



Aethiopia 16 (2013)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALESSANDRO BAUSI, Universität Hamburg

Review

FRANCIS BREYER, *Das Königreich Aksum. Geschichte und Archäologie
Abessiniens in der Spätantike*

Aethiopia 16 (2013), 252–256

ISSN: 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

Bairu Tafla, Ulrich Braukämper, Ludwig Gerhardt,
Hilke Meyer-Bahlburg and Siegbert Uhlig

Reviews

ly diminish the excellent quality of the scientific material. The Ethiopianist community is awaiting impatiently the following issues and hoping for a long and fruitful continuation.

Olga Kapeliuk, Hebrew University, Jerusalem

FRANCIS BREYER, *Das Königreich Aksum. Geschichte und Archäologie Abessiniens in der Spätantike* = Zaberns Bildbände zur Archäologie. Sonderbände der Antiken Welt, Darmstadt – Mainz: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2012. 160 pp., 159 b/w and colour figs. Price: € 29.99. ISBN 978–3–8053–4460–9.

In keeping with the title of the series it has appeared in “Illustrated volumes to archaeology. Special volumes on the Ancient World”, the book under review might be recommended not only for the small price, compared to the great quality of the print, but also for the numerous and beautiful, useful and mostly quite recent colour images, drawings and maps, which document quite in detail, through the avowedly popularizing and felicitously appealing style of the author, the ancient civilization of the Aksumite kingdom from an archaeological perspective. History and archaeology are often mixed in presentation with history of research (especially the German one), and all in all the example and the achievements of the 1906 “Deutsche Aksum-Expedition” (henceforth: *DAE*), also intermingled with earlier reports (in particular by Francisco Alvarez), are constantly quoted or referred to.

The book is divided into the following parts: a general presentation of the site of Aksum (“Zur Einstimmung”, pp. 8–19); a history of the research on Aksum, with special focus on the discovery and interpretation of its royal inscriptions (“Geschichte und Erforschung des Reiches”, pp. 20–48), with further subdivisions; a review of the monumental archaeological findings (“Die Monumente Aksums”, pp. 49–127); an overview of other archaeological sites with Aksumite remains (“Die wichtigsten antiken Fundstätten Abessiniens”, pp. 129–148); a conclusion (“Ausblick: Zurück zu den Anfängen”, pp. 149–151); a chronological table (p. 152); notes with bibliographical references (pp. 153–158); notes on transcription, bibliographical abbreviations and sources of the illustrations (pp. 159–160). Note that the ch. “Geschichte und Erforschung des Reiches” is subdivided into several parts, the titles of which are slightly misleading: for example, on coins (“Goldstücke und Silberlinge: das aksumitische Münzwesen”, pp. 35–39) and Christianization (“Wann wurde Abessinien christlich”, pp. 39–46), both of which actually dealing with general questions of Aksumite history and periodization, strongly involving (esp. pp. 44ff.) archaeological questions as well. It is to be remarked, however, that the problem of the “Ethiopian origins”, that is, of the origin of the Semitic civilization of Ethiopia, is reviewed in its proper terms on pages 149–151 and includes, as it has to be done, questions of epigraphy, in particular the relationships between the two groups of actual South Arabian inscriptions of Ethiopia.

Had the author limited himself to presenting Aksumite antiquities in their most superficial and immediate appearance (for it would be just unfair to exact from today's archaeology the same results as those achieved by *DAE* in 1906, since expectations have changed and present day archaeology does not certainly overlap with *DAE* methodology), one could stop here and nothing more could be said. Yet – as the author promises and claims on p. 3 of the cover, alluding to forthcoming contributions of his, also on Aksumite royal inscriptions¹ – special expectations are justified as far as Aksumite history, epigraphy and Ethio-Semitic linguistics are concerned, and the relevant scholarly standards (all the more so as the author states to have also adopted the “äthiopistisches Transkriptionssystem”, p. 159). From this point of view, however, the reader might be disappointed by Breyer's volume.

As to the transcription system, it appears that there is little consistency, and it is difficult to realize which criterium is followed. This would not be so important, had the author himself not pointed to standardization and consistency. I only provide very few examples, which are far from giving an overall idea of the problems: p. 8, fig. 1: “Miṣ'iwa”, for “Məṣəwwa” according to the adopted system; “Asmāra”, for “Asmāra” (or “Asmāra”). – p. 10: “Ḑndā Maryam”, for “Ḑnda Maryam” (also on p. 15): actually “Ḑnda” is continuously written “Ḑndā” (pp. 19ff.) with no rule or justification; “Timqat” instead of “Ṭəmṣāt”. – p. 14: “Gäbraä Mäsqäl”, for “Gäbrä Mäsqäl”. – p. 15: “Addi Şəḥafi”, for “Addi Şəḥafi”; “Gabre Śəlassi”, for “Gäbrä Śəllase”. – p. 17: “Bəriḳ Awdi”, but p. 19 “Bruḳ Awdi”, with apparently the same name transcribed in different forms without standardization whatsoever. – p. 20 (frame): names of the kings, “Ar'ad”, for “Ar'ad”; “Yeṣaq”, for “Yəṣḥaq”; “Zāra'a Ya'əqob”, for “Zār'a Ya(ə)qob”. – p. 32: Ἀζωμίτην, for Ἀζωμίτην (also on p. 38); also on p. 34 (αχωμιτων instead of αζωμιτων; βασιλεύς instead of βασιλεύς), with a Coptic (-like Greek) font used to render the Greek. – p. 33: “Ḑlla Amida”, for “Ḑllā Amida”. – p. 38: (legends on coins): the transcription of the legends on coins is very problematic (the root of the verb “to win” is erroneously written, ἑωωω, for ἑωωω, and transcribed *tmw*, for *tmw*); there are many errors also in Greek (spirits and accents missing or in the wrong places, missing iotas etc.). – p. 43: “Şə'əzana”, but on which basis? – p. 86: ጳጳፍ, wrongly for ጳጳፍ. – p. 111: “Yohanəs”, for “Yoḥannəs”. – p. 104 and *passim*: “Ta'aka Maryam”, is actually better rendered “Ta'aka Maryam” (as it appears in *RIÉ* no. 195). – p. 150: “Attar”, for “Attar”. – p. 153ff.: so many errors occurring, esp. in Italian titles, but not only in them. – p. 159: “OLZ Orientalistische Literaturzeitschrift”, for “OLZ Orientalistische Literaturzeitung”.

¹ A field where, incidentally, more authors are working at this time; by BREYER s. now “Die Inschriften ‘Ēzānās”, in: S. WENIG (Hrsg.), *In Kaiserlichem Auftrag. Die Deutsche Aksum-Expedition 1906 unter Enno Littmann*, Band 2: *Alttertumskundliche Untersuchungen der DAE in Tigray/Äthiopien* = Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. Kommission für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen. FAAK (Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen) 3.2, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2011, pp. 339–352, yet delivered in 2006.

There are, however, even a number of content inconsistencies, which seem to betray scarce familiarity or too recent and superficial acquaintance with Ethiopian Studies.

P. 9, Enno Littmann described the priest – or at least met him – not in 1907, but (of course in) 1906. – p. 10: the crowning of King Susānyos (r. 1607–1632) is placed in the 16th century. – p. 15: one can not agree that “Fast alle Quellen über das antike Königreich Aksum ... sind in Aksum selbst zu finden”, whereas a number of sources concerning the Christianization of the country with Frumentius in the 4th century and the Ethiopian exploitations in South Arabia with Kaleb in the 6th century are abundantly detailed in non-Ethiopian sources. – p. 21: according to the author, the Portuguese delivered “die ersten Beschreibungen der Monumente Aksums aus erster Hand”: but neither such a first-hand account of Portuguese exists for the 15th century nor is such a statement found in the alleged source. – p. 22: “Corvilhã” (twice), instead of “Covilhã”. – p. 23: “Jerómio Lobo”, for “Jerónimo Lobo”; “*Historica Aethiopica*”, for “*Historia Aethiopica*”; and Hiob Ludolf is mentioned more or less on the same level of Urreta, which would have certainly hurt Enno Littmann himself. – p. 110: the prominent archaeologist Rodolfo Fattovich is always “Rudolfo” (pp. 27, 127, 137, 147), but also “Riccardo” (p. 110). – p. 28: South Semitic speakers are too easily identified with South Arabian speakers. – p. 29 (and elsewhere): “Mārīb”, for “Maʿrib”; in consideration of the uncertainty of the dating of the Sabaeen era, the date of the inscriptions is given in twofold form, but twice minus five (“547/8 [542/3] n. Chr.”, “558 [553] n. Chr.”) and once plus five (“552 [557] n. Chr.”). – p. 30: the name of the Jewish king is wrong (“Asʿār” instead of “Asʿar”); “Abraha” is erroneously considered the general at the time of Kaleb’s expedition. – p. 32: the missing mention of Aksum in Plinius is not astonishing, given the sources he relied on. – p. 36: the first gold Aksumite coins were not exactly of equal weight to the Roman ones (“Ausgabe von Geldstücken gleichen Gewichts”), but a fraction of them. – p. 78: how can we consider that the “Grab des Bazan” (no. 15 in the map), actually to the West of the Aksum area, is situated to the South? On p. 78 one can read, “Am anderen Ende der antiken Stadt lag eine weitere Nekropole für die Elite”. – p. 79: on the “Gudit-Stelenfeld” the author says, “Mit Sicherheit war hier nicht die Elite bestattet, denn diese hielt sich sicherlich in der Nähe des Königs auf. Mit Fug und Recht könnte man das «Gudit-Stelenfeld» als drittklassig bezeichnen”, but in the caption of the same page, “Abb. 64 Stelen des sog. «Gudit-Stelenfeldes», einer Elite-nekropole am Westrand von Aksum”. – p. 99: on the etymology of the name of Aksum: yet the most recent hypothesis quoted (actually M. Kropp’s “»Gesondert, gestiftet und geheiligt«: Hierapolis in Äthiopien. Zur Deutung des Namens Aksum”, *OrChr* 94, 2010 [2011], pp. 176–198) is in keeping with what already Lanfranco Ricci had proposed (cited on p. 157, n. 250). – p. 123: apart from “Abba Pāntālewōn”, for “Abba Pāntālewōn”, not a word is said concerning the question of the so-called “Syriac [or Syrian] saints” of Aksumite Ethiopia. – p. 141: concerning Adulis, no mention of the essential concept of “port of trade” is done, made except for a confused remark (“Dort [in the *Periplus maris Erythraei*] erfahren wir beispielsweise, dass der Hafen «unfrei» war”). – p. 147, on Ham (apart from “Sānaʿfe”, for “Sānaʿafe”), quite alarming is “Dābrā Liqanos”, for (the universally famous!) “Dābrā Libanos” (of Eritrea). – p. 152 (chronological table): “527: Der byzantinische Kaiser Justin I. schickt den Gesandten Rufinus nach Aksum”, but Rufinus is to be placed a couple of centuries earlier.

Other points directly regard Ethiopic epigraphy.

P. 34: the author repeats – once more – the erroneous statement that Cosmas did not recognize that the *Monumentum Adulitanum* consisted of two inscriptions, whereas it appears that Cosmas is well aware of that (Cosm., *Top. chr.* II, 59 Καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἐν τῇ εἰκόνι ἐγγράπτο, ἃ καὶ εὗραμεν σῶσαι· ὀλίγα δὲ ἦσαν τὰ ἀπολλόμενα, οὐδὲ γὰρ πολὺ ἦν τὸ κεκλασμένον μέρος αὐτῆς. Εἶτα ὡς ἐξ ἀκολουθίας καὶ εἰς τὸν δίφρον ἐγγράπτο οὕτως). – p. 43: I confess to ignore the role of Albrecht Alt in admitting the existence of three ʿEzana: yet I surmise that here Franz Altheim (whose name got confused with Albrecht Dihle’s?) was meant (cf. Franz Altheim and Ruth Stiehl, “Die Datierung des Königs ʿĒzānā von Aksūm”, *Klio* 39, 1961, pp. 234–248, and other contributions by them). – p. 40: the Ethiopic script is considered to depend directly upon the Sabaeen one, but as is well known the question is very much debated. – p. 47: why is the Ethiopic script on coin indicated as “altsüdarabisch-äthiopisch”? – p. 49: it is not explained on which ground the word *hawalt(i)* is considered to be a Cushitic loanword, since a plausible Semitic etymology is available (s. W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Geʿez: Geʿez–English/English–Geʿez*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1987, p. 249). – p. 52: the correct interpretation of the “bisi”-element is *bāʿasəyā/bāʿase*, not *bāʿasi*. – p. 113: the Ethiopic text (rendering *DAE* IV, no. 11 [= *RIÉ* I, no. 189]) is wrong, and so the transcription, in more words, and within this context the emendation “*za² angasā{na}<ni>*” (proposed by Littmann in *DAE*, yet rightly disregarded by *RIÉ*, since the text is sound and points to a *pluralis majestatis*) is superfluous; but also the translation is wrong, since *za-manbara* is the object of the preceding verb **ወአመሐሽአንኩ** [†] *waʿamahšanku*, that is omitted here. – p. 115, fig. 115: “«Pseudo-sabäischer» Abschnitt” etc., but actually the picture represents the end of the pseudo-Sabaeen text and mostly the beginning of the Ethiopic text in Ethiopic writing, that is pl. 103 in *RIÉ* II, no. 185 bis, face B, containing two Gəʿəz texts, one in Sabaeen (first 27 ls.) and one in Ethiopic script (following 16 ls., as well explained also in *RIÉ* I, p. 246). – p. 116: the possible building of a “Bewusstsein” as a main factor to explain the origin of Ethiopic vocalization does not take into consideration the fact that not only the presence of vowels, but many other general features of the scripts themselves, even earlier distinguished Ethiopic and Sabaeen scripts. – p. 117: even in a popularizing publication, the statement that the influence of South Arabian in Ethiopia is limited to facts of the 1st century A.D. is unacceptable: one must note that *de facto* the author provides a more comprehensive view in the following pages (esp. pp. 149–151), but then, why be so inconsistent here? it should be always clearly distinguished between the earlier and proper South Arabian inscriptions (first and second groups of South Arabian inscriptions), and the later (Aksumite) Ethiopic inscriptions in Sabaeen script. – p. 119: the statement that “Besonderes Kennzeichen der früheren Inschriften ist die mehr oder weniger klare Trennung zwischen Konsonanten, die im Gəʿəz zusammengefallen sind (ʿ/ʿ, h/h/h, s/s, s/š)”: yet, the situation is quite clear, and there is no confusion in the properly Aksumite inscriptions; *məslā*, for *məsle*; erroneous also *w=z=srq*, for *w=z=srq*. – p. 115: the date of publication of the second (pseudo-)“trilingual” Aksumite royal inscription is not 2001, but 1991 in *RIÉ*, even though the second set was already extensively used by R. Schneider, “Notes sur les inscriptions royales aksumites”, *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 44, 1987, pp. 599–616 (s. now the English translation “Notes on the Royal Aksumite Inscriptions”, in: A. Bausi [ed.], *Languages and Cultures of Eastern Christianity: Ethiopian* = *Variorum, The Worlds of Eastern Christianity (300–1500)* 4, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2012, no. 3, pp. 35–56) and even earlier in the fundamental article by M. Rodinson, “Les nouvelles inscriptions d’Axoum et le lieu de déportation

Reviews

des Bedjas”, *Raydān* 4, 1981, pp. 97–116. – p. 148: concerning the inscription of Ham, the presence of biblical quotations in Aksumite inscriptions is not exceptional at all, as it is widely witnessed by several Ethiopic royal inscriptions.

After these remarks, it might be fair to add that the author will have occasion either to revise the present edition or to provide a better focused contribution on some specific aspects of the Aksumite civilization. He has actually succeeded in providing a comprehensive first-hand view on Aksum archaeological remains and to widely consider the vast range of related literature (a task greatly facilitated now by the existence of such syntheses as the *EAE*, which can also cause inconveniences). Essential aspects of the Christian Aksumite culture – monastic settlements, liturgical installations – related to archaeological remains have not yet been considered and the work focuses on the earliest and central phase of the Aksumite civilization. Less exciting aspects of archaeological research, such as non-monumental archaeological remains (ceramics etc.) or environmental investigation, that are so important to modern research, have not been sufficiently considered. Instead importance has been given to recent spectacular discoveries of further South Arabian sites in Ethiopia (in the nearby of Wəqro) and the author is certainly right – although without a perfect first-hand knowledge of the previous history of research – that this is an intriguing frontier of Eritrean and Ethiopian (and not only Aksumite) archaeology.

Alessandro Bausi, Universität Hamburg

STEFFEN WENIG (Hrsg.), *In Kaiserlichem Auftrag: Die Deutsche Aksum-Expedition 1906 unter Enno Littmann*, Band 2: *Alttertums-kundliche Untersuchungen der DAE in Tigray / Äthiopien* = Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. Kommission für Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen. FAAK [Forschungen zur Archäologie Außereuropäischer Kulturen] Band 3.2, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2011, 402 pp., 189 b/w figs., 9 colour figs. Price: € 79.00. ISBN: 978–3–89500–890–0.

This beautiful richly illustrated volume is the second of the originally planned two which were intended to celebrate the 1906 “Deutsche Aksum-Expedition” (henceforth: *DAE*), as well as to resume the whole range of topics dealt with by the historical epoch-making enterprise and its related publications. There will be, however, a third volume dedicated to churches, monasteries, and ethnographic researches, also furnished with a CDROM of all *DAE*-pictures and records to complete the series. The main focus of the present volume is the antiquities in Təgray and Ethiopia, that also include epigraphy and manuscript evidence.