



Aethiopica 18 (2015)

International Journal of Ethiopian and
Eritrean Studies

ALESSIO AGOSTINI, Sapienza Università di Roma

Review

ALESSIA PRIOLETTA, *Inscriptions from the Southern Highlands of Yemen:
The Epigraphic Collections of the Museums of Baynūn and Dhamār*

Aethiopica 18 (2015), 245–248

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

Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
- ÄthFor* Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).
- AethFor* Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid.*, 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid.*, 2012ff.).
- AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London, 1917ff.).
- CSCO* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
- EAE* S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
- EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- PdP* *La Parola del Passato. Rivista di studi classici*, Napoli 1946ff.
- PICES 8* TADDESE BEYENE, ed., *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa (26–30 November) 1984*, I–II (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies–Frankfurt am Main: Frobenius Institut, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, 1988–1989).
- PICES 10* C. LEPAGE and É. DELAGE, eds, *Études éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes, Paris, 24–28 août 1988* (Paris: Société française pour les études éthiopiennes, 1994).
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND, A.J. DREWES, and R. SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches* (Paris: (Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres) Diffusion de Boccard, 1991).
- RRALm* *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Roma, 1892ff.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli, 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.

Reviews

thor, there is no way of independently identifying authors beyond the first). It would also have been a good idea to provide an index of the toponyms cited in the more archeologically-oriented publications, thereby giving a clear indication of those sites that have been the object of excavations and reconnaissances, or simply treated in the more general historical studies.

The *AfO* bibliography has thus become, in recent decades, a truly indispensable tool, facilitating navigation within an increasingly multifaceted body of research, published throughout the world and often disseminated in very heterogeneous and hard-to-find publications. The current risk is that hard-copy reviews of this kind will be surpassed by their more flexible and up-to-date counterparts increasingly available online. For this reason, a greater effort in reorganising this material—not limited merely to combining the various annual bibliographies—would allow for a more effective presentation of the single entries and, hopefully, maintain continuity in the future.

Alessio Agostini, Sapienza Università di Roma

ALESSIA PRIOLETTA, *Inscriptions from the Southern Highlands of Yemen: The Epigraphic Collections of the Museums of Baynūn and Dhamār*, *Arabia Antica*, 8, Philological Studies (Roma: «L'Erma» di Bretschneider, 2013). 408 pp., 235 ills, 2 maps. Price: € 145.00. ISBN: 978-88-913-0001-0.

Among the projects conducted at the University of Pisa, which led to the realization of the online Corpus of South Arabian Inscriptions,¹ was the cataloguing and digitization of inscriptions housed in a number of Yemenite museums (project CASIS²). Thanks to this operation, some important epigraphic collections, very difficult to access and often including virtually unpublished pieces, have been brought to general attention.

The book under review is the result of the work carried out by Alessia Prioletta on the collections stored at the Museum of Baynūn, the Regional Museum of Dhamār and the University Museum of Dhamār. All catalogued inscriptions and artefacts have, in the meantime, been uploaded to the online database. However, the present study offers an occasion to review the present state of knowledge regarding the history of this part of Yemen's southern highland, corresponding to the present-day governorate of Dhamār (south of Ṣanʿāʿ) where the above-mentioned museums are located.

¹ CSAI, which has now been merged in the broader Digital Archive for the Study of pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions (DASI, supervision by A. Avanzini).

² 'Cataloguing and fruition of South Arabian inscriptions through an informatic support'.

This part of South Arabia is known thanks to a textual corpus that is very significant as far as the first millennium CE is concerned, but relatively scant for the archaic period. Such a documentary gap is now starting to be redressed thanks to this work and to dozens of newly-discovered rock inscriptions in the territory of Dhamār—the content of which is also discussed by Prioletta in the first part of the volume.³

The book comprises four parts: an ample introduction, followed by specific parts devoted to the three collections. In total, 235 inscriptions are analysed: 116 from the Regional Museum of Dhamār (DhM siglum), 89 from Baynūn (BynM) and 30 from the University Museum of Dhamār (ThUM). Each collection is organized in chapters according to the textual typology of the inscriptions. The most significant, also in terms of content, are the construction and dedicatory inscriptions. As often happens in museum collections, the exact provenance of these pieces is, in most cases, uncertain and can only be surmised by analysing the cultural and linguistic traits of the texts themselves. Recent acquisitions of pieces originating from the Jawf valley were made by the Regional Museum of Dhamār, which explains why the collection includes some important Jawfite pieces written in early Sabaic (e.g. DhM 383), some of which clearly come from al-Bayḍā° (e.g. DhM 208), as well as a conspicuous number of inscriptions written in Minaic (among the most notable are DhM 387 and DhM 399). A Minaic collection (mainly funerary stelae) is also present in the Baynūn Museum, together with some Qatabanic texts (surprisingly, only five pieces in the whole corpus).

Those inscriptions that can be linked with any certainty to this region help to pinpoint some features and crucial moments in the region's history—first of all, the tribal geography of the area. One of the most prominent tribes was the Muha°nifum tribe, which, in antiquity, occupied the north-western part of the present-day Dhamār governorate. We now know that they were already settled here in the early phase of South Arabian history, as they produced inscriptions in a very refined archaic style. Another important ancient tribe was Shaddādum, located in the north-eastern part of al-Ḥadā°, around the prominent sites of Baynūn and al-Aqmār. Other important clans included the Muhaqra°um (at the southernmost limit of the Dhamār governorate), the Maytamum, around Hakir (an area particularly involved during the raids between Saba° and Ḥimyar in the first and second centuries CE) and, finally, the Yuhabshir tribe.

The archaic inscriptions from the first millennium BCE already reveal much competence in the writing of the Sabaic language—a fact that, accord-

³ These rock inscriptions were discovered by Kh. Nu°mān, and were the object of 'A Study of South Arabian Inscriptions from the Region of Dhamār (Yemen)', PhD thesis at the University of Pisa, 2012 (unpublished).

ing to Prioleta, suggests that the common linguistic Sabaic substratum was not limited to the core of the Sabaeen territories, such as Maʿrib, Ṣirwāḥ and lower Jawf, but also included part of the central and southern plateau. It is implied that only such linguistic homogeneity could explain what the available documentation seems to indicate and, furthermore, that a strong cultural influence emanating from the political and cultural Sabaeen supremacy can be assumed. However, it is very likely that such hypothetical linguistic homogeneity may have been secondary and influenced by a strong cultural Sabaeen supremacy. The linguistic situation of the region should have been, in fact, more complex, also given that such Sabaean influence would have been limited to the upper class, the only group able to commission such refined and expensive epigraphic documents from a properly-trained scribal school. It also seems to suggest that, in the archaic phase, Sabaʿ exercised some form of political control, at least over the northern portion of this region, as is suggested by invocation of Sabaeen rulers in some archaic texts (i.e. Sumhūʿalī in DhM 298 and Yadaʿōl in DhM 344). What is more, as Prioleta recalls, no tribe from the Dhamār region is mentioned as a target of the military operations of the earliest *mukarribs*, which might indicate that most of them were already gravitating toward the Sabaeen sphere.

The second half of the first millennium BCE is less represented in the inscriptions found in this region, which might be explained by the fact that Sabaeen power was already declining, as was its cultural stimulus.

The following period of the kings of Sabaʿ and dhu-Raydān is, in contrast, the most represented in these collections. The region of Dhamār started gravitating towards the Ḥimyarite political sphere at the end of the first century BCE and then found itself in the harshest period of conflict between Sabaʿ and Ḥimyar. Around 275 CE, Sabaʿ was annexed by Ḥimyar, so that a period of relative stability began. The central role of the tribes of this region is again confirmed by a text in the Baynūn collection (BynM 4—also known as Av. Būsān 4), in which the king conqueror of Shabwa, Shammar Yuharʿish (around 300 CE), already with the long title (king of Sabaʿ, dhu-Raydān, Ḥaḍramawt and Yamnat) recalls several construction works in the area.

In terms of linguistic geography, the situation is quite complex in the Middle Central Sabaic phase.⁴ The typical innovations of this period, which began spreading around the third–second century BCE, are in fact not regu-

⁴ According to the framework established by P. Stein, followed by the Author: see P. Stein, *Untersuchungen zur Phonologie und Morphologie des Sabäischen*, Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, 3 (Rahden/Westf.: Marie Leidorf, 2003), in particular pp. 5–10; cf. also P. Stein, ‘Zur Dialektgeographie des Sabäischen’, *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 49/2 (2004), 225–245.

larly found in this region. A similar situation can be observed with the linguistic traits originating from Radmān (in the east). The area north of Dhamār, despite being closer to the central Sabaean centres, was less influenced by Sabaic innovations than the area around Hakir, closer to Radmān, which, in turn, had been expected to share more innovations with the Radmanic dialect. Qatabanic influences, in lexicon, phraseology and graphic style, are now sometimes more noticeable (e.g. BynM 6 and BynM 88).

Epigraphic documents which can be assigned to the Late Sabaic linguistic phase are limited in number, but it is worth noting that they do not seem to adhere perfectly to the linguistic innovations documented in the Central Sabaic milieu for the same time (e.g. the *-n* augmented infinitive of the derived verbal stems, which continues to be irregular until the end of the fourth century CE).

Far from being marginal within ancient Yemen, Dhamār was often involved in the most crucial turning points in the pre-Islamic history of Southern Arabia, and the region is now characterized by a documentary continuity, spanning from the beginning of the first millennium BCE to the sixth century CE. From a social point of view, the relative stability of tribal groups is also worth noting, and can be observed until the sixth–tenth centuries CE.

The book includes a number of maps, and the inscriptions are accompanied by very good and readable photos. The study concludes with several detailed and helpful indices (index of proper names: individuals, royal names, toponyms, divine names, buildings, months; index of words organized under roots; index of sigla of other inscriptions cited with related bibliography). This study is a clear demonstration that an online textual database, while very useful for research involving a large and multifaceted epigraphic corpus such as the one from ancient Yemen, cannot replace more comprehensive and insightful analyses in traditional formats.

Alessio Agostini, Sapienza Università di Roma

JITSE H.F. DIJKSTRA and GREG FISHER, eds, *Inside and Out. Interactions between Rome and the Peoples on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, *Late Antique History and Religion*, 8 (Leuven–Paris–Walpole, MA: Peeters, 2014). xviii, 481 pp. Price: € 94.00. ISBN: 978-90-429-3124-4.

This rich book is the result of a well organised workshop held at the University of Ottawa on October 11–13, 2012, elaborating on the theme of ‘peoples on the frontier of the Roman Empire’ in Late Antiquity. It is a deliberate attempt at extending an approach fruitfully employed in recent