easier to identify content-related varieties although, in some cases, the positioning of the texts cannot always be straightforward—as in the case of RES 4536, which is included among funeral inscriptions, but is also a construction inscription.

Each inscription is accompanied by a philological-lexical commentary that has benefited from the extensive work conducted in tandem within the ‘Sabäisches Wörterbuch’ project and has led to a more wide-ranging and consistent translation effort. Of course, this work aims at giving greater prominence to textual aspects, than to historical, political, or religious issues. However, there are extensive final indices relating to proper names, place names, and theonyms, which, in some cases, offer a wider commentary on the most significant or attested entries: especially for clan and tribal names, together with toponyms and theonyms, attestations are given also outside the present corpus, with several mentions to non-Sabaic occurrences, which is commendable. Onomastics is presented in vocalized forms with the advantage of making the texts more readable; such vocalizations follow established customs but are nevertheless subjected to morphological and

<sup>1</sup> The association of RES 3943 with this Yīṭaʿamar Bayyin had finally been accepted also by von Wissmann, after discarding his previous hypothesis connecting it with Karibʿil Watar bin Dhamarʿalī and then preferring also a dating at the end of the sixth century. See H. von Wissmann, *Die Geschichte von Sabaʿ*, II: *Das Großreich der Sabäer bis zu seinem Ende im frühen 4. Jh. v. Chr.*, ed. W. W. Müller, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Sitzungsberichte, 402 (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1982), 269–274.

syntactic evaluations, also considering the reconstructed nominal inflection, especially for the form with mimation or nunation.

There are no lexical indices, which is a reasonable choice to contain the size of the volume, more so because occurrences can now be easily checked online from the *Sabäisches Wörterbuch*. Although it is not an eminently epigraphic study, data relating to the support are recalled, when possible; the archaeological context of the findings has been at times essential also for assuming a textual categorization otherwise impossible for many fragmentary texts. However, an apparatus of images is not present (but the available iconographic references are always indicated): while a palaeographic analysis of the texts was certainly beyond the scope of this type of work, it cannot be denied that such an investigation may prove very useful when dealing with texts from a given area. A cartographic documentation with the location of the monuments, possibly enriched by the indication of the on-site inscriptions, would have been very useful here.

This ninth volume of the series *Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel* offers a valuable tool realized with philological rigor, which gives a comprehensive analysis of some of the most important ancient documents from the centre of the Sabaean kingdom. Collecting epigraphic material by site or limited area is always a choice that facilitates the re-evaluation of texts in a perspective of an archaeological contextualization. It is well-known that the core of the Sabaean capital, the ‘citadel’ of Mārib, has not yet been excavated due to disputes between local tribes rendering any such mission unsafe, even before the present disruption. One can only imagine the richness of the documentation, not only epigraphic, awaiting the fortunate scholars who may—perhaps, in the future—dedicate themselves to investigating the centre of this paramount archaeological settlement.

Alessio Agostini, Sapienza Università di Roma

RĀĠIB, MĀYKIL ḤILMĪ [RAGHEB, MICKEL HELMY], الفيثوطوكيات الحبشية (وداسي) *at-Ṭī'uṭūkīyāt al-ḥabašīya* (Widdāsī Māryām) *fī daw' 'ašliḥā al-qibṭī wa-turāt at-tarānīm aš-šarqīya al-'uḥrā* ('The Abyssinian Theotokia (*Widdāsī Māryām*) in View of Their Coptic Origin and the Heritage of the Other Oriental Hymns') (Cairo: Madrasat al-'Iskandarīya, 2022). 496 pp. EGP 600.00 (e-book). ISBN: 978-977-6591-98-1.

This book, aimed at a scholarly Coptic audience, provides a thorough introduction to the *Waddase Maryam* (CAe 2509, in the following *W.M.*) and its direct and more distant sources. In fact, the work goes far beyond what is announced in its